

Institutional Support and Government Policies: A Comparative Study of Jewish Life in Azerbaijan and Iran

Dr. Muhammad Asim (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Government Graduate College Asghar Mall Rawalpindi, and Honorary Vice-President at Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum (Islamabad Office)

Email: asimsheikh62@yahoo.com

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This study has no aim to hurt any ideological or social segment but is purely based on academic purposes.

Abstract

This research paper presents a comprehensive comparative study of Jewish life in Azerbaijan and Iran, with a focus on the institutional support and government policies governing Jewish communities in both countries. Drawing upon the constitutional provisions of Azerbaijan and Iran and utilizing relevant theoretical frameworks, the paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the socio-political context in which Jewish communities operate. The analysis begins by examining the constitutional provisions related to religious freedom and minority rights in Azerbaijan and Iran, drawing from the respective constitutions of the countries. In Azerbaijan, the Constitution of 1995, as amended, guarantees freedom of religion and bans discrimination based on religious beliefs. Conversely, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes the role of Islam as the state religion, yet grants some protection to recognized religious minorities, including the Jewish community.

In exploring the government policies that impact Jewish life, the paper employs the theories of multiculturalism and social identity. Kymlicka's theory of multiculturalism provides insights into how states can accommodate the rights and identities of minority groups within their diverse societies, while Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory sheds light on the dynamics of intergroup relations between the Jewish communities and the majority population in Azerbaijan and Iran. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research examines the institutional support provided to Jewish communities in areas such as education, religious practices, cultural preservation and socio-economic opportunities. By comparing the policies and practices in Azerbaijan and Iran, the study aims to identify best practices and potential areas for improvement to ensure the well-being and integration of Jewish communities. Moreover, the findings of this study contribute to a broader understanding of religious freedom and minority rights in Azerbaijan and Iran. By examining the constitutional provisions and government policies and applying relevant theories, the research provides valuable insights for policymakers and scholars alike,

aiming to foster more inclusive and harmonious societies that respect and celebrate cultural and religious diversity.

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Introduction

As Jewish community is centuries-old inhabitant of the region currently divided between the Iran and Azerbaijan, this research paper presents a comparative study of Jewish life in Azerbaijan and Iran, with a primary focus on the institutional support and government policies that govern Jewish communities in both countries. By exploring the relevant constitutional clauses in Azerbaijan and Iran and applying theories on multiculturalism and social identity, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the present socio-political context in which Jewish communities exist.

- In Azerbaijan, the Constitution, as amended in 1995, guarantees religious freedom and prohibits discrimination based on religious beliefs. Article 48 of the Constitution affirms the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, ensuring that all citizens have the right to practice their faith without hindrance. Similarly, Article 25 explicitly bans any form of discrimination on religious grounds, providing legal protection for religious minorities, including the Jewish community (Barouk, 2017).
- In contrast, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran defines Islam as the official state religion. While recognizing the rights of recognized religious minorities, including Jews, Article 13 stipulates that Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians are the only religious minorities whose adherents can practice their faith freely within the limits of the law. Article 14 further acknowledges their right to hold religious ceremonies, thereby granting certain protections to the Jewish community in Iran (Constitution of Iran, 1989).

Theoretical frameworks play a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics of intergroup relations within Azerbaijan and Iran. The theory of multiculturalism, as proposed by Will Kymlicka, provides valuable insights into how states can accommodate the rights and identities of minority groups within their diverse societies. Kymlicka's theory emphasizes the importance of cultural recognition and collective rights, contributing to the understanding of how Azerbaijan and Iran address the concerns of their Jewish communities. Additionally, the social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, offers crucial insights into the dynamics of intergroup relations between Jewish communities and the majority population in both countries. The theory examines how individuals identify with particular social groups and how these group identities impact behavior and perceptions of others. The research then analyzes the level of institutional support provided to Jewish communities in various spheres, including education, religious practices, cultural preservation and socio-economic opportunities. Through a comparative analysis of Azerbaijan and Iran, this study aims to identify best practices and potential areas for improvement to ensure the well-being and integration of Jewish communities (Barouk, 2017).

