

[1988] The Jews of Kurdistan in transition: From Kurdistan to Israel

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Introduction

A group of twenty residents from Jerusalem took a trip in July, 1988 to Turkey, mainly to its Eastern Kurdish districts. It could have been considered an ordinary journey if the Israeli tourists had not been in fact native Kurdish Jews.[1] Originally they were from Zakho, Iraqi Kurdistan, and most of them had immigrated to Israel between the years 1950-1951.[2] As Israeli citizens, they are prevented from visiting Iraq. Thus, the only option left for them if they wish to visit Kurdistan is Turkey, with which Israel has diplomatic relations. The purpose of their voyage to Turkey was to search for the Kurdish flavor of life which they had left behind when they immigrated to Israel. All these years since their immigration, they have been longing for Kurdistan; the land, the people, the scenes, the cultural climate in which they were raised. In a similar tour, a year earlier, a group of Kurdish tourists sailed to the heart of the river where they asked a Kurdish singer who joined them to sing Kurdish songs while sailing. They took him on this journey to the heart of a river because in Turkey the Kurdish language is strictly forbidden and he certainly could not have sung in public at the club where he works. There is no need to say that the Turkish authorities would not have approved if they knew about this specific wave of Israeli-Kurdish tourism. Many tours of this nature have taken place in the last few years and the number is increasingly growing each summer. The Kurdish Jews in Israel are highly attached to the land of their birth and some of them would pay a fortune if they would be permitted to visit their home towns in Iraq. Also, around July of 1988, a group of young Israeli dancers went on an official journey to West Germany and Italy. The teenagers from the neighborhood of *Katamonim* (or *Gonenim*) represented Jerusalem in this tour. The significant point is that the youth group performed Kurdish dances rather than Israeli folk dances. This fact might be surprising, but only at first glance. *Gonenim*, where these teenagers were raised, is a neighborhood where many Kurdish Jews live. [3] They are the first generation born in Israel to immigrants from Kurdistan. Their tour was not the first international trip of this sort and nor was it the first Kurdish dance troupe ever to represent Israel in Europe. At least a dozen similar groups actively perform in Israel. *Ma'oz Zion (Kastel)*, near Jerusalem, is another community inhabited mainly by Kurdish Jews. Kurdish dances frequently take place there on holidays, weddings and other joyful occasions and in 1974 this community actually formed an official dance troupe, affiliated with the local municipality, whose chairman was a Kurdish Jew (Nathaniel Gabai), native of Zakho, the son of the former Jewish *mukhtar* of Zakho Jewish community (Moshe Gabbai). Throughout the years this troupe was invited to Germany and Holland where it was praised for its performances. The dance troupe and the tours to Turkish Kurdistan should be sufficient to demonstrate the warm and emotional feelings of the Kurds in Israel towards their land of birth and the Kurdish culture. They are highly moved by anything linked to Kurdistan. Many feel nostalgia towards Kurdistan.[4] In some communities along with those mentioned above, the Kurdish spirit is much more emphasized due to the simple fact that they are heavily populated by Kurdish residents. The Neo-Aramaic language is still heard in the streets of these communities as if these people had not yet left Kurdistan, where Neo-Aramaic was the common spoken language among Jews. A stranger who passes through *Katamonim* will be surprised to see the elder Kurds walking on the streets with their traditional Kurdish costumes and *kafiyya*, speaking Neo-Aramaic. It is evident that not only the native Kurds feel this way towards the Kurdish tradition but also their children are very well aware of their Kurdish origin. It is no wonder that they are actively involved in dance troupes and take part in typical Kurdish events such as the traditional spring festival - the *Sehrane*. The Israeli teenagers while performing in such events are very convincing, dancing various Kurdish folk-dances and dressed in colorful Kurdish costumes.

The director of the youth's dancing group and the major force behind its achievements is Mr. Gurji Zaken, [5] a man full of enthusiasm, known by all for his dedication to the Kurdish tradition. Fifty year old Gurji was quite a famous Kurdish singer at weddings and other joyful events. He has also recorded a tape of Kurdish songs, but his musical career had to be stopped due to medical instructions. Gurji, native of Zakho, immigrated to Israel at the age of fourteen. He is one of my informants in an oral history research project of the Kurdish Jews. His Kurdish childhood, which was prematurely taken away from him due to the circumstances (the immigration en-masse of the Iraqi Jews to Israel), seems to be one of the factors behind his great attachment to the Kurdish culture. Among his virtues: he has an amazing memory, he is a remarkable story-teller and has total command of both Neo-Aramaic and Kurmanji, the Kurdish dialect spoken around Zakho. Four remarks should be taken into consideration to understand how the Kurdish culture continues to flourish in Israel:[6]

