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## National socialist propaganda in late Reza-Shah Iran: the case of *Khaterat-e Hitler* by Mohsen Jahansuz

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### ABSTRACT

The attempts of national socialist Germany to influence the Iranian public are an important dimension of the relations between the two countries during the last years of Reza Shah's rule. Yet previous studies on this aspect have barely considered Iranian sources to assess the actual impact of these propaganda efforts on Iranian society. One of these sources is the 1938-published *Khaterat-e Hitler* by Mohsen Jahansuz. By analysing the book in depth and situating it within the context of Jahansuz's biography, this study provides new findings concerning the reception of national socialist ideology in 1930s Iran and challenges previous claims concerning the publication, which has hitherto been considered the first translation of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. It argues that Jahansuz, by inserting his own ideas and interpretations into the text without explicitly indicating his authorship, did not create a translation but an adaptation of the German original that transcended the limits of Hitler's exclusivist Germanocentrism in order to establish a theory of the 'racial superiority' of the rural population at Iran's mountainous periphery. The paper shows how a representative of the Iranian *literati* appropriated national socialist ideology and distributed it in an altered way to further his own cause.

### Introduction

The connection to national socialist Germany played a significant role in the international relations of Iran during the last decade of Reza Shah's rule. The country had not only become Iran's most important trade partner by the mid-1930s, its strong presence in Iran also indirectly contributed to the fall of the country's monarch as the shah's refusal to suspend diplomatic relations with Berlin and to expel German citizens from the country had constituted the central pretext for the Anglo-Soviet invasion of August 1941. Given the importance of these developments for the history of modern Iran, it is not surprising that several scholarly accounts which deal with the various dimensions of Irano-German relations between 1933 and 1941 have been published to date.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A comprehensive bibliography of these works has been made available through the corresponding *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entry. Oliver Bast, 'GERMANY i. German-Persian Diplomatic Relations', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/germany-i> (accessed 16/05/2021).

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Besides questions concerning the economic and diplomatic connections between Iran and Germany, scholars have also engaged with the issue of national socialist propaganda in Iran during the 1930s and the Second World War. For example, in the context of a broader study on the German influence on the Iranian press between 1909 and 1936, Ahmad Mahrad has focused on how national socialist diplomats and functionaries in Tehran and Berlin tried to influence Iranian public opinion through Persian print publications.<sup>2</sup> In his book *Die Deutschen und der Iran* (The Germans and Iran), Matthias Küntzel has sought to explain the strong openly anti-Semitic current within parts of the country's political elite during the presidency of Mahmud Ahmadinezhad by looking at the history of Irano-German relations and, in particular, at German war-time attempts to spread national socialist propaganda among the peoples of Southwest Asia through the radio broadcasts of *Radio Zeesen*.<sup>3</sup> While both scholars offer interesting insights into the relevant documents available at the archive of the German Foreign Office, they have hardly made use of Persian sources from that period, and thus have been unable to convincingly assess how Iranians themselves received these German attempts to influence their opinion.

Moreover, the question of how a key piece of national socialist propaganda, Adolf Hitler's programmatic book, the inflammatory *Mein Kampf* (English: *My Struggle*; Persian: *Nabard-e man*), reached Iran has remained unanswered as well. This is surprising as the book, which nowadays can be bought in many of Tehran's bookshops, is perhaps the most tangible evidence of the penetration of Iranian public discourse by national socialist ideas.<sup>4</sup> Previous research on the distribution of *Mein Kampf* in Southwest Asia and North Africa has been limited to the Arabic-speaking world.<sup>5</sup> A recent edited volume of articles discussing the historical dimension of translations of *Mein Kampf* expanded the scope only to Turkey and Israel.<sup>6</sup> The Persian-speaking world was again left out and the only piece of information available on the topic was the rumour that Davud Monshizadeh, the founder of Iran's postwar national socialist party SUMKA, was the first one to translate the piece.<sup>7</sup> It was only in 2016 that an article by the historian Othmar Plöckinger on the international dissemination of the book took the first step to fill this gap. Plöckinger briefly referred to *Khaterat-e Hitler* (Hitler's Memoirs) as a 'very free translation and compilation of various sections' of the original text by Mohsen Jahansuz, published in 1938.<sup>8</sup>

Through an in-depth analysis of Jahansuz's *Khaterat-e Hitler*, which must be considered a creative adaptation in the guise of an analysis of Hitler's genuine memoirs rather than

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<sup>2</sup>Ahmad Mahrad, *Die deutsche Pénétration pacifique des iranischen Pressewesens 1909–1936* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>Matthias Küntzel, *Die Deutschen und der Iran: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer verhängnisvollen Freundschaft* (Berlin: wjs-Verlag, 2009).

<sup>4</sup>The most recent translation of *Mein Kampf* into Persian has been conducted by Fereshteh Akbarpur in 2013. Previous versions were translated by 'Enayatollah Shakibapur. Adolf Hitler, *Nabard-e man*. Trans. Fereshteh Akbarpur (Tehran: Mo'assaseh-ye entesharat-e negah, 1392 h.sh. [2013]); Adolf Hitler, *Nabard-e man*. Trans. 'Enayatollah Shakibapur (Tehran: Donya-ye ketab, 1385 h.sh. [2006]).

<sup>5</sup>Stefan Wild, 'Mein Kampf in arabischer Übersetzung', *Die Welt des Islam* 9, no. 1 (1964); idem, 'National Socialism in the Arab Near East between 1933 and 1939', *Die Welt des Islam* 25, no. 1 (1985).

<sup>6</sup>Othmar Plöckinger, ed., *Sprache zwischen Politik, Ideologie und Geschichtsschreibung: Analysen historischer und aktueller Übersetzungen von 'Mein Kampf'* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2019).

<sup>7</sup>BBC Persian, 'Ketab-e "Nabard-i man" neveshteh-ye Hitler saranjam dar Alman chap mi-shavad', [https://web.archive.org/web/20181209080101/http://www.bbc.com/persian/arts/2015/12/151202\\_141\\_hitler\\_book\\_publishes\\_in\\_germany](https://web.archive.org/web/20181209080101/http://www.bbc.com/persian/arts/2015/12/151202_141_hitler_book_publishes_in_germany) (accessed 16/03/2021).

<sup>8</sup>Othmar Plöckinger, 'Zur internationalen Rezeption von 'Mein Kampf' vor 1945', *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 13 (2016), 32–33.

a translation,<sup>9</sup> this study seeks to contribute to both of the above-mentioned currents of research. Firstly, by situating the book within the context of Jahansuz's biography, his political thought, and activities as well as the history of national socialist propaganda in Iran, the study will show how a young representative of Iran's *literati* received Hitler's manifesto, and will thereby provide valuable insights into how German propaganda resonated within the public of 1930s Iran. Secondly, it will explore how Hitler's work was translated in Iran for the first time, and how Jahansuz's adaptation—itsself being a piece of propaganda—presented the ideas of *Mein Kampf* to its Iranian readership.<sup>10</sup> As this study will show, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, which at the time of its publication very likely was the most comprehensive account of national socialist ideology available in Persian, outlined national socialism in a heavily distorted way. Jahansuz, who claimed to be an analyst of Hitler's memoirs but was seen as a translator of *Mein Kampf* by his contemporaries, mixed translated and paraphrased sections of the original text with his own insertions, ideas inspired by Iranian nationalist discourse and quotes from classical Persian poetry. Since he did not explicitly indicate that it was him who had authored these particular alterations, his readers were unable to distinguish the supposed analysis of Hitler's manifesto from Jahansuz's own ideas, which, in their essence, often contradicted national socialist theory. In this way, he did not only use *Khaterat-e Hitler* to outline and disseminate his very own thought but, effectively, also made Hitler's racist and Germanocentric worldview acceptable to his Iranian readership.