By investigating the constitutional clauses and government policies while applying relevant theoretical frameworks, this research endeavors to provide valuable insights for policymakers and scholars, fostering more inclusive and harmonious societies that embrace and celebrate cultural and religious diversity.

Constitution of Azerbaijan

Within the Azerbaijani Constitution, several constitutional clauses provide protections and guarantees for the rights and religious freedom of the Jewish community within the Republic of Azerbaijan:

- **Article 25**
This article prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion and ensures equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs. It serves as a foundation for protecting the rights of religious minorities, including the Jewish community (Constitution of Azerbaijan, 1995).
- **Article 48**
This clause guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for all citizens. It ensures that individuals, including the Jewish community, have the right to practice their faith freely without interference (Constitution of Azerbaijan, 1995).
- **Article 50**
This article safeguards the freedom of religious organizations to carry out their activities in Azerbaijan. It ensures that religious communities, including the Jewish community, have the right to establish places of worship, religious schools and charitable institutions (Constitution of Azerbaijan, 1995).
- **Article 58**
This clause emphasizes the right to education for all citizens, including members of the Jewish community. It ensures that educational institutions and curricula respect the diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of students (Constitution of Azerbaijan, 1995).

These constitutional clauses collectively establish the legal framework for safeguarding the religious freedom and rights of the Jewish community within the Republic of Azerbaijan. They demonstrate Azerbaijan's commitment to promoting a diverse and inclusive society where religious minorities, including Jews, can practice their faith and contribute to the nation's cultural and social fabric.

Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran

In the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the following constitutional clauses provide protections and guarantees for the rights and religious freedom of the Jewish community within the country;

- **Article 13**
Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education (Constitution of Iran, 1989).
This article explicitly recognizes Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians as recognized religious minorities in Iran. It ensures their right to practice their religious rites and ceremonies freely, as well as the right to govern their personal affairs and religious education based on their religious canons.
- **Article 14**
In accordance with the sacred verse ('God does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with those who have not fought against you on account of your religion and who have not driven you out of your homes') [Quran, 60:8], the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are

duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity and to respect their human rights (Constitution of Iran, 1989).

This article emphasizes the duty of the Iranian government and Muslims to treat non-Muslims, including the Jewish community, with kindness, justice and equity. It underscores the importance of respecting the human rights of religious minorities based on Islamic principles.

- **Article 15**

The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian (Constitution of Iran, 1989).

- **Article 19**

All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; color, race, language and the like, do not bestow any privilege (Constitution of Iran, 1989).

This article enshrines the principle of equal rights for all citizens of Iran, irrespective of their ethnic background or religious affiliation. It emphasizes that no specific group is given privilege based on their ethnicity or religion, providing protection against discrimination for religious minorities, including Jews.

- **Article 23**

The investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief (Constitution of Iran, 1989).

This article guarantees freedom of belief and prohibits the investigation or harassment of individuals based on their religious beliefs. It ensures that members of religious minorities, including Jews, have the right to practice their faith without fear of persecution or discrimination.

- **Article 26**

The formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations, as well as religious societies, whether Islamic or pertaining to one of the recognized religious minorities, is permitted provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic republic (Constitution of Iran, 1989).

This article allows the formation of religious societies for recognized religious minorities, including Jews, as long as they do not contravene the principles of the Islamic Republic. It affirms their right to organize and practice their religious and cultural activities freely.

- **Article 69**

The President must obtain the approval of the Islamic Consultative Assembly for the appointment of the religious leaders of recognized religious minorities (Constitution of Iran, 1989).

This article requires the President to seek approval from the Islamic Consultative Assembly for the nomination of religious leaders from recognized religious minorities, ensuring their religious leadership is respected and recognized within the framework of the country's governance.

These constitutional clauses collectively establish the legal framework for safeguarding the religious freedom and rights of the Jewish community and other religious minorities within the Islamic Republic of Iran. They reflect Iran's commitment to promoting diversity, equality and respect for religious beliefs within the framework of Islamic principles.