- a. Most of the Kurds still live together in the same neighborhoods or agricultural communities where they compose in fact a majority of the population. The more homogeneous the community, the easier it is for the Kurds to preserve their unique traditions. This produced both positive and negative consequences, resulting from living together throughout the years. On happy occasions such as a wedding, the family receives constructive assistance from neighbors in the arrangements and preparations. Also at sorrowful events, such as death, they receive psychological and emotional support and condolences, which cannot be measured, from the surrounding community. On the other hand, however, the concentration of Kurdish families in a small community frequently causes friction, disagreements and rivalries in these communities.
- b. The language which is largely spoken in various degrees of intensity in the homes of all the Kurds is Neo-Aramaic which was spoken by Jews and Christians in Kurdistan for countless generations.
- c. The favorite music in these houses is usually "Eastern music" (Arabic, Greek and other Mediterranean melodies

composed of Hebrew songs) rather than Western (European, American or even the mainstream Israeli) music. In every Kurdish house one can find dozens of tapes of Kurdish music. The most popular singers are Muslim Kurdish singers who still live in Kurdistan: Hammo (Muhammad Aref Jizrawi), Hasso (Hassan Jizrawi) and Isa Barwari. d. Kurdish dances, performed to the sounds of *Dohla*, Kurdish drum, and *Zurna*, Kurdish wind instrument, are an indispensable part of any Kurdish wedding or other cheerful occasion. There are so many such occasions due to the large extended families that frequently they coincide with one another, and the Kurdish guests have to choose between events or to rush from one to another.

From the Kurdish Mountains into Israel: A new beginning

Almost all the Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan immigrated to Israel by 1951. Two waves of immigration took place, one in the mid-thirties [7] and the second in 1950-51, when the Iraqi government allowed Jews to immigrate to Israel. At first, those who wished to immigrate had only to give up their Iraqi citizenship. Later, the Iraqi regime announced that the immigrants would not be permitted to take any property out of Iraq.[8]The Kurdish Jews from Turkey and Persia, on the other hand, were less restricted in their immigration to Israel. Thus they came more gradually. Today, approximately 100,000 Kurdish Jews live in Israel.[9] In the early fifties (1950s), more than 750,000 Jewish immigrants from many countries arrived to Israel in the first three years after the independence, creating a mosaic of cultures. The population of the small country more than doubled in a short time, mainly due to the mass immigration of Jews from Arab and Islamic countries. The sharp differences between the various ethnic groups created social and ethnic tension. The term "oriental" Jews to indicate outsiders were used by Israelis of European origin in reference to Jews from the Middle East who immigrated to Israel. In analyzing the absorption process and the status and image of the Kurds in Israel, there is a need to clarify socio-cultural phenomenon, commonly referred to as the melting-pot concept. [10] The new immigrants were expected to integrate into the society, stripped of their original culture, adopting new, Israeli-Westernized characteristics. The concept of melting-pot in Israel was designed primarily for the new immigrants from the Islamic countries. Their original cultural identity was suppressed in the course of the bureaucratic process of absorption and integration. As a result, many felt either shame or humiliation about being "Easterner" (or "Oriental") as opposed to the other segment of the population from European origin, which were "Westerners". (These two groups are better known as *Sepharadim* and *Ashkenazim* respectively.) It was not very likely for the new immigrants, due to the conditions in this young and developing country to have a distinctive cultural pride. The Oriental Jews were ranked at the lowest level of the social scale. Prejudice, stereotypes and racial feelings contributed their part as well as the fact that they came from a traditional society and were lacking the skills and education required by a modern country. These facts added to the general atmosphere in Israel, causing discrimination, cultural and social suppression against the new immigrants. The Kurdish Jews were not spared from such a fate. In Israel, as almost in any other country that absorbs immigrants, the new immigrants were stigmatized according to their land of birth. The Moroccans, for example, were considered hot tempered, violent and lazy, [11] while the Kurds were regarded as ignorant... . They were a favorite subject of ethnic jokes. The phrase "Ana Kurdi" which literally means, "I am a Kurd" symbolized them. It implies that the Kurd speaks in a straight forward manner, without hesitation. It also signifies someone who is simple minded and ignorant. The term 'Kurd' in Israel has a negative connotation. This stereotype prevailed mainly during the 1950's and 1960's. Nevertheless, many people are still stereotype oriented. A young professional told me that once, during a job interview she could not answer a question addressed to her. She simply replied: "Ana Kurdi " only to find out that the interviewer was of all things Kurdish. She did not use this phrase out of racial prejudice but, rather due to inter- cultural conditioning. Itzhak Rabin, a former Israeli Prime Minister, was once asked in a cabinet meeting (in 1974) whether Israel was interested in Kurdish pressure on Iraq and whether the United States prevented such pressure. "I don't know" he replied. One of the cabinet members, Dr. Yoseph Burg, added immediately the phrase "Ana Kurdi ", to indicate the ignorance which such an answer reflected. Even though people might still use such a phrase out of habit the image of the Kurds has in fact changed in the course of years. This change was effected through the positive attitude, economic achievements and the hard working nature of the Israeli Kurds. The atmosphere was more severe during the 1950's but even today one can sense echoes of social tension in Israel. From the mid-seventies onwards, however, opposite socio-cultural tendencies to those described above arose and they were not disconnected from political developments.[12] The new theme that emerged stressed giving each ethnic group the pride which was withheld from them in the past. The concept that the Western culture was preferable has no longer been dominant. The uniqueness of each distinctive group was encouraged to be emphasized and expressed.

