Chapter 1

“All of you to Tel Aviv on Purim”: A Local-National Festival

This chapter will describe the rise and fall of the carnival from beginning to end, with a focus on its institutional aspects, as the necessary background for the ethnographic explorations of the following chapters.

Anthropological and historical literature about modern nationalism and its public rituals customarily focuses on free outdoor events such as processions, public ceremonies, or street performances. This literature mostly ignores events with admission fees, such as balls or fairs, which superficially seem unrelated to the construction of national identities. However, the study of urban festivals no longer considers their economic functions as “contaminating” their cultural authenticity, but as conflating with their cultural functions. Indeed, paid events, such as the “people’s fair” in interwar New York, constructed identities and produced various meanings, even if their initial motives were commercial.

The Tel Aviv Purim carnival combined free outdoor events with indoor events that required admission fees. The street procession was always the carnival’s core event, except for the years when the procession did not take place—before 1913 or 1914, in 1920 due to the Tel-Hai incident mentioned above, and in 1930, after the violent conflicts of the summer of 1929. In fact, for contemporaries, the word “carnival” (and its Hebrew neologism, “Adloyada”) referred commonly to the costume procession, rather than to the entire event. The cultural impact of the balls, attended by two or three thousand people at most,

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1 See the following collections, dedicated mostly to outdoors events: Moore & Myerhoff 1977; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Kideckel 1983; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & McNamara 1985.

2 McGuigan 2011.

3 See: Susman 1984: 211–215.
was different from the impact of the procession, whose crowd reached six-digit numbers in the mid-1930s. Nevertheless, despite the differences between the two categories, both were part of the same cultural site, which integrated capitalist mass entertainment with nationalist ideology. This chapter will therefore describe the carnival as a “field of cultural production” with different agents, areas, discourses, and practices.4

The Purim carnival made its debut in the Yishuv’s public culture in 1908 with the first costume ball in Jaffa, and was an ongoing event until the cancellation of the procession in 1936 due to budgetary and administrative limitations. The micro-history of the carnival reveals several stages of institutionalization, defined by the four motives that guided the planning of such public events: 1) Fundraising (or making money); 2) Entertainment and/or education; 3) National identity construction (or ideological recruitment); and 4) Bolstering the fledgling economy. As we shall see, both the balls and the street-carnival began as fundraisers. The second and third motives followed shortly thereafter, but the fourth came into play only toward the late 1920s. The identity of the organizers and their motives suggest the following sub-periodization for the celebration:

1. The 1910s: communal events.
2. 1920–1924: Kapai (Palestine’s Workers’ Fund).
3. 1925–1928/9: JNF (Jewish National Fund).
4. 1928–1935: Tel Aviv municipality.
5. 1936: cancellation.

Within this sub-periodization, we may discern two main periods, with 1928 as a watershed. The first period was characterized by difficulties of institutionalization, a low level of organization, and a focus on fundraising as the main goal of the celebrations. The second period, by contrast, was characterized by a high level of institutionalization with expenses that resulted in a deficit for the public fund. During this peak period, Tel Aviv viewed itself as the world center of Purim celebrations.

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4 Bourdieu 1993: 29–73.
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The Ottoman Period: Communal Events

As I mentioned in the introduction, as the nineteenth century drew to a close with the ongoing bourgeoisification of the Jews, there were only dim residues of traditional Purim celebrations in Europe. The festival was adapted to bourgeois ways of life and re-interpreted “in a refined way” by the “Purim Association of New York” (1861–1902), which organized fancy charity dress balls to accrue donations of considerable sums of money for city hospitals and Jewish institutions. This model quickly spread throughout North America.

Toward the turn of the century, this festive form declined in North America, but it was adopted and developed in Jaffa in the late Ottoman era, during the years before World War I. It was in a Zionist cultural context that Jewish intellectuals and cultural entrepreneurs embarked on a more rigorous celebration of Purim, contended with its content and practices, and suggested new interpretations. It began with Purim balls of the *Hapo’el Hatza’ir* [“The Young Laborer”] Club in Jaffa in 1908, and later on, in 1913 or 1914, began the street carnival in Tel Aviv, then a Jewish suburb north of Jaffa.

The origins of these two cultural formats—ball and street carnival—may not be traced to Jewish tradition. In the late 1800s, charity balls were a widespread venue of leisure and pastime for the middle classes across Europe and the Americas. These balls were mostly organized in a communal venue, in clubs tied to a particular social class, profession, or similar affiliations, and aspired to be an educational venue for culture and progress. In provincial towns as well as metropolises across the world, this cultural venue was vigorously adopted by non-profit organizations as a fundraiser.

The regional socio-economic circumstances that led to the adaptation of the new Purim balls in Ottoman Palestine were enabled by its urbanization. In that context, a limited sphere of modern leisure—

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5. See introduction, p. xxii
6. Goodman 1949: 371–373 (quote from 371); Goodman 1950.
7. Joselit 1994: 219–263.
8. On American “Middletown” see the classical field research: Lynd & Lynd [1929] 1956: 281–288. On the Jewish workers’ clubs in New York see: Michels 2005: 105–109. On East European Jewry see, for example: Shternshis 2006; Veidlinger 2009: 202–208.
is, leisure as a profitable field—began its formation and expansion. The balls were one of many events, alongside sports, music, dancing, public reading, and amateur theater, which began to emerge in Palestine in the 1900s, particularly (but not exclusively) in the Jewish sector.9

The initial motivation for organizing the first Purim ball was to raise money for the activity of the Hapo’el Hatza’ir club in Jaffa and specifically its Hebrew journal (which bore the same name). Hapo’el Hatza’ir was a newly founded (1906) social movement and political party which aspired to create a Jewish working class but disagreed with the Marxist and Yiddishist bias of its main rival labor party, Po’alei Tzion. Instead, it emphasized Narodnik-Tolstoyan values of return to the soil and self-productivization, as well as Hebrew literature. It newly founded journal, printed and published in Jaffa, functioned as the center of the minuscule Hebrew world of letters in Palestine.10

At its outset, the journal had no more than a few hundred subscribers, and hence was published only sporadically. The movement sought to expand its financial resources, and the local Jaffa club came up with the idea of organizing a Purim ball. Since the club members produced the balls voluntarily, the expenses of costumes, decoration, and other costs were relatively low. The balls were sold out, and in 1910 there was even a mass altercation over tickets, which was resolved only when it reached the Ottoman courts.11 The events were highly profitable: in 1909, the income was more than 200 Frank, and it came to 600 Frank in 1910.12 The profitability of the balls was also evident in the steep increase in ticket prices between 1908 and 1914.13

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9 Ram 1996: 120–121; Naor 2003: 81–88; and particularly: Lev Tov 2007. On the characteristics of modern leisure see: Rojek 1985; Turner 1982b.

10 Shapira, Y. 1968; 292–293; Govrin 1985; Tzahor 1998: 234; Shavit 1998.

11 Hapo’el Hatza’ir 15.3.1910 (no serial number), 15; Hapo’el Hatza’ir 12, 31.3.1911, 19.

12 Hapo’el Hatza’ir Adar 1909 (no serial number and Gregorian date), 14; Hapo’el Hatza’ir 12, 31.3.1911, 19. See also: Lev Tov 2007: 122.

13 The prices were 1.5–7 Bishlik (the Turkish currency) in 1909; and 1.5–11 (French) francs in 1914. Although it is hard to assess the exact increase, due to the complex mixed monetary system of late Ottoman Empire, this is in-
The first ball, in 1908, was advertised as “a new spectacle never seen in Palestine.” Unfortunately, it was not fully realized due to a bloody fight, which took place in town that very night, when an Arab younger was stabbed by several Russian-Jewish youth because of a romantic dispute, causing the Turkish police to forcefully intervene and make many arrests. Retrospectively, some historians saw this event as the first nationalist bloodshed between Jews and Arabs since the beginning of Jewish immigration to Palestine (unlike previous incidents, which were merely local mayhem). As for the Purim ball, contemporaneous sources disagree as to whether this fight took place soon after the event began, or toward its end, and whether or not the ball was cancelled. In any case, the occasion was a financial success, despite the distress.

The idea of Purim costume balls had spread rapidly from Jaffa to Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jewish colonies such as Petah Tikva and Rehovot, as well as to other clubs, communities, and organizations in Jaffa itself. When the local Hapo’el Hatza’ir club in Jerusalem organized a Purim ball, it was defined as “the first one ever in our city.”

