Глава 7. MECHANICS FLEEING COMMUNISM: RUSSIAN REFUGEES IN IRAN AND THEIR RESETTLEMENT IN AUSTRALIA, 1930–1955 [1]

> "The Bazaars are full of surprises … where one can buy all kinds of junk laid out in little chess-board squares on the ground, for a few farthings, every kind of thing from old sardine-tins to silver kettles pawned by Russian refugees. Nothing more tragic than this evidence of the Russian catastrophe; here is an old gramophone record, and here a pair of high button boots, very small in the foot, with a pair of skates screwed on; they speak not only of present day misery, but of a life once lived in gaiety; and all theoretical sympathy with Lenin vanishes at the sight of this human, personal sacrifice made on the altar of a compulsory brotherhood. Russia seems very near.[2]"

Vita Sackville-West made this observation on the human consequences of the Russian Revolution when in Tehran in 1926 while visiting her husband, Harold Nicholson, who was Charge d'affaires at the British Legation.

The Russian Diaspora in Iran (and indeed in the Middle East more generally) has not been the subject of academic study to date. The purpose of my research is to address this gap, examine the experience of this group of stateless refugees,

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[2] *Sackville-West, Vita.* Passenger to Teheran. 2nd Edition, originally pub. 1926. Heathfield: Cockfield Press, 1990. P. 96.

and compare theirs with that of the other strands of the Russian Diaspora.

Overview

Following the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War of 1918-1921, a large wave of Russians left the country: possibly between one and two million people[3]. These refugees or emigres, as some preferred to style themselves, included members of the nobility, bureaucrats, business people, military officers, artists and their families, ethnic minorities who had failed in their bids for independence (e.g. Georgians, Azeris and Turkmen), and others no longer comfortable with the new regime.

The greatest number fled or were expelled to Western European countries (especially France and Germany), while another major group of emigres settled in Manchuria in Harbin and along the Russian Railway Concession. Others were evacuated with the remnants of the White Armies from the shores of the Black Sea by the British and the French in 1920, and ended up in Turkey for a period, before moving on to other countries in Europe including Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. A few others fled south and crossed the Iranian border or were already there and became stranded after the failure of the White forces in the Civil War.

In the early 1930s the Soviet Collectivisation and Dekulakisation campaigns, generated another wave of displaced people across the borders in the South. It included both ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, Cossacks and local tribal groups such as the Turkmen.

As well as forming a later wave of refugees from the Soviet Union, a distinctive feature of this group compared to the

[3] *Robinson, Paul.* The White Russian Army in Exile, 1940-1941. Oxford University Press, Oxford, P. 16; *Denisenko, Mikhail*. Historical and Current Trends in Emigration from Russia. Russian Council. August 14, 2013. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/historical-and-current-trends-in-emigration-from-russia/ (accessed on: 30.07.2019).

earlier Russian emigre groups is that they were generally not from intelligentsia, military or bourgeois backgrounds. They tended to be from rural and trades backgrounds: probably `kulaki' in many cases. These were people who had hung on in the new Soviet Union in the 1920s, and if not for Collectivisation and De-kulakisation or `strife in the village', could probably have pursued meaningful lives in the Soviet Union. But having left in the upheavals of the early 1930s they could not safely return. They had to make a new life in a very different land.

By the time of the October 1917 Revolution, Russia and Iran had diplomatic, military and trading relationships going back a number of centuries and Russian military, commercial and technical expertise in the 19th century were valued and increasingly turned to by Iran's Qajar rulers. At the same time Iran had lost two wars with Russia and a number of its northern provinces including Georgia, much of the Azerbaijan region and the area that is now Turkmenistan. But while Iran was wary of its new Communist neighbour after 1917, the Russian refugees often had useful skills for an actively modernising Iran. Their trade and technical skills and Russian language became assets during World War Two when the `Persian Corridor' was established as a major supply route for Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union, as an alternative to the North Sea and Far Eastern routes.

After the War, the Russian emigres and indeed European refugees generally became unwelcome. It seems nationalist and religious actors were increasingly hostile to the presence of the Russian emigre community, and there was also pressure from the Soviet Union itself in the context of Cold War tensions with the Iranians, Americans and British. A further factor was the endemic political turmoil and violence in Tehran in the late 1940s and early 1950s, associated both with internal political manoeuvring and the struggle with the British over control of Iran's oil resources.

A large proportion of the Russian community seems to have left Iran by 1955, mostly for Australia and North and South America. Interestingly, of those who came to Australia, most did not do so through the official Displaced Persons program: they paid their own fares or had them paid for by their local employers and sponsors, often assisted by Churches and even in some cases by the New York-based Tolstoy Foundation as part of its program of assisting displaced Russian refugees.

Those coming to Australia settled mainly in Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne and again had to rebuild their lives and communities in a new country.

Iran in the Literature of the Russian Diaspora

The Russian Diaspora after the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War is well served by studies. See for example: Robinson[4] on fate of the White Russian army in Turkey and Europe; Andreyev and Savicky[5] on the Russian diaspora in Prague between the World Wars; Williams[6] on the Russian émigré community in Germany; Johnston[7] on the Russian exiles in Paris; Chiasson[8] for Harbin in the 1920s; for Shanghai Ristaino[9]; and for the United States, Hardwick's study[10] of

[4] *Robinson, Paul.* The White Russian Army in Exile, 1920-1941. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

[5] *Andreyev Catherine and Savicky Ivan.* Russia Abroad: Prague and the Russian Diaspora, 1918-1938. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004.