Social and Economic Changes of the new Kurdish immigrants in Israel

In the second half of the 18th century, Kurdish Jews began to immigrate to Palestine, preferably to Jerusalem, where they formed a considerable community. In 1939, the number of the Kurds in Jerusalem rose to 4,369 within the Jewish population of 80,850.[13] According to a survey taken in 1972, 30,000 Kurds lived in the Capitol. In 1989, I estimate that there are between forty and fifty thousand Kurds in Jerusalem alone. In the beginning of the 20th century the diligent and hardworking Kurds held various occupations within the workforce. Many hard working Kurds earned their living in the quarries, as builders or in the pioneering work of road paving. Throughout the years many others found work as shopkeepers in *Mahane Yehuda*, the biggest outdoor market (Hebrew: *Shuq*) of Jerusalem, and they own vegetable and fruit stores. Therefore the Neo-Aramaic language is commonly spoken in the market between shopkeepers and Kurdish clients, either out of acquaintance or in order to gain a better price in bargaining. Porterage is another unique occupation that has become monopolized by the Kurds. As a result Kurds also now control the moving company business. Havatzelet Street in downtown Jerusalem, which is known as the center for porters is equally famous for its strong and large Kurdish figures. The children of former Kurdish builders, following in their fathers' footsteps, have become contractors and managers of huge companies. Jerusalem is the home of at least a dozen Kurdish contractors whose wealth is legendary. The last two presidents of the Association of Contractors in Israel were Kurds. Some of these wealthy contractors are involved in large projects overseas, in Africa, Europe and the United States. More than a dozen Kurdish families, also from Jerusalem, have also established themselves in the hotel management business and own hotels in Jerusalem, Eilat, Tiberius and Netanya. In Kurdistan some Jews practiced a large range of occupations such as shepherds and farmers. They lived as peasants in villages, growing vineyards, orchards, grain, tobacco and raising cattle and

sheep. The Jews of Zakho had some other peculiar professions which involved trading transactions. Many families earned their living being rafts men (Neo-Aramaic: tarraHe) and muleteers (Neo-Aramaic: qaterchaye).

Not only in the Kurdish mountains but also in Israel some Kurdish Jews were attracted to the pastoral way of life and settled in agricultural communities, sometimes inhabited exclusively by Kurds. The Kurds, as previously mentioned, preferred to be with Kurds. These communities are located in the mountainous areas of Jerusalem, around Haifa in the north, in the Jordan Valley region and in the south of the country, the Negev. A large group of the town Jews earned their living through a variety of trade, store ownerships and other various crafts such as tailoring, shoe production and the kind. As is true with many immigrant communities, many second generation Kurds have broken the traditional pattern of following in their parents footsteps in their business by receiving education in the universities and other institutions of higher learning. Some of those educated hold high positions in governmental ministries and serve as high ranking officers in the police forces and the army (presently there is one Kurdish Major General, Yitzhak Mordechai, who is the head of the Israeli Army Central Command. In the late 1990s he would become the defense minister in the cabinet of Benjamin Netanyahu). Economic Turning Point The immigration of the Kurdish Jews to Israel has been, from many aspects, a turning point. Economically, it has been a story of success which is indicated by socio-economic change within the communities. While in Kurdistan only a few Jews were relatively rich, in Israel the wheel of fortune turned around. Many of the poor Kurdish Jews received for the first time in their lives a real opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and fulfill their potential. For many of them it has been a new beginning. New horizons have been opened and it has been as though they were reborn. The traditional hierarchical stratification which was based on wealth broke down in the new circumstances and life conditions offered in Israel. It should be noted that in Kurdistan the majority of the Jews had hardly any chance for socio-economic mobilization. A person who was born into an impoverished family would have found it quite difficult to escape poverty. He might have improved his economic status compared to his father's, but he certainly could not become a rich man. He was limited in resources and was primarily concerned with earning a basic living. The opposite description was also correct. Wealthy Families would usually keep their socio-economic status for a few generations unless a financial catastrophe occurred. In the unique economic conditions of Kurdistan the rule that only the rich could become richer, generally prevailed. Only someone who had resources and economic patience (for instance, to store goods for a long time, until the prices were