According to Boaz Lev Tov, the historian of leisure culture in Ottoman Palestine, the balls of Hapo’el Hatza’ir were quickly transformed into the “highlights” of Jaffa’s leisure events—even though there were several organizational fiascos. The balls of Hapo’el Hatza’ir in Jaffa continued to function as the center of this new field of cultural production, whereas the other agents—including “Betzal’el” school in Jerusalem, “Hamaccabi” and Tze’irey Hamizrakh [“Oriental youth”—a Yemenite clubs, and others, functioned as a cultural periphery. Although at that stage, Jaffa was still smaller and less populated than Jerusalem, it had
already begun to establish itself as the cultural center of Palestine, particularly in the matter of cultural trends.  

The balls’ programs were to a great extent similar in all of their venues, and were consistent with a communal format. Like the organizers, the performers were always amateur members of the community. The guiding principle was the eclectic use of various available cultural media. As in similar Eastern European events, for the most part there was a performance of a Yiddish play, usually (but not always) translated to Hebrew, such as plays by Y.L. Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, Yitzhak Katzenelson, and others. The plays were mostly related in some way to the Purimspiel tradition, vaudeville plays (carnivalesque farces), or adaptations of biblical episodes such as the Book of Esther. Sometimes there were folkloric performances describing Jewish Diaspora communities, such as those of Yemen or Eastern Europe, or satirical performances about the Yishuv. In addition, the program included speeches by local leaders or businessmen, with poetry and prose readings, the playing of classical music, pantomime (or “live pictures” as it was called), satirical monologues, costumes contest, gymnastic performances, fireworks (or “Bengalese fire” as it was called), confetti, music and dancing. These media had nothing in common except their cultural availability.

These were communal events, in which everyone knew one another, and community members displayed their talents on stage and entertained the audience of fellow community members, with the purpose of collecting money for community institutions. Nationalist messages, if they appeared at all, were modest and indirect. Socialist messages were totally absent. The balls functioned as Zionist cultural sites not because of their messages, but because they constructed the identity of the community by presenting its “slice of life” onstage—as communal theatre is defined by anthropologist Victor Turner. It emphasized the community character of the new leisure sphere, the

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19 See: Kark 1980: 24; Kark 1990: 146–155; Ram 1996: 203–210; Kellerman 1993: 122–136; Lev Tov 2007: 90–96.

20 See balls programs, for example: announcements in Ze’evi 1988: 359, 360, 477, 478; Hapo’el Hatza’ir Sh’vat 1909 (no serial number and Gregorian date), 1; Hapo’el Hatza’ir Adar 1909 (no serial number and Gregorian date), 13–14; Haheirut 20.3.1912; Haheirut 25.3.1913; Hapo’el Hatza’ir 21, 16.3.1914, 16.

21 See: Turner 1982a: 16; Turner quoted in: Bennett 1997: 105.
arenas of which were mostly semi-public spaces—cafés, hotels, ballrooms, libraries, schools, and ideological-political clubs, rather than the street. It thus exemplified the community character of Zionist activity in Ottoman Palestine.22

As we shall see, after World War I the center of leisure activity moved to the street and the market, and indicated the creation of a new Jewish public sphere. The communal element became secondary with the surprising and rapid growth of the urban space of interwar Tel Aviv, while the urban bourgeoisie dominated the leisure sphere that was once the province of the Labor Movement circles.

The Purim street carnival of 1914 may be seen, retrospectively, as offering a harbinger of the creation of outdoor Jewish public culture. It was the first organized carnival to be reported in the newspapers of the era, and the first of which we have corroborated evidence. It was reported that

Last Saturday night, a costume procession was held outdoors in Tel Aviv. This was a sort of Hebrew “carnival” and an innovation which attracted masses of people to Tel Aviv’s streets that night.

After describing the procession’s route through the suburban streets, the writer added that

This was but the formal part of the procession, [and] until a late night hour, individual and group costumes were seen loitering on the streets. Some utilized this opportunity to collect small sums of money from the crowd on behalf of the JNF. The lack of order, the crowding and the unruliness of the crowd, somewhat obscured the ambiance.

The procession was organized by Eisenstein, a teacher.23

The first carnival organizer was Avraham Eisenstein, later known as Avraham Aldema (1884–1963), for many years the art teacher

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22 See: Saposnik 2008.

23 *Hapo’el Hatza’ir* 21, 16.3.1914, 16; A. M. Heiman, “Mikhtavim mi-yafo” [Letters from Jaffa], *Heheirut* 30.3.1914.
in “Herzlia” Hebrew school in Tel Aviv and a prominent figure in Purim balls, already known for his creative costumes. Many years later, in his memoirs, he described an earlier Purim procession (which probably took place in 1913) as an educational event for which his students were required to dress as biblical figures to gain knowledge of the Oriental style then dominant at the Betzal’el Art School in Jerusalem. Meir Dizengoff, then the chair of the Tel Aviv committee, liked the idea, and on behalf of the committee offered Aldema financial assistance for the next year. We may assume that, for people such as Dizengoff, the educational rationale was what differentiated Aldema’s procession from the Purim of 1911, for example, when “groups of costumed children and youngsters walked from house to house and sang.” Another clue to the organizers’ motives is revealed in the report which stated that some of the amateur performers collected money for the JNF.

Like many other components of Zionist invented traditions, the Purim carnival was initiated by a teacher and his students. Although this was a street event which later on evolved into a huge mass event, in 1914 it was celebrated within the suburban community of Akhuzat-Bayit and the “Herzlia” school located there.

Although it appeared that at this stage no one, including members of the JNF, thought about earning money from the carnival in an organized manner, this option had actually been widely discussed, and it was often recognized that the Purim festival could, by its nature, be made into a fundraiser. In 1912, several JNF activists suggested that Purim would be decreed as “a day of Shalach-Monos for the JNF”—re-appropriating the traditional practice of sending food, drink, or gifts to friends, relatives, and neighbors on Purim. In that spirit, the JNF “prepared medals as prizes for children who would collect money

24 Hapo’el Hatza’ir Adar 1909 (no serial number and Gregorian date), 13–14.
25 Manor 2004.
26 Aldema’s memoirs were never published, but were quoted in: Aieh-Sapir 2003: 103. It seems that Lewinsky’s description relies on this story. See: Lewinsky 1955: 281.
27 “Be-Eretz-Israel” [In the Land of Israel], Ha-olam 29.3.1911 (no serial number), 18–19.
28 The most notable example to invention of teachers was Tu B’shvat. See: Shavit & Sitton 2004: 48–49; Saposnik 2008: 61–62.
for the nation’s fund.” 29 Others suggested that the traditional “half shekel” (a customary annual charity given during the month of the Purim holiday) and the Shalach-Monos would be allocated throughout the Jewish world as a donation for the redemption of Jerusalem. 30 As a response to the suggested connection between the redemption of Jerusalem and Purim, the writer Yaakov Rabinowitz published a pungent article, already mentioned in passim above, in which he attacked the very idea of utilizing the exilic and despised festival of Purim for such a sublime purpose. From his perspective, there was a direct connection between Purim, a “spiritual yellow stain,” and the “schnorr” (a Yiddish word which in that context referred to dishonorable begging) methods which were regularly used by Zionist institutions. 31

Historically, Rabinowitz had a point: the traditional Purim celebrations included special charity activities, known as “Purim-money” (ma’ot Purim), which comprised a separate Jewish legal (“Halakhic”) category for charitable giving. In the case of the standard commandment to give charity, the giver must confirm that the beggar is indeed a person in need of charity. But on Purim, no confirmations should be requested, and charity should be given to anyone who asks for it, in the spirit of the festive atmosphere. 32

Zionist fundraising had effectively used this “schnorr tradition.” Despite the harsh criticism of Zionist “schnorr” culture, and the explicit Zionist contempt for living on charity in contrast to earning one’s living, the charity turned into an important mechanism not only for fundraising, but for ideological recruitment as well. Initiated and promoted by “teachers for the JNF,” the “blue box” became a domestic cult whose object was the JNF itself. Its praxis of worship was the donation. 33 In due course, the practical intersection of Purim and the JNF proved crucial for the institutionalization of the carnival and the

29 Ha-or, 11th of Adar, year 30 [1912]; He-heirut 11.3.1912.
30 These were Yehoshua Barzilay (1855–1918) and Menahem Ussishkin (1863–1941), who later became the president of the JNF (Ha-heirut 13.3.1913; Ha-heirut 16.3.1913). On the background of this initiative see: Shilo 1989: 105; Katz 1989.
31 Ya’akov Rabinowitz, Hapo’el Hatza’ir 21.3.1913, 7.
32 Maimonides, the laws of Megillah 2:16. See also BT Avoda Zara 17:2–18:1, Bava Metzi’a 78:2; Shulhan Arukh orakh-hayim 694.
33 Bar-Gal 2003; Shavit & Sitton 2004: 48–52.
bals. As we shall see, it served not only as another way to fundraise and to propagate Zionist ideology, but as a way to re-interpret Purim to meet the moral and aesthetic standards of a “modern” culture.

