

The power of silence: rethinking Iranian Jews' power relations during the Qajar dynasty.

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I am a lecturer in the History of the Middle East at the University of Aberdeen. I work on ethnic-religious minorities in the Middle East with a specific interest in Iranian Jews. My previous research explored how the political history and diplomatic strategies that characterize the sixty-year relationship between Iran and Israel and the wider conflict between national and religious identity have affected the process of migration and integration of Iranian Jewry within Israel. As this specific type of research has terminated, I have published my book entitled '*Iranian Jews in Israel: Between Persian Cultural Identity and Israeli Nationalism*', with the publisher I. B. Tauris.

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The status of the Jews of Iran during the Qajar dynasty, mutated, because of being a minority among the Shiite dominant group and adjusted itself through the processes of annexation within Iranian society. Iranian Jews engaged in power relations with two main groups: European envoys and representatives of the Qajar dynasty. The ability to endure in the changing political environment of Iran as a religious minority was facilitated by the strategic dimension of silence that was used as a medium in establishing power relations with dominant elites within the Iranian society.

This paper aims to use the practice of silence as a theoretical framework to understand how Iranian Jewry, between the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, managed to preserve their Judaic practices in Iran despite being a religious minority. Silence operated as being both an instrument for leading groups to control them through the practice of "silencing" them, and as a way used by Iranian Jews themselves to resist and escape possible persecutions and social control by the dominant elites. Silence both in its oppressive and resistance forms acted to create a dynamic relationship between Iranian Jews and dominant elites working in Iran.

Keywords: Silence, Iranian Jews, Qajar dynasty, Shiism, Mashhad Jews, oppression, resistance.

Introduction

Recent studies on the history of Oriental Jews in the Middle East and Israel have stressed that the history and narratives of MENA¹ Jews have been addressed within the narrative framework of Zionism². The traditional Zionist narrative³ has continuously stated the centrality of the state of Israel as the only basis for the long-term security of Diaspora Jews. The Zionist revolution succeeded in its political aims, but the State of Israel had to face the cultural challenge to reconnect MENA immigrants with the rest of the Jews who returned to Israel. Zionists believed that the Jewish community, once returned to its homeland, would be established under the umbrella of Jewish identity. The ideological pressure to transform newcomers into “new Jews” as envisaged by traditional Zionist ideology specifically targeted diaspora Jews coming from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.⁴ Scholars in the field have described this trend among Zionists as “Jewish Orientalism.”⁵ According to them, political Zionism was influenced by European orientalist ideology and somehow it internalised its dogmas:

“It can be seen that the formation of a new Jewish identity was founded on the same old principles that once used to reject the Jews in the European discourse.”⁶

Traditional approaches to the history of MENA Jews were expressed in the work of Karl Frankenstein, a celebrated professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who in the 1950s claimed that Mizrahi Jews developed the same primitive mentality as many of the

¹ Middle East and North African Jews.

² See also Goiten (1996), Simon (2003) and Yosef (2002) Summerfield (2003), Trevisani Semi & Parfitt (2005) Shabi (2009) Kramer (1989)

³ Zionist ideology shaped the state of Israeli ideology and was the backbone of Israeli identity during the formative years of the State of Israel.

⁴ Cohen (1995), pp. 203-214

⁵ Shenhav (2006), p. 56

⁶ *ibid*, p.56

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immigrants from ‘backward’ countries⁷. In the 1950s, Israeli sociologist Yosef Gross agreed with Frankenstein’s position about MENA Jews and claimed that Mizrahi emigrants suffered from ‘mental regression’⁸. S.N.Eisenstadt in the 1950s researched Iranian Jewish immigrants to Israel. According to him, Iranian Jews were culturally inferior compared to the majority of Ashkenazi Jews living in Israel.⁹ The principal argument of these scholars was that Jews coming to Israel from Middle Eastern countries had often been subjected to forms of discrimination by Muslim rulers and due to this, they had failed to develop a culture closer to that of Western countries and developed an ‘Oriental identity’.

Post-Zionist literature has criticised the traditional position of Zionist literature towards MENA Jews and inaugurated a new series of studies on the history of MENA Jews. Shohat stated that the Israeli elite of western origins stereotyped MENA Jews according to the same patterns used by colonialists towards the colonised. As a result, the denial, and the distortion of MENA Jews’ history, as well as ethnic discrimination, were some of the features imposed on Jews of Oriental origins¹⁰. Two different trends have started within post-Zionism: the more critical of these openly denounced Israeli Ashkenazi “Orientalist” perspectives towards Oriental Jews. In the 1960s pioneering studies on discrimination against Oriental Jews started to react against Orientalism of the 1950s, and by the 1970s-1980s, post-Zionism began to become a clear trend in Israel. For instance, Shuval, in a study on an ethnically mixed housing project in Israel, argued that Moroccan Jews were ranked lower than Ashkenazi Jews and that Moroccan Jews perceived themselves as lower than Ashkenazi Jews¹¹. Weingrod in his evaluation of MENA Jews

⁷ Shalom Chetrit (2004), pp.76-8

⁸ Shohat (2001), pp. 58-71

⁹ S115-211, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, Israel

¹⁰ Shohat (1988), No. 19/20 pp. 1-35

¹¹ Shuval (1966), pp.101-110

agreed with Shuval and added that Jews from Egypt, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern countries were considered “inferior” to European Jews¹². Shabi has reported the profound division within Israeli society between Ashkenazi and Oriental Jews and demonstrates how prejudices against MENA Jews have affected their lives and absorption within Israel¹³.