[6] *Williams, Robert C.* Culture in Exile: Russian Emigres in Germany, 1881–1943. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1972.

[7] *Johnston, Robert H.* New Mecca, New Babylon; Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920-1945. Kingston, Ontario: McGill University Press, 1988.

[8] *Chiasson, Blaine R.* Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918–29. Vancouver, 2010.

[9] *Ristaino, Marcia Reynders.* Port of Last Resort: The Diaspora Communities of Shanghai. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Russian emigration to the Pacific Coast which draws on the oral testimonies of a number of Russian emigrants.

There has, so far, been very little mention of the Russian diaspora in Iran and very few for the Middle East more generally (but note here the essays on Russians in Egypt and Lebanon in Institute of Oriental Studies)[11].

Published and unpublished memoirs of Russians and others who lived in Iran between the Wars are also very scarce, especially in English. An exception is Alexander Malakhoff's memoir[12] of growing up in Iran which provides a valuable account of a Russian family's life in Iran from the early 1900s up to the late 1950s when he left to study at an American University. His grandfather from St Petersburg arrived in Mashad as a trader for a Germany-English company specialising in purchasing wool in the 1900s, stayed there for his firm after the Revolution, and sent his children to be educated in Prague's Russian diaspora schools, before they re-joined him in Meshed in 1933.

Studies of Iran for the period between the two World Wars and in particular of Russian or Soviet involvement in Iran also do not deal with the diaspora community of Russian refugees or emigres specifically (see for example Andreeva[13], Volodarsky[14], Matthee and Elena Andreevna[15]; Cronin[16]; and

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[10] *Hardwick, Susan Wiley.* Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

[11] Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Materials. International Scientific Conference. Russian Diaspora Countries of the East. Moscow, 2010.

[12] *Malakhoff, Alexander.* Growing up in Iran. Bloomington: Author House, 2009.

[13] *Andreeva, Elena.* Russia and the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

[14] *Volodarsky, Mikhail.* The Soviet Union and its Southern Neighbours: Iran and Afghanistan, 1917-1933. Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass and Co., 1994.

Rezun[17]). Probably the best overall coverage of the Soviet Union's activities in Iran up to the end of the WW2 remains that of George Lenczowki (1949)[18].

Interestingly, two Russian emigre architects who worked in Iran from the 1920-s have received some attention. See the essay by Ravandi-Fadai[19] on the life of Nicolai Markov, a member of the Cossack Brigade, who became the preferred architect of the Reza Shah, which does offer a glimpse into the life of a former White officer in Iran; and the essay on Mihail Spassovsky who seems to have legitimately emigrated to Iran in 1926 before giving up his Soviet passport in the early 1930s and then moving to Harbin to in 1940 due to pressure from the Soviet government.[20] The role of Russian emigres in the nas-

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[15] *Matthee, Rudi and Andreevna, Elena* eds. Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and the Politics of Power in the Qajar Era. London and New York, 2018.

[16] *Cronin, Stephanie ed*. Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran, 1921-1941. Oxford, 2010; *Cronin, Stephanie* ed. Iranian-Russian Encounters. Oxford, 2013.

[17] *Rezun, Mirun*. The Soviet Union and Iran: Soviet Policy in Iran form the Beginnings of the Pahlavi Dynasty until the Soviet Invasion in 1941. Alphen aan den Rijn : Sijthoff & Noordhoff International; Geneve: Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales, 1981.

[18] *Lenczowkski, George*. Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948: A Study in Big Power Rivalry. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1949.

[19] *Ravandi-Fadai, Lana.* Reconstructions of a Native in Exile: Cossack Brigade Fighter and Architect of Tehran – Nicolai L'Vovich Markov (1882-1957) // Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and the Politics of Power in the Qajar Era. / Ed. by Rudee Matthew and Elena Andrevna. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017. P. 334-354.

[20] *Vozchikov, V.A*. Mihail Spassovsky – Architect and Artist. Facts and Life in Teheran in New Look. International Scientific Newsletter, Issue 8. Altai State Humanitarian and Pedagogical University. Novovsibirsk, 2015.

cent Iranian film industry in the 1920s and 1930s has also been noted (O'Dell, 2013, p.329).[21]

Nor do studies of Iran's experience of World War Two and the Mossadegh period address the circumstances of Russian refugees. These works cover the military and political role of the Soviet Union in Iran, including the Anglo-Soviet invasion of August 1941, the operation of the Persian Corridor Lend Lease Aid program, the economic problems caused by the War, and the Cold War manoeuvring and nationalist politics of the turbulent post-war period[22]. As both Cronin (2010)[23] and Schayegh (2008)[24] have noted, there in the historiography of modern Iran there remains a predominant focus on state-building and modernisation and very limited coverage of the social and economic life of the Iranian population itself in this period[25].

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[21] *O'Dell, Emily Jane.* Iranian-Russian Cinematic Encounters // Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800 / Ed. by Stephanie Cronin. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. P. 324-326.

[22] See for example: *Nickkie R.* Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, Updated Edition. Yale University Press, 2003; *Abrahamian, Ervand*. Iran Between Two Revolutions. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982; *Saikal, Amin*. The Rise and Fall of the Shah; Iran from Autocracy to Religious Rule. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980; *Fawcett, Louise d'Estrange*. Iran and the Cold War: the Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; *Amanat, Abbas*. Iran: A Modern History. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017; *Fatemi, Faramarz S*. The USSR in Iran. South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1980.

[23] *Cronin, Stephanie*. Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran: Opposition, Protest and Revolt, 1921-1941. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

[24] *Schayegh, Cyrus.* Recent Trends in the Historiography of Iran under the Pahlavi Dynasty, 1921-1979 / History Compass. 6/6, 2008.