**The 1920s: Fundraising**

The new British rule after World War I brought many changes to Palestine, among them a noteworthy acceleration in urbanization and industrialization processes. One unpredicted factor not planned by either Zionist institutions or the British government was the rapid growth of the urban area of northern Jaffa (the first plan for the urban development of Tel Aviv was commissioned as late as 1925). The former suburb of Jaffa was very quickly transformed into a separate urban space with its own “sense of place” as a “Jewish city.” After 1948, the young city eventually conquered and swallowed its mother-city. Purim celebrations turned into “Tel Aviv’s festival,” and were a good indicator for the evolution of the Jewish urban public sphere.

The JNF was not the only institution to discover the power of Purim as a fundraiser. During Purim 1920, the Palestine Workers’ Fund, known as Kapai, tried to organize a “flower festival,” inspired by the “flower war” in Nice, France. The entire town was meant to be decorated with flowers, and the festival was to be accompanied by a costume procession and a costume ball. Unfortunately, the outdoor event was cancelled because of the Tel-Hai incident (the indoor events took place, though with some delay). Although the idea of a flower festival was abandoned, Kapai continued to organize costume processions every year from 1921 to 1924. Continuing the tradition initiated before World War I, the procession was organized and led by Avraham Aldema. The role of the procession was to attract crowds from the hinterland to the city in order to solicit donations by selling stamps and ribbons in the street. In addition to the costume proces-

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34 See: Welter 2009.

35 The literature on the growth of Tel Aviv is voluminous. See, in a nutshell: Shavit & Bigger 2001; LeVine 2005; Rotbard 2005; Shoham 2012.

36 “Hed Yafo” (Feedback from Jaffa), Doar-Hayom 8.3.1920. See: Genihovsky 1994: 72.
sion, there were a few more centers for happenings, such as gymnastics performances in a sports field or bicycle parades on other streets.\(^{37}\)

Since the personnel of Kapai focused on fundraising, they did not dedicate much thought to the content of the carnival. In order not to overspend, they accepted everyone who wanted to participate—businesses, private people, and institutions—and did not set standards for inclusion. They did not employ marshals and did not even bother to put into place barriers (such as ropes) to distinguish the procession from the crowd. As a result, the procession was not very regimented.

In the meantime, many organizations throughout the country continued to organize indoor Purim balls in keeping with the community model of the late Ottoman era. Before World War I, this format was particularly popular in the “new Yishuv”—that is, among the more “modern” segments of Jewish society. Later, Purim balls became widespread throughout the region, including in classical “old Yishuv” sites such as Tiberias and Safed (and later on even Beirut and Cairo). Purim balls were organized by “Talmud-Torah” schools (traditional religious schools with minimal secular studies), Sephardic communities, and also by youth clubs, schools, small peripheral and rural communities, and public institutions. These balls included some element of fundraising for a community institution.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) “Hag ha-Purim beyafo: Tahaluhkat hamasekhot letovat kapay” (Purim festival in Jaffa: Costumes procession for Kapai), Ha’aretz 28.3.1928; “Lehag ha-Purim” (For Purim festival), Ha’aretz 26.2.1924; an announcement on Kapai’s costumes festival, posters collection in University and national library, file v1969/4 (Carmiel 1999: 230); from Kapai to Tel Aviv committee, 28.2.1921, TAMA 216–01.

\(^{38}\) Examples of Purim balls were: “Maccabi” and the scouts of Zikhron-Ya’akov (Ha’aretz 10.3.1920); “Maccabi” in Jerusalem and school children in Rishon-Letzion (Ha’aretz 12.3.1920); boys of Sephardic Talmud-torah in Jerusalem (Doar-Hayom 8.3.1920); girls’ school students in Jerusalem (Doar-Hayom 28.3.1921); Tiberian community (Ha’aretz 15.3.1920); orphans’ home in Safed (Doar-Hayom 21.3.1922); a play “Ahasuerus” by amateurs from Persian ethnic group in Jerusalem (“Me-hayey yerushalayim” [Life in Jerusalem], Ha’aretz 7.3.1921); or amateurs theatre of pioneers with local maidens in Petah-Tiqwa (Doar-Hayom 31.3.1921). In Beirut and Cairo this format arrived a little later, only in the late 1920s. See: “Purim be-ka-hir” (Purim in Cairo), Ha’aretz 13.3.1928; “Beirut,” Doar-Hayom 8.3.1931; “Beirut,” Doar-Hayom 31.3.1932.
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The communal format was now dominant in the “provinces”—whether geographic, institutional, or social—but not in Tel Aviv. Time did not stand still in this effervescent town and Tel Aviv introduced cultural innovations which always arrived at the periphery a few years later. Even before it acquired demographic centrality, Tel Aviv already functioned as a cultural capital and as the trend-setter for the entire Yishuv and even for non-Jewish Palestine.

One notable Tel Aviv entrepreneur who recognized the cultural and financial opportunity offered by Purim was Baruch Agadati (1895–1976), a painter, choreographer, dancer, film producer, and bohemian. He was an experimental artist and a Zionist ideologue who made major contributions to the development of Hebrew dance and cinema, and understood his enterprise as a contribution to the creation of Zionist festive culture. Agadati spent much of his time abroad, where he learned new technologies for mass-entertainment and implemented them in his grandiose Purim balls. Agadati formed quite an intriguing business partnership with significant Zionist institutions, primarily the JNF, in order to organize the largest and fanciest Purim balls, which stood out as a unique mix of profitable capitalist mass-entertainment and Zionist ideology.

As early as 1921, Agadati organized a costume ball for 500 guests (by invitation only) at the “Eden” theater in Tel Aviv. The guests included writers, artists, local politicians, and business leaders, who paid the full ticket price to earn this privilege. In a way, this celebrity event—the first of its kind in Tel Aviv—returned the balls’ genre from the community event to the pre-modern aristocratic format. The guest list was a significant factor in branding Agadati’s balls as the places where things happen.

Another element, which already appeared in the 1921 ball, was a costume procession that would parade through the crowd, influenced by the street-carnival that evolved at that time. Whereas at the community balls the audience was passive and sat quietly, here the audience was meant to be active and to engage with the performers.

39 On his experiments in dancing see: Manor 1986; Eshel 1991. On his experiments on documentary and feature cinema see: Shnitzer 1994: 34, 63; Gross & Gross 1991: 12, 80–82, 135–160; Shoham 2011b.

40 “Hag ha-Purim be-yafo” [Purim festival in Jaffa], Ha’aretz 28.3.1921.
so as to blur the distinction between the performers and the audience. The frontal theatrical format was abandoned, and instead the event was now a huge “happening” based on active amusements, akin to modern theme parks.

Agadati commissioned professional entertainers for his Purim ball, and some were even brought in from abroad. In 1922, he brought a circus with clowns, magicians, and acrobats from Beirut. Unlike in the first year, from 1922 and onward everyone could buy tickets, and the ball was a fully commercial event. The balls became enormously successful, attended by thousands of people. Beginning in 1926, Agadati divided the balls’ events and spread them over several evenings, so as to differentiate between the ordinary people (workers or members of the middle class) and the aristocrat celebrities.

In the years that followed, two additional important innovations were imported by Agadati from North America: jazz music and dancing as the party’s highlight, and beauty pageants (or “Hebrew Queen Esther”), only six years after their initiation in Atlantic City (see chapter six).

The amplified attention given here to Agadati and his balls is not intended to link the phenomenon to one man, significant as he may have been. In the terms of Bourdieu, Purim balls were formed as a cultural field, structured along patterns of production, distribution, and consumption of culture. These structures organized the patterns of taste and style which were disseminated in the field and created its unique stratification. Agadati was located at the center of the field, but there were many additional actors there. The definition of Agadati as a main taste-maker in the field is not linked to the question of originality: did he create the cultural formats by himself or replicate others? There were a few obvious cases in which he imitated a cultural practice from another actor in the field. But it was only after Agadati put it into practice that it was used by other entrepreneurs and became conventional in the field. One such instance was the introduction of the food counter at Agadati’s balls in 1925, after the owners of “Eden”

41 Ha’aretz 22.2.1922.
42 See: Carmiel 1999: 12–155.
43 Bourdieu, supra note 4.
theatre did it in 1924.\textsuperscript{44} His main cultural role was to obtain technologies of mass-entertainment from beyond the field, abroad, or the margins of the field—and then to replicate and disseminate them throughout the field. Agadati functioned here as a name, a brand, rather than as a real person, since every year “his” balls were actually organized by a large group of people (as we shall see) but were marketed under his name (much like Walt Disney). Agadati’s name became a main agent in this field, which means that innovations that appeared at his balls became trendy, whereas other ideas could pass under the public radar. Agadati’s name and its accompanying symbolic capital were crucial in the Purim balls’ attainment of a structured and competitive economic field.