Institutional Support to Jewish Life in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is known for its historically tolerant and inclusive approach towards religious diversity, including support for Jewish life. Public and private institutions in Azerbaijan have taken various measures to foster an environment conducive to the preservation and flourishing of Jewish culture and traditions (Barouk, 2017). Below are some examples of how public and private institutions support Jewish life in the Republic of Azerbaijan;

Cultural Centers and Synagogues

Azerbaijan has a number of Jewish cultural centers and synagogues that serve as community hubs and places of worship for Jewish residents. One prominent example is the Mountain Jews Community Center in Baku¹, which provides cultural and religious services, educational programs and social events for the Jewish community. Additionally, the European-style “Red Town” in Baku houses several synagogues, reflecting the country’s commitment to preserving Jewish heritage² (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

¹ The Mountain Jews Community Center in Baku, Azerbaijan, holds a rich history that dates back several decades. The Mountain Jews, also known as Juhuro, are an ancient Jewish community indigenous to the Caucasus region, with a distinct cultural and religious identity. It has a long history of residing in the Caucasus and their presence in Azerbaijan can be traced back over two thousand years. Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, has been a significant hub for the Mountain Jews’ cultural and religious activities. During the Soviet era, religious freedom was restricted and religious institutions faced challenges. However, after Azerbaijan gained independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the country experienced a resurgence of religious freedom and a renewed focus on preserving cultural diversity (Barouk, 2017).

In this context, the Mountain Jews Community Center in Baku was established as a symbol of religious and cultural revival for the Jewish community. The center was officially inaugurated in the late 1990s and since then, it has become a prominent institution catering to the needs of the Jewish community in Baku. The community center serves as a hub for various activities, including religious services, educational programs, social events and cultural gatherings. It plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of unity and identity among the Mountain Jews in Baku. The center has also played a significant role in promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation in Azerbaijan. It actively engages in multicultural events, where representatives from various religious communities come together to celebrate shared values and promote mutual understanding (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

The Mountain Jews Community Center in Baku stands as a testament to Azerbaijan’s commitment to religious tolerance and pluralism. It reflects the country’s dedication to preserving the cultural heritage and traditions of the Mountain Jews, providing them with a space to practice their faith, celebrate their culture and strengthen their community bonds. Through this center, the Mountain Jews continue to contribute to the vibrant tapestry of Azerbaijan’s diverse and inclusive society (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

² Historically, Baku has been a melting pot of diverse cultures and religions due to its strategic location as a major port city on the Caspian Sea. The Jewish community has been an integral part of Baku’s social fabric for centuries. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Baku experienced significant economic growth due to the oil boom. This period, known as the “Oil Rush”, attracted a diverse population, including many Jewish merchants, entrepreneurs and intellectuals from various regions, such as Iran, Central Asia and the Caucasus (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

As the Jewish population grew, they established their neighborhoods within Baku. One of the most significant Jewish neighborhoods was known as “Red Town” or “Krasnaya Sloboda”. The name “Red Town” does not refer to communism but rather originates from the word “krasny”, which means beautiful in Russian. It reflects the vibrant and picturesque nature of the neighborhood. Moreover, within “Red Town”, the Jewish community built numerous synagogues, reflecting their dedication to preserving their religious and cultural heritage. These synagogues became important centers of worship, education and community gatherings, providing the Jewish population with a sense of belonging and identity. Even during challenging times, such as the Soviet era when religious freedom was

Government Support for Religious Tolerance

The Azerbaijani government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to religious tolerance and pluralism. The state actively supports interfaith dialogue and cooperation and the country's leadership often participates in multicultural events to promote unity among different religious groups, including the Jewish community. Throughout the years, several events and initiatives have highlighted this commitment to coexistence and understanding;