raised), would be able to maintain and increase his wealth. In Kurdistan, economic advantage has also remained with some families. There is a strong correlation between kinship patterns of socio-economic status: wealthy families increase the likelihood of the families next generation in retaining and perhaps strengthening their economic and social status. In Israel, all the Kurds rich or poor had to start all over again from the beginning because they practically left all their property in Iraq and came to Israel. Interestingly enough, most of the richer families in Kurdistan are not quite as rich in Israel and vice-versa, many of those who were poor in Kurdistan became very rich and economically successful in Israel. In fact, mainly the poor ones broke through and became rich within a period of fifteen or twenty years of their immigration. Some of my informants who were very wealthy in Kurdistan told me the following: "Look at this (the name is given) family, they hardly had anything to eat in Zakho... and here they have become millionaires". Or they would say: "Look at this person. In Dohuk, his status was very low, and here he became so rich. When he sees me, he crosses the road to the opposite side... because he cannot look at my eyes." Description of the Jewish trade community of Zakho could further clarify this phenomenon. At least half of the families (150 out of 300, in the mid-forties) earned their living through various trade transactions. The Jewish merchants in Kurdistan could be divided into three main groups. (i) Wholesaler merchants (Neo-Aramaic, pl:tijare), who owned stores and shops in the Khan or the Jewish market (Neo-Aramaic, shuqet hozaye). (ii) Shopkeepers (Neo-Aramaic, pl:dikandare), merchants in a smaller size compared to the first group. (iii) Wandering Peddlers (Neo-Aramaic, pl: bazaze or xazare). They would buy products in the market and then ride a donkey or a mule would travel between the villages around the town. The peddlers would leave their home town on Sunday and returned after a week or two.[14] Besides the objective difficulties of journeys in the isolated and remote Kurdish mountains, the Jewish peddlers were also vulnerable to attacks by brigands. Throughout the years many Jewish peddlers were robbed and a few dozens were murdered by the brigands after being robbed. In Neo-Aramaic being robbed is literally translated as being "stripped", derived from the Neo-Aramaic root Sh-l-X (Heb. ש-ל-ח) which actually means to take off the clothes, since even their clothes were usually taken by the brigands. It was indeed an extremely dangerous occupation. The murdered peddlers still strongly prevail in the collective memory of the Kurdish Jewish community as if it just occurred and not in fact tens of years ago. The wholesale merchants used to cooperate in partnership with smaller merchants and peddlers. In such partnerships, they only invested money while the troubles and risks of the journey were left to their partners, the peddlers and small merchants, who were also responsible for negotiating and carrying out of the deals. The wholesalers themselves used to wait for a message from their wakil (Arabic, representative) in the big city. For instance, the big merchants in Zakho, or Dohuk, had a wakil, commercial liaison, in Mosul who would inform them that the price of a certain good, which they have had in storage for a long time, has been raised. Then they would send the requested merchandise by delegates, either through rafts men (Neo-Aramaic, pl:tarraHe), or muleteers (Neo-Aramaic, pl: qatarchaye). The smaller merchants, the peddlers and other less fortunate had to work much harder in Kurdistan to make a living. No wonder, therefore, that once in Israel they were willing to work at any available job and were not afraid of taking risks. Those who had been well off in Kurdistan, on the other hand, were more spoiled and selective in choosing their job. Their social and psychological background imposed limits on them. Their self-image was still one of a rich and respected person. Nevertheless, not only did they have to earn a living but they usually had to work under supervision and being subordinate to others, a situation unfamiliar and difficult for them to handle. As a result, working themselves to a higher position was a far more difficult task.[15] The economic transformation of the Kurds in Israel was observed by Danni Rubinstein, a journalist from Jerusalem. In his youth, in the early fifties, he volunteered to teach Hebrew to the New Kurdistanian immigrants in the absorption center Kastel (known for its ancient castle and also known as Mevaseret Zion, near Jerusalem. He followed the absorption process of the Kurds in Jerusalem and their progress throughout the years. Rubinstein gives the next account: [In the fifties] "the tin huts in which they lived were burning from the heat of the summer... and they were freezing in the winter..." "Today", added Rubinstein, "some of the streets of Kastel are more luxurious than those of Savion, a suburb of Tel-Aviv, perhaps the most expensive location in Israel.[16] Intrigues and Politics: The Association of Kurdish