Agadati surprised his competitors almost every year with some cultural innovation, which almost immediately became common throughout the entire field. Beginning in the mid-1920s, most Purim balls across Palestine held a costume procession that paraded among the crowd and not on stage, and the balls’ programs were focused on jazz and other trendy dance styles. A few years after the introduction of Hebrew Queen Esther into Agadati’s balls in 1926, every ball, even the communal ones, elected its own “Queen Esther.” After Agadati cancelled the pageant in 1930, it took two or three years until the custom disappeared from the other balls throughout the country. After Agadati retired from organizing balls in 1934 for unknown reasons, it was only two or three years before mass Purim balls were no longer organized.

Besides Agadati’s, grandiose Purim balls were also organized by the workers’ theatre group “Ohel” [tent] beginning in 1930, and in 1932–1933 “Ohel” was in partnership with Agadati. Other mass balls were organized by the satirical theatres “Hakumkum” [the water boiler] and “Hamataté” [the broom]. Somewhat more modest balls were organized in commercial institutions, such as hotels, cafés, and theatres.\textsuperscript{45}

There were also youth movements and sports associations—in par-

\textsuperscript{44} “Megilat Purim bete’atron Eden” [The book of Purim in Eden theatre], Ha’aretz 19.3.1924; Carmiel 1999: 96–97.

\textsuperscript{45} Such as: “Spector” hotel (Ze’evi 1988: 483) and “Palatin” hotel (Doar-Hayom 14.3.1927; “Tel-Aviv,” Doar-Hayom 19.2.1931); café “Lorentz” in Jaffa or casino “galey-aviv” (Carmiel 1999: 168), “Eden” theatre (Ze’evi 1988: 481, 482; Doar-Hayom 2.3.1923; “Olelot Purim be-Tel-Aviv” [Purim stories in
particular, the non-political ones such as the scouts and “Hamaccabi”—as well as “Landsmanshaftn,” the ethnic associations of Jews from Yemen, Hungary, Iran, Bukhara, and other regions, and political movements such as “Beitar” (oriented to the right-wing) and “Hapo’el” (oriented to the Labor Movement). Balls were also organized by schools, small communities, student associations, and other groups, such as the club of discharged soldiers, “Menorah.”

As for the guests, we have a few estimations and a bit of data. As mentioned before, there were about 500 people on the guest list for Agadati’s ball in 1921. Since Tel Aviv’s population amounted then to no more than 3,000 people (including children), many of the guests were probably from side out of the town, which was surely true of the “Arabs and Christians” who attended. In 1926, the main ball was attended by about 2,500 people, while “thousands gathered near the gate [of the ballroom] to watch the costumes.” In 1929, when the Tel Aviv municipality assumed responsibility for the street carnival, it began to collect a tax of 10 Mils (that is, a Grush, 1/100 of Palestine pound) for each ball ticket. According to the Municipality’s data, on that Purim, 10,664 tickets were sold to Agadati’s four balls. Along with the other balls that year, held by “Hamataté,” the “Eden” and “Ophir” theatres, and the Yemenite club, the total number of Purim ball tickets sold was 19,116 (the entire population of the city was no more than 40,000). In 1932, the figures were similar. These figures demonstrate that even when the special taxes are considered (including the JNF donation, to be discussed below), this was a highly profitable business.

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46 Such as: the students’ association “el-al” (“Tel-Aviv,” Doar-Hayom 19.2.1931); ball of World Association of Hebrew Youth (announcement by World Association of Hebrew Youth, Ha’aretz 7.3.1928); “Menorah” balls (announcement of “Menorah,” Doar-Hayom 27.2.1931). On civil society and “Landsmanshaftn” in interwar Tel Aviv see: Helman 2006b.

47 “Hag hapurim beyafo” (Purim festival in Jaffa), Ha’aretz 28.3.1921. For Tel Aviv’s population see below, chapter two, table 1.

48 Ha’aretz 1.3.1926.

49 Municipal memorandum, 3.4.1929, TAMA file 04–3218a; Doar-Hayom 5.4.1929. In that year, the municipality’s revenue from the balls were 150 Palestine pounds (“Tel Aviv,” Doar-Hayom 3.4.1929).
The role of the balls as a site of national identity construction relies on much more than the numbers, though. It is probable, of course, that there were many individuals who had no personal interest in the balls. That said, the huge numbers of guests, the quantity and quality of elite figures in attendance, and above all the steady stream of nationalist discourse regarding the balls—all indicate their central cultural function. As we have seen, among those who did not attend, many crowded to watch the costumed guests entering the balls, and in any case these entrances were a major attraction of the carnival.\textsuperscript{50} Many more read the juicy newspaper descriptions and the various publications, and imagined themselves as guests. There was no other cultural phenomenon of such scope in British Palestine, and in the pre-TV period, the balls attracted great attention (which was obviously exaggerated in relation to the actual events).

This capitalist-nationalist culture drew criticism motivated by a nationalist puritan ethos. Whereas mere capitalist culture could have been tolerated, it was the combination of nationalism and capitalism that irritated the critics. The writer A.Z. Rabinowitch (1854–1945), a prominent opponent, wrote that “Purim days are upcoming, and here and there, there are talks about preparations to masquerade and dancing balls which have multiplied and in recent years wore the deceptive cloak of alleged nationalism.”\textsuperscript{51} Many critics targeted what they viewed as escapism and hedonism, and labeled the bond with nationalism as hypocrisy on both sides.\textsuperscript{52} Nevertheless, the vast rhetorical exchanges revealed that the balls were indeed understood by many to be a national culture.

Elsewhere I elaborate in detail the balls’ program and the actual experience of visiting the event. Very generally, it may be said that the balls were designed to create a multi-sensory experience. Every single guest was struck by a flood of stimuli directed toward the five senses. The mass balls were intentionally designed to produce and amplify

\textsuperscript{50} Supra note 47.

\textsuperscript{51} A.Z. Rabinowitch, “Beveit yisrael ra’iti sha’aruriya (Hoshe’a vav)” [In the house if Israel I have seen indignity (Hosea 6)],” a proclamation from 12.1.1931, posters collection, national library of Jerusalem, file V1836/e.

\textsuperscript{52} See, for example: H. Shorer, “Ivelet-Purim” [The foolishness of Purim], \textit{Hapo’el Hatz’a’ir} 8 (19), 14.3.1930, 2–3; idem, “Hamasekha sheli” [My mask], \textit{Hapo’el Hatz’a’ir} 22–23, 18.3.1932, 12.
what was perceived as an urban experience. In terms developed in performance theory, the balls demonstrated “restored behavior” of crowd-edness, urban alienation and individual isolation.\(^{53}\) For the average Tel Avivian (who mostly immigrated there from Eastern Europe or Yemen), this experience was familiar from the literature of western urbanism (Dickens, for example), rather than from everyday life, since Tel Aviv developed such urban characteristics only after the mid-1930s.\(^{54}\)

**Purim: The Festival of the JNF**

This capitalist character of the field did not prevent Zionist institutions in general, and the JNF in particular, from engaging in intensive fundraising linked to Purim. Whereas the 1910-era initiatives mentioned above were carried out in a fragmented way, if at all, in the 1920s, the link between the JNF and Purim was formalized. In 1923, awareness of Purim’s fundraising potential, realized in both Kapai’s carnival and the mass balls, led JNF activists to the decision made at their annual national conference: a “tax” of a half-Grush (1/100 of Egyptian pound) would be added to every Purim ball ticket. The amount was, at the time, about 5% of the ticket price.\(^{55}\)

Unlike other Zionist funds, the JNF never limited itself to mere fundraising. Officially, its main task since its foundation in 1901 was to purchase and develop land in Palestine. However, the JNF was intensively involved in Zionist educational and cultural activity through its Department of Publicity, and its endeavors extended far beyond its immediate fundraising needs.\(^{56}\) Among many other activities, they suggested new interpretations for the historical exilic Purim:

[The Nation that desired to] atone for the spiritually alien elements which clung to the exile’s festival, inserted its own qualities of soul and being, the foundation of active public joint:

\(^{53}\) Schechner 1985: 35–40.