- Azerbaijan organizes an annual Multiculturalism and Tolerance Festival, where representatives from various religious and ethnic communities, including Muslims and Jews, come together to celebrate their diversity and shared values. The festival showcases cultural performances, traditional cuisine and exhibitions, promoting mutual respect and understanding among different religious groups (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).
- The Azerbaijani government officially recognizes and respects Jewish holidays, granting time off for Jewish employees to observe these special occasions. This recognition demonstrates the country's commitment to supporting the religious practices and traditions of the Jewish community (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).
- President Ilham Aliyev has consistently emphasized the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation. He has actively participated in various interreligious events, fostering a sense of unity among religious leaders and promoting a message of tolerance and respect for all faiths (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

Jewish Educational Institutions

In Azerbaijan, Jewish educational institutions receive support from both public and private sectors. For instance, the Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish School³ in Baku offers educational programs that include the study

restricted, the Jewish community in Baku managed to preserve its cultural and religious practices within the confines of "Red Town" (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

In the post-Soviet era, with the restoration of religious freedom and the independence of Azerbaijan, the government renewed its commitment to religious diversity and tolerance. This included supporting the preservation and restoration of historical religious sites, such as the synagogues in "Red Town" (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

Today, the European-style "Red Town" remains an important landmark in Baku, showcasing Azerbaijan's rich cultural and religious diversity. The presence of several synagogues in this neighborhood serves as a living testament to the country's commitment to preserving Jewish heritage and fostering an inclusive and harmonious society. The historical significance of "Red Town" and its synagogues continues to be cherished and celebrated by both the Jewish community and the broader Azerbaijani society (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

³ The Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish School in Baku has a significant history in providing Jewish education and preserving Jewish culture in Azerbaijan. The school is part of the worldwide network of Chabad-Lubavitch educational institutions, known for their commitment to promoting Jewish education and values. The history of this school dates back to the early 1990s when Azerbaijan gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union. During this period, with the restoration of religious freedom, the Jewish community in Azerbaijan saw an opportunity to revive and strengthen its cultural and religious identity (Ahmadov, 2008).

In 1991, the Chabad-Lubavitch movement established the Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish School in Baku. The school aimed to provide a comprehensive Jewish education to the younger generation, including the study of Hebrew, Jewish traditions, history and values. It became an essential institution for nurturing a strong sense of Jewish identity among the students, fostering a connection to their religious and cultural heritage (Ahmadov, 2008).

The Azerbaijani government has played a crucial role in supporting the Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish School and protecting it from potential threats, including those from Iran. Azerbaijan is well aware of the importance of preserving religious diversity and promoting interfaith harmony within its borders. The government has consistently

of Hebrew, Jewish traditions and history. The school aims to preserve Jewish cultural identity among the younger generation (Ahmadov, 2008).

Preservation of Jewish Heritage

Azerbaijan has taken steps to preserve Jewish historical sites and monuments. The Red Settlement, located in the city of Guba⁴, is one such example, representing the cultural heritage of Jews who settled in the region centuries ago (Ahmadov, 2008).

demonstrated its commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of religious minority communities, including the Jewish community (Ahmadov, 2008).

The Azerbaijani government's support for the Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish School is evident through several measures;

- 1) The Azerbaijani constitution guarantees freedom of religion, providing a legal framework for religious institutions, including the Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish School, to operate freely and without fear of discrimination (Ahmadov, 2008).
- 2) Azerbaijan and Israel have maintained robust diplomatic relations. These relations have fostered cooperation in various fields, including education and cultural exchanges, contributing to the safety and security of Jewish institutions in Azerbaijan (Ahmadov, 2008).
- 3) The Azerbaijani government takes security seriously and ensures the protection of religious institutions, particularly those at risk from potential external threats. Adequate security measures are in place to safeguard the Chabad Ohr Avner Jewish School and other Jewish institutions in the country (Ahmadov, 2008).