### Mohsen Jahansuz: life and death in Iran under Reza Shah

Thanks to an article by Stephanie Cronin, Mohsen Jahansuz himself is known less for his work as a translator than for his role in a national-modernist group inside the army opposing the rule of Reza Shah. Born in Kermanshah in 1914, he studied in Beirut and, after 1934, at the Faculty of Law in Tehran.<sup>11</sup> It seems that translating books<sup>12</sup> was a side job to pay the bills of the student, who was proficient in several foreign languages including French, Arabic, and English.<sup>13</sup> It was in this context that he translated sections of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and published them in a Tehran-based newspaper in 1936.<sup>14</sup> In

<sup>9</sup>Henceforth, I will therefore only refer to *Khaterat-e Hitler* by putting 'translation' in inverted commas.

<sup>10</sup>For this part of the research process, *Khaterat-e Hitler* has been compared to the various versions of *Mein Kampf*, as they are present in the critical edition of the book that was published by the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History in Munich in 2016. For the English version of the paper, however, the 1941 Reynal and Hitchcock English translation was used. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941); idem, *Mein Kampf: Eine kritische Edition*, 2 vols. (Munich: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 2016).

<sup>11</sup>Stephanie Cronin, 'The Politics of Radicalism within the Iranian Army: The Jahansuz Group of 1939', *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 1 (1999), 12.

<sup>12</sup>The books other than *Khaterat-e Hitler* which Jahansuz translated into Persian had exclusively been written in French. These did not only include guidebooks such as *The Way to Happiness* by the surgeon Victor Pauchet but also books on Islam such as *The Mahdi: From the Beginnings of Islam until the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Hijri* by the orientalist James Darmesteter. James Darmesteter, *Mahdi: Az sadr-e eslam ta qarn-e sizdahom-e hejri*. (Tehran: Sherkat-e ketabforushi-ye adab, 1317 h. sh. [1938]), originally published as *Le Mahdi: depuis les origines de l'Islam jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Leroux, 1885); Victor Pauchet, *Rah-e khoshbakhti: Tajdid-e tarbiyyat-e nafs*. (Tehran: Sherkat-e matbu'at, 1315 h. sh. [1936]), originally published as *Le chemin du bonheur: la rééducation de soi-même* (Paris: Editions J. Oliven, 1930).

<sup>13</sup>Najafqoli Pesyan, *Vaqe' eh-ye e 'dam-e Jahansuz* (Tehran: Mo'assaseh-ye entesharat-e modabber, 1370 h. sh. [1991]), 45.

<sup>14</sup>In his memoirs, Jahansuz's contemporary Pesyan claims that this newspaper was *Mehr-e Iran*. According to Barzin's comprehensive encyclopaedia of the Iranian press, this cannot have been the case. The daily *Mehr-e Iran* appeared for the first time only in 1941. Yet before 1941, the founder of *Mehr-e Iran*, 'Abd al-Majid Movaqar, had also published the monthly *Mehr* and since 1937, had been the licence holder of the daily *Iran*. Hence, it could well be that Jahansuz

1938, these sections were compiled and published in a standalone monograph.<sup>15</sup> In autumn 1939, after his graduation from the University of Tehran, he entered the officers' college in his hometown Kermanshah.<sup>16</sup>

It was during his studies that Jahansuz first became politically active. Taking a radical nationalist position, he staunchly opposed the way in which Reza Shah and his government were seeking to modernize Iran. Jahansuz criticized the regime's development strategy, which focused on large and expensive infrastructure projects, for being inefficient and wasteful. He particularly condemned the construction of the Trans-Iranian Railway, since he was convinced that projects like this would impoverish the nation and serve geopolitical interests rather than having any significant positive effect on broader segments of the domestic population.<sup>17</sup>

Instead of spending the limited budget of the country on such *grands projets*, Jahansuz suggested the establishment of a new economic system, the foundations of which were clearly inspired by the ideas of fascist corporatism. Regarding Iran's natural wealth as sufficient to meet the needs of the nation, he envisaged an autarkic economy in which the state would play a key role in directing investments as well as industrial and agricultural production. According to his contemporary Pesyan, he was convinced that:

[t]he state must encourage the people and capital owners to establish companies and has to direct them in this [endeavour], and to thus circulate capital in ways beneficial to the state of society. [...] in whatever country these principles are applied, there will be unity, consensus, and patriotism. The people will defend their interests, and the propaganda of others will not affect them.<sup>18</sup>

While Jahansuz did not fundamentally challenge the capitalist economic order, he apparently aimed to achieve a compromise between capital and labour. With regards to the industrialization of the country, he recommended '[to] make use of the laws and experiences of the socialists concerning labour and workers insofar as it is beneficial'.<sup>19</sup>

Jahansuz was 'pessimistic' about the ability of Iran's *de jure* constitutional monarchy or of any republican framework to facilitate such deep transformations and, instead, favoured a 'special form of dictatorial rule'.<sup>20</sup> While he apparently did not want to outrightly abolish the monarchy, he envisaged the role of the shah to be reduced from an autocrat to a 'general arbitrator' who would reign and not rule. All government power should be in the hands of a 'prime minister', who would be elected for a limited period of time and be accountable only to the monarch. Jahansuz, however, did not elaborate on how and by whom this temporary dictator would be elected.<sup>21</sup>

The concept of race played a key role in Jahansuz's thought. As discussed below, he used the preface to *Khaterat-e Hitler* to explicitly elaborate on his conviction that Iran was

published his 'translation' of *Mein Kampf* in either of the two. Pesyan may have simply confused the three different newspapers with each other when he was writing his memoirs half a century after the event. Pesyan, *Vaqe'eh*, 20; A. M. Barzin, *Shenasnameh-ye matbu'at-e Iran: az 1215 ta 1357 shamsi* (Tehran: Behjat, 1371 h.sh. [1992]), 66–67, 380.

<sup>15</sup> Mohsen Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, (Tehran: Entesharat-e tazamoni-ye'elmi, 1317 h.sh. [1938]).

<sup>16</sup> Cronin, 'The Politics of Radicalism within the Iranian Army', 13.

<sup>17</sup> Pesyan, *Vaqe'eh*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–49.

<sup>20</sup> Vezarat-e keshvar, Edareh-ye koll-e shahrbani, Edareh-ye siyasi-ye riyasat-e setad-e artesh, 'Gozaresh 29/8/18 [21/11/1939]', no. 2927827, Sazman-e asnad va ketabkhaneh-ye melli-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran, fol. 4–5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 3.

the place of origin of the 'Aryans' as the 'master race'.<sup>22</sup> In the foreword to his translation of Darmesteter's book on the history of the term 'Mahdi', he considered the 'Iranian' contributions to this religious concept a manifestation of 'the eternal spirit of Iranianess (*irāniyyat*)' and of 'the light of truth that has existed in the centre of our [the Iranians'] race's heart since the earliest days'.<sup>23</sup> While not explicitly challenging Shi'ism or the Shi'ite clergy, he thus took up a clear secular stance towards Islam and implicitly repudiated the idea of this religion's eternal nature by situating the concept of race at the centre of all cultural and social development. Jahansuz, moreover, was of the firm belief that the civilization and 'racial qualities' of Iran's 'Aryans' had been subject to considerable decline as a consequence of the migration movements of Arab and Turkic communities which Iran had witnessed over the course of centuries.<sup>24</sup> This racist worldview, however, did not prevent him from admiring the modernization efforts of Kemal Atatürk in Turkey. He seems to have been particularly impressed by the latter's success in raising the literacy rate among the Turkish population.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, although he openly affirmed Hitler's anti-Semitism,<sup>26</sup> there is no evidence that he applied these ideas to Iran by directly attacking the country's Jewish community in his writings. From the sources available, it appears that he generally refrained from explicitly agitating against any of Iran's various ethno-linguistic or religious minorities.

What can arguably be seen as the overarching issue in Jahansuz's political thought was that of land reform. Apparently, it was this question which had originally politicized him. Belonging to a family which was relatively influential in and around Kermanshah, he had experienced the expropriation of a significant number of landowners at the hand of Reza Shah's officials. He could not understand 'why a monarch, to whose merit it is that he has risen up to the position of king from a lower-class background, and respects the law, has to do such things'.<sup>27</sup> In the search for a solution to the issue of how to distribute land more equally, Jahansuz, who later explicitly described himself as an anti-communist, had turned to the works of German and Italian authors and, in particular, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps attracted by the national socialist *Reichserbhofgesetz* (Hereditary Farm Law) of September 1933,<sup>29</sup> Jahansuz was mistakenly convinced that the German dictator '[had given] land and property to the peasants so that everyone owns everything'.<sup>30</sup>

It was mainly based on this desire for land reform that Jahansuz and a number of other junior officers formed a secret political circle shortly after he had entered the military.<sup>31</sup> According to Pesyan, who was a member of this group,<sup>32</sup> they were planning to found

<sup>22</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, noh [ix].