[25] *Cronin, Stephanie*. Ibid. P. 3; *Schayegh, Cyrus.* Ibid. P. 1400-1406.

Nevertheless, social history or history from below is beginning to receive some attention as the Cronin (2010, 2012)[26] and Matthee and Andreeva (2018)[27] attest. And the situation of refugees and ethnic minorities in Iran is beginning to receive some attention. See for example, the recent work of Lior Sternfeld (2018)[28] on the experience of the Jewish community in Iran in the Twentieth Century and Atina Grossman's paper (2017)[29] on that of Jewish refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran and India.

The emigration of Russians from Iran has rarely been mentioned in Australian studies of Russian immigration. The experience of one family, the Andropovs, which came from Iran to Australia has been noted[30] and Boris Christa in his overview of the Russian waves of emigration to Australia does mention that some Russians came via Iran[31]. Understandably most studies in Australia are dominated by those who came from the Far East and Europe, the largest groups of Russian migrants who came to Australia and other countries, and es-

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[26] *Cronin, Stephanie*. Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran: Opposition, Protest and Revolt, 1921-1941. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries: Russians in Iranian Military Service, 1800-1920. // Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

[27] *Matthee, Rudi and Andreevna, Elena* eds. Ibid.

[28] Sternfeld, Lior B. Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018.

[29] *Grossman, Atina.* Soviet Jewish refugees in Soviet Central Asia, Iran and India // Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union / Ed. by Mark Edele, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Atina Grossman. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017. P. 1-27.

[30] Australiada Editorial Board. Russians in Australia, Sydney, 2012. P. 54-57.

[31] *Christa, Boris.* The Great Bear and the Southern Cross: the Russian Presence in Australia / Ed. by John McNair and Thomas Poole // Russian and the Fifth Continent. St Lucia: University of QLD Press, 1992. P. 81-109.

pecially those from Harbin/Shanghai and the Displaced Persons camps of Europe.

Brief Chronology

1. Russia and Iran

Russia had a long and often difficult relationship with Persia over many centuries before the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. As part of its imperial ambitions in Central Asia, it had eventually seized the northern provinces of Persia (made *de jure* by the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay) both in the Caucasus and in the Khorasan region north-east of the Caspian in what is now Turkmenistan. In obtaining these lands, Russia also obtained citizens, especially Azeris, Turkmen and other ethnic groups which were quite Persianized and often used to trading into Russia and moving their herds across the border. Russian financial and trade penetration of Persia increased in the second half of the nineteenth century in parallel with the activities of the British. But Iranians also respected Russia as a powerful Western state and looked to Russia among other European countries for modern education and technology[32].

Iran's Qajar rulers also turned to a Russian military model to help to strengthen their own position and as a counter to British influence in the south of Iran. The Cossack Brigade was funded by Persia, but effectively run by the Russian High Command. Established in 1879, it went on to play a critical role in Iranian politics up to its dissolution in 1921 with the consolidation of Reza Shah's position as the de facto ruler of Persia[33]. Persia perforce developed a policy of pursuing a middle way or 'positive balance' between the competing imperial pressures of Great Britain and Russia but it was not always successful in achieving this outcome.

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[32] For an overview of Russia's role in Iran up to WW1 see: *Andreeva, Elena.* Russia and Iran… P. 13-21.

[33] *Cronin, Stephanie*. Deserters, Converts, Cossacks… P. 143-185.

During World War One, due to its military operations against Turkey, Russia again was active in Iran particularly in the north-west, occupying Azerbaijan, and together with the British, largely dictating policy and economic decisions in Iran for the duration of the War. But with the February and October Revolutions[34], Russian military forces in Iran quickly disintegrated and Russian influence declined accordingly. The British then hurried to try to consolidate their position in Iran through a treaty in 1919 that would have made Iran a virtual protectorate of Great Britain. However, popular outrage allowed the Iranian Government to reject the British proposal and as a counter it quickly moved to normalize relations with the now much weaker Soviet Union through the Soviet-Iranian Friendship Treaty, signed in February 1921.

The Soviet Government insisted on the inclusion of a provision in the Treaty squarely aimed at the recent Civil War experience and the presence of White Army elements in Iran: "The parties undertake a mutual obligation not to tolerate on their territories the setting up or stay of any organisations or groups no matter what names they assume; nor of individuals whose purpose is to struggle against Persia and Russia…, nor to tolerate on her territory any mobilization or recruitment into the ranks of an army or armed force belonging to those organisations"[35].

While this provision did not cause immediate problems for émigré Russians in Iran, it was to prove a useful lever for the Soviet Union in World War Two and the 1940s.

Commercial relationships were developed between the new Soviet Government and the Iranians over the next decade including in areas such as the Caspian fisheries, the export of grain and purchase of capital equipment. In fact, the Soviet Union became Iran's major trading partner up to the mid-1930s before Nazi Germany overtook it as it worked to build

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[34] *Andreeva, Elena.* Russia and Iran… P. 21.
[35] *Volodarsky, Mikhail*. Ibid. P. 51-52.

its economic and cultural relationship with Iran as the Aryan homeland[36].