A second trend within post-Zionism has been more analytical in understanding MENA Jews. A growing number of scholars have begun to study MENA history, its emigration, and absorption, from the viewpoint of its protagonists. The trend in the reconstruction of the historiography of Oriental Jews is to recognise that these Jewish minorities lacked social, political, and cultural representation both in their countries of origin and later in Israel. Post-colonialist theories have been used to deconstruct the pre-given concept of the “Jewish nation” as mainly a Western product and to use alternative notions to include the Orient in the Israeli narrative and history. Often lacking agency, Oriental Jews once in Israel, have been victims of the systematic ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic discrimination carried out by Israeli institutions. Post-colonial Zionism as an emergent counter-hegemonic discourse in contemporary Israel has, as Uri Ram argues, undone the “*conspiracy of silencing the clouding of Oriental Jewish identity in Israel.*”¹⁴

The goal of this article is twofold. First, I will bring a post-colonial Zionist discussion outside the context of Israeli society and map the origins of the formation of the discriminatory discourse that was produced against Iranian Jews first in Iran during the Qajar dynasty. I will use the case of Iranian Jewish history and argue that, though the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Orientalist discourse about their identity and

¹² Weingrod (1979)

¹³ Shabi (2009)

¹⁴ Ram (2005)

history was the outcome of Iranian Jewry's encounters with two groups: European philanthropists and representatives of the Qajar dynasty, the ruling Shiite house that governed Iran from 1789 to 1925. Second, I argue that through the use of the practice of silence, Iranian Jews constructed and preserved their identity in Iran. For the specific case of the Jews of Mashhad, silence was their agency in Iran and enabled them to endure as a religious minority in the challenging political environment of Iran.

The article will deal with two different forms of silence that regulated Iranian Jewish relations with the Qajaris and European philanthropists and ask: *'To what extent did the theoretical framework of silence enable us to understand the development of power relations between Iranian Jews and dominant groups in Iran between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?'*

The theoretical framework of silence will be addressed in its functional rather than structural use, that is in how it works with power relations between Iranian Jews and other dominant groups. The methodological use of silence will allow the interaction of different agents that regulated their socio-political relations in Iran: on the one hand, the Qajaris and European envoys used the practice of silence as a tool and indeed a measure to exert control over the minority group. The practice of silencing Iranian Jews allowed dominant groups to maintain their status quo and implement their control over them by denying them any form of participation in the socio-cultural and political development of Iran. On the other hand, silence was used by Iranian Jews, mainly Mashhadi Jews, as a form of resistance away from these groups. The *off-stage status*¹⁵ in which Mashhadi Jews maintained and practised Judaism, became their haven where they nourished and developed their Jewish identity. Scott has coined this term to address the voices of the

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¹⁵ Scott (1990)

oppressed in the specific context of a relationship of subordination. Away from the public space, often under the dominion of the dominant groups, the subordinate groups have been able to organise a culture that dissents and reacts against domination. For Iranian Jews, silence and their private homes became the space where they nurtured and practised Judaism. The off-stage status was for the Jewish community of Iran silence that developed crypto-Judaism. The practices of resistance that were applied by Iranian Jews to preserve their Judaic traditions revealed that minorities developed an identity that resulted from the cultural patterns of subordination and oppression.

Thus, analysing the practice of silence as a form of resistance will enable me to deconstruct the origins of their fallacious identity, which was produced by the Orientalist discourse, and unfold how Iranian Jewry developed its identity. Moreover, parallel to the development of a Zionist discourse that delegitimised the indigenous identity of the first immigrants who arrived in the 1950s, Iranian Jewry through the agency of silence produced their discourse which enabled them to survive in Iran through the twentieth century.

The first section of this article will examine the function of silence in its oppressive form. It will look at how both Qajaris and European philanthropists, through the practice of silencing Iranian Jews, maintained their status quo and formed an Orientalist discourse that was the foundation of discriminatory attitudes towards them once they arrived in Israel in the 1950s. The second section will examine how silence functioned as a form of resistance for the Jews of Mashhad. Silence acted as their agency and through this practice, the community maintained and developed a unique form of Judaism that has endured until today. The importance of addressing silence as a form of resistance is to recognise the intricated levels of relations minority groups established with the power-holders.

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The power of oppressive silence under the Qajar dynasty

Silence has played a fundamental part in communication, and culture as well as in shaping social and political relations. Contrary to general assumptions that only language and verbal communication contribute to the construction of communities and political action, silence has operated to pursue the same goals of communication. The practice of silence whether voluntary or not has been endured by social and political groups throughout history. To maintain equilibrium and ultimately preserve the status quo, dominant groups have used different mechanisms including silence to persevere their power control over their subject.¹⁶ This section will examine how silence, in its oppressive form has functioned as a political tool for both the Qajaris and European envoys who encountered Iranian Jewry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The legitimacy of Shi'a Islam as the main identity factor of the Qajar dynasty verbalised power relations through religious means and legalised Shia's authoritarian methods over Iranian Jews. Following the Gramscian theory of power relations¹⁷, the political and cultural hegemony of the *ulemas* was achieved through the formation of the discourse of "impurity" of Iranian Jewry.¹⁸ Gramsci recognised that silencing, in this oppressive form, is related to the development of hegemony and coercion as an explanation to control the masses.¹⁹ Although his understanding of silencing masses comes from the analysis of how a fascist regime works, Gramsci's definition of hegemony helps us to unfold the importance of silence in power relations between Jews and the Qajaris. According to him, the function of hegemony which the dominant group exercises through society and on the other hand that of "direct domination" or command which is exercised through the State

¹⁶ Tanned (1990)

¹⁷ Gramsci (1980) pp. 352-53

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Gramsci (1971)

and juridical government are key to explaining social relations. Groups can be silenced not only by dominant groups but also through the creation of discourses that sustain and reinforce the hegemonic relation between oppressors and the oppressed. Gramsci recognised that both hegemony and coercion are required to silence the masses.²⁰ According to him, the function of hegemony which the dominant group exercises through society and on the other hand that of “direct domination” or command which is exercised through the State and juridical government are key to explaining social relations. Thus, Iranian Jews’ experience of oppressive silence, was an indicator of misfortune and crime which enable Shiites to maintain their status quo by using silence as a platform to reinforce the coercive aspects of hegemony.