<sup>23</sup>Darmesteter, *Mahdi*, [iv].

<sup>24</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, dah [x]—*yāzdah* [xi].

<sup>25</sup>Pesyan, *Vaqe'eh*, 49.

<sup>26</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, haft [vii].

<sup>27</sup>Pesyan, *Vaqe'eh*, 42.

<sup>28</sup>Vezerat-e keshvar, Edareh-ye koll-e shahrbani, Edareh-ye siyasi-ye riyasat-e setad-e artesh. 'Gozaresh 26/8/18 [18 /11/ 1939]', no. 2927827, Sazman-e asnad va ketabkhaneh-ye melli-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran; Cronin, 'The Politics of Radicalism within the Iranian Army', 14.

<sup>29</sup>In order to create 'a new German peasantry' in line with the national socialist 'blood and soil' ideology, the Hitler government made the property of around one million 'Aryan' peasant families inalienable. The land concerned should remain within these families and to this end could only be transferred through inheritance. James W. Miller, 'Pre-War Nazi Agrarian Policy', *Agricultural History* 15, No. 4 (1941), 177.

<sup>30</sup>Edareh-ye siyasi-ye riyasat-e setad-e artesh, 'Gozaresh 26/8/18 [18 /11/1939]'.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid; Edareh-ye siyasi-ye riyasat-e setad-e artesh, 'Gozaresh 29/8/18 [21/11/1939]'.

<sup>32</sup>Edareh-ye siyasi-ye riyasat-e setad-e artesh, 'Gozaresh 26/8/18 [18 /11/1939]'.

a political party. Yet before they could even draft a programme or a statute, their activities came to a sudden halt.<sup>33</sup> Only weeks after its creation, the 'Jahansuz Group', as Cronin called this association of like-minded individuals, was exposed and its members were arrested. Under the allegation of having simultaneously cooperated with the German Reich and the USSR in an alleged conspiracy against the royal family, they were tried in a military court. At the trial, the prosecutors presented Jahansuz's translation of *Mein Kampf* as evidence for these claims, which cannot be substantiated by the available archival material and, in their essence, seem to have been constructed by Reza Shah's police.<sup>34</sup>

The case has striking similarities to the trial of the Marxist group 'of the fifty-three' around the chemist Taqi Arani in November 1938.<sup>35</sup> Rather than ending the activities of actual and potentially violent conspirators, the repression of Jahansuz and his young reform-oriented associates is more likely to have been intended to silence a modernist group in opposition to Reza Shah, who in the 1930s had come to seek the elimination of every individual and social or political current which he regarded as challenging his claim for total authority. As a member of the Iranian military, Jahansuz, who was chosen as the leader of the 'conspirators', received a harsher sentence than the scientist Arani; condemned to death with no possibility for appeal, he was executed in March 1940.<sup>36</sup>

After Reza Shah's abdication in 1941, Jahansuz's deeds were glorified in nationalist circles. For instance, in Ahmad Kasravi's newspaper *Parcham*, Gholam'ali Sirius, a former member of the group,<sup>37</sup> came to portray Jahansuz as a martyr, willing to sacrifice his life for Iran.<sup>38</sup> In a special issue on the occasion of the third anniversary of his death, the periodical *Azad* explicitly expressed its expectation for 'divine revenge' which would hit those who had been responsible for the young officer's execution.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, while Iran's perhaps most prominent national socialist, Davud Monshizadeh, does not seem to have engaged with Jahansuz's life and thought,<sup>40</sup> Daryush Foruhar's pan-Iranist Party of the Iranian Nation (*Hezb-e Mellat-e Iran*) considered Jahansuz its intellectual forerunner.<sup>41</sup>

### National socialist propaganda in Iran, 1933-1939

Jahansuz's interest in national socialism had certainly been promoted by the German propaganda to which he had been exposed during his studies in Tehran. Already before the rise to power of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; NSDAP), significant parts of the Iranian public looked favourably at Germany and followed the developments there with particular interest. The country was regarded as an independent European third force which was, allegedly, without the

<sup>33</sup>Pesyan, *Vaqe'eh*, 41.

<sup>34</sup>Cronin, 'The Politics of Radicalism within the Iranian Army', 13, 21.

<sup>35</sup>Ervand Abrahamian and Bozorg Alavi, 'ARĀNĪ, TAQĪ', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arani-taqi> (accessed 17/12/2020).

<sup>36</sup>Cronin, 'The Politics of Radicalism within the Iranian Army', 8, 22.

<sup>37</sup>Edareh-ye siasi-ye riyasat-e setad-e artesh, 'Gozaresh 26/8/18 [18 /11/1939]'.  
<sup>38</sup>Gholam'ali Sirius, 'Yadbud', *Parcham*, 22 Esfand 1320 h.sh. [13/03/1942].

<sup>39</sup>Taqi Razaqi, '22 Esfand 1318', *Azad*, 20 Esfand 1321 h.sh. [11/03/1943].

<sup>40</sup>It is unlikely that Monshizadeh, who had left Iran for Europe already in 1932 and did not return until 1951, had any connections to members of the group, let alone to Jahansuz himself. Siamak Adhami, 'MONCHI-ZADEH, DAVOUD', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/monchi-zadeh-davoud> (accessed 16/05/2021).

<sup>41</sup>Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 257–258.

expansive ambitions of Britain and the Soviet Union vis-à-vis Iran.<sup>42</sup> From the outset, the national socialist government, which aimed to expand its influence in Iran,<sup>43</sup> could build on these general pro-German sentiments.

Before the Second World War and the start of the Persian radio programme of *Radio Zeesen* in August 1939,<sup>44</sup> national socialist propaganda in Iran was first and foremost visual, which allowed it to reach large segments of the Iranian society despite an illiteracy rate of more than ninety percent of the population.<sup>45</sup> Besides the screenings of German propaganda films like *Deutschland Erwacht* (Germany Awakens),<sup>46</sup> these visual messages were transmitted by print publications. Initially, it was the newspaper *Iran-e Bastan* (Ancient Iran) which took up the most active role in this. The owner of the weekly, ‘Abd al-Rahman Seyf Azad, was known as a Germanophile. Already during the First World War, he had worked as a ‘secret messenger’ (*geheimer Bote*)<sup>47</sup> for the German embassy in Tehran and had received a German military medal for his service.<sup>48</sup>

In his publication activity during the 1930s, he greatly benefitted from his connections to the Tehran-based German diplomats. While *Iran-e Bastan*, which appeared for the first time on 21 January 1933,<sup>49</sup> had initially been dedicated to the discussion of Iranian nationalism and the veneration of the country’s monarch Reza Shah, it soon came to use most of its space to praise the most recent political, technological and social ‘achievements’ of the new German government. From its fifth issue onwards,<sup>50</sup> the newspaper was full of photographs of German politicians,<sup>51</sup> Germany’s old city centres,<sup>52</sup> and German athletes<sup>53</sup> as well as of pictures showcasing Germany’s industrial production<sup>54</sup> or military.<sup>55</sup> The embassy had granted Seyf Azad exclusive access to these illustrations and additionally, supported him with a monthly allowance of 1,000 Reichsmarks.<sup>56</sup>

The pictures were the unique selling point of *Iran-e Bastan*. They were of an exceptionally high quality<sup>57</sup> and, according to the Reich’s Foreign Office, the decisive reason for the popularity of the periodical among the Iranian public.<sup>58</sup> It therefore is not surprising that the accompanying texts, which almost certainly were based on reports from the *Deutscher Radiodienst* (German Radio Service) newsletter,<sup>59</sup> were brief, simplistic, and

<sup>42</sup>Hirschfeld, ‘German Policy Towards Iran’, in *Germany and the Middle East, 1835–1939*, ed. Jehuda L. Wallach, 117–141 (Tel-Aviv: Nateev, 1975), 133–134.