2. The 'Former People' in Iran in the 1920s and 1930s

As Vita Sackville-West's observation highlights, there were White Russian refugees in Iran in the 1920s, as indeed there were in places like Iraq and Syria, but it is likely they were few in number. As well as a few traders, some members of the White Armies and the Persian Cossack Brigade remained in Persia after the Civil War and the collapse of the independent Central Asian republics by 1922. Some of these officers were absorbed into Reza Shah's army or moved on like the group of 66 Ural Cossacks under General V.I. Toltstoff, who having retreated to Iran via the Karakorum, left in 1922 and found their way by ship to Vladivostok and thence to Australia where they settled to farm in tropical Queensland[37]. Yet another former White officer seems to have turned his hand to carpet selling in Tehran to make ends meet during the 1920s before eventually leaving for England (Personal communication).

But over the northern border in the new Soviet Union yet another storm was brewing. After the post-famine recovery period of the New Economic Policy (NEP), in the late 1920s, the Soviet government decided it was time to resume pursuit of its socialist project and break its policy of *smychka* or détente with the peasantry in an effort to free-up resources for the first Five Year Plan for crash industrialisation. In 1928 the Soviet Government made a decision to prosecute the Collectivisation of Russian agriculture. In tandem, the Dekulakisation campaign was ramped up. These measures, along with the continuing use of disenfranchisement, led to a massive upheaval in the Soviet countryside. Villages and towns were turned upside down as the poorest were often put in charge of

[36] Ibid. P. 82-99.
[37] *Christa, Boris.* Ibid. P. 81-109. P. 97.

the new collective farms and for determining who was a kulak and dealing with their property[38] (on the impact of the disenfranchisement campaigns of the late 1920s on small business people and traders, see Alexoupolous[39]. Further incentives for some to leave the Soviet Union were the introduction of passports for city dwellers in 1932, the purpose of which was to keep peasants in their villages and prevent them from continuing to flood the cities as a result of the upheavals in the countryside and famine, and the introduction of conscription in 1932.

A large number of 'outcasts', to use Fitzpatrick's term, were on the move across the countryside. If not executed outright, hundreds of thousands were exiled or deported to prison and labour camps; others were fleeing the authorities because they had opposed Collectivisation or because they were evicted from their homes. Families were set adrift on the roads and railways all over the Soviet Union[40]. Some of the dispossessed could find other villages to live in, or try to return to their own eventually, but others decided to head south or east and try their luck to getting to China or to Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. In due course they were joined by families fleeing

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[38] *Viola, Lynne.* The Second Coming: Class Enemies in the Soviet Countryside, 1927-1935 / Ed. by J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning // Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. P. 65-69; Peasant Rebels Under Stalin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; *Conquest, Robert*. Harvest of Sorrow. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986; *Applebaum, Anne*. Red Famine: Stalin's War on the Ukraine. London: Penguin, 2017.

[39] *Alexopoulos, Golfo.* Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens and the Soviet State, 1926-1936, Ithaca and London, 2003. P. 30-31.

[40] *Fitzpatrick, Sheila*. Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930-s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. P. 115-27. And for a description of a typical `dekulakisation' experience see: *Belov, Fedor*. The History of a Soviet Collective Farm. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956. P. 5-6.

the famine from the Ukraine, Caucasus and the Central Asia regions.

The Soviet borders in the South, at least up to 1932, do seem to have been more porous than say those on the Western European border. As to their routes across the borders, some people jumped from trains, others found their way through the mountains on the Turkmenistan/Iran border with the help of guides. One family reported that their father and a friend had been a in labour camp near the Soviet border and were encouraged by the local commander to head East or West overnight before a Soviet official came the next day to call up those eligible for Conscription. Some refugees also talk of the help they received as kulaki by sympathetic officials or soldiers as they made their way southwards (Personal communications).

British consular reports from Persia for the period 1930 to 1933 repeatedly note the large numbers of Russians and other ethnic groups in the South trying to cross the border in order to flee Collectivisation. The British Consulate's 'Persia Report' of 1933 stated:

> "The number of refugees from the Soviet Union increased enormously, both into Khorasan and Azerbaijan. Many thousands were reported to have crossed between Julfa and Astara [in the Azerbaijan region] in the last part of July alone, while, between February and October, some 45,000 persons are estimated to have entered Khorasan, mostly Turcomans or Persians previously resident in Turkestan. As in the past, the treatment of those crossing the Khorasan frontier left much to be desired, while at one time great distress was caused in Tabriz by the issue of orders for all refugees, no matter how long established, to be moved to places further south. This order was, however, modified later, and on both frontiers the

refugees seem on the whole to have been well treated once they reached the big cities."[41].

The Iranian Government's initial response to this pressure seems to have been to restrict refugees to rural settlements. Periodically they were pushed out from the cities to smaller rural communities again. They also had to report to Police on a monthly basis and were not allowed to travel without permission beyond their home-town. Nor were they allowed to work in Government positions or to own property or businesses, which usually meant they had to go into partnership with someone else.

Who were these people? Well so far based on Australian immigration records, their occupations were mostly mechanics, fitters and turners, farmers, dressmakers, carpenters, and a few engineers and some small traders. In short, they were not the typical White emigres of diaspora literature: not intelligentsia, military figures, nobility, wealthy businessmen or senior officials[42]. Noting of course that their occupations as per their emigration papers may not have been their real occupations or qualifications when they escaped the Soviet Union. Some informants have observed that their fathers' occupations were probably not the result of formal training so much as learning 'on the job'.

But it does seem that their skills were in demand. In the 1930s Reza Shah pursued an aggressive modernisation program, which included a strong infrastructure component such as the building of the north to south rail line linking the Caspi-

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[41] British Consulate. *Persia. Annual Report: 1933;* copy in National Australian Archives, Series A981. Per 9. Part 1. P. 19.