From 1794 to 1925, Iran was ruled by the Shiite Qajar dynasty. In contrast to the Safavid dynasty, the Qajaris were not deemed to be divinely legitimised and as a consequence Shi’a clergy gained more power and extensive authority in religious matters. The

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implications of the Qajaris loss of divine legitimation were greater at the administrative level: religious minorities in Iran were left at the mercy of local administration and *ulemas*.²¹ Often the *ulemas* took advantage of the lack of centralised power to benefit from religious taxes. Although Judaism was formally recognised by Islamic Law as a monotheistic faith and its followers were protected under the historical formulation of *dhimma*, most of the Shiite legal discussions about the status of Iranian Jewry took place in the 19th Century and discussed some of the principal *dhimma* regulations. As part of the process, Iranian Jews were often harassed at tax time to give more funds than those expected from the *jizya*, the poll tax that religious minorities had to pay under an Islamic state. In the eighteenth century, during the Qajar dynasty, while the Muslim population

²⁰ Gramsci (1971) pp.12-13

²¹ Shaim (2005)

of Iran was increasing, the number of Jews declined and, by the end of the nineteenth century, the number of Persian Jews in Iran was estimated at 70,000.²²

The early decades of the Qajar dynasty were particularly hard for the Jews of Iran, who had to survive different forms of discrimination as a religious minority. As documented by Tsadik, Shiite clergy discussed the different agents of impurity and some *ulemas* provided an inventory of elements that make a Shiite impure, which included touching a kafir, a Jew. Grounded in the Quranic verse 9.28, the predominant interpretation in the Imami Shi'i hadith literature agreed that followers of monotheistic faiths were infidels because they did not believe in Islam and were thus deemed to be religiously unclean.²³ The Jew was considered to be ritually unclean and due to this, he had to be differentiated externally from the believers in every possible way. This became the decisive factor in threatening Iranian Jewish existence in the 19th Century. In addition, the chaotic domestic situation in Iran under the Qajar dynasty permitted a certain degree of freedom to the local clergy who had the power to incite the local populations against minorities. Moreover, Iranian Jews were exposed to persecutions that were scattered and separated in the country.²⁴ The record concerning different forms of persecutions that occurred in these years is detailed and offers the opportunity to understand how difficult life was for the Jews in Iran.

Ritual uncleanliness was pivotal in silencing the community and establishing a hierarchical relationship between the Jews and the rest of the Muslim community. Iranian Jews were forbidden from appearing in public and pursuing specific jobs that required close contact with Muslims. The majority of Iranian Jews ended up being small peddlers,

²² Netzer (1973-1974)

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ Fischel, p.17

weavers, and dyers, occupations that were not popular among Muslims.²⁵ Except for a few cases in Tehran and Hamadan, Iranian Jews could not occupy higher political or social positions or perform their religious ceremonies in public. According to travellers to Iran in the 1850s, Jews were obliged to live in ghettos or *mellah* away from the rest of the Iranian population. According to Lord Curzon, the social conditions of Jewish neighbours as being poor. His account also stressed the fact that Iranian Jews were forbidden to wear the *kolah*, the traditional Persian headdress, and were not allowed to ride a horse in the streets.²⁶

The construction of the concept of uncleanness defined the dichotomy between Shia Islam and Judaism and silenced the community politically, socially, and geographically. Silence served the Qajaris to exert control over them through their disappearance from society.

As stated by Yeroushalmi:

*“Iranian Jews did not have tangible political, economic and military leverage inside Iran, and deprived of any significant foreign connections and relations with European and regional states and governments through the first decades of the nineteenth century, Iran’s Jewish and Zoroastrian minorities were as a rule less protected and considerably weaker.”*²⁷

These measures silenced Iranian Jews and suppressed their engagement and connection with the foreign Jewish community. The negation of public engagements with both foreign and domestic groups was aimed at delegitimising the community’s existence in Iran and had very clear consequences in structuring the social and economic status of the Jews in Iran in the nineteenth century. The imposition of silence and relative social

²⁵ Fischel (1950)

²⁶ Curzon (1892), pp. 510-511

²⁷ Yeroushalmi (2009) Vol 40 p.xxii

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stillness were the key instruments that allowed Qajar authorities to reinforce the law and order based on the Shia identity as the “marker” of the Iranian society.

Shia religion was the backbone of the political ideology that organised and regulated the legal status of religious minorities in Iran. These silencing measures had been used by the Qajar dominant elite to avoid cultural and political differences. Accounts of the status of Iranian Jews during that time are largely accounts of their oppression in the form of what they could not say or express for being a religious minority. The hegemonic hierarchy was established through the unsaid. The unsaid, is not only complementary to the said in the sense that all the elements of these two components influence each other by contributing to each other’s meaning and interpretation but the unsaid, in the form of silence, suggests a condition of subjugation and hegemonic control by a group of people over another one.²⁸ Ritual uncleanness was pivotal in silencing the community and establishing a hierarchical relationship between the Jews and the rest of the Muslim community. Qajar rulers exerted control over the Iranian Jewish community by silencing them and Jews were excluded, and officially denied agency.

The intellectual conversation among *ulemas* regarding the Jewish minority went beyond delegitimising Iranian Jews’ socio-political and geographical presence in Iran. Instead, Muslim clergy challenged the monotheistic faith on theological grounds. If on the one hand, Shiite clergy recognised Judaism and its sacred text to be revealed by God, on the other, they had to prove the superiority and unicity of the Islamic pact with God. *Ulemas* engaged in the process of “othering” Judaic traditions to establish the uniqueness of the Islamic faith. Tsadik gave an account of the specific aspects of Judaism that were discussed by Muslim polemicists to reiterate the superiority of Islam. Shiite polemics

²⁸ Tylor (1978)

against Judaism spanned from theological to legal accusations. One of the main accusations against the Torah was to negate its sacrality by asserting its alteration.²⁹ The argument was that the version of the Torah sanctified by contemporary Jews was not originally revealed. One of the Muslim critics called Ali Bahrani argued that the Torah missed parts during the days of Moses.³⁰ This assumption was based on the story that when Moses returned with the tablets the Israelites were worshipping a calf. Moses cast the tablets down and then took Aaron by the head and pulled him toward himself. At the same time, it was apparent that God took away some parts of the tablet. According to Bahrani, this story, which is reported in the Quran, proved that the Torah had some missing parts already at the time of Moses.³¹ The various arguments about the corruption of the Torah were aimed at showing the discrepancy between different elements of the Jewish Bible. The practice used by Muslim *ulema* to discredit Judaic text and tradition was a form of epistemic oppression. Following Dotson's definition of epistemic oppression, Muslim Shiite clergy justified Muslim theoretical claims as though they were knowledge.³² The practice of epistemic oppression was deployed by Shiite authorities to silence and indeed devalue Judaic traditions as potential contributors to the Islamic tradition: the dominant discourse that was created by the Shiite clergy about Judaic texts reinforced their position of power holder and *knowers* within the Qajar Empire. Thus, the practice of epistemic oppression not only silenced the knowledge and Judaic traditions but also *othered* their practices and traditions.