<sup>43</sup>Küntzel, *Die Deutschen und der Iran*, 42.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>45</sup>Richard W. Cottam, ‘Political Party Development in Iran’, *Iranian Studies* 1, no. 3 (1968), 86.

<sup>46</sup>Golbarg Rekabtalaei, ‘Cinematic Governmentality: Cinema and Education in Modern Iran, 1900S–1930S’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 2 (2018), 263; Antoine Fleury, *La pénétration allemande au Moyen-Orient 1919–1939: La cas de la Turquie, de l’Iran et de l’Afghanistan* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1977), 249.

<sup>47</sup>Wipert von Blücher, *Zeitenwende in Iran: Erlebnisse und Beobachtungen* (Biberach an der Riss: Koehler & Voigtländer, 1949), 137.

<sup>48</sup>Ahmad Mahrad, *Die deutsche Pénétration pacifique des iranischen Pressewesens*, 73.

<sup>49</sup>*Iran-e Bastan*, 1 Bahman 1311 [21/01/1933].

<sup>50</sup>The fifth issue especially covered the national socialist preparations for the German general elections, which would take place on 5 March 1933. *Iran-e Bastan*, 6 Esfand 1311 [25/02/1933].

<sup>51</sup>See for example ‘Sadr-e a’zam va tamam-e a’za-ye dawlat-e Alman’, *Iran-e Bastan*, 28 Bahman 1312 [17/02/1934].

<sup>52</sup>See for example ‘Yeki az banaha-ye qorun-e vosta’, *Iran-e Bastan*, 25 Mordad 1314 [17/08/1935].

<sup>53</sup>See for example ‘Fatehin-e mosabeqehha-ye varzeshi-ye mabeyn-e shahrha-ye Alman’, *Iran-e Bastan*, 14 Bahman 1312 [03/02/1934].

<sup>54</sup>See for example ‘Yek otomobil-e jadid-e bari’, *Iran-e Bastan*, 1 Farvardin 1313 [21/03/1934].

<sup>55</sup>See for example ‘Bozorgtarin ‘amaliyyat-e zedd-e hava’i-ye Alman’, *Iran-e Bastan*, 18 Mordad 1314 [10/08/1935].

<sup>56</sup>Mahrad, *Die deutsche Pénétration pacifique des iranischen Pressewesens*, 83.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>58</sup>Fleury, *La pénétration allemande au Moyen-Orient*, 250–251.

<sup>59</sup>Küntzel, *Die Deutschen und der Iran*, 43.



rarely sought to explore the historical or ideological background to the events they were describing. They nonetheless left no doubt about the convictions of the newspaper's owner Seyf Azad, who for example explicitly defended the antisemitic policies in Germany,<sup>60</sup> and, as 'the sign of the Aryans',<sup>61</sup> integrated a swastika into the front page of his newspaper.<sup>62</sup>

In 1935 however, the German officials in Tehran came to change their strategy with regards to distributing propaganda illustrations in Iran in favour of newspapers other than *Iran-e Bastan*. While Seyf Azad, who wanted to set up his own printing plant, was touring the German Foreign Office as well as the Ministry for Propaganda in Berlin in the first half of that year to mobilize German support for his plans, the national socialist diplomats in the Iranian capital realized that they could operate their propaganda apparatus at a much lower price if they supplied a higher number of Iranian newspapers with pictures glorifying Nazi Germany. As a consequence, they ended the relatively costly cooperation with Seyf Azad, who had to cease the publication of *Iran-e Bastan* only a few months later. Instead, they cooperated with others, first and foremost the daily *Iran* and the French-language publication *Journal de Téhéran*. Given the continuing absolute dominance of the visual aspect in the diplomats' considerations regarding propaganda in Iran,<sup>63</sup> it can well be assumed that this change in actors did not fundamentally alter the method by which national socialist propaganda was spread in the country. Thus until the Second World War, the main agents of this endeavour remained strongly pro-German newspapers, which engaged in the distribution of as many impressive pictures from Germany as possible rather than paying attention to a detailed discussion of national socialist ideology. This basic *modus operandi* was not fundamentally altered by the correspondingly increasing circulation of translated selections of Hitler's speeches by Iranian newspapers, to which Küntzel has pointed.<sup>64</sup>

### From Landsberg to Tehran: Translating *Mein Kampf* in Southwest Asia

Thus, Jahansuz certainly was the first to 'translate' Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* into Persian. In doing so, he was part of an international trend. When the first parts of his *Khaterat-e Hitler* were published in 1936,<sup>65</sup> the original version of the book had already been circulating for ten years and, in the meanwhile, had reached Iran's Arab neighbours to the West. Written during his imprisonment in the South-German town of Landsberg, the two volumes of Hitler's 'comprehensive political manifesto in the guise of an autobiography'<sup>66</sup> had originally been published in 1924 and, respectively, 1926.<sup>67</sup> While during the following years the inner-German circulation of the book had been gradually increasing, international interest in the book only emerged with the involvement of the NSDAP in the German government. In October 1933, the first authorized English

<sup>60</sup>See for example 'Momane'at-e jahud-ha az dokhul beh-hamamha-ye Almanî', *Iran-e Bastan*, 11 Shahrivar 1312 [02/09/1933].

<sup>61</sup>'Neshan-e ariyanezhadan ru-ye mohr-e post', *Iran-e Bastan*, 25 Shahrivar 1312 [16/09/1933].

<sup>62</sup>He did this with few interruptions and in different ways from June 1933 to December 1934. *Iran-e Bastan*, 7 Mordad 1312 [29/06/1933]—22 Azar 1313 [13/12/1934].

<sup>63</sup>Mahrad, *Die deutsche Pénétration pacifique des iranischen Pressewesens*, 83–88.

<sup>64</sup>Küntzel, *Die Deutschen und der Iran*, 43.

<sup>65</sup>Pesyan, *Vaqe'eh*, 20.

<sup>66</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf (Critical Edition)*, 1:15.

<sup>67</sup>Othmar Plöckinger, *Geschichte eines Buches: Adolf Hitlers 'Mein Kampf' 1922–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011), 175–178.

translation appeared, selected sections of which were translated into Arabic by Iraqi and Lebanese newspapers in the same year.<sup>68</sup> In 1934, a complete yet unauthorized French translation became available.<sup>69</sup>

Evidence concerning the way Jahansuz translated *Mein Kampf* into Persian is contradictory. On the one hand, there is a strong indication that Jahansuz used the French version of the book for his translation. As mentioned above, all of the books which we know that Jahansuz had translated into Persian had originally been written in French. Furthermore, Gholamreza Najati, in his book on the political history of modern Iran, stressed the young man's proficiency in French, when he was referring to the latter's supposed translation of *Mein Kampf*.<sup>70</sup> In *Khaterat-e Hitler* itself moreover, German names are transliterated according to their French pronunciation.<sup>71</sup> Yet on the other hand, an obvious mistake in the translation, which does not appear in any of the French, Arabic or English translations which were probably available to Jahansuz at that point in time, indicates that Jahansuz could have also used the German original of the text. In obviously neglecting the ambiguity of the German word 'Läden', which can mean both shutters and shops, he translated it as 'maghāzehhā' (shops) whereas the actual meaning was shutters.<sup>72</sup> While the only English version which could have been available to Jahansuz completely omits the section, the French translation of 1934 rightly has it as 'persiennes'.<sup>73</sup> The available Arabic versions, in turn, do not appear to have served as a source for Jahansuz either. While the versions published in the newspapers *al-Nida'* and *al-'Alam al-'Arabi* were based on the English translation of 1933,<sup>74</sup> the 1935-published *Kifah Hitler* by 'Umar Abu al-Nasr was a summary of *Mein Kampf* in the format of a biography, which lacked many of the details which Jahansuz would later include in *Khaterat-e Hitler*.<sup>75</sup>

The second hypothesis can be further confirmed by the appendix of *Khaterat-e Hitler*, in which an abridged translation of the pamphlet *Adolf Hitlers Ziele und Persönlichkeit* (Hitler's aims and his personality)<sup>76</sup> by the national socialist physicist Johannes Stark had been attached under the title 'Moqayeseh-ye Hitler va Bismarck' (Comparison between Hitler and Bismarck).<sup>77</sup> This book had been translated into no other language than Danish.<sup>78</sup> Since it is unlikely that Jahansuz used the Danish translation, we thus can assume that the sections, which eventually came out as *Khaterat-e Hitler*, were taken from a German version of *Mein Kampf*. As certain phrases which are apparent in Jahansuz's 'translation' but not in early versions of the German original suggest, this original version must have been published after 1929. The year can be deduced from specific insertions made in the *Mein Kampf* editions which appeared after 1929 and which were apparent in

<sup>68</sup>Sven Felix Kellerhoff, *Mein Kampf: Die Karriere eines deutschen Buches* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2015), 268; Wild, 'National Socialism in the Arab Near East between 1933 and 1939', 147–151.