\(^{54}\) Shoham 2013b: 111–135. On urban characteristics of Tel Aviv since the mid-1930s see: Razi 2009.

\(^{55}\) *Ha’aretz* 24.1.1923. The Egyptian pound was the Palestinian currency until 1927.

\(^{56}\) Bar-Gal 2003.
makhatzit hashekel [half the shekel] [...] mishloach manot [...] and gifts to the poor [...] even in the exile. And now that the public sensibility of the Nation is set free, it is only natural that the land of Israel will take the first place in this festival.\textsuperscript{57}

In other words, the criticism of the exilic nature of the festival was harnessed by the Department of Publicity of the JNF in favor of their needs, re-interpreting the “schnorr” tradition as an example of a healthy public life which Jews had even in exile. As proved by historian Hagit Lavsky, criticism of the schnorr policy was based on aesthetics rather than ethics: it targeted individuals who lived on charity and exhibited humiliated mannerisms, but organized charities and donations in the national context were elevated.\textsuperscript{58}

Accordingly, the personnel of this department thought about many new and creative ways to celebrate Purim and increase donations. The Department organized Purim balls with revenues donated to the fund. The balls took place first in Palestine in 1923, and beginning in 1925 throughout the Jewish world. The department advised local activists about educational costumes, and many ways to increase the income of these events beyond ticket sales, such as selling ribbons, flowers, and flags; selling rights to play; and collecting “JNF Shalach-Manos” door-to-door.\textsuperscript{59} Some suggested using traditional Purimspieler to collect money on Purim, “in which every Jew and Jewess [is] expected to send Shalach-Manos to their people, a check for Kakal [JNF].”\textsuperscript{60} It was assumed that “Purim has the capacity for fundraising,”\textsuperscript{61} and officially, Purim was one of the “four yearly projects” for JNF fundraising and actually became the main annual fundraiser.

Purim was so important to the JNF that, in 1925, the fourteenth Zionist Congress approved a JNF monopoly over other Zionist organizations in collecting donations on Purim day. From that time onward,

\textsuperscript{57} “Purim” [no author], CZA, file KKL5/4917/1.
\textsuperscript{58} Lavsky 2002. See also Shenhav 2004.
\textsuperscript{59} A formal letter from JNF executive to activists in North America, 1927 (no date), CZA, file KKL5/2452; Karnenu Adar 1929, CZA file KKL5/2521.
\textsuperscript{60} An announcement of Canadian Zionist organization, no date, CZA file KKL5/930.
\textsuperscript{61} From the central office of the JNF to national offices, 28.12.1928, CZA file KKL5/930.
no Zionist organization other than the JNF was permitted to fundraise on Purim day without permission from the local JNF office. This resolution was valid at least through 1936.\footnote{From F. Rosenblit, a member of Zionist executive in London, to Zionist associations, 13.2.1927, CZA file KKL5/2106; from Zionist organization to all Zionist federations and fractions towards Purim 1930, 21.2.1930, CZA file KKL5/3587/1; from central JNF office in Jerusalem to local offices, 30.1.1935, CZA KKL5/6312; a reminder about the prohibition to fundraise on Purim, \textit{Doar-Hayom} 1.3.1936.}

Indeed, in many places in Palestine it was assured that “all ball organizers received permission from the JNF, and deducted some of their income, according to the agreement.”\footnote{This report concerned Jerusalem (\textit{Ha’aretz} and \textit{Doar-Hayom} 15.3.1927). See also: “Yerushalayim” (Jerusalem), \textit{Ha’aretz} 28.2.1928.} In Tel Aviv, however, the enforcement of this resolution was difficult, since it was the main location of established Purim celebrations which were not JNF initiatives. As early as Purim 1923, JNF ribbons were sold in the streets of Tel Aviv alongside Kapai’s ribbons.\footnote{“Tel-Aviv,” \textit{Ha’aretz} 1.3.1923.} In 1924, following the death of the Zionist leader Max Nordau (1849–1923), the JNF declared Purim to be “Nordau day,” and collected money to establish a village in his name. Ribbons were sold, pairs of volunteers conducted door-to-door solicitation, balls were organized, and \textit{Shalach-Monos} for the JNF were collected. However, Kapai insisted on organizing the carnival street-process. The local Jaffa/Tel Aviv JNF office published a furious letter in the newspapers, in which Kapai was accused of disobeying the JNF’s central office. Eventually they reached a compromise: JNF’s ribbons were sold in the streets until 2 p.m., and after that only Kapai’s.\footnote{A public letter from the JNF’s national office, \textit{Ha’aretz} 19.3.1924; “Yafo ve-Tel-Aviv” (Jaffa and Tel Aviv), \textit{Doar-Hayom} 23.2.1924.} On Purim 1925, there was no more debate: the local office of the JNF in Tel Aviv, now backed by the aforementioned Zionist Congress resolution, took over the carnival and was the sole organizer of the procession until 1928.

As for the balls, the JNF needed a more sophisticated technique than collecting voluntary “taxes” as it did everywhere else. Many of the ball organizers in Tel Aviv, especially the many whose motivations were commercial rather than cultural, educational, or communal—would probably have refused to deduct this donation from their
income. The local chamber of the JNF found an original solution: they entered into a concealed partnership with Baruch Agadati.

Beginning in 1923, all announcements and advertisements for Agadati’s balls prominently declared that no less than 50% of the full income from the balls (and not just the net profits) would be donated to the JNF. Rather than a donation, it was business cooperation. For the public eye, the JNF was depicted as merely sharing the income, but actually, the JNF and Agadati organized the balls together and the costs were equally divided. The local apparatus of the JNF provided office services and advertisement, and also shared the expenses.66 This cooperation continued until 1928.67 After it was discontinued in 1929, the JNF indeed began, with partial success, to collect “taxes” from incomes of Purim balls in Tel Aviv, as was customary elsewhere.68

Since the organizers of the street-carnival and the main balls were now one and the same, the links between the two were tightened. Agadati named the main ball “the carnival ball,” and was highly involved with the street-carnival as well. Hebrew Queen Esther was “the ball’s queen” and at the same time “the procession’s queen,” and led the carnival procession in an open car.69

The connections between the balls and the carnival were not only organizational but also thematic. In 1925, the procession was officially dedicated to a special topic: the encouragement of Jewish industry and commerce (“Totzeret Ha’aretz”). In practical terms, this meant that every Jewish business was permitted to participate in the procession and advertise itself. Some businesses did so without even trying to add a light-hearted touch to amuse the crowd—which generated vociferous criticism regarding the carnival’s commercialization.70 The criticism caused the organizers to add a few original floats each

66 See: Ha’aretz 8.3.1925; an announcement of local JNF office in Tel Aviv and Jaffa, Doar-Hayom 6.3.1928; Ha’aretz 1.2.1926.
67 See two separate stories about the two different activities of JNF and Agadati: Ha’aretz 7.2.1929; Ha’aretz 3.3.1929.
68 Doar-Hayom and Ha’aretz 22.3.1929.
69 “Yafo ve-Tel-Aviv” (Jaffa and Tel Aviv), Ha’aretz 22.1.1926. See chapter five.
70 Carmiel 1999: 241–242; “Hashavu’a ba-pe’ula lema’an Totzeret Ha’aretz” [This week’s activity for Jewish products], Doar-Hayom 13.3.1935. For criticism on commercialization see, for example: editorial letter, Ha’aretz 8.3.1927.
year, which were somewhat more satirical, or at least promotional, to endorse Zionist agricultural ethos, highly promoted by the JNF publicity on every other day. Nonetheless, the commercial component continued to take the central place in the procession. As noted by historian Anat Helman, the carnival displayed a “celebration of economy,” which was quite at odds with the Zionist puritan ethos. The capitalist logic of the balls thus permeated the street carnival, and boosting the economy became a serious consideration in its favor beginning in the mid-1920s.

These links with the carnival helped Agadati’s balls to acquire a growing reputation as much more than mere entertainment: they were considered original Hebrew culture, the genesis of a unique Hebrew tradition. “Hebrew Queen Esther” was but the most eminent example of this discourse (see chapter six). This reputation radiated to the entire field of Purim balls, to which the Hebrew-Zionist media dedicated many inches of widespread reports, stories, atmospheric descriptions, analyses, and cultural critiques, which sometimes related even to minor balls and discussed insignificant details. These celebrations were understood as one of the most important phenomena of the new Hebrew culture in Palestine. The announcement of a “50% donation” promoted the national value of the capitalist event.