immigrants as a source of political power The late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir was once a guest of honor at the first official assembly of the Kurdish Immigrants Association in Israel (1973). In her speech she remarked that it took twenty five years (since the establishment of the state in 1948) until their first official gathering, then "the Kurds must be very bad politicians". The Kurdish association which has been active since 1970 is indeed politically motivated. The chairman, Mr. Habib Shimoni and the small group of activists around him are affiliated with the Labor party. Most of them have political interests. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of them harness their activity in the Kurdish Association as a carriage for their political aspirations in the Labor party. The Kurdish Association is supposed to be an interest group representative of the Kurds in Israel. Instead it is an organization, controlled by a few activists and petty politicians who are concerned mainly with themselves. Any social or ethnic based organization in Israel has a potential political power. Leaders of large sectors of the population are likely to demand the representation of their interest group in the political sphere. This is usually done through the candidacy of the leader of the sector in question to the Israeli parliament, on behalf of one of the large political parties. The political assumption behind this candidacy is that the political party will attract as many voters as possible from the sector which the candidate represents. In this manner, candidacy of one of the Kurdish association leaders, for instance, is aiming towards the Kurdish voters. It should be understood therefore, how the chairman of the Kurdish association, Mr. Habib Shimoni, became a parliament member in 1974 on behalf of the Labor party. Ever since that time he tried repeatedly, without success, to be nominated again as a candidate for the parliament. Some explanations for his political failure are explored in the examples below. Most of the public events organized by the Kurdish association focus on folklore. The biggest annual happening is the Sehrane, the spring festival, which somehow takes place around September-October, in the autumn. The Sehrane attracts between ten and twenty thousand Kurds and others from all over the country. For two successive days they gather in one of the national parks, live in tents, listen to Kurdish music and dance in groups to the sounds and traditional dancing melodies from early dawn until midnight. They enjoy, of course, delicious Kurdish food and the men drink 'Araq or Conjac. The festival is usually covered by the Israeli media, more so during election years, when Israeli leaders are guests of honor and speak in front of thousands of potential voters. The Sehrane of September 1988, two months before the Israeli election, was attended by all the prominent political leaders, from both large parties. Once, when both leaders of the two major parties failed to show up to the festival, it caused disappointment to Mr. Shimoni, the chairman of the Kurdish association, who hoped for some moments of fame and glory in the company of the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. In the last volume of Hithadshut (the publication of the Kurdish association) he hence expressed his anger and frustration concerning their absence at the festival. Five full pages in that publication were dedicated to letters of protest which he had sent to the Israeli leaders and the answers which he received from them. The Kurds who were celebrating in the Sehrane were indifferent to the appearance of one Israeli leader to the other, for they were dancing, singing and celebrating with their friends and families. They were indifferent whether some political leaders were present in the huge park or not. Mr. Shimoni however managed to bring this matter to the political level, hoping to receive some attention. Actually, in the political arena he is not taken seriously. Nevertheless, he is the chairman of the Kurdish association, in which he invests his energy, time and talent. He is the first and the only chairman of the association for the last eighteen years, a fact which by itself does not necessarily demonstrate too much democracy. Internal politics have caused some internal disputes within the Kurdish association. In 1985, group of Iranian Kurds withdraw from the Kurdish association and established a separate association of Kurds from Iranian origin. In doing so they protested against Mr. Shimoni who did not cooperate or associate with them. Ever since another spring festival is organized annually by the new Association of the Iranian Kurds. It is entitled Seyran (a spring festival in the Neo-Aramaic dialect of the Iranian region). Personal disputes have also threatened to split the Kurdish association and endangered the celebrating of the Sehrane. In 1984, a dispute between Mr. Shimoni and his rivals in the association caused a temporary split. His rivals organized a separate Sehrane festival in the in Jerusalem, leaving Mr. Shimoni out. Among the visitor-guests for this Sehrane was the mayor of Jerusalem, Mr. Teddy Kollek, who came to greet the Jerusalemite Kurds, some of whom work in the municipality, or are associates in the labor party, in which Mr. Kollek is a member. Later on Mr. Shimoni unjustly accused Mr. Kollek in the local press of interfering in internal dispute and inflaming the atmosphere between the Kurds. This vicious accusation was baseless since Mr. Kollek was not quite aware of the internal conflict. All he really wanted was to greet the Kurds for whom he has much appreciation. Mr. Shimoni, on the other hand, was furious that a political figure honored the Sehrane organized by his opponents, thus giving it publicity. This is a typical example of Mr. Shimoni's tactless behavior which was the cause for many disputes.[17] The Kurdish Association has its own publication, as mentioned above, Hithadshut. It has been published irregularly, five volumes within the last seventeen years. The editor is Mr. Shimoni himself who wishes, it seems, to centralize most of the functions of the association by himself only. Hithadshut has some valuable sections dedicated to historical and cultural aspects of the Kurdistani Jews. Some articles deal with the contemporary situation of the Muslim Kurds in Kurdistan. Other sections simply glorify and self-praise Mr. Shimoni. Hundreds of pictures, articles, and letters are dedicated to him and to the small group of his closest associates. These parts of the journal are intended to advance his political aspirations. In this manner Mr. Shimoni has made the publication his own personal and political organ. In 1984, Mr Shimoni failed in the primaries of the Labor Party once again to be nominated as a candidate for the parliament. As a result, he organized a group of elderly Kurds and activists on a mission to the leader of the Labor party, Mr. Shimon Peres. The mission demanded that Mr. Shimoni be nominated as a candidate for the parliament otherwise the Kurds would withdraw from the Labor party and would establish a new party of their own. Neither their demands were met nor their threat carried out. This was another act designed by Mr. Shimoni which was ridiculed by all, since no change was expected even among his peers (Mr. Shimoni knew very well that he had no chances in establishing a new party. His hope was that he will succeed to convince the Labor's leader that he has a wide backing and therefore should be nominated as a candidate, in spite of his failure in the primaries).[18] Most of the activists in the Kurdish Association, as stated above, are affiliated with the Labor party. Although no direct survey or poll has ever been taken exclusively among the Kurdish population in Israel as a whole it appears that their political preferences are divided between the two large parties, Labor and Likud, with no considerable advantage to either. The 1988 elections to the Israeli Parliament confirm this notion. In five agricultural communities which are inhabited almost exclusively by Kurdish Jews the results show equality in the votes for Likud and Labor.[19]