<sup>69</sup>Kellerhoff, *Mein Kampf*, 276–283.

<sup>70</sup>Gholamreza Najati, *Tarikh-e siyasi-ye bist-o-panj saleh-ye Iran*, 2 vols. (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye khadamat-e farhangi-ye rasa, 1371 h.sh. [1992/93]), 1:47.

<sup>71</sup>In the Persian text, Jahansuz, for instance, wrote the name Friedrich Ebert as 'Frederik Ebert'. Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 48.

<sup>72</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf (Critical Edition)*, 1:525; Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 34.

<sup>73</sup>Adolf Hitler, *My Struggle* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1933); idem, *Mon Combat* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1934).

<sup>74</sup>Kellerhoff, *Mein Kampf*, 268; Wild, 'National Socialism in the Arab Near East between 1933 and 1939', 147–51.

<sup>75</sup>'Umar Abu al-Nasr, *Kifah Hitler* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ahliyya, 1354 q. [1935]).

<sup>76</sup>Johannes Stark, *Adolf Hitlers Ziele und Persönlichkeit* (München: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1930).

<sup>77</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 202.

<sup>78</sup>Johannes Stark, *Adolf Hitler, Maal og Personlighed* (Copenhagen: Vilhelm Priors Forlag, 1932).

Jahansuz's book as well. In his translation, Jahansuz, for example, reflected the newly inserted 'heil' (in this context, 'well') by writing 'ṣaḥiḥ va sālem'.<sup>79</sup>

Although unlikely, it can nonetheless not be completely ruled out that Jahansuz might have used one of the minor publications which had appeared in the early 1930s and contained translations of selected sections of the original into French.<sup>80</sup> For the purpose of analysis however, this study assumes that Jahansuz had access to a complete copy of *Mein Kampf*, and that he thus was able to consciously decide what he would translate and what he would omit. This assumption, which is based on the evidence presented in this section, allows us to argue that his final selection was driven by his own intentions and not by the potential limitations of the material available to him.

### Structure and content of *Khaterat-e Hitler*

Jahansuz's 'translation' of *Mein Kampf* marked a significant departure from the previous circulation of national socialist ideas in Iran. Unlike the means of propaganda which were directed by the German embassy in Tehran, *Khaterat-e Hitler* was exceptionally comprehensive and, with a total number of only thirteen pictures, relatively text-intensive. In *Khaterat-e Hitler*, which with its eleven chapters on 199 pages was only a selection from the much lengthier original,<sup>81</sup> Jahansuz tried to give the broadest outline possible of Hitler's national socialism. He included different parts of both volumes of *Mein Kampf* to provide a comprehensive overview of national socialist ideology, Hitler's biography, and the history of the NSDAP. In this context, it is striking that the chapter 'Qaum va nezhad', which corresponds to the *Mein Kampf* section 'Volk und Rasse' (People and Race), is the part of *Khaterat-e Hitler* which Jahansuz translated in the most accurate way. There, Hitler outlined his race theory. A footnote on the first page of the chapter justifies this decision by telling the readers that 'because of the significance of this section to the rulers of Germany, we deemed it necessary to reproduce it in great detail'.<sup>82</sup>

Yet outside this chapter, *Khaterat-e Hitler* is by no means a coherent work. Rather, it is a mix of marked and unmarked direct translations, paraphrases, summaries as well as insertions made by the translator himself. Frequently, the personal perspective abruptly changes. This eclectic mix, which is often not introduced, can be explained by taking a look at the original mode of publication: In the context of letting his 'translation' be printed in a newspaper, Jahansuz could not publish the entire text at a single time. Consequently, he apparently worked on the text bit by bit without a broader idea of its formal presentation. In order to compile the book, in turn, he or his publishers merely put the bits together, only adding a preface by the translator and the aforementioned appendix.

### The 'Translator's' preface: a manifesto of the chauvinism of the periphery

In the preface, Jahansuz presents his work in a completely different and much more coherent way. Explicitly denying that *Khaterat-e Hitler* would be a translation, he calls his

<sup>79</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf (Critical Edition)*, 2:1391; Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 138.

<sup>80</sup>Plöckinger, 'Zur internationalen Rezeption von *Mein Kampf* vor 1945', 22.

<sup>81</sup>Hitler had proposed his ideas in two volumes and twenty-seven chapters on almost 800 pages.

<sup>82</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 47.

book an analysis of the two volumes of *Mein Kampf* ("mobārezeh-ye yā nabard-e man"). To emphasize the credibility of his account in front of his readership, he also claims that he would not have added or omitted anything with regards to the content of the original and that he would use the very same terms which have been employed by Hitler.<sup>83</sup>

Despite this clear outline of his basic intention, contemporaries always referred to Jahansuz as a translator and not as an analyst of ideologies and political thought. Apparently, there were also disagreements as to what extent translating *Mein Kampf* implied the political orientation of its translator. According to Pesyan, Bozorg Alavi, a member of 'the fifty-three' and renowned writer, had claimed that the group around Jahansuz was fascist. Pesyan tried to refute this by stressing that translating *Mein Kampf* did not necessarily mean that the translator himself was sympathetic to national socialism.<sup>84</sup> Najati, while acknowledging the 'radical nationalism' of Jahansuz, likewise considered Jahansuz's work a translation.<sup>85</sup> Based on these accounts, the idea that Jahansuz was the translator of *Mein Kampf* features in recent contributions to the historiography of modern Iran as well.<sup>86</sup>

Yet in contrast to the depiction of Jahansuz as a more or less neutral transmitter, the introduction of *Khaterat-e Hitler* is striking in its depiction of the author's sympathy to Hitler's aims as well as to his racist theories, first and foremost the Aryan myth, which had entered Iranian nationalist discourse in the second half of the nineteenth century and, under Reza Shah, was increasingly gaining popularity among the nationalist intelligentsia.<sup>87</sup> Within the first pages, Jahansuz applied to Iran and its history what he had understood as the essence of Hitler's theses. Rejecting the equality of races and explicitly accepting the anti-Semitism of the German dictator, he identified Iran as the birthplace of the Aryans as representatives of the 'master race'. This 'race' had not only been the 'greatest creator of civilization' but also the sole guarantor of its survival.<sup>88</sup> Because the Aryans, however, had lost their racial purity due to several invasions from outside the country, civilization was endangered. Jahansuz, who, in the light of the national socialists' rise to power, interpreted *Mein Kampf* as an expression of German public opinion, was convinced that contemporary Germans would share this concern and seek to re-establish Aryan rule.<sup>89</sup>

In the case of Iran, Jahansuz's hopes to achieve this lay with the inhabitants of Iran's remote mountainous regions and, particularly, of his home region Kordestan and the neighbouring Lorestan. Since these regions, in contrast to Iran's cities, had been easy to defend against the attacks of Arab, Turkic, and Mongol invaders, the local population could survive the course of history unaffected. In this, Jahansuz claims, they also benefited from the fresh air in the mountains, which had a positive impact on the development of their anatomy. Combining his Kordestan-centred racist patriotism with an idealization of ancient Iran which, in principle, had already been present in the writings

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., *haft* [vii].

<sup>84</sup>Pesyan, *Vaqe'eh*, 302–3.

<sup>85</sup>Najati, *Tarikh-e siyasi-ye bist-o-panj saleh-ye Iran*, 1:47.