In other words, Agadati was ahead of his competitors not only in the techniques of entertainment, but also in the commercial use of nationalist ideology. His competitors tried to catch up with him, but of course no one could afford to set aside half of their income to give to the JNF—for the most part, donations were no more than 15%, and more frequently around 5%, of the ticket price. At one ball in Rehovot, it was announced that the JNF would receive 30% of the ball’s income, alongside an apology for the exceptionally high prices.

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71 Helman 2006: 388–389. On the celebration of the economy see Abrahams 1982. On the puritan ethos see Almog 2000: 209–225. On the “totzeret ha’aretz” campaigns see: Shoham 2013c.

72 See an announcement on Purim balls in migrash harusim in Jerusalem, Doar-Hayom 2.3.1928; an announcement on a ball in “Bristol” café in Jerusalem, Doar-Hayom 7.3.1930; an announcement of “world association of Hebrew youth,” Doar-Hayom 4.3.1927; supra note 55; and many more.
of the tickets. The fact that the JNF made such a clever commercial use of nationalist ideology indicates that it played the big game by the capitalists’ rules, and defeated them on their home field.

The concealment of the partnership by both partners implies that both were aware of a certain ideological inconsistency. Moreover, this misinformation served both sides. The balls drew heavy criticism for their hedonism, escapism, and inappropriateness for a nationalist project. With Hebrew Queen Esther, gender issues were added and the carnival was criticized as immodest (see chapter six). Had the attackers known that the JNF itself, and not a private entrepreneur, stood behind these controversial cultural events their attacks would have been devastating. Instead, Agadati, who was known as a bohemian and spent much of his time abroad, attracted such harsh criticism by younger artists, journalists, and critics that, in one instance, he sued the authors of a protest proclamation for defamation. But this bohemian reputation helped to sell tickets. From his perspective, to defend himself against criticism, it was more convenient to point out the 50% donation to the JNF, rather than depict himself as the JNF’s business partner.

Despite the concealed and contradictory intentions of the organizers, the final cultural product was a combination of nationalism and capitalism, or a capitalist nationalism. Willingly or not, the JNF was a central agent for the importation of capitalist mass culture and its assimilation into the New Hebrew culture, whereas the Tel Aviv Bohemians had a significant role in nation-building. To use Bourdieu’s words, Zionism was commoditized and sold in “the market of symbolic goods.” At the same time, capitalist mass-culture was nationalized as an “authentic” national culture. Although each side depicted (and probably genuinely thought about) this cooperation as a tactical collaboration with an inevitably powerful force, nationalism and capitalism were entangled in terms of the content as well, as we shall see throughout this book.

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73 “Neshef hasiyum,” [Final carnival ball], Doar-Hayom 6.3.1928; an announcement on the “final carnival ball,” Doar-Hayom 9.3.1928.

74 “Mana shel ha-trask” [Some lessons from the “trask”], posters collection in national and university library in Jerusalem, file v/1836e; Ze’evi 1988: 493. It should be mentioned that the JNF’s part was not ignored in these posters. See also: Carmiel 1999: 105 and note 248; Helman 2007: 89–91.

75 Bourdieu 1993: 112–141.
Unsurprisingly, this connection was well-understood by the Arab-Palestinian press, which closely surveyed Purim celebrations every year, and reported that “[they] organized balls, in which money was collected, to achieve political goals.” From the Arab perspective, the Zionist anti-urban rhetoric did not conceal the eminently urban features of the emerging Jewish public sphere in Palestine.

1928–1936: Peak Time

The few years of the JNF’s responsibility for the street-carnival were characterized by a constant process of institutionalization. The numbers of out-of-town visitors had significantly increased each year, and Purim celebrations throughout the country (outside Tel Aviv) sharply declined (see chapter two). The JNF’s activists were attentive to criticism and made attempts to improve the carnival. They organized mass public amusements before the procession, such as comic and real sports competitions, gym performances, or chess games in which people posed as the chess pieces. They added a few orchestras (such as the British Police Orchestra) to accompany the celebrations and provided public dancing. In response to criticism about commercialization, they featured political-satirical floats that required considerable financial investment and added dances and a comic act at the procession’s departure. In response to criticism about inadequate artistic standards, they employed experts who were present in the office during the days before the carnival and provided guidance regarding parade floats. But there was a catch: the constant requirement to

76 From Al-Jazira newspaper, translated and appeared in: “Me-ha’itonut ha-arvit” [From Arab media], Ha’aretz 2.3.1926.
77 “Yemey ha-Purim be-Tel-Aviv” [Purim days in Tel Aviv], Doar-Hayom 12.3.1925; “Yafo ve-Tel-Aviv” [Jaffa and Tel Aviv], Ha’aretz 9.2.1926; “Tel-Aviv ve-yafo” [Tel Aviv and Jaffa], Ha’aretz 18.3.1927; “Purim be-Tel-Aviv” [Purim in Tel Aviv], Ha’aretz 20.3.1927; “Hakarnaval be-Tel-Aviv” [The carnival in Tel Aviv], Ha’aretz 21.3.1927.
78 “Purim be’eretz Israel: Be-Tel-Aviv” [Purim in Palestine: In Tel Aviv], Doar-Hayom 2.3.1926; “Purim be-Tel-Aviv,” Ha’aretz 1.3.1926. For criticism of commercialization see supra note 70.
79 “Tel-Aviv ve-yafo: Mikhtav galuy latoshavim me’et hava’ada hamesaderet” [Tel Aviv and Jaffa: An open letter to the residents from the organizing com-
“improve” the carnival also increased the expenditures, and in 1928, it turned out that the income from the sale of stamps and ribbons did not cover the costs. The carnival that had started out as a fundraiser had become a financial burden. Hence, a few weeks before Purim 1928, the JNF announced that it would not organize the carnival that year.

This announcement triggered a widespread and distressed public debate. An overwhelming majority of people—hundreds of residents who signed a petition, and journalists, intellectuals, artists, and officials—exerted substantial pressure in making the categorical demand to retain the carnival. The question was how and by whom.80 The announcement by JNF’s national office stated that

The value of the carnival, in our opinion, lies in the creation of a folk character for the Purim festival, and the elevation of the public spirit. In due course, the carnival became a tradition, and is now attended by thousands of guests and tourists. One can assume that if it will be enriched and improved in content, it will turn into a real economic power by attracting tourists.81

While fundraising was not addressed, the other three aforementioned motives to organize public events appeared here: the development of national culture and its transformation into a tradition (a key concept here; see chapter three), mass entertainment (or “elevation of the public spirit”), and—this is the first time it was explicitly mentioned—the encouragement of economic activity by marketing the carnival as a tourist attraction. The fundraising component had lost its relevance, since at this stage, apparently, the carnival operated at a deficit.

The JNF appealed to various Zionist institutions, but the Tel Aviv municipality was the only one to take on the challenge and share the expenses and the organization costs with the JNF, while affirm-
ing their logic. In 1929, the institutions co-organized and co-sponsored the carnival. In 1930, the JNF shirked its responsibility and left it to the municipality alone. Although the carnival was eventually cancelled that year due to the violent conflict in the summer of 1929, the municipality was alone in making serious attempts to organize it. From 1931 onward, the municipality carried this burden alone.

The JNF renounced not only its role in conducting the Purim carnival, but also its role in the mass Purim balls. After 1928–1929, the JNF resorted to other fundraising techniques, such as a Purim bazaar (some 100,000 used items were sold), door-to-door solicitation, and other activities.

Why did the municipality assume this responsibility? In addition to the reasons mentioned above, the self-image of the city as a sovereign entity seemed to have a crucial role. Toward the late 1920s, the city began to develop its mythical discourse as the “first Hebrew city,” which was exemplified, in one instance, in the grandiose celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the city (previous significant dates, such as the fifteenth anniversary, were not given a single public mention). Purim was already identified with the Zionist city, and became an eminent ideological expression of Urban Zionism.