Contact with Muslim Kurds after the Immigration

The immigration of the Kurdish Jews to Israel brought to an end a long time relationship with their fellow Muslim Kurds. Characterizing the nature of these relationships, many incidents could point to the contrary, while others exemplify how the relations between the two groups were cordial. In any case, this is a far more complicated subject than we could elaborate on. Throughout the years the Israeli-Kurds followed the struggle of the fellow Muslim Kurds for an independent state from a far distance. They watched and listened to the radio and television with great interest. Worried and frustrated, they knew that there was nothing they could do. Habib Shimoni, while a parliament member, brought the issue of the Kurdish struggle to the agenda of the parliament. Although it seems that the contact between Jews and Kurds ended while the former had immigrated, there were some exceptions.²⁰ One story exposes the nature of a single relationship between a Jewish Kurd and a Kurdish Mula. The late Kurdish leader, Mula Mustafa Barazani, visited Israel twice secretly to meet with the Israeli authorities, and also met on these occasions with his Jewish friend, David Gabai, better known as Xawaja Xino. Between the years 1965-1974 there was cooperation between the Iraqi Kurds and the State of Israel. These were fruitful years of contact between the Kurdish leader and the Israelis, through military consultants and other messengers. Israel was one of the few countries who assisted the Kurds; in military equipment, strategy and tactics of war, medical and technical supplies and in other ways. David Gabai was a childhood friend of the child Mustafa Barazani. His father, Eliyahu Gabai (Xawaja Xino) was the head of the Jewish community of 'Aqra and had strong contact with the Barazani family. During the 1930's he supplied food and aid to the Kurds who were revolting against the British. His son David Gabai later became one of the richest men in 'Aqra. In 1951 he immigrated to Israel like the rest of the Jewish Kurds and the tie between him and Mula Mustafa Barazani ceased. Since his property was left behind he had to work in road paving for a living, then as a shepherd and lastly as a grocer in a vegetable store. When the relations between Mula Mustafa and Israel were initiated, the Kurdish leader continually inquired about his old friend Xawaja Xino (which was originally the nick-name of his father). Eyebrows of the Israeli authorities were raised in wonder as to the identity of this mysterious person whose name was frequently mentioned by the Kurdish leader. In Israel, in the city of Tiberius where he lived he was known in his Hebrew name David Gabai. His Kurdish nickname was known only among family and friends. Finally he was located in Tiberius and the authorities asked him to talk about Mula Mustafa Barazani. He was recorded as if he were speaking directly to Barazani himself and so he said: "When you went to Russia in 1945 the Iraqi authorities wanted to hang me. They blamed me for assisting you. I told them that you forced me to trade for you, by threatening my life and the lives of my family. I bribed a police officer and so I was rescued from death." When Mustafa Barazani was told that his friend Xawaja Xino was located he asked for proof that the man is indeed alive. He received the recorded message and a picture. Barazani listened delightedly to the recording, but when he looked at the picture he pointed out the work shirt of Xawaja Xino and said: "Xawaja Xino wears a worn shirt?! This is a shame to the State of Israel." The Israeli messenger who witnessed this incident indicates that only at this point had he realized how strong the contact was between these two. From this point on, there was much correspondence between them. Thereafter they met three times; twice in Israel and once in Kurdistan. In 1968, on Mula Mustafa's first visit to Israel he demanded, while still in the airport to see Xawaja Xino. A messenger was sent immediately to bring Xawaja Xino, and the two spent one whole night talking to one another. On his second trip to Israel, in 1973, Barazani asked to visit Xawaja Xino in his house. Some Israeli Kurds were also invited to this meeting. Mula Mustafa wore a western suit and Xawaja Xino wore a traditional Kurdish outfit. The two men closed themselves in a room and talked for a long time. Then they returned to the reception room, where for six hours Kurdish songs were sang, stories were recalled and food and drinks were served. A few months later, Xawaja Xino's dream to go back to Kurdistan came true. The eighty six year old man went to visit Mula Mustafa for two weeks at his headquarters in the Kurdish mountains. Throughout the time between their meetings they corresponded. A large file of letters from Barazani is kept in Xawaja Xino's house. In 1979 Mula Mustafa Barazani passed away. Six months afterwards Xawaja Xino too passed away. Salima, Xawaja Xino's daughter, said that in his last six months he was in grief. There is a strong argument among the Kurds in Israel, that this special connection between the two helped increasing the confidence of Barazani in Israel. Whether it is true or not; such a strong bond further indicates that the ties between Jewish Kurds and Kurdistan did not cease when they immigrated to Israel.^[21] Aside from this special case, there have been various other interactions between Israeli Kurds and Muslim Kurds, increasing in number in the recent years. The Sehrane of 1988 was tempered by the call of the newly formed Public Council of Kurdish Jews to focus world attention on the chemical warfare being waged against the Kurds of Iraq. The public Council also invited former secretary of the D.P.K. (Democratic Party of Kurdistan) in exile, Hamid Huseini to visit Israel in the Sehrane. Huseini indeed came and met with the press and with some political figures who attended the Sehrane, as well as the Kurdish members of the Council. Special Kurdish guests who came from West Germany to take part in the Sehrane were "Bargeran" and "Sarbast" (their revolutionary names), two singers who entertained and moved the crowd with emotionally delivered mellow Kurdish songs. For "Sarbast", coming to the Sehrane in Israel had special meaning. Apparently he grew up in the Jewish Quarter of Zakho, in one of the homes the Kurdish Jews had left when they immigrated to Israel. "Bargeran", after occasionally meeting Israeli Kurdish tourists in Frankfurt, visited Israel and his Kurdish friends for the fifth time this year.^[22] In these very days when thousands of Kurdish refugees flee from Iraq to Turkey, they receive attention from the media. Among the reporters who flew to Turkey were some Israelis. One of them is Hana Kalderon from "Haaretz". She wrote that the rumors that an Israeli journalist is there (in Sirtustu camp) spread quickly. A young Kurd, Faysal Muhammad Barwari, asked her to meet with him and his two friends, Wajjan Musa and Hashem Tamar. They told her they wanted to move to Israel, to live there for a while, until the situation will improve. "We are not the only ones", they emphasized. "There are many like us. In a minute we can compose a list [of people interested]". "What are you going to do in Israel?" asked the reporter. "We do not know", was the answer, [but] "it will be better than [being] here or in Iran." After a while appeared a Kurdish man from Amedia, and asked the Israeli journalist to send his message to his Jewish friends from Amedia, now living in Israel. "Please write" he asked, that I, Muhsen Saleh 'Abd al-'Aziz [al-] 'Amedi, ask "the Jews in Israel [those] who immigrated from Amedia, with whom we lived and to whom we helped, to help us now. Give this message to Yoel, Yehezkel, Yitzhak and Moshe Matlub. I remember them, all of them"^[23] The Jerusalem post's reporter, Yehuda Litani, who also visited some refugees camps in Turkey had similar impressions. In Diyarbakir refugee camp he sat in a tent among twenty five Kurds and