[42] Ships nominal rolls, 1950-55 / Australian Archives: Shipping Arrivals and Immigration and Naturalisation records, Canberra, Australia; Report on the refugee problem in Iran, 1952 / Tolstoy Foundation Archives, Administrative Records for Iran and the Middle East, Valley Cottage, New York State.

an with the Gulf, an expansion of roads and dams, and many new schools and other public buildings[43].

The father of one informant was responsible for operating the power generator for a mosque at Qom. There were also jobs in retail shops and working as maids for the more well-off. Others gravitated to the oil refinery at Abadan and textile factories. Over the course of the 1930s it seems many families managed to work their way to Tehran where there were more job opportunities and they could have a more satisfying community life with other Russians.

3. The Church of St Nicholas in Tehran

After the signing of the 1921 Iranian-Soviet Friendship Treaty, the Soviet Government took over and promptly closed the two Consular Churches in Tehran. The parishioners managed to rescue the Iconostasis from one of the Churches but the other contents of the Churches were apparently tossed into the street by the Embassy officials.

A chapel was eventually opened in a parishioner's house in Aromane St. The officiating priest, Father Vitaly (Sergeev), had come to Iran with the Ecclesiastical Mission to Urmia in 1907 when the Russian Orthodox Church accepted an invitation to cater for the Orthodox Assyrian Community that had fled from Turkey to Iranian Azerbaijan[44].

According to Father Zarkashev, the current Rector and historian of the Church of St Nicholas in Tehran, in the late 1930s services on major Saints' Days, the prayer-house in

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[43] *Amanat, Abbas.* Iran: A Modern History. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017. P. 452-66.

[44] *Zarkeshev, Igumen Alexander.* Interview. History of Russian Orthodoxy in Iran. Interview with Anna Lisichkina, 2014. Orthodox Book of Russia Website. http://ricolor.org/rz/mp/2/, downloaded 28 March 2019; *Zarkeshev, Abbott Alexander*. Russian Orthodox Church in Persia-Iran (1597-2001). Saint Petersburg, 2002. P. 99-107 (in Russian).

Aromane St began to get quite crowded and the congregation often spilled into the street, sometimes requiring the police to maintain order. A new church was clearly needed. At around the same time, Father Vitaly (Sergeev), due his age and fear of another party taking over the Church, asked the ROCOR Foreign Synod in New York to provide another priest who could be brought in as a possible successor.

The ROCOR Synod in due course appointed Father Vladimir (Malyshev) who arrived in Tehran in April 1941. He reputedly had been a doctor with the Tsarist and White Russian Armies who ended up in Yugoslavia after the War with his wife but had turned to the priesthood after the death of his son. He served at the ROCOR Mission in Jerusalem before coming to Iran. He was, apparently the driving force behind the building of the new Church. With the agreement of the local authorities the Parish raised enough money to purchase a plot of land on the northern outskirts of Tehran, opposite the American Embassy[45].

A formal ceremony for the laying of the Foundation Stone was held on 21 August 1944 and the new Church, after the completion of the cupolas was consecrated on 9 April 1945. It quickly became a major focus and source of support for the Russian refugee community. Father Vladimir seems to have been well-loved by the Parish. He initiated Sunday school classes and an annual Summer Camp on the hills north of Tehran which are fondly remembered by some of the children. He was also known to provide medical services to the Polish refugee camps set-up in Tehran during the War. Father Vitaly died in 1946 and Father Vladimir was appointed as his replacement by the ROCOR Synod.

5. World War Two and the Persian Corridor Lend Lease Aid

The Anglo-Soviet invasion of 18 August 1941 was a major shock for Iran and almost fatal for the Pahlavi regime. Although it was touch and go whether the regime would survive

[45] *Zarkashev, Abbott Alexander*. Ibid. P. 99-107. (in Russian).

in the end the British seem to have decided that the monarch was likely to be a force for stability during the War.

Similar to the arrangement with Britain in the First World War, the Soviet Union occupied northern Iran and the British held the Southern zone extending up from Abadan, with the middle of the country including Tehran nominally under Iran government control. But Britain and the USSR took control of transport and supply infrastructure and handled foreign and military affairs. The northern Soviet zone was off limits without permission to Iranians and other countries' personnel, and many Russians in Tehran were fearful of going there in case they did not come back. In the north of the country some émigré Russians initially fled to Tehran on the assumption that they would be arrested when the Soviet forces arrived (Personal communication) but it seems, perhaps with a few exceptions, that the occupying authorities treated emigres relatively benignly, even if they were sometimes reminded that their status as 'former people' was not forgotten. Alexander Malakoff recounts that his father approached the Soviet *komandatura* in Mashad to offer his sevices to help the Russians stop the enemy and was told that 'Russia did not need help from your kind'[46].

With the occupation by the Anglo-Soviet forces, the local Russian community seems to have had more freedom: for example, Iranian officials were suddenly more deferential and relaxed about their travel and reporting requirements. Some local Russians even gained employment with the Soviet administration in the North. It was also noted that Russian soldiers, on the whole, tended to be quite disciplined and well behaved with the civil population in Iran, possibly because, as one observer suggested, they knew that punishment for their misbehaviour could be transfer to the Eastern Front (on Soviet

[46] *Malakhoff, Alexander.* Ibid. P. 107-108.

behaviour in occupied Iran see Fatemi (1980) and Reynolds (1944)[47]).