The municipality introduced new standards of professionalization—bureaucratic, organizational, financial, and artistic—and the celebrations reached heights hitherto unknown in the festive culture of the young Yishuv. The committee, which was now comprised of city council members, artists from various fields, writers, and representatives of several Zionist institutions, was assembled by the beginning of winter. The carnival was expanded in time and space to almost three

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82 A plan of action by the Purim committee, 15.1.1929, TAMA 04–3218a.
83 “Likrat hagigot Purim” [Towards Purim celebrations], *Doar-Hayom* 11.3.1929.
84 From Dizengoff to Zionist Board/National Council/JNF/Keren Hayesod, 23.1.1930, TAMA 04–3218a, and CZA S30/2307; from the JNF to Tel Aviv municipality, TAMA 04–3218a; from Dizengoff to the JNF’s Jerusalem office, 3.2.1930, TAMA 04–3218a.
85 *Ha’aretz* 2.2.1931.
86 *Doar-Hayom* and *Ha’aretz* 22.3.1929; from central JNF office in Jerusalem to local offices, 30.1.1935, CZA KKL5/6312.
87 See: Azaryahu 2009; Shoham 2012.
days in larger areas of the city. However, during this process, the carnival evolved from an event that invited active audience participation into a well-organized event that left the audience in a passive role. In the concepts developed by Alexander, it was a transition from a “ritual,” in which performers and audience take active part, into a “performance” by active performers in front of a passive audience.  

The most evident change was organizational: the municipality initiated the use of ropes, marshals, and even police horsemen to establish boundaries between the procession’s route and the crowd. The committee began to put private individuals and groups under contracts which obligated the city to provide financial assistance, while the other party was obligated to participate in the procession, or pay a fee. The idea was to enhance the “artistic level” of the parade floats, and the committee helped with professional advice, materials, and equipment. Only floats which demonstrated a “satisfying artistic level” were allowed to participate in the parade. Hence, despite the committee’s attempts, public participation declined somewhat toward the mid-1930s.

The committee tried (with limited success) to encourage the public to decorate the city with greenery, flowers, photos of prominent Zionist figures, national or carnival flags, and colorful lighting. The municipality its part and constructed spectacular lighting with different images, such as a palace, a big tent, the burning bush (in the central synagogue), and others. After 1934, three illustrated gates were placed above the central Mugrabi square, painted by artist Nahum Guttmann (1898–1980), on biblical themes from the Book of Esther. The committee also introduced new technologies, such as loudspeakers and radio (the first broadcasting station in Palestine was initiated in 1936).

88 Alexander 2004.
89 A series of contracts between the committee and a few people, TAMA 04–3219b.
90 “Hahakhanot le-Purim be-Tel-Aviv” [Preparations for Purim in Tel Aviv], Doar-Hayom 28.2.1934; “Likrat nishfey ha-Purim be-Tel-Aviv” [Towards Purim balls in Tel Aviv], and “Tel-Aviv,” Doar-Hayom 17.3.1935. See pictures: Carmiel 1999: 233; Carmiel 2004: 202.
91 “Miyedi’ot va’adat hahagigot” [From the celebrations committee], Davar 15.2.1934; Davar 1.3.1934; Ha’aretz 2.3.1934. On the radio in British Palestine, see Stanton 2013.
A significant change from 1928 onward was the prevention of the participation of floats which lacked a satirical or artistic motif in performance, whether made by commercial or non-profit organizations. Considerable sums of money were allocated as prizes for floats in the procession, and thus, as early as in 1928, “most of the procession’s participants had a national-public or even political character.”92 Indeed, alongside the presentation of national values or educational institutions, there was growing number of controversial floats which described actual disputes between Labor Movement and right-wing Revisionist Zionists, religious and secular, farmers and workers, and others, as well as critiques of the British government. Among the educational floats, a special place was assigned to the Yemenite group Tze’irey Hamizrakh (“Oriental youth”) whose members, even in the mid-1920s, were considered “authentic” performers of folk culture, which many described as the “highlight of the procession.”93 These floats left a deep mark on the collective consciousness, including that of those who were not present, but heard about the proletarian Tel Aviv group that won prizes and recognition on Purim and interpreted this recognition as “a sure sign of redemption” from their difficult socio-economic situation (see chapter four).94 Other Jewish ethnic groups such as Caucasians and Egyptians conducted folkloric performances in the carnival as well.95

In 1931, the organizing committee began to give the streets special comic names from the Book of Esther, such as “speaker of his people’s own language” [“umedaber kilshon amo” — Esther 1:22] for Ben-Yehuda Street (Ben-Yehuda was considered the “reviver of the Hebrew language”); or “and Haman restrained himself” [vayit’apak Haman — Esther 5:10] for Magen-David square, with reference to the public restrooms at the site.

92 “Purim be-Tel-Aviv” [Purim in Tel Aviv], Ha’aretz 7.3.1928. See pictures: Carmiel 1999: 161, 200, 239; Carmiel 2004: 201.

93 See: “Tel-Aviv: Yemey ha-Purim” [Tel Aviv: The days of Purim], Davar 1.3.1926; “Hakarnaval hapurimi be-Tel-Aviv” [Purim carnival in Tel Aviv], Ha’aretz 24.3.1932.

94 Doniach 1933: 156–157. This author, who was based in North America at the time, apparently translated the words of the newspaper story (supra note 92) word by word. See also: “Mikhtavim lama’arekhet” [Editorial letters], Ha’aretz 9.3.1928.

95 See, for example, Carmiel 1999: 244.
In 1932, the committee decided to introduce a new Hebrew word for carnival, and appointed a special committee of copywriters to come up with a neologism: “Adloyada” (see chapter four). This new name symbolized a general tendency to empower the carnival in all respects. The committee introduced opening and closing ceremonies, which included music, theatre, and dance performances, in addition to children’s performances, which expanded the carnival to three days.96 These, and additional street spectacles, were performed on “Esther’s Palace,” a new public stage built in Mugrabi square in anticipation of Purim every year beginning in 1932. This was a huge, three-story street theater, with three 30-meter-high figures of biblical King Ahasuerus, Mordechai, and Esther, built on top of the third story. The first floor could carry an orchestra of a few dozen musicians to accompany the shows (with as many as 60 people). The middle floor was used for the performances (as many as 16 people), with “oriental” gates (that is, gates with round boughs) in the background. The entire cost of this stage was 320 Palestine pounds.97

In addition, several orchestras were spread throughout the city and played waltzes, marches, and ethnic music to encourage public dancing. The public amusements included horse races (with Bedouin and English participants alongside Jewish clubs), dancers and choirs in the streets, and popular songs that were written for the occasion.98

In 1932, a generic and thematic change was introduced as well. Until then, the non-commercial floats touched mainly upon actual politics or displayed educational and cultural activities. Beginning in 1932, the committee decided to take responsibility for a central float. This float depicted a nationalist meta-narrative, from the bible to Zionism,

96 “Hilulat hapurim maka galey hayim” [Purim joy is expanding], Doar-Hayom 22.3.1932.
97 For additional photos of Esther’s Palace, see Fisher 1984: 96; fragments 71–76 from Axelrod cinema news broadcast, Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, VT ax10; unidentified British film, Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, VT 00034; and a contract for the construction of this project, 25.2.1932, TAMA 04–3219c.
98 “Tel-Aviv,” Doar-Hayom 1.3.1932; “Tel-Aviv: Va’adat mi’aley Purim” [Tel Aviv: The committee for Purim projects], Doar-Hayom 11.3.1932; “Tel-Aviv,” Doar-Hayom 13.3.1932; “Likrat hakarnaval” [Towards the carnival], Doar-Hayom 18.3.1932; “Seder hagigot hapurim be-Tel-Aviv” [Program of Purim celebrations in Tel Aviv], Doar-Hayom 22.3.1932.
with changing themes: “the aliyot [immigrations] to the Land of Israel” (1932), “poetry in Israel” (1933), “Israel’s tribes past and present” (1934), and “from slavery to freedom” (1935). The first three themes were suggested by Haim N. Bialik (1873–1934), considered the era’s “national poet.” These floats cost hundreds of Palestine pounds.99 The mundane language of satire and the display of Zionist achievements was transformed into a mythical language of Jewish meta-historical narratives. When a float of the biblical tribes with their flags paraded past, “masters of tradition in the crowd reminded their neighbors of the verses which determined each tribe’s flag.”100 Another observer commented that these historical floats “display history as a holy of holies, and [display] the present as profane of profanes.”101 Floats displaying Zionist achievements, including those made by the JNF, the Hebrew University, the Hebrew Technion in Haifa, the “Zebulon” naval school, and others, did not disappear, however.102 The carnival was so expanded that in 1934 the procession included more than 100 floats.

Toward the mid-1930s, another interesting development was the gradual disappearance of the political floats which gave expression to the internal political disputes of the Yishuv. After 1934, when relations between left- and right-wing factions in the Yishuv deteriorated after the unresolved murder of the Zionist-socialist politician Haim Arlosoroff (1899–1933), the committee made major efforts to close down these floats. Indeed, as early as 1931, controversial floats—that is, floats presented by one group to criticize another—were not common in the procession. Paradoxically, the carnival’s last two years witnessed two political scandals.