listened to the most senior man there, Salman Khurshid, who asked him to transfer a message to the Israeli public and especially to "our Jewish brothers who used to live with us in Kurdistan". Then, the man asked the reporter about the nature of the uprising, the "intifada", in the West Bank and Gaza strip. The reporter explained the situation to him and then Salman Khurshid concluded: "Let me suggest something and see how you Israelis and your government react to it." The man simply suggested that one and a half million Palestinians will be transferred to Northern Iraq, to the Kurdish part of the country. "They will have to be accepted nicely by their so-called Arab brothers", he said "And send us, instead, to the territories. Believe me everybody will be satisfied." Why, asked the reporter, and Salman Khurshid reply: "Because we are your friends, we can trust each other...We will guard your border, we will protect you from the Arabs, our common enemy." For the reporter's question if he is serious, he answered: if you were to agree to my suggestion "most of us here would leave without hesitation". In the Mardin refugee camp near the Syrian border, when the name Israel was mentioned, a group of Kurds asked the reporter "please help us". In which way? he replied. First, said one of them, "take in some thousands of refugees like you took the Kurdish Jews, our brothers, at the beginning of the 50's." Then, he said, "raised your voice for us in the most powerful state in the world; the United States", which is your ally. They are not doing enough, he complained. "Don't they understand that the Iraqis are publicly committing genocide?" During his last visit to Diyarbakir refugee camp the reporter was approached by a Kurd, Shafiq Mustafa Mula al-Jalil, who wanted to send a letter through him to his old Jewish neighbors from the village of Sharanash, who now live in Israel. In the letter, the writer does not ask anything specific, but only sends his regards to his Jewish neighbors.[24] The fact that Kurds, during their hard times, think about Israel and specifically the Kurdish Jews there as a potential source of support, seems to reinforce the opinion that the relationship between Jews and Kurds in Kurdistan were more cordial than the opposite.

Notes

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1. Whenever a reference is made for the Kurdish Jews in this article, it actually denotes Iraqi Kurdish Jews.
2. For more details on the immigration of the Jews from Iraq see the following: Shlomo Hillel, Operation Babylon (1987); Nissim Rajwan, Jews of Iraq: 3000 Years of History and Culture (1985); Heskell M. Haddad, Flight from Babylon: Iraq, Iran, Israel, America (1986).
3. More Kurds live in the Katamonim (or Gonenim) neighbourhood in south Jerusalem, about forty and fifty thousand people.
4. Nostalgia of Jews from the Arab countries to their land of birth is usually regarded in Israel as either idealizing the past or focusing on the positive recollections. The Kurdish Jews generally long for the good experience they had in Kurdistan while also remembering the bad experiences there. At the same time, they generally love and appreciate their present life in Israel.
5. Zaken family, originally from Zakho, is the largest extended family of Kurdish Jews in Israel.
6. The Kurdish culture indeed continues to flourish in Israel but at the same time this is the last generation of Kurdish natives. Hadi Rashid al-Jawashli in his book "al-Hayat al- ijtimaiyyah fi Kurdistan" (pp.4-5), wrote about his meetings in Damascus with Kurds, who were descendants of Kurdish soldiers of Şalāh al-din . In spite of the hundreds of years which have passed, they still preserve their original social Kurdish characteristics and language. It does not seem very likely that something similar will occur with the Israeli Kurds.
7. In this wave of immigration, families were torn apart when some members of the family immigrated to Palestine while the rest of the family remained in Kurdistan.
8. See the citations in note no: 3.
9. More figures on the Jews of Kurdistan in Israel and their distribution there according to their exact hometown in Kurdistan and their present location in Israel is to be found in the book: Amnon Shiloah, Arik Cohen and Yisaskhar Ben-Ami, Ha-kehilot Ha-yehudiyot Me-Asia Hatikhona Hadromit Vehamizrahit Beyisarel-Rikuz Netunim [The Jewish Communities from Central, Southern and Eastern Asia - concentration of data], (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1976):72-108.
10. The terms "Conformity" and "Melting Pot" are sometimes mistakenly misplaced. In the American experience Conformity meant that anyone was welcome to come to the United States, provided they dropped the cultural patterns in which they were reared and totally adopted the Anglo-American pattern of life. The "Melting Pot" theory suggested that the developing American cultural tradition was not strictly only one, but rather a product of contributions made by several cultural traditions. The different traditions were melted together to create one new product. In Israel, when the term melting pot usually used in this context, the real meaning behind it was similar to that of Conformity.
11. The harsh economic situation did not strengthen the immigrants who were subjected, among other things, also to economic discrimination. On this and other issues concerning the immigration see this partial list: Tom Segev, 1949: The First Israelis (1986); Eliezer Ben Rafael, The Emergence of Ethnicity: Cultural Groups and Social Conflict in Israel (1982); Moshe Shokeid, Dual Heritage: Immigrants from the Atlas Mountains in an Israeli village (1985); Heskell M. Haddad, Jews of Arab and Islamic Countries: History, Problems, Solutions (1984); Rafael Ben Shoshan, "The Moroccan identity in Israel", Bama'arakha, no:151-2, May-August 1980: 204-206; Maurice M. Roumani, "The Sephardi factor in Israeli politics" in The Middle East Journal, vol. 42: no.3 (Summer 1988); 423-435. (See also the books cited in note 19.)
12. In general, the pattern of the cultural emergence of the Eastern Jews in Israel, the improvement in their social status and ethnic identity is parallel to the emergence of the "Likud" party to their rule in 1977. It is clear that the Oriental Jews were responsible in part for Likud's victory over the Labor for the first time since the establishment of the state of Israel. See, for example, Roumani, Ibid and for more details see the citations in notes 11 and 19.
13. Ze'ev Vilna'i, "Kurdim be-eretz Yisra'el" [Kurds in the land of Israel] in Ve'im Bigvurot, Jerusalem 1984, P.194.
14. Occasionally the peddlers lost the sense of time during their trips. There is a famous story about one of them who returned to Zakho after a long trip and did not see any one on the streets. Wandering around on his donkey he thought that something horrible had happened while he was away. Soon afterwards he realized that it was "Yom Kippur" (the Day of Atonement), the most holy day in the Jewish religion. The city was quiet because everyone was fasting and praying in synagogues.
15. Mordechai Zaken, "Mosdot merkaziyim vemishar bekehilat yehude Zakho" [Social and economic institutions among the Jewish community of Zakho], Hithadshut (5), 1985:11-22.