With the development of the Persian Corridor, suddenly there was also more work and more money, if tempered by the rampant inflation that accompanied the Allied Occupation. Some local Russians gained positions working on the Persian Corridor supply line, in varying capacities including in motor workshops repairing and servicing the trucks hauling supplies north, washing trains, or were otherwise involved in the provision of food and other services. The British, Russians and Americans deployed over 100,000 military personnel in Iran during the War and employed some 50,000 Iranian civilians[48].

Some of the Russian families that came to Australia say their young men did their apprenticeships in some of the workshops servicing the Persian Corridor supply chain as mechanics and fitters and turners. Others worked on road building for the British or even in electrical power stations (there were many private power companies in Tehran at this time). It is likely their local knowledge, and ability to speak Farsi and Russian in many cases meant they were highly employable during the War despite their continuing nervousness about the proximity of the Soviet military and officialdom (Personal communication)[49].

The Post-War Situation in Iran

In the end of the War in 1945 things became more difficult for the refugee community. The closing of the Persian Corridor and the redeployment of its rolling stock and personnel to the Pacific Theatre or for reconstruction work in Eu-

[47] *Fatemi, Faramarz S*. Ibid. P. 38-40; *Reynolds, Quentin.* The Curtain Rises. London: Cassell and Company, 1944. P. 30-31.

[48] *Jackson, Ashley*. Persian Gulf Command. New Haven and London, 2018. P. 236.

[49] On one occasion he asked the Consul if he should return to the Soviet Union after the War but Consul said this would not be wise (Personal communication).

rope, led to the Iranian economy slowing and a rapid rise in unemployment.

With the departure of the British and United States military and Lend-Lease personnel by January 1946 and the more reluctant withdrawal of the Soviet forces by May 1946, there was also a surge in domestic political activity, an almost democratic interregnum. The nationalist spirit in Iran was strong after the War and there was contention between the weakened young Shah and the army, conservatives (large landowners in the main), nationalist political groups increasingly rallying to Mossadegh, the clergy or ulama and the Tudeh, the communist party which had been legalized in 1941 after the abdication of Reza Shah.

With a strong nationalist reaction to the experience of occupation during the War, and the Soviet attempt to remain in Azerbaijan and force Iran into offering an oil concession in the north, it seems refugees, and especially European ones, were increasingly unpopular. A number of informants stress the hostility expressed in the streets to 'unclean infidels'. They had to time their visits to the shops to buy bread carefully. There was also the continuing suspicion, notwithstanding they were 'enemies of the people' that they might be agents of the Soviet Union, which it is true was not averse to infiltrating agents across the northern border.

In February 1949 the Shah narrowly escapade assassination by a Leftist activist who was associated with the Tudeh even if not acting on its or the Soviet orders. This led to an immediate crackdown on Leftist newspapers and the banning of the Tudeh again. This event has been mentioned by a few informants as the reason why they had to leave.

The campaign to take control of the British refinery at Abadan, led by Prime Minister Mossadegh, was the other major factor that drove Russians to leave. The legislation for the nationalisation of the British Refinery at Abadan was passed by the Majlis in February 1951 and the British withdrew their

oil refinery personnel by the end of the year. Mossadegh then closed the British Embassy and Britain instituted an embargo on buying oil from Iran which was supported by US and other major oil buying countries[50]. As a result, the economy was forced into recession and unemployment rose steeply. Constraints on refugee travel were again more strictly enforced, which meant it was increasingly difficult to find work elsewhere.

The creation of Israel in 1948 also did not help European refugees in the Middle East at this time either as many countries not unreasonably felt they had enough problems dealing with the huge influx of Palestinian refugees. In addition, after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Iraq expelled the bulk of its Jewish population to Iran, some 30,000 people, who were expected to transit from there to Israel.

1. The Refugee Exodus from Iran

Some Russians had been managing to leave Iran since the late 1940s. The *New York Times* reported in November 1949 on the arrival of a group of 36 peasants from Iran but originally from Rostov-on-Don[51]. They had been in communication with a relative in California who organised their sponsorship. The paper reported they had used nearly all the income from the sale of their assets in Iran to purchase flights via Stockholm to the United States. They did not have enough money to fly on from New York so the Airline gave them bus-fares to get to San Francisco to join their relatives. Hardwick also mentions the case of the Molokans that migrated as a group from their town in northern Iran to join other Molokans in California, again in 1949[52].

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[50] *Keddie, Nickkie R.* Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, Updated Edition. New Haven and London, 1981. P. 23-131.

[51] "White Russians" arrive from Iran. / New York Times. November 10, 1949. P. 23.

[52] *Hardwick, Susan Wiley*. Ibid.

But things were not moving quickly enough for the Iranian Government. In late 1950 or early 1951 (it is still not clear when) the Iranian Government approached the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva to do something about removing European refugees from the country. With no response from the UN, the Iranian Majlis passed legislation which required these refugees either to leave Iran by 22 March 1952 (the Iranian New Year) or to seek Iranian citizenship. If they were not able to do either of these things it was proposed that they be deported to two small islands in the Persian Gulf.