The othering of the Jewish community through epistemic oppression aimed at excluding Judaic contribution to knowledge production in Iran. Thus, epistemic exclusion silenced

²⁹ Tsadik (2005) p. 118

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ *Ibid*

³² Dotson (2014) p. 116.

the community in ways that went beyond the outcome of social and political oppression. Muslim Shiite clergy could use Islamic sources to recognise the alleged limits and the fallacy of the Judaic system. For instance, Rida'i, one of the Shiite critics, argued that Jewish law illicitly allowed Iranian Jews to drink wine whilst the Book of Judges equated the drinking of wine with idol worship and impurity.³³ Although this specific rule was only applied to Nazarites, Rida'i and other Muslim intellectuals overlooked and reinterpreted verses that contradicted his argument. Moreover, the trend among Shiite clergy was to revise some Judaic epistemological sources to confirm the same contingent power relation between Shiites and Iranian Jews at an intellectual level. Oppressive silence was manifested through the practice of epistemological oppression and injustice, which hindered, and discredited Jewish contribution to Shiite knowledge. Therefore, epistemic oppression was a fallout of social and cultural oppression that was imposed on the Jewish minority through oppressive silence. The status quo of the dominant Shiite elite was indeed maintained at an intellectual level and had profound political consequences and justified oppressive silencing practice. The critiques of the Torah and its validity had implications for its followers. In these respects, both the Torah and the Jew were undervalued in their creed in comparison to Shia Islam, which was considered to be the true religion. The Sharia was implemented and justified to act and discriminate against Iranian Jews based on these theoretical assumptions.

³³ Book of Judge 12:1-25 and Tsadik (2005) p.123.

Western encounters and oppressive silence

The history of Iranian Jewish education and cultural activities in Iran during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not receive public exposure in the narratives of both Iran and Israel until the arrival of the first Christian missionaries and Ashkenazi envoys in Iran in the late nineteenth century. Iranian Jewish communities in Iran remained geographically isolated from Western influences for centuries, and only sporadically did religious envoys come to visit Iran from Palestine.³⁴ The geographical isolation favoured the development of a form of Judaism that was blended with Persian traditions and reflected the long time history of the community in Iran. As a result of this, the absence of both orthodox Judaic habits and central organisational machinery rushed many Western envoys to believe that Judaism in Iran was primordial and a reflection of Iranian Jewry's low social and cultural status. These assumptions were based on the absence of a rabbinical court and Jewish schools led many European envoys to conclude that "*Jewish culture and Jewish creativeness in Iran were poor and did not provide a foothold for ensuring the continued existence of Jewish beings.*"³⁵

Although these institutions were not present in Iran, the richness of their Judaism should be researched concerning the interaction of rabbis with Shiism and the development of indigenous practices. For instance, the Karaites rebelled against the Rabbinic centre in Baghdad and rejected contents contained in the Talmud and the Aggadah narratives. The development of this sect in Iran was influenced by the intellectual and political environment of Shi'ism in Iran. Nemoi argued that in the same way as the Shiites rejected Sunni oral tradition and have waited for the arrival of the Mahdi, the Karaites

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³⁴ S20-451, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel.

³⁵ Glanz, (June 1972)

have had similar interpretations within Judaism.³⁶ Karaites communities lived in northern Iran up until the mid of the nineteenth century.³⁷

The trend among Jewish communities in Iran in the nineteenth century whether large or small was to place Judaic education around Jewish learning. In doing so, a few schools were established within the largest Jewish communities. The school was called *maktab khaneh* and was often placed in the Rabbi's home or the synagogue and had a teacher who was called a molla or khalifa.³⁸ The principal subjects and topics covered in these schools were biblical prayers. The pupils recited prayers that were functional and connected to their Jewishness: eating, drinking, and washing hands forged their distinctive Jewish identity around the basic tenets of the biblical traditions. Hebrew language and the vast tradition of Judeo-Persian literature were pivotal in preserving and nourishing Judaic traditions through the language and literature. In these schools, teachers used to read the sacred texts, poems, Midrash and prayers in Hebrew. Moreover, in the nineteenth century, the majority of Iranian Jewish men were able to read Hebrew. In 1846, the missionaries Stern and Sternschuss visited Isfahan and reported that the majority of the Jews could speak Hebrew.³⁹ These practices demonstrated that Judaism in Iran followed a pattern that was the legacy of Iranian Jewry's interaction with Iranian intellectual and cultural discourses.

Instead, Western envoys did not recognise diversity but silenced the community with a discourse that justified their intervention in Iran. Iranian Jewry's socio-cultural status caught the attention of the first British Christian missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century due to the increasing economic and political interest of Britain in Iranian natural

³⁶ Nemoy (1987) p.xii

³⁷ Netzer (1996)

³⁸ Cohen (1996)

³⁹ Stern (1854) pp.162-163

resources. Although Iran was never officially colonised by foreign powers, Christian missionaries saw Iran as an opportunity to spread Christianity and the decentralised domestic situation in Iran permitted foreign countries to influence and control Iran more easily. Christian missionaries embarked on the “civilising mission” of visiting and converting Iranian Jewish communities to Christianity. Moreover, an increasing interest in the status of the Iranian Jewish minority demonstrated by American and European powers during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was encouraged by both humanitarian concerns and imperialist interests in the area. Christian missionaries’ intervention with religious minorities was no more than an attempt to keep British influence in the country.⁴⁰

Among the many Western missionaries who took part in this enterprise, Dr Joseph Wolff, a Christian priest of Jewish origins, travelled to the Middle East and Iran to convert Jewish minorities to Christianity in the nineteenth century. His attitude towards Middle Eastern countries was one of superiority. He strongly believed that the Ottoman Empire would have flourished under European power due to natural Turkish indolence and stubbornness in resisting European influence. Furthermore, his account of Iranian Jewish communities living in Iran was a remarkable Orientalist portrait that intertwined a sense of Western and Christian superiority. In the diary, he wrote while travelling to Iran Wolff stated that: *“The Ottoman Empire would have been a beautiful country if in the hands of a European power; for it is blessed with everything by nature; but it will never be improved by the Turks, for, besides their natural indolence...”*⁴¹