⁴ The Red Settlement, also known as Krasnaya Sloboda, is a historically significant Jewish community located in the city of Guba in Azerbaijan. It is one of the oldest and largest all-Jewish settlements in the Caucasus region, with a unique cultural and religious heritage. The history of this settlement dates back several centuries. The Jewish community in Guba traces its roots to the medieval period when Jews migrated to the region from Iran and other neighboring areas. Over time, the settlement developed into a thriving Jewish enclave with a distinct identity and customs (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

The name "Red Settlement" does not refer to any political ideology, but rather it originates from the word "krasny", which means beautiful in Russian. It is believed that the name was given by Russian soldiers stationed in the region, appreciating the beauty of the area and its unique Jewish community. The settlement is known for its well-preserved Jewish cultural and religious traditions. The community has maintained its distinct identity over the centuries, preserving its language, religious practices and cultural heritage. Yiddish, a language closely related to German and Hebrew, is spoken by the members of the community, signifying their unique historical ties (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

One of the most remarkable features of the Red Settlement is the colorful houses adorned with blue Star of David symbols, a testament to the community's Jewish identity. The architecture and layout of the settlement reflect the historical influence of the Jewish residents (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

The Azerbaijani government recognizes the historical significance of the Red Settlement and actively supports its preservation and promotion as a vital cultural heritage site. The government provides resources to maintain and restore the historic buildings and monuments within the settlement, ensuring the continuation of the rich Jewish heritage. Moreover, tourism has also played a role in promoting the Red Settlement as a cultural destination, attracting visitors interested in exploring the unique Jewish history and traditions of the region. The settlement has become an essential part of Azerbaijan's cultural landscape and a symbol of the country's commitment to preserving its diverse religious and ethnic heritage (Mikdash-Shamailov, 2002).

Media Coverage and Public Recognition

Local media outlets in Azerbaijan often cover Jewish community events and festivals⁵, contributing to public awareness and understanding of Jewish culture and traditions. Public recognition of Jewish holidays and festivities by government officials further promotes an inclusive environment for the Jewish community (Ahmadov, 2008).

Scholarly Research on Jewish History

Academic institutions and scholars in Azerbaijan have conducted research on Jewish history and culture, contributing to a deeper understanding of Jewish life in the country. For example;

- Institute of Oriental Studies of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences focuses on research in various areas of Oriental studies, including Jewish history and culture in the Caucasus region.
- Baku State University have many departments engaged in research related to Jewish history and culture.

⁵ These festivals are;

1) **Passover (Pesach)**

Passover is a significant Jewish festival commemorating the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. During this festival, families gather for special meals known as Seders, where they retell the story of the Exodus and partake in symbolic foods, such as matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs. In Azerbaijan, Jewish families come together to celebrate Passover with traditional customs and rituals (Ahmadov, 2008).

2) **Rosh Hashanah**

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is a time of reflection, prayer and the blowing of the shofar (ram's horn). It marks the beginning of the High Holy Days and is a time for introspection and renewal. Jewish communities in Azerbaijan observe Rosh Hashanah with special synagogue services and festive meals (Ahmadov, 2008).

3) **Yom Kippur**

Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement, is considered the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. It is a day of fasting, prayer and repentance, during which Jews seek forgiveness and spiritual purification. Jewish individuals in Azerbaijan participate in solemn Yom Kippur services and engage in reflection and self-examination (Ahmadov, 2008).

4) **Hanukkah (Chanukah)**

Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the Greek-Syrian forces and the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. During this eight-day festival, Jews light the menorah, adding one candle each night. In Azerbaijan, Jewish families light the menorah, exchange gifts and enjoy traditional foods, such as latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly-filled doughnuts) (Ahmadov, 2008).

5) **Purim**

Purim commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from the plot of Haman to destroy them. It is a festive holiday filled with joy, costumes and the reading of the Book of Esther. Jewish communities in Azerbaijan celebrate Purim with lively gatherings, theatrical performances and the sharing of food and gifts (Ahmadov, 2008).

6) **Sukkot**

Sukkot, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, is a harvest festival that commemorates the Israelites' time in temporary shelters during their journey through the desert. During Sukkot, Jews build and dwell in temporary outdoor structures called sukkahs. Jewish families in Azerbaijan construct sukkahs, decorate them with fruits and decorations and partake in festive meals and prayers (Ahmadov, 2008).

- Azerbaijan National Library holds valuable resources and publications related to Jewish history and culture in Azerbaijan.
- Jewish Studies Center at the Azerbaijan State University of Languages is dedicated to the study of Jewish culture, history and languages and it may host scholars engaged in research on these topics (Huseynov, 2023).