This might not have been a real threat, merely a way of increasing pressure on the stateless to leave and on the UN and Western governments to extract them. The deadline of twelve months was extended by six months twice pending the outcomes of negotiations on an arrangement with the UNHCR (Tolstoy Foundation Archives, Middle East Cabinet, 1952, Transcript of conversation with Dr Khalatbari, Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

At this time, the United States Embassy in Tehran kept a register of people who wanted to migrate. A list of these registrants was shared by the Embassy with the Tolstoy Foundation in early 1952. It shows that intending emigrants were registering as early as 1946 and in growing numbers through to 1952. The largest group by far were the Russians, but there were also Armenians from Russia, Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, and some other nationalities. In addition, there were also about 4000 Jewish people needing to emigrate from Iran, mostly to Israel though some wanted to go to the United States. Some people on the list specified their preferred country but many did not[53]. As the large Displaced Persons programs swung into action in Europe and the Far East, long standing

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[53] Tolstoy Foundation, Middle East Cabinet, Table from US Embassy. Visa Applicants for Emigration to the United States, 1952.

refugees in the Middle East were now also increasingly hopeful they too could take advantage of these programs.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) had been busy in Tehran since the establishment of Israel in 1948 in assisting Jews to emigrate. By 1951 it was running weekly flights for emigrants to Israel as well managing a number of holding camps in Tehran and providing relief to the families awaiting their turn for emigration[54].

The first departures of Russian emigrants to Australia seem to have been in 1950 – one family says they were the very first of the Persian Russians to arrive and they settled in Melbourne (Simon Andropov, personal communication). By 1952, Australian immigration records show that nearly 100 hundred individuals had managed to emigrate from Iran. Australia had no diplomatic representation in Iran, so families registered with the British Consulate which would process the applicants and arrange any necessary medical checks. None of these families came as Displaced Persons. They either paid their own fares or they came to an arrangement through local sponsors in Australia in the Russian communities in different cities or through Christian Churches which expected them to pay their passage back when they were on their feet again. Once in Australia immigrants would write back to family members or friends and encourage others to come and would find them Australian citizens who would also sponsor them – classic chain migration.

In 1951, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had a small office in Iran both to provide Technical Assistance and to assist refugees. A very experienced United Nations official in Tehran, Vladimir Temnomeroff, took it upon himself to draw the Commissioner's attention to the growing plight of this relatively unknown

[54] *Sternfeld, Lior B*. Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018. P. 63-72.

group of stateless Russian refugees. In a report to the Commissioner of 20 April 1952, Temnomeroff highlighted the uncertainty generated in the Russian community by law on deportation and citizenship of February 1951[55]. He also interviewed about 50 refugees and included some of their case studies. It is worth quoting a couple of examples to highlight the different circumstances of some of these Russian refugees and the barriers they faced in trying to live a normal life:

> "S is a Russian refugee who has been in Iran since 1933. He has a landing permit for Australia where he is going in a few days, as soon as he gets a lasssez-passer [sic] which he is sure to get, but [sic] has to do some bargaining for a reduction in price because of lack of money. The visa has been arranged by a friend who recently left Teheran for Australia. He asked for his and his friend's certificates which I gave him."
>
> K. is a Russian refugee, 21 years in Iran. Specialist in re-inforced [sic] concrete works, he worked as a contractor, but did not get the money for his last job. Has been unemployed for ten months with a family of five persons. He is expecting visa [sic] for Australia, but has no money for transportation."

He also mentioned the example of a stateless Russian who had been in Iran since 1914, and of those in other professions including a bridge-builder, the owner of an Oriental bookshop in Teheran and a hydro-meteorologist surviving as a piano-tuner.

A pleading letter to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees at this time from some members of the Russian community captures the desperation families were feeling:

> "Last year the Iran Government passed a law which had drastic results for Russian emigrees [sic]

[55] Temnomeroff, letter to UNHCR, 20 April 1952. Tolstoy Foundation Archives, Middle East Cabinet.

> living in Iran.... the Russian emigrees who stayed here after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, emigrees from the USSR and those who did not go back to the USSR (Soviet employees) are now now living in Iran for many years. The greatest influx of escapees was during the time of 'political vivisection' of the so-called 'collectivization' and 'persecution of the kulaks' mostly before 1933.
>
> ...for nearly twenty years all the refugees are under police supervision and they have no right to move along freely in the country. During this last year the emigrees – residents of Teheran are not allowed to go to any other city pending their deportation.

The authors go on to note how difficult it is for the Russians to become Iranian citizens due the property requirements which were out of reach for most Russian emigres. They continue:

> These emigrees who were tied up to certain localities and were under control of police were deprived of other rights, for example they could not work in governmental enterprises and they could not own stores and offices. Therefore, due to all these conditions…[they] are dragging a life of poverty [sic], only thanking God that they have still succeeded in keeping their life.
>
> …Logically analizing [sic] this situation one comes to the conclusion that all the Russian emigrees having no possibility of getting Iran citizenship will be forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union...."[56].

They conclude by addressing through the UNHCR the `free world with our plea to help us. S. O.S.! We beg to save us.'

[56] Letter to UNHCR, April 20, 1952, from V. Vorobiev et.al., Tolstoy Foundation Archives, Middle East Cabinet.

The previous year, in July 1951, Prime Minister Mossadegh apparently raised the matter of dealing with the European refugee problem directly with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees when the former was in Geneva as part of his visit to Europe to appear at the International Court of Justice's Hearing of Britain's appeal for a ruling on Iran's nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company at The Hague[57].

Estimates of the total number of Russian refugees in Tehran in 1952 vary but a survey conducted at that time by the Tolstoy Foundation, at the request of the High Commissioner, found that there were likely to be about 1200 Russians left out of a total of 2000-3000 European refugees still in Iran. Apparently, the number of refugees had greatly reduced over the past year, and especially because of the Jewish refugees who had gone to Israel with the help of the JDC, and through voluntary migration to Australia, the United States and South America.