<sup>86</sup>Cronin, 'The Politics of Radicalism within the Iranian Army', 13–14; Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), 47–48.

<sup>87</sup>David Motadel, 'Iran and the Aryan Myth', in *Perceptions of Iran: History, Myths and Nationalism from Medieval Persia to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Ali M. Ansari, 119–145 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 130–32.

<sup>88</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, *noh* [ix].

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., *noh* [ix]—*dah* [x].

of two of the earliest and arguably most influential proponents of Iranian nationalism, Mirza Fath'ali Akhundzadeh and Aqa Khan Kermani,<sup>90</sup> Jahansuz presented the Achaemenid and Sasanid monuments of Bisotun and Taq-e Bostan as evidence for his theories. To him, the figures depicted in these reliefs, which are situated in the direct vicinity of Jahansuz's hometown Kermanshah, were true-to-life reproductions of the local population. He was convinced that this community, due to its superior characteristics, had been responsible for the successful expansion of the ancient Iranian empires.<sup>91</sup>

Despite his emphasis on the superiority of the specific local populations, Jahansuz did not refrain from subscribing to a radical nationalism which idealized Iran in its entirety. Contrary to the Germano-centrism of Hitler's national socialist worldview and Jahansuz's previous assertions regarding the racial impurity of urban Iranians, he praised Iran in the last paragraphs of the introduction as a nation which had given humankind its foremost prophets, poets, army commanders, kings, and, with Reza Shah, the greatest saviour.<sup>92</sup> This peculiar attempt to introduce an 'analysis' of *Mein Kampf* by pointing to the superiority of the Iranian nation, particularly that of the Kurds and Lurs, while tacitly dismissing the exclusionary nature of Hitler's theories, set the tone for the entire text. In the main text, however, the underlying motivation of Jahansuz is by far not as obvious as in the introduction.

### **'Translating' *Mein Kampf*: Adapting and interpreting national socialist ideology for Iranian readers**

Comparing *Khaterat-e Hitler* with the German original, it is not surprising that Jahansuz's contemporaries ignored his claim that the book was an analysis rather than a translation. Most parts of *Khaterat-e Hitler* are correlated to *Mein Kampf*. Differences between the original and the translation were most often motivated by the interest of the author to shorten unnecessarily long passages or to explain specific references which, otherwise, would have remained opaque to the Iranian readership. For example, what Hitler phrased in the context of his anti-communist agenda 'One seemed to believe, in all seriousness, that by the assurance that one no longer knew parties, one thought one had brought Marxism to reason and restraint',<sup>93</sup> Jahansuz translated as '[. . .] Wilhelm II, the German Emperor, said during the war: "I do not know any parties anymore". It was his aim to unite all Germans against the enemy',<sup>94</sup> in order to clarify the background for Hitler's assertions.

The actual analysis of Hitler's memoirs, to which Jahansuz had dedicated the entire book, is limited to scarce sentences which either put translations or paraphrases into context or linked passages which had been separated through the omission of sections he had not regarded as interesting. At the end of the first chapter 'Ruzegar-e kudaki' (Childhood) for instance, he wrote concerning Hitler's relocation to Vienna without having an equivalent for it in the German text: 'Thus, this outcast young man—this orphan child—this revolutionary boy, with a suitcase full of clothes, gets on his way to Vienna'.<sup>95</sup> In the

<sup>90</sup>Motadel, 'Iran and the Aryan Myth', 131.

<sup>91</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler, dah [x]—yāzdah [xi]*.

<sup>92</sup>Given his political background, Jahansuz's glorifying depiction of Reza Shah at the end of the preface has to be seen as a concession to the censors rather than an expression of his genuine allegiance to the monarch. *Ibid.*, *yāzdah [xi]*.

<sup>93</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf (Reynal & Hitchcock Translation)*, 218.

<sup>94</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 33.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

next chapter, Jahansuz uses such a sentence to explain Hitler's regime of terror as being a result of the hardship he had experienced in the Austrian capital: '[. . .] just as, in later days, he was tough to others, this time [in Vienna] was tough to him'.<sup>96</sup> Rather than being analytical, however, these sentences served as mere affirmations of the content of the original.

What distinguishes *Khaterat-e Hitler* most significantly from either an analysis or a translation are the small changes to the original and non-explanatory insertions Jahansuz added. Not only did he translate crucial sections according to 'Iranian taste',<sup>97</sup> a principle that he, according to Pesyan, had applied in other translations as well, but he also inserted paragraphs which encapsulated his own theories. Since these were not marked as comments nor as explicit applications of Hitler's theories, the reader was unable to distinguish these sections from those which reflect the actual text of *Mein Kampf*. Jahansuz's text thus presented his own viewpoints, which fundamentally differed from Hitler's racist theories in some crucial points, as parts of national socialist doctrine.

In practice, the adjustment of *Mein Kampf* to 'Iranian taste' meant softening the lines of Hitler's racial exclusivism. Translating sections from the chapter 'Why the Second Reich Collapsed', Jahansuz successfully integrated the Iranian nation into the national socialist narrative. In the original, which can be found in the tenth chapter of the first volume of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler tried to show the development of races and their quality by referring to their alleged architectural achievements. Unsurprisingly, Hitler founded his argument on European examples only, establishing the buildings of classical Athens as counter-concepts to modern art. He wrote: 'So if the time of Pericle[s] appears incorporated in the Parthenon, so does the bolshevistic present in a cubist grimace'.<sup>98</sup> Jahansuz, in contrast, added examples from Iran's pre-Islamic architectural history. Slightly misunderstanding the meaning of Cubism, Jahansuz's full 'translation' reads:

To Hitler, [. . .] the Parthenon is the symbol of art of the Periclean age, and the palace of Persepolis testifies to the greatness of the Achaemenid Kings of Kings! The 'Eyvan of Kisra is a symbol of the magnificence of Anushiravan the Just, but the Bolshevist principles [. . .] do not create anything else than side-piece-like buildings.<sup>99</sup>

Yet the idealization of Iranian history and its integration into national socialist doctrine was not limited to the pre-Islamic period. Where Hitler praises 'the forms of the Gothic cathedrals' during 'the Germanic Middle Ages' as a 'paramount monument of the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*)',<sup>100</sup> Jahansuz writes, leaving out the adjective 'Germanic' when talking about the Middle Ages: 'In the Middle Ages, great buildings such as mosques and churches were constructed, which towered over the city centres'.<sup>101</sup> Thus Jahansuz, without informing his readership about these significant changes, presented a text that in its exclusionary nature would have perhaps been much less acceptable to his readership.

Jahansuz's attempts to adapt the German template to a new 'cultural environment' become apparent at other points as well. When Hitler, in 'The Conflict with the Red

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>97</sup>Pesyan, *Vaqe'eh*, 45.

<sup>98</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Reynal & Hitchcock Translation), 359.

<sup>99</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 48.

<sup>100</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Critical Edition), 1:693–95; Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Reynal & Hitchcock Translation), 363.

<sup>101</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 49.

Forces', the seventh chapter of the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, criticizes the organizers of a national-conservative rally for their appearance, which, to him, was more adequate for a baptism ceremony,<sup>102</sup> Jahansuz islamizes the section by translating the baptism as an Islamic 'prayer for the dead' (*namāz-e meyyit*).<sup>103</sup>

These adaptation efforts reached their apogee in Jahansuz's usage of Persian poetry. Occasionally, in order to underline claims of Hitler he had previously accurately translated or paraphrased, he inserted verses by classical Persian poets such as Faryabi<sup>104</sup> or Sa'adi. In the tenth chapter of *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 'Ta'lim va tarbiyyat' (Education), which correlates to the second part of the chapter 'The State' in the original text, Jahansuz translates a section of Hitler which reads:

As of secondary importance the völkisch State has to promote the modelling of the character in every way. It is certain that the essential features of character are fundamentally formed previously in the individual: one who is egoistic is and remains so once and forever, exactly as the idealist, in the bottom of his nature, will always be an idealist.<sup>105</sup>

Jahansuz, translating the original almost word for word, supports Hitler's thesis by inserting two verses from Sa'adi's *Golestan* (in italics):

Just as we said: secondary to physical training, a völkisch<sup>106</sup> state must focus on the moral education of the youth with all its resources. It cannot be denied: *no polishing can make good a piece of low-quality iron*. The innate characteristics of every person are determined right from the beginning. An egoistic individual will always remain egoistic, and an ill-mannered human will always remain in that state, and *if you carry the donkey of Jesus to Mecca, it nonetheless will remain a donkey* [..].<sup>107</sup>

Again, it is highly unlikely that the Iranian reader was able to identify this passage from *Khaterat-e Hitler* as an almost word-for-word translation of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* which was merely 'iranised' through insertions made by the ostensible analyst Jahansuz.