Research works have also explored the historical ties between Azerbaijan and Jewish communities and have shed light on shared cultural heritage, such as;

- Dr. Fuad Akhundov is a prominent Azerbaijani historian who has extensively researched the history of Jewish communities in Azerbaijan, including their cultural contributions and interactions with other communities in the region.
- Dr. Yagub Mahmudov is a historian and expert in Jewish studies who has focused on the history of Jewish communities in Azerbaijan and their role in the country's multicultural society.
- Dr. Farid Alakbarov is a scholar known for his research on interfaith relations in Azerbaijan, including the history of Jewish-Muslim interactions and the preservation of Jewish cultural heritage.
- Dr. Ogtay Shiraliyev is an academic who has contributed to the study of Azerbaijani history, including the history of minority communities, such as the Jewish population.
- Dr. Leyla Alishova is a researcher who has explored the history of Jewish communities in Azerbaijan and their contributions to the country's cultural diversity (Huseynov, 2023).
- Dr. Ismail Agakishiyev is a historian who has studied the history of the Jewish community in Azerbaijan, particularly their experiences during different historical periods.

International Recognition

Azerbaijan's commitment to religious tolerance and support for Jewish life has been recognized internationally. Scholars and experts from various countries have acknowledged Azerbaijan's positive approach to fostering interreligious harmony and cooperation (Mammadov, 2003).

Institutional Support to Jewish Life in Iran

Similar to Azerbaijan, Iran also hosts Jewish community since centuries and they have constitutional and political rights (mentioned above, specifically article 13 of the constitution). Similarly, all the festivals that Jewish community observes freely in Azerbaijan, also observe in Iran without any constitutional or political restriction. Moreover, the Iranian Parliament, known as the Islamic Consultative Assembly, reserves one seat for a representative of the Jewish community. This ensures their voice is heard and their interests are represented at the national level (Sternfeld, 2019) (Asim, 2023).

At the same time, Iran has Jewish schools where students can receive a Jewish education while also following the national curriculum. Jewish educational institutions have the freedom to teach religious and cultural subjects in accordance with their traditions. In addition, the Iranian government recognizes the historical importance of Jewish heritage sites and has taken steps to preserve them. Ancient synagogues and Jewish cemeteries are protected as part of the country's rich cultural heritage (Sternfeld, 2019) (Asim, 2023).

Conclusion

this comparative study of Jewish life in Azerbaijan and Iran sheds light on the diverse approaches to institutional support and government policies regarding religious minorities in two distinct societies. While both countries have historical Jewish communities, their experiences differ due to their unique cultural and political contexts.

- In Azerbaijan, the government's commitment to preserving Jewish heritage and fostering interfaith harmony is exemplified through initiatives like the restoration of historical synagogues, recognition of Jewish holidays and participation in multicultural events. This approach aligns with theories of multiculturalism, which emphasize the importance of acknowledging and respecting diverse religious and cultural identities within a society. Scholars such as Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka have extensively studied multiculturalism, advocating for the accommodation of different religious and ethnic communities to promote social cohesion and tolerance (Asghar, 2023).
- On the other hand, Iran's institutional support for its Jewish community is grounded in constitutional recognition and representation in the Parliament. However, challenges exist concerning religious freedom and human rights for religious minorities in Iran. The situation in Iran reflects the complexities and tensions that can arise in societies where religious militancy and intolerance prevail. The works of scholars like Samuel Huntington, who introduced the theory of the "Clash of Civilizations", highlight how the clash of religious and cultural identities can exacerbate conflicts in societies where religious extremism is dominant (Asghar, 2023).

Both Azerbaijan and Iran serve as examples for societies struggling with religious militancy and intolerance, such as Pakistan, Sudan, South Sudan and Afghanistan. These countries can learn from Azerbaijan's inclusive approach, which prioritizes interfaith dialogue and from Iran's constitutional recognition of religious minorities. Embracing principles of multiculturalism and promoting religious coexistence can pave the way for peaceful and harmonious societies, fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse religious communities.

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