The account of Dr Joseph Wolff is particularly interesting as it highlights and stresses in different accounts the poor conditions of the Jews of Iran. For instance, in his report on

⁴⁰Tsadik (2007)

⁴¹ Wolff (1848) p.58

the Jews of Bokhara, the group was regarded to live in extremely poor conditions due to the continuous repressions by local mullahs.⁴² Wolff visited the Jewish community of Mashhad in 1831 and reproached them for ‘their flagitious morality’ and insincerity of their conduct. Wolff strongly believed that the only possibility for the Jews to be redeemed was through their conversion to Christianity.⁴³ Other accounts of the Jews of Mashhad depicted the tragic conditions of the community that resulted in harassment, persecution, and eventually forced conversion to Islam in the 1800s. Dr James P. Riach wrote in 1841 from a border town between Khurāsān and Afghanistan, that not only the Jews of Mashhad were suffering, but also those of Harāt.⁴⁴

British missionaries reported on the Jewish community in Iran merely focused on the condition as persecuted minority and their poor socio-cultural condition. They began to frame the discourse about Iranian Jewry using the politics of philanthropy and humanitarianism. In the nineteenth century, the impetus for establishing the Christian missionary society was determined by the alleged necessity of liberating Iranian Jews from their status of poverty and humiliation caused by being a minority group. Cultural Orientalism became the framework for Western-Eastern relations and laid the foundation for a discourse on Iranian Jews' lifestyle: they were considered to be primitive and backward and not properly educated. Many European travellers reported that the condition of Persian Jews under the Qajar dynasty was problematic and required European intervention.⁴⁵

During his brief stay as Ambassador Extraordinary to the Court of Persia (1835–6), Sir Henry Ellis spoke on humanitarian grounds against the persecution of Jews.

⁴² *Ibid* (1848) p.4.

⁴³ *Ibid* (1848) pp.180–2; *ibid* p.11.

⁴⁴ Abbott (1884) pp. 39–40; 45, 47.

⁴⁵ Elwell-Sutton (1941)

Humanitarian concerns about the status of the Iranian Jews were usually accompanied by statements on their intellectual and poor social conditions. Reports on the Jews of Hamadan stressed that the community was maltreated, ignorant, poor, and trapped by tyrannical local Persian authorities. The discourse that was produced by Christian missionaries stigmatised Iranian Jews and denied the latter any possibility to review and regain their stories. The narrative that Iranian Jews were living in poor socio-economic conditions and should be rescued through the “civilising mission” of Christianity, produced and perpetuated the silencing of the community’s story or possibility to review it. Despite this, the relatively low number of Jews converted to Protestantism and the principal reason for conversion was rather connected with practical advantages; those who converted were protected by Westerners and started to have access to better services and jobs.

Moreover, in 1824, the London Society for Promoting Christianity among Iranian Jews also began its activity of conversion.⁴⁶ The missionaries did not tell the Jews that Protestantism meant conversion to Christianity but instead represented it as a higher development of Judaism.⁴⁷ This approach suggested a sense of superiority by European missionaries who took advantage of Iranian Jews’ social and cultural conditions to promote Christian values and creed. Moreover, some Scottish Biblicists in their writings expressed a distinctive sympathy and even affinity towards the Jews which was translated into missionaries’ expeditions to the Middle East. The Church of Scotland also became involved in the missionary project of converting Jews of the Middle East to Christianity. Its main stance was to send qualified missionaries who were able to debate with Jews and distribute the New Testament in Hebrew and Yiddish. The number of Jews who attended

⁴⁶ Cohen (1996)

⁴⁷ S20 451, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

missionary schools in Iran was relatively small and most of them never converted to Christianity. The large majority of 50,000 Iranian Jews believed that conversion was not a good alternative to Iranian Judaism. In total 500 Jews from the communities of Tehran, Hamadan and Shiraz converted to Protestantism.⁴⁸

The emergence of Zionism and support for Zionist ideas by a growing number of British politicians and Christian missionaries, successfully combined British economic and political aspirations in the Middle East with the demand of creating a Jewish State in Palestine. This led to the birth of evangelistic missionary societies impelled by the combination of millennialism, Zionism, and specifically Christian Zionism. This Christian strand proposed a literal reading of the Bible and stressed the belief that the Jewish people as heirs to the land of ancient Israel had the legal right to establish a state coinciding with the biblical borders of Palestine. Indeed, the Jewish return to the Holy Land was seen as a requirement for the Second Coming, the inevitable Armageddon, and the dissolution of the world.⁴⁹ The combination of these motivations energised European activities in the Middle East and Iran in the nineteenth century. Christian missionaries increased their activities in Iran despite the resistance of Iranian Jews to conversion and all reported about the community being poor, persecuted, and lacking leadership.

The discourse that was created by Christian missionaries about Iranian Jews can be interpreted within the wider context of Jewish diplomacy of the late 1800s and encouraged them to establish schools for the community in Iran as well as to improve their social and economic status. Among them, Sir Moses Montefiore, a wealthy Sephardi Jew, was the head of both the London committee of Jews and the Paris-based Alliance Israelites Universelle. The Alliance was extremely prolific in expanding its curriculum

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⁴⁸ S20 451, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel.

⁴⁹ Lieber, (1992) pp. 157–9.

among Mizrahi Jews. The growing concern about the future of the Iranian Jewish community reached its apex when in 1867, Montefiore received a report about further persecutions against the Jews of Hamadan. A British agent, R. T. Thomson, graphically testified in *Notes on the Jews in Oormiah*, February 1867, that the Urmia Jews were harassed by continual discriminatory taxation and extortions of every kind by their governor, Rajab 'Alī Khān. Thus, the British Government for the first time made an official complaint against the Qajar Government about the persecution of Jews and Christian minorities.⁵⁰

Up to WWII, the Alliance was able to improve its influence among Iranian Jewry because of the Iranian government's need for capital and its role in the great European market. Moreover, The Alliance Israelites and Montefiore influenced their respective governments, particularly the British consuls, to represent Jewish interests quite often. The first such intervention was Montefiore's support for the Jewish community in Hamadan in 1865.⁵¹ It was followed by a European Jewish relief fund to help Iranian Jews to survive the famine in 1871. European Jewish leaders pushed the Shah Nasir al-Din Shah to formally protect Iranian Jews with a *farman* of protection in 1873. The negotiations about better protection of the Iranian Jewish community resulted in the opening of the first Alliance elementary schools in various Iranian cities between 1899 and 1904.