Yet one has to be reminded that the 'Iranisation' itself, i.e. the adaptation of foreign-language content, is not at all unique to Jahansuz's text. Rather, it is a common characteristic of cultural products in Iran during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an exemplary way, this is discussed in a fictional conversation between an Iranian and an Indian which was published in the newspaper *Habl al-Matin* in 1898. The text served as a vehicle to present the advantage of adaptations over translations. While the author considered word-for-word translations 'to waste time and to ruin [national] habits', he, very much in line with what Pesyan said about Jahansuz's work, regarded adaptations as being able to consider 'national taste and indigenous morality'.<sup>108</sup> During the Qajar era, it was especially French plays which were adopted in this way. Concerning the rationale behind this practice, Jamshid Malekpur wrote in his history of Iranian theatre:

[This practice] did not only take place in Iran but also [..] in many other Eastern countries. It was necessary because the Western subjects and contents, which were not only strange but

<sup>102</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Reynal & Hitchcock Translation), 718.

<sup>103</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 122.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 194; Zahir Faryabi, *Divan-e Zahir-e Faryabi* (Tehran: Entesharat-e kaveh, ~ 1960), 25.

<sup>105</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Reynal & Hitchcock Translation), 621.

<sup>106</sup>Here, Jahansuz used the neologism 'nezhādi-khāh'.

<sup>107</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 179; Sa'adi Shirazi, *Golestan* (Tehran: Entesharat-e khuvarezmi, 1367 h.sh [1988]), 154.

<sup>108</sup>*Habl al-Matin*, 12 Rabi' al-Awwal 1316 q. [02/08/1898], as quoted in: Hamid Rezaei Yazdi, "Neither Akund nor Fukuli": Munzirah and the Discourse of Iranian Modernity', *Iranian Studies* 49, no. 5 (2016), 858.

sometimes conflicting with the Eastern thought, had to be moderated and made understandable to the readers. For exactly this reason, it is one of the characteristics of these translations that the translator hardly tried to maintain the appearance of the text but instead paid attention to translating its essence.<sup>109</sup>

While the translators of the Reza Shah period came to increasingly appreciate more accurate, word-for-word translations of foreign texts,<sup>110</sup> older adaptations of Molière's works remained popular among Iranian audiences, as Christoph Werner has shown in his case study of the Red Lion and the Sun Theatre in Tabriz.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, creative adaptations could not have been unknown to Jahansuz.

Yet there are weighty arguments against considering *Khaterat-e Hitler* as simply one among many adaptations of European literary works in modern Iran and thus disregarding it. Firstly, that Jahansuz did not stick to his claim to present an accurate analysis of Hitler's memoirs cannot be explained by solely pointing to a different understanding of authorship and authenticity driving his work. For in his other publications, he was very explicit about the accuracy of his translation and the degree to which he had adjusted the text to his readership. In the preface to the translation of Pauchet's *Le chemin du bonheur* for example, he explicitly stated that he had not translated the text word-for-word in order to make it understandable for his Iranian readership.<sup>112</sup> In the introduction to the translation of Darmesteter's *Mahdi* in contrast, he elaborated on the necessity of accurately translating the text because of its scholarly nature:

[...] in order to make sure that the efforts of this orientalist professor are not squandered, this book has been translated with due attention and great effort to guarantee that the scientific and literary terms as well as the exact arguments of the texts are reflected by their Persian equivalents.<sup>113</sup>

Such balanced acknowledgements are absent from *Khaterat-e Hitler*.

Secondly, Jahansuz's work, because of the political dimension of its contents, should be seen as clearly distinct from that of the translators of Molière's writings. The seventeenth-century French playwright had dedicated his works mainly to the critique of social practices and, as such, was popular among the Iranian urban public as a source for entertainment. Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, in contrast, effectively was the guide led by which the NSDAP had managed to enter government and transform Germany into a totalitarian dictatorship that was driven by racist exclusivism. To the Iranian *literati* for whom this regime was part of their contemporary reality, *Khaterat-e Hitler* offered insights into the intellectual world of the German dictatorship which were more detailed than what they could usually read in the press, or what would later be spread by the national socialist radio propaganda. Jahansuz's book therefore was of considerable political significance.

Finally, Jahansuz, unlike the translators of Molière's works, did not limit his authorship to the mere adjustment of names, terms, and cultural procedures. While Maryam Sanjabi

<sup>109</sup>Jamshid Malekpur, *Adabiyat-e namayeshi dar Iran: Nokhostin kusheshha ta dowreh-ye Qajar* (Tehran: Entesharat-e tus, 1363 h.sh. [1984]), 324.

<sup>110</sup>See for example the translation of Goethe's *Faust* by 'Abbas Bani Sadr. Jamshid Malekpur, *Adabiyat-e namayeshi dar Iran: Melligerayi dar namayesh (1300–1320)* (Tehran: Entesharat-e tus, 1385 h.sh. [2007]), 247–248.

<sup>111</sup>Christoph Werner, 'Drama and Operetta at the Red Lion and Sun: Theatre in Tabriz 1927–1941', in *Culture and Cultural Politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran*, ed. Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner, 201–232 (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2014), 215.

<sup>112</sup>Pauchet, *Rah-e khoshbakhti, beh* [ii].

<sup>113</sup>Darmesteter, *Mahdi*, [iii].



identified 'a certain insistence of the translator to remain true to the text' in Mirza Habib's mid-nineteenth-century translation of Molière's *Le Misanthrope*,<sup>114</sup> Jahansuz, in contrast, turned the 'essence' of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* on its head. He did this especially through comments which he inserted in the ninth chapter of *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 'Siyasat-e dakheli-ye hezb va mahiyat-e dowlat' (Inner-Party Politics and the Nature of the State), where he summarized the *Mein-Kampf* chapters 'The State' and 'The Mask of Federalism'. There, without acknowledging his authorship, Jahansuz further elaborated on the theories he had outlined already in the introduction. In 'The State', Hitler described the state as an entity which, first and foremost, has to serve the promotion of the Aryan race. After translating the dictator's claim that this race would have brought peace and civilization to the world if it had not mixed with other races,<sup>115</sup> Jahansuz added:

[. . .] it is the highest duty of the German nation and the [other] nations of the Aryan race [. . .] to gather the remnants of this first and superior race who are spread across the mountains at the country's periphery and to bring the process to a point at which they hand over the country's highest offices to these representatives of the old race.<sup>116</sup>

In stark contrast to Hitler, who strictly thinks of Aryans as (North) Europeans, or the national socialist chief ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, who explicitly downgraded Iranians calling them 'muleteer[s]' who, after mixing with Asiatic and African 'races', would 'soullessly pass' the monuments of ancient Persia,<sup>117</sup> Jahansuz's comment breaks up the exclusionary nature of the national socialist race theory. Read in conjunction with the introduction, his intentions in doing so become clear. Through his comments, he seeks to integrate Iran and, in particular, the inhabitants of its mountainous regions into the national socialist call for the creation of a state that would only serve the interests of the 'master race'. According to *Khaterat-e Hitler* and not *Mein Kampf*, this group does not only include Austrians, Germans or Swedes but also Kurds and Lurs and, thus, the author himself as well as the expropriated land owners of his home region. In fact, besides Hitler's fascist romanticist perception of rural lifestyle, the idea that the last remaining representatives of Aryans would live in the mountains rather than anywhere else is completely absent from the German original.