After some further consultations, the UNHCR engaged the World Council of Churches (WCC) to help non-Russians in Iran and the Tolstoy Foundation, nominally under the auspices of the WCC, was asked to handle the Russians. In 1953, the United States Congress passed the *Refugee Relief Act* to make it easier for refugees to enter the country and established the United States Escapee Program (USEP) to provide funding for refugee relief agencies to rescue people fleeing Communist persecution[58]. Under this program it specifically contracted the Tolstoy Foundation to continue its work over the remainder of the 1950s to help stateless Russians all over the world includ-

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[57] Tolstoy Foundation Archives, Middle East Cabinet, 1952.

[58] *Marrus, Michael R.* The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. P. 352-54; Loescher, Gill. Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and the Global Refugee Crisis. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. P. 55-68.

ing in Iran to emigrate to countries where they would be safe[59].

While, as has been noted earlier, initially some Russian families from Iran came to Australia, the bulk were eventually assisted to emigrate to the US with some also going to countries in South America, including Brazil, Chile and Argentina. In a report to the State Department in October 1953, the Tolstoy Foundation advised that it had registered just over 1200 Russians in Iran to be assisted to emigrate to the United States[60].

2. Russians in Iran after 1955

Mohammed Mossadegh's Government was overthrown on 18 August 1953 by a coup orchestrated by the British and American Governments in collaboration with the Shah and elements that supported him. But Russians refugees continued to leave, notwithstanding the more stable if increasingly repressive political environment instituted by the Shah and his supporters. People were still leaving in 1954-55 so perhaps they were not ready to assume the political situation would remain stable, given their experience over the past decade. Continuing Government sanctioned violence was also a concern. Young Alexander Malakhoff, for example, as a university student witnessed the military enter his classroom soon after the Coup and assault and remove students, which he says prompted him apply to go to a university in the United States shortly afterwards[61].

Judging by the Tolstoy Foundation's Annual Reports, the Russian resettlement caseload in Iran was largely exhaust-

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[59] For a broad overview of the Tolstoy Foundation's role in refugee relief work see *Tolstoy Foundation Inc.* History, Aims and Achievements, New York: Tolstoy Foundation, 1976.

[60] Survey of Refugees and Escapees from Behind the Iron Curtain. Report to State Department, 31 October 1953. Tolstoy Foundation Archive, Middle East Cabinet.

[61] *Malakhoff, Alexander*. Ibid. P. 347-54.

ed by the late 1950s and the Foundation refocused its work on helping those Russians who needed to become Iranian citizens to enjoy full social and economic benefits. There remained a Russian community in Iran, if with an ageing profile. Some papers relating to a dispute at the Church of St Nicholas in Tehran in 1961 include a petition with the names of 430 parishioners as signatories, mostly Russians[62]. The Parish established a nursing home in 1960 to cater to help address the needs of its increasingly aged members. But interestingly, in 1965, Father Victorin, the then Rector of St Nicholas, organised the building of a school for the Russian community, so there must still have been enough children who needed to be educated in Russian culture, religion and language to warrant the investment.

By the time of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 it was estimated there were still some 300 mostly elderly Russians living in Tehran. The Tolstoy Foundation became involved in helping those who wanted to emigrate and in fact arranged for some of them to be resettled in its nursing homes in France. The Foundation also has some records on individual families it assisted to migrate to the US at this time.

The St Nicholas Church in Iran had no priest for a period after the Islamic Revolution – the new Government required that any new Rector be Iranian born. However, in 1995 the Church affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate and the current Rector, Dr Zarkeshev, was appointed shortly afterwards. In 2014, there was a 70th Anniversary event for the founding of the Church. At the time a journalist with the Russian delegation managed to track down a few descendants of Russian émigré families. One person she managed to talk to by phone said the Church usually only opened on feast days as there were very few parishioners left[63]. The Church was now mainly

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[62] ROCOR Synod Archives. New York, Iran. Box III, Petition, 1961.

[63] *Faustova, Milena.* Russian Orthodoxy in Iran. Voice of Russia, March 9, 2012. URL: www.johnsanidopolous.com/2012/03/russian-orthodoxy-in-iran.html (accessed on: 23.01.2019).

used by the staff of the Russian Embassy though occasionally the few people left in the community would gather at the Cemetery for funerals or commemorations.

Conclusion

Based on this brief overview, what can we conclude about this strand of the Russian diaspora? First, that their experience is largely unexplored and unremembered. There appear to be no detailed academic studies of this group, no collective biographies and very few published memoirs or personal reminiscences.

Secondly, the composition was quite different to the immediate post-Revolution/Civil war refugees and emigres. Overwhelmingly they left in the course of the upheavals of Collectivisation and Dekulakisation, so they were mostly people who had lived in the Soviet reality for a decade or so before fleeing. How this timing affected their view of the new Soviet state, since to an extent they were a part of it, would be worth exploring. In addition, they appear to have been mostly kulaki – tradespeople, skilled workers, industrious peasants and some technical professionals. So, their sensibility, their experience of exile and statelessness differed from that of the typical emigre intellectual, noble, senior official or White Officer.

We also know they lived for two decades as probably unwanted Christian guests in an Islamic country. Many had children there, who were brought up in the Orthodox faith but who grew up in a broader Islamic cultural setting, and often attended Iranian schools. What they made of this experience and how it influenced them and affected their views of the society around them would be well worth studying.

Lastly, most of them were uprooted and displaced twice in their lives, once in the Soviet Union, their homeland, and then again in the 1950s, when they had to leave the country, they had resided in for twenty years. Perhaps this has not been an uncommon experience for stateless refugees in the last one

hundred years, but nonetheless, their experience is worth exploring and documenting, both as a contribution to social history of displacement and migration and for their unique refugee experiences.

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