The relationship between the Alliance Israelites and Iranian Jewry was marked by episodes of cooperation and dispute. The cooperation between local rabbis and the Alliance were testimonies in epistolary exchanges that showed that Iranian rabbis were

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⁵⁰ Montefiore (2005) pp.192-3

⁵¹ Green Vol. 110, No. 3 (June 2005), pp. 631-658

heard regarding the matter of how Judaism should have been taught in classes.⁵²

However, these voices were not strong enough to break the discourse that Western envoys constructed around “the Persian nature” and identity. Thus, the traditional *maktabas* were closed and, the Alliance established new schools which offered a modern, secular, and French education.

Since the establishment of the Alliance number of Jewish envoys from both Europe and Israel were sent to Iran to reiterate the inadequate condition of Iranian Judaism and to correct it. Yona Cohen, an Israeli envoy was sent to Iran to report on the status of Iranian Judaism. He confessed that Iranian Judaism and its practices were not orthodox: Jews smoked during Shabbat, did not know Hebrew, and were culturally Iranian.⁵³ Moreover, Baruch Duvdevai, an Ashkenazi Jew who worked in Iran as the Executive director of the Aliyah department in the 1950s, reported that the Iranian Jewish community was extremely naïve and did not know much about Judaism.⁵⁴ Again, Speizerhandler’s account of Iranian Judaism in the late 1960s reiterated that the community practised a primitive form of Judaism in comparison to Western standards.⁵⁵ According to Kleinbaum, modernity and progress were introduced among the Iranian community by the Alliance education, and that indigenous Jews understood that emancipation only came through modern and Western education.⁵⁶

Different from the discourse of Christian missionaries, European Jewish envoys stressed the importance of liberating Jews from Muslim oppression. They believed that Iranian

⁵² Shouker’s letter from Shiraz, no. 31 10, nov, 1904 in AIUA File IE14; Louriya’s letter from Teheran, 15 Sept., 1905, in AIUA File XIVE 150 and also Cuenca’s letter from Hamadam, No28, 3 Feb.1935, in CAHHJP, Hamadam file.

⁵³ Interview with Yona Cohen (1984)

⁵⁴ Interview with Baruch Duvdevani. 1980.

⁵⁵ S20 451, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

Jews' history of isolation from the Western world worsened their condition of ignorance and poverty. At the turn of the twentieth century, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee started to be involved in the social and economic life of the community and they transferred 15,000 dollars to support needy Jews in Iran via the American Embassy. Between 1921 and 1925, the American minister himself was an American Reform Rabbi, Joseph Kornfeld. Kornfeld frequently intervened on behalf of the local Jewish population. Moreover, the silencing of the community happened on two different levels: on the one level, the Orientalist discourse that was produced by Western Jews justified their educational commitment to correcting and improving Iranian Jewish status. It was indeed a silencing measure that reinforced the status quo of the dominant group not only in the community but more broadly intertwined American and British political and economic interests with Iran. On the other level, there was an increasing trend among western Jews to speak on behalf of the community. Kornfeld inaugurated what later became an imperative among Western Jewish envoys to Iran in the 1970s. According to Moshe Gilboa, of the second Israeli mission in 1978, the complete lack of Jewish leadership became an issue that had to be solved to build up a community structure as well as provide a reference point for the Jews living in Iran. The discourse around the making of an Iranian Jewish leadership investigated several possibilities albeit only a few seemed to have any potential. Since there was a complete lack of Judaic authority, the first suggestion was to form a religious leadership in France from members of the Sephardic community and then send them to Iran through the French embassy.⁵⁷

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The exercise of the power of Ashkenazi Jews over Iranian Jews was expressed mainly through these oppressive silencing measures aimed at educating Iranian Jews about

⁵⁷ C10 2375, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, Israel

Western Judaic practices. To dominate and exert control over Iranian Jewry, Ashkenazi envoys described their status as intrinsically inferior and primitive and altered their image. In doing so, Iranian Jews became *invisible* or without a clear voice of their own. The distortion of their identity impeded Iranian Jews to have a voice in the construction of the discourse about themselves. Iranian Jewish voices were not part of the official narrative about their existence and identity in Iran. Iranian Jews did not have the opportunity to write their history and the discourse formation about their experience in Iran silenced the community's voice in many ways. Iranian Jewish history was sequestered and thus silenced by dominant and hegemonic groups. Boje⁵⁸ suggested that the term sequestered refers to stories that are set apart from the mainstream. In saying so, these stories of Iranian Jewish education have been deliberately silenced and sometimes interpreted to accomplish the dominant political agenda of both Christian and Jewish envoys in Iran. The documentation of "Iranian Jewish primordial cultural habits" was crystallised in "the archives." The archive, as Foucault defined it:

*"The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped in distinct figures, composed together under multiple relations, maintained or blurred under specific regularities [...]."*⁵⁹

The dominant elite applied the "strategy of patronage"⁶⁰ and, under these conditions, the archive was the instrument that supported their sociocultural legacy to do so. The

⁵⁸ Boje (1991)

⁵⁹ Foucault (2004), p.101

⁶⁰ Hacoen (2003)

investigation of the negation of Iranian tradition and cultural heritage by the Western Jewish leadership and the marginalisation of Iranian Jews from the discourse about themselves followed the traditional East-West dichotomy well described by anti-colonialists like Fanon, Cesaire and specifically Edward Said's contribution to the field with his Orientalist theory.⁶¹ As is the case within the history of colonialism, Fanon considered how natives were silenced by the presence of the oppressors and how silence regulated this power relation between the oppressed and oppressors. Iranian Jews were not allowed to have a voice of their own and their self-image was distorted.