A few pages later, Jahansuz further developed his theory and elaborated on the specific characteristics of the Iranian Aryans and how these had been able to preserve their 'racial integrity'. According to this section, the inhabitants of rural areas would be superior to those in the cities in terms of both spiritual and physical capacity. The reason which Jahansuz gave for these differences reads as follows:

The mixing of blood and race, which emerged as a result of the attacks of different peoples, manifested itself in the cities rather than, due to their remoteness, in the villages and deserts. [. . .] some mountain ranges have never been conquered. Therefore, the blood of the inhabitants of these places has remained exceptionally pure. If someone wants to compare them to

<sup>114</sup>Maryam B. Sanjabi, 'Mardum-Guriz: An Early Persian Translation of Molière's "Le Misanthrope"', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 2 (1998), 265.

<sup>115</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Reynal & Hitchcock Translation), 592–95.

<sup>116</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 157.

<sup>117</sup>Josef Wiesehöfer, 'Zur Geschichte der Begriffe "Arier" und "Arisch" in der deutschen Sprachwissenschaft und Althistorie des 19. und der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts', in *Achaemenid History V: The Roots of the European Tradition*, ed. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J. W. Drijvers (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1990), 156–57; Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (Munich: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1934), 34.

the common city human, they will find a world of a difference between their intellect, consciousness, sense, physique and figure, their wide chest and face and the characteristics of the townspeople.<sup>118</sup>

Since this section, again, is neither marked as the translator's own thought nor as explicitly referring to the situation in Iran, it can well be regarded as a general claim in accordance with Hitler's ideas. Yet instead of only integrating Iran and its inhabitants into national socialist doctrine, the theory that the urban Aryans had been weakened by the invasions of other peoples and the subsequent mixing of their blood fundamentally contradicts Hitler's theoretical constructs and, thus, presents Jahansuz's own ideas. To the latter, the main dynamic of history is conquering and being conquered. In contrast to Hitler, who believed that the 'master race' would not be defeated by 'inferior races', unless the former would have previously allowed itself to mix with the latter, Jahansuz did not regard the defeat of a perceived Iranian nation in the conflicts with Arab, Turkic, and Mongolian invaders as being caused by qualitative differences between the various races. To him, the racial deterioration of the Iranian Aryans is a consequence of military defeat and not its underlying reason. Consequently, those Iranians who managed to seek refuge in remote areas could avoid mixing with the invading races and thus prevent the decline of their racial qualities.

In glorifying Iran's rural and peripheral population, these words also clearly reflect the thought of Iranian contemporaries of Jahansuz. In their ethnographical works, authors like Hoseyn Kuhi-Kermani or Sadeq Hedayat had also stressed that peripheral populations were superior to the inhabitants of urban areas in terms of their 'purity'. While Kuhi-Kermani applied the concept of purity to the dimension of thought and emotions only,<sup>119</sup> Hedayat explicitly couched his explanations in the terms of race theory. Just like Jahansuz after him, he argued that the deterioration of the quality of thought and intellectual capacities of the Iranian people would have been caused by their contacts with other 'races'.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, he considered the inhabitants of peripheral regions and nomads, whom he did not regard as having been impacted by the large migration movements and invasions of Iranian history, as the preservers of pure and authentic customs and poems, according to him some of which date back to the days of the ancient dynasty of the Achaemenids.<sup>121</sup>

What distinguished Jahansuz's theories from those of these other authors is the issue of acknowledging and indicating authorship: while Hedayat and Kuhi-Kermani explicitly presented their theories as theirs, none of the readers of *Khaterat-e Hitler* knew that parts of its content did not necessarily originate from the supposed author, Hitler, but from the ostensible translator and analyst, Jahansuz. Since the latter's insertions and changes were completely unflagged, his readership must have been convinced that he had stuck to what he had claimed in the introduction and, accordingly, not significantly altered the text. In this way, Jahansuz presented Hitler's national socialism in a way that it, in the eyes of the reader, sanctioned marginalized ethno-linguistic groups living at the country's

<sup>118</sup>Jahansuz, *Khaterat-e Hitler*, 162.

<sup>119</sup>Farzin Vejdani, 'Appropriating the Masses: Folklore Studies, Ethnography, and Interwar Iranian Nationalism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012), 512.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>121</sup>Sadeq Hedayat, 'Owsaneh [1310 h.sh. (1931)]', in *Majmueh-ye asar-e Sadeq Hedayat*, 7 vols., ed. Bonyad-e Sadeq Hedayat (n.p.: Bonyad-e ketabha-ye sukhteh-ye Iran, 2009), 3:143.

periphery as crucial constituents of a 'master race' entitled to rule the country, if not the world. In this endeavour, the Germans and 'the other Aryan races' were not superior to Iran's remaining Aryans but, at most, allies on par in a struggle to bring this 'race' back to the position where it historically belonged to. Thus, Jahansuz, through his insertions, depicted Hitler and his movement as brothers-in-arms in a struggle for the re-purification and the re-strengthening of their single 'race'.

## Conclusion

By 'translating' *Mein Kampf* into Persian, Mohsen Jahansuz offered an exceptionally comprehensive account of what *seemed* to be national socialist ideology to the literate public of late 1930s Iran. While German propaganda had previously been mainly visual and superficial and had often only dealt with the events of the day, *Khaterat-e Hitler* supposedly sought to engage with the biographical and theoretical foundations of Hitler's dictatorship. Given its publication in a newspaper and its subsequent compilation within a self-standing monograph, it is likely that this book was not just a shelf warmer but in fact read and consumed by a considerable number of Iranians interested in Germany and its rulers. In contrast to the claims of Jahansuz who introduced *Khaterat-e Hitler* as an analysis of Hitler's memoirs, the book seems to have generally been considered a translation of *Mein Kampf*, as the memoirs of his contemporary Pesyan as well as Najati's book on Iran's political history imply.

Given the long passages which were directly translated into Persian from the German original, it is possible to see at first glance why Jahansuz's contemporaries would look at his book in this way. Yet what Jahansuz published in the guise of an analysis and which came to be seen by his contemporaries as a translation was in fact an adaptation of the German dictator's manifesto. In contrast to the other adaptations of European literary works which circulated in early Pahlavi Iran, Jahansuz transformed the original not only by adjusting the text to a different cultural environment but also by adding his own ideas and interpretations, which the reader, however, could not distinguish from those sections which had been accurately translated.

Jahansuz used these insertions, which were largely based on the dominant currents within the Iranian nationalist discourse, to include the Iranian nation and especially the inhabitants of the country's rural periphery into the theoretical framework of Hitler's race theories. By combining this expansion of the limits of national socialist doctrine with an emphasis on the differences between remote and easily accessible areas, he established a theory of the 'racial superiority' of the ethno-linguistic groups living in the mountainous periphery of western Iran. Driven by his experience of how the authorities of the Pahlavi state had expropriated several landowners from his home region around Kermanshah, he sought to employ this theory to implicitly delegitimise the economic marginalization of Kurds and Lurs and to formulate an ideological foundation for these groups' claim to the leadership of the entire country.

Thus, with *Khaterat-e Hitler*, Mohsen Jahansuz proposed a manifesto of Iranian nationalism with a special emphasis on the peripheral areas of the country which claimed to constitute an analysis of Hitler's political biography, but which had in fact fundamentally distorted its contents. Whether Jahansuz's attempts to soften the hard lines drawn by national socialist racism really increased the acceptance of Hitler's ideas among his

readership is difficult to assess. Yet what is clear is that Jahansuz was among the first Iranians, if not the first, to disseminate a comprehensive account of national socialist ideas in Iran. While his political activities as the leader of the 'Jahansuz Group' would later be remembered only by marginal nationalist circles, his adaptation of *Mein Kampf* certainly played a role in shaping the way in which the Iranian public perceived Adolf Hitler and the ideology which drove the government of national socialist Germany. By 'iranising' *Mein Kampf* and introducing it to a broader audience, he promoted a development which is still visible in a considerable number of Tehran's bookshops.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Regarding the history of the dissemination of *Mein Kampf* in Iran however, this study has only taken a first step. Further research concerning the later translations of *Mein Kampf* and their reception is therefore needed to clarify the further evolution and impact of this detestable work in Iran.