16. Dani Rubinstein, "La-Kurdim yesh harbe yedidim" [The Kurds have many friends]. Davar ha-Shavua , 23 November 1984.
17. Habib Shim'oni's desire for publicity and his anxiety in organizing the "Sehrane" could be best illustrated from the way he planted rumors in the Israeli press, about the expected visit of Mula Mustafa Barazani to the Sehrane festival in September 1975. The newspapers' reports were indeed a little skeptical and asked "Will he come or not ?", but in the meanwhile the Sehrane was publicized and many Kurdish people came to celebrate, hoping that they would be able to see the admired Kurdish leader. When Barazani finally did not come, the Hebrew newspaper "Davar" reported that "the Persian government, perhaps the Shah himself, prevented Barazani from coming to the Sehrane". Perhaps Mr. Shimoni did invite the Kurdish leader to participate in the Sehrane. Nevertheless, it seems not very likely that Barazani, after the collapse of the Kurdish struggle would appear in public at a festival in Israel. Mr. Shimoni, taking advantage of the public interest, continued to claim even when the festival began, that Barazani still might be coming. See "Ma'ariv", 16 September 1975 and "Davar", 25 September 1975.
18. Hithadshut (Jerusalem), vols. 1-5, (ed.) Habib Shimoni, Jerusalem.
19. The five agricultural communities in question are Alqosh (named after Alqosh in Iraqi Kurdistan) near Haifa; Even Sapir, Orah, Aminadav and Nes-Harim near Jerusalem. The average vote for the Labor in these five communities is 35.7% while the average for the Likud is 34.4%. The distribution of the votes, in percentage, to the Labor and Likud respectively, were as follows: Alqosh: (19.3; 39.6); Even Sapir: (42.4; 36.5); Orah:(30.7; 40.9); Aminadav (35.7; 32.4); Nes-Harim (50.5; 22.6). For more details about ethnic vote and the ethnic factor in Israeli politics in Israel see: Hanna Hertzog, Political ethnicity in Israel," (in Hebrew) Megamot, vol. 28, no. 2/3 (March 1984); Yohanan Peres, Ethnic relations in Israel, (in Hebrew) Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Hapoalim, 1977; Asher Arian, Politics in Israel: The Second Generation (Chatham: NJ: Chatham House publishers, 1985); Lilly Weissbrod, "Protest and Dissidence in Israel," in Cross-Currents in Israeli Culture and Politics, ed. Myron J. Aronoff, vol.4 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984).
20. There are still some connections between Jewish and Muslim Kurds. One of my informants is in touch with his Agha's son, who lives today in the United States.
21. Yitzak Ben Hurin, "Ma'ariv-Sof Hashavua" (Tel-Aviv), 9 September 1987. More about the history of the connection between Gabai family and Barazani family see in the following Hebrew newspapers: "Yediot Aharonot", 12 April 1963; "Ma'ariv", 8 March 1977 and the publications: Hithadshut, vol. 1(1973):14-15, Bama'arakha (Jerusalem), no. 147 (May 1973):44-45.
22. The Jerusalem Post-International Edition ,15 October 1988.
23. "Haaretz", 7 October 1988.
24. The Jerusalem Post-International Edition ,15 October 1988.

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