This legacy had a profound effect on Iranian Jewish immigration and integration within Israel. In the early 1950s, the Iranian newcomers were described as an exotic community whose Judaism was practised in a very primordial way.⁶² Given this, representatives of the Jewish Agency reported that the emigration of Iranian Jews to Israel had been far more problematic than those from other non-European countries due to the absence of working skills as well as the absence of appropriate Jewish cultural traditions and awareness, which isolated them from the rest of Israelis.⁶³ Ashkenazi Jews interpreted cultural divergences with Iranian Jewry in an "orientalist" way: they claimed that the first wave of Iranian *olim* did have "a social element" that prevented them from integrating within the society. The "a-social element" was due to their nature of being lazy and degenerate, which prevented them from working hard.⁶⁴ Iranian Jews' laziness, it was argued, explained the difficulties of absorption and adaptability to the new Israeli situation: Iranian Jews lacked permanent employment and flexibility in changing their values and traditions.⁶⁵

Commented [CA10]: Comments to 1.4.1 and 1.4.5 ,

⁶¹ Shohat (1988)

⁶² S20-451, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, Israel

⁶³ Shkalim (1982) Interview with Baruch Duvdevani

⁶⁴ S6-6732, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, London

⁶⁵ S115-211, Central Zionist Archives of Jerusalem, London

Silence as a form of resistance

In 1839, the entire Jewish community of Mashhad was accused of an act of mockery and contempt for Islam. Incitements against the Jews and public religious denunciation soon developed into an assault on the community, resulting in the killing of some 36 and the forced conversion of the rest.⁶⁶ The Shi'ite clergy in Iran ordered not only the cutting off of the water supply to its Jewish community but also they were forbidden to leave their neighbourhood and therefore were implicitly condemned to death.⁶⁷ The attack and forced conversion of the Jewish populace took place at a time of heightened political and military tension in the city's vicinity. Unlike the Jews of Shiraz, the Jews of Mashhad could not return to Judaism despite Muhammad Shah's decree four years later permitting them to do so. As the holiest Muslim city in Iran, Mashhad during the nineteenth century was more influenced by its religious leadership than by political authority in Tehran. Although some of these Jews preferred to go to Herat in Afghanistan instead of converting to Islam, the majority of the Jews of Mashhad adopted Persian costumes and habits.⁶⁸ Iranian Jews acted, outside the home, as Muslims: they shopped in Muslim stores and observed Muslim holidays. Mashhadi Jews performed the rites of Islam, married among themselves but performed the Muslim wedding ceremony, buried their dead following the Muslim rituals, and even made their requirement pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina or Karbala. In doing so they were honoured with the title of Karbala-I by the Muslim community.⁶⁹

It appeared that the only way to escape from persecutions under the Qajar Government and to obtain equal rights in Islamic society was to convert to Islam.⁷⁰ The conversion was the main vehicle through which Qajaris accepted Jews into society under the name

⁶⁶ Nissimi (2003

⁶⁷ Tsadik (2007), p.36

⁶⁸ ACC/3121/E3/172, Archives of the Board of Deputies, London

⁶⁹ Patai, (1997) p. 18.

⁷⁰ ACC/3121/E3/172, Archives of the Board of Deputies, London

of “Mohammedans”.⁷¹ Forced conversion to Islam was a common practice among the Jewish community in Spain under the Muwahidun dynasty to be preserved and survive among Muslim leaders. The formation of the crypto-Jewish community of Mashhad in the nineteenth century represented an example of how the community resisted and protected their identity in a hostile environment using silence as a form of resistance. Silence took the form of the hidden space at home where the community could nourish and develop its Jewish identity. The Jews of Mashhad defied conversion to Islam and reorganised themselves in the silent space of their home by creating unique cultural and social mechanisms that later turned them into a fully recognisable group.

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The home was a private and silent space that could not be controlled by the dominant group and therefore enabled Jews to maintain and nourish their Judaic traditions. Given the peculiarity in which their Jewish identity developed, the social structure of the community had to be reorganised under the new conditions dictated by the silence. To maintain the community cohesive, Iranian Jews activated new mechanisms that were peculiar to their silent status. These new mechanisms that were activated by the community at home, resembled Gellner’s model of nationalism. Although Gellner in setting out two principles for the emergence of nationalism believes early industrialization is one of them, Mashhadi Jews proved that in a pre-industrial time, religious cohesivity among this group had the same result. Mashhadi Jews reinforced and developed a unique attachment to Eretz Israel which evolved into Zionism. In comparison to the rest of Iranian Jewry at the time, the Jews of Mashhad developed an intimate relationship between their Jewishness and Zionism.

Commented [CA12]: Comment 1.4.9

⁷¹ *Ibid*

They went “offstage” and this condition as described by Smith became the place where Iranian Jews produced a discourse beyond direct observation by powerholders.⁷² In these regards, Iranian Jews maintained and practised Judaic traditions that contradicted their public image of Muslims. The offstage condition was meant for a different audience and under different constraints of power, Iranian Jews nourished and reorganised their identity as a community. The offstage platform was intentionally kept silent and away from the practices of domination and exploitation that were displayed by the Shiite government in Iran during the Qajar dynasty.

Silence, in the form of off-stage status, was intentionally chosen to survive within an oppressive environment, and due to this, became a form of resistance. Cooper states that resistance has become an ambiguous term for any position that is in opposition to power and that scholars should be looking for nuances within it.⁷³ Contrary to his view, silence among the Iranian Jewish community was the only viable option to cope with subordination and oppression by the Qajar dynasty. As Aptheker suggested, all forms of coping and survival are resistant, and they took the specific form of silence which allowed Mashhadi Jews to persist as a community in Iran⁷⁴. Their everyday struggle to resist as a religious and ethnic minority in Iran was translated into silent resistance. In their private homes and spaces, they were Jews and complicated manoeuvres were carried out to preserve their Judaic traditions. For instance, Shabbat preparations were carried out in the basement and women took care of rolling wicks for the candles, making the wine, and baking the bread, plus matzah for Pessah.⁷⁵ Jewish identity and its fragile survival among members of the community were maintained and protected by women not only in the

⁷² Scott (1990)

⁷³ Cooper (2005)

⁷⁴ Aptheker (1989)

⁷⁵ <https://www.jpost.com/cafe-oleh/ask-the-expert/the-double-lives-of-mashhadi-jews>

secrecy of their homes but also to connect with members of the community. Moreover, kosher food was often smuggled home under women's chadors or long cloaks.⁷⁶ The role of women in preserving the identity in the Spanish crypto-Jewish community has been highlighted by Levine-Melamed. She argued that the role of women was very different from her counterpart in other Jewish communities.⁷⁷ Mashhadi women, as the custodian of their homes, became the protagonists of the off-stage space and were equalled to male Jews in preserving and nurturing Judaic traditions and identity. Gender relations mutated and became non-conformist to the traditional Iranian society and women and indeed families transmitted Jewish practices and folklore. The reconstruction of the history of the offstage period went, as argued by Nissimi, through the process of historicising the memory of the community which passed folk stories and shared memories with its members which emphasised the "miraculous and heroic work done by the members of the community to keep Judaism alive in Mashhad."⁷⁸

The network of silent customs and folklore created cohesion within the group and reinforced communal ties among its members and Israel. The power in the safety of the silence spoke for the self-assertion and self-identification of Mashhadi Jews as being Jews and created a social space for their subculture.⁷⁹ Strategic silence paid off and the community not only survived but became one of the most prosperous Jewish communities in Iran and abroad. The strong community identity that merged from the underground period, proved to be successful when the community moved to Israel in the 1950s for two main reasons. First, the close connection with the Land of Israel during the underground period was later translated into the strong support for Zionism. **Contrary to the Iranian**

Commented [CA13]: 1.4.3

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Levine-Melamed (1995) p. 209.

⁷⁸ Nissimi (2003)

⁷⁹ Scott (1990) p.18

Jewish communities who emigrated to Israel in the 1950s, the vast majority of Mashhadi Jews understood the State of Israel to be their promised Land and constituted a means of identification with the Jewish people. Second, Mashhadi Jews relied on strong community bonds to build their synagogues and community centres.⁸⁰ The strong community ties that were established by the Mashhadi community differed from the structure of the Iranian Jewish *olim*: Iranian *olim* arrived in Israel without this structured support⁸¹ and Iranian *olim* did suffer acute socio-cultural distress. Iranian Jews experienced not only a loss of identity through their enforced acculturation but their lack of structure did not support the community through the process of absorption into Israel.

⁸⁰ Nissimi (2006)

⁸¹ Shumky (1955)

Conclusion

Silence regulated power relations between Iranian Jews and the dominant groups in two ways: oppressive silence was deployed by Qajar rulers and European envoys to maintain their status quo, exert control over Iranian Jewry, as well as a form of resistance strategy by Mashhadi Jews. Departing from the rigid confines of linguistics, the use of silence as the theoretical framework to understand power relations between Iranian Jews and the dominant powerholders has helped us to understand the multifaceted status of Iranian Jews as a religious minority in Iran. Between the end of the nineteenth century through the twentieth century, their identity was strongly shaped by the cultural patterns of domination and subordination and silence determined these socio-political features. Contrary to Foucault's understanding of power as embedded everywhere in social life through the communicative systems or discourses, silence, in its oppressive and resistance forms has offered a framework to analyse the status of minorities. Analysing silence in association with the creation of a power system opens new ways of approaching Foucault and post-modernist literature about the construction of power relations through the fabrication of discourses.

Qajar rulers neglected any intellectual contribution and public engagement of Iranian Jewry to the Iranian society by suppressing their voices in several ways. Oppressive silence comprised different physical and intellectual measures that deliberately altered and made Iranian Jews' presence in Iran invisible. The most effective measure was the formulation of the concept of ritual uncleanness. Grounded in the Islamic tradition of the dhimma system, Iranian Jews were not simply tolerated as a religious minority but deliberately discriminated against for being kefir, infidels, and therefore uncleaned people. Moreover, the delegitimization of their status altered society's perception of their status and forced them to disappear from the public space. Qajar rulers aimed at

maintaining the status quo through the silence of oppression. Iranian Jews were forbidden from mingling with the rest of the Iranian society and were not allowed to do certain jobs. Oppressive silencing measures also characterized encounters between Iranian Jewry and European envoys who arrived in Iran in the late nineteenth century and silence was an imposed status for those Iranian Jews who encountered Christian missionaries and Ashkenazi Jewish envoys. European missions came to Iran between the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century and discovered that the status of Iranian Jewry was not up to European standards. Under these conditions, they 'sequestered' Iranian Jewish stories by narrating their version of how Iranian Jews lived and practised Judaism. European envoys created a regime of truth that depicted Iranian Jewry as primitive. The silencing of the community happened through the creation of a discourse that founded an ideological basis in Orientalism. Iranian Jewish identity was therefore represented through Orientalism and this regime of truth was crystallised in the Israeli archives and affected their emigration and absorption in the 1950s. Although Post-colonial Zionism has criticised the systematic ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic practices of discrimination carried out by Israeli institutions, Orientalist prejudices against Iranian Jewry were formed well before In Iran, already at the end of the nineteenth century.

Hence, the use of silence was not only imposed by dominant groups, but it was a successful political strategy used by Mashhadi Jews to survive as a minority. The Jews of Mashhad used silence in the form of *off-stage status* to use Scott's analytical framework, which resisted and forged a unique cultural identity that differed from the rest of the Iranian Jewish community. In this instance, silence became the agency of Iranian Jews' existence in Iran. Silence was the platform used by Iranian Jews to resist and develop their agency in Iran. Owing to silence, Judaism did not disappear in Iran but

developed into a unique form of Jewish identity that synthesized Iranian Jews' condition in Iran at that time and is still enduring today. Mashhadi Jews' Judaism was strongly intertwined with Zionism and advantaged the community to maintain strong ties with Israel since its establishment in 1948.

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Iranian Jews' existence as a minority was exposed to many challenges that affected their survival in Iran. However, a story of persecution and discrimination has not been the only one describing their experience in Iran at the turn of the twentieth century. The use of silence as a theoretical framework has unfolded a more complicated reality about power relations between Iranian Jews and dominant powers. The eclectic function of silence as a political tool has characterised and shaped the identity of this minority in any way. Iranian Jews' narrative about its existence in Iran is not only a story of subjugation but also an example of how minorities can engage and survive in a hostile environment by developing alternative strategies of protecting their identity at risk. In this way, silence inaugurates new ways of approaching the history of minorities in politics and socio-cultural studies.

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