The first was a massive fight between two youth groups, Hapo’el and Beitar, which occurred during Purim 1934. It began a few hours after the procession, when Labor Movement Hapo’el paraders passed near the Revisionist Zionist club and an altercation ensued—which was eventually stopped by British police, who made numerous arrests. As one would expect, in Doar-Hayom, the right-wing newspaper, the
Hapo’el youth were accused of initiating the fight, and in the Labor Movement newspapers Davar and Hapo’el Hatza’ir, the opposite stance was taken. Probably the most accurate and reliable description was provided by the “tabloid” Iton Meyuhad, which reported that “the mischievous youth of the political parties violate the festival’s joy while defending their opinions with punches, bricks, and stick beatings.”

The second scandal took place right before the procession of 1935, following severe labor disputes in Petah-Tikva. Rosa Cohen (1890–1937), the city council member representing the Labor Party (and the mother of future Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin), forbade the traditional procession of Petah-Tikva youth on horseback from the “Maccabi Absalom” Club, led by the settlement’s heroic protector, Avraham Shapira (1870–1965). The argument delayed the entire procession for two hours, and eventually Shapira and his young fellows rode twenty minutes ahead of the procession. The Farmers’ Association of Palestine [hit’ahadut ha-ikarim] protested to Mayor Dizengoff regarding “the humiliating and offensive attitude shown toward our fellow-riders, led by Avraham Shapira, by an official Tel Aviv municipality institution such as the committee for Purim celebrations—publicly, during the celebration.”

A public event can bring social tensions to the surface of public consciousness and contain them—and thus enables society to diffuse potential conflict. The committee’s close inspections disrupted the process of the alleviation of internal tensions, which then erupted in public life in different ways, much less pleasant than controversial parade floats.

These scandals, however, did not prevent many from seeing these years as the carnival’s finest hour. The periphery was utterly abandoned during Purim, and no Purim celebrations were organized.

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103 A.S. Yuris, “Purim shehushbat” [An interrupted Purim], Hapo’el Hatza’ir 9.3.1934, 12–13; Davar 2.3.1934; “Hitpartzut damim mashbita shuv simhat hahag be-Tel-Aviv” [Again, a bloody brawl ruins the festival’s joy in Tel Aviv], Doar-Hayom 4.3.1934; Iton Metuhad 4.3.1934, 1; Yediot Iriyat Tel-Aviv 5 (1934), 197.

104 “Tahalukhat ha-Adloyada be-Tel-Aviv” [The carnival procession in Tel Aviv], Doar-Hayom 21.3.1935; a letter of complaint from H. Ariav, chair of hit’ahadut ha-ikarim, to the Tel Aviv municipality, 10.4.1935, TAMA file 04–3222.

105 See: Handelman 1990: 10–12.
beyond Tel Aviv—everyone travelled to the city, and none celebrated in their home communities. It was also an international event, which drew not only many tourists from abroad but also a notorious international pickpocket, who was caught during the carnival.\textsuperscript{106} The public was requested not to bring children to the opening ceremony due to the anticipated crowds as early as 1933.\textsuperscript{107} In 1934 and 1935, there were recurring reports of fainting and minor injuries as outcomes of excessive crowding or falls from heights, as well as thefts—which were unknown before 1932, when the municipal police and the “Red Star of David” (the Jewish first-aid organization) were idle during the carnival. Roofs and balconies were so overcrowded that in-house municipal correspondence revealed severe concerns about collapsing structures (with relief that the dangers were not realized).\textsuperscript{108} Since the crowding and the noise diminished capacities to see and hear the show, the 1934 opening ceremony was abbreviated to more rapidly disperse the crowd.\textsuperscript{109}

These were the years during which the entire \textit{Yishuv} made the pilgrimage to Tel Aviv, and which imprinted the carnival in the Zionist/Israeli collective memory. In 1935, the new tradition seemed strong and stable. Hence, the news of the cancellation of the carnival which began to spread throughout the city in the winter of 1936 had the impact of a thunderstorm on a sunny day.

\textit{The Decline}

The municipality’s implementation of higher standards led to greater public expenses for materials, equipment and, wages for painters, writers, dancers, choreographers, actors, musicians, stage hands, contractors, marshals, and the director of the procession—Moshe Halevi (1895–1974), a notable director from the “Ohel” theatre. In addition, there were expenses for ads, publications, office work, and temporary

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Palestine Post} 2.3.1934.

\textsuperscript{107} “Tel-Aviv,” \textit{Doar-Hayom} 10.3.1933.

\textsuperscript{108} CZA, photos collection, phkh 4144; Hanoch 1932: 29; \textit{Yediot Iriyat Tel-Aviv} 5 (1935), 147–148; Carmiel 1999: 247–248; Carmiel 2004: 202; and more.

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Palestine Post} 1.3.1934; \textit{Ha’aretz} 1.3.1934; \textit{Davar} 2.3.1934; a memorandum, a summary of Purim celebrations of 1934, 26.3.1934, TAMA 04–3220c.
policemen. The municipality was not always capable of meeting the cost, since the deficit was always deeper than anticipated.\footnote{See: a program for Tel Aviv Purim celebrations, 15.1.1929, TAMA 04–3218a; Carmiel 1999: 233–234; an agreement between Moshe Halevi and the Tel Aviv municipality, 24.3.1932, TAMA 04–3219b; from Arye Lubin to Dizengoff, 27.3.1931, TAMA 04–3218b.}

Unfortunately, the income did not come close to meeting the expenses. The institutionalization of the carnival in the 1920s decreased public participation, and despite open pleas from the municipality, no money was donated to cover the deficit. For unknown reasons, the carnival’s financing was never included in the municipality’s annual budget. Every winter, someone would remember that Purim was approaching, and then scramble to assemble an organizing committee. This committee immediately started seeking financing for the celebrations. There would be a patchwork of donations, special budgets and additional sources of income, and most years it somehow was held together—with particular credit to vigorous fundraising by Mayor Dizengoff, who personally took responsibility for a great deal of the carnival and in 1934 raised more than 1,000 Palestine pounds, which covered most of the deficit.\footnote{Expense report [no date, from 1933], TAMA 04–3220b; expense report about Purim and internal memorandum about the carnival, 26.3.1934; from Dizengoff to the municipality management, 2.1.1935, TAMA 04–3220c; protocol of the meeting of the organizing committee, 10.2.1935, TAMA 04–3221c; from Moshe Halevi to the carnival committee, 22.3.1935, TAMA 03–3211d.}

In 1935, Dizengoff was severely ill, and the city’s officials did not give much attention to the carnival, leaving it with a deficit of over 3,000 Palestine pounds.\footnote{The protocol of the meeting of the organizing committee, 10.2.1935, TAMA 04–3221c.} In 1936, Dizengoff’s illness, along with the embarrassing fact that the previous year’s deficit was not yet covered, led to the decision to celebrate Dizengoff’s seventy-fifth birthday on Purim day. Instead of the carnival committee, the city’s secretary assembled a “committee for Purim and Dizengoff’s Jubilee,” which decided, “due to reasons of budget, […] to cancel the procession for one year and instead, to focus on amusements and shows for three
nights and two days on the ‘civic field.’”\textsuperscript{113} The merchants’ association protested the decision, but as Dizengoff himself reminded them in his pungent response, they had consistently refused to donate money to the carnival in previous years.\textsuperscript{114}

In the public media announcement, the cancellation was explained by the municipality as the outcome of the “state of world Jewry and the limitations and edicts in Palestine.”\textsuperscript{115} The “Arab revolt” broke out a month later, after Passover, and was remembered by many as the real reason for the cessation of the carnival.\textsuperscript{116} However, while the atmosphere in Purim of 1936 was already strained, the reasons for the cancellations were merely budgetary and administrative.\textsuperscript{117} The carnival was temporarily cancelled only for the year of 1936, but as bureaucrats know too well, nothing is more permanent than a temporary decision. The next Adloyada procession in Tel Aviv was organized in 1955, in a different form and context.

This was part of a general process of the decline of all Purim celebrations, including the balls. Public interest in the balls had begun to weaken in the early 1930s. Fewer newspaper inches were dedicated to the balls, and, in general, they were treated as banal parties no different from everyday Tel Aviv parties. In 1934, Agadati retired from organizing the balls, and in 1935, as part of its desperate search for new sources of income, the carnival committee drastically raised the balls’ “carnival taxes” and minimized the potential profit. Because there was no procession in 1936, and there were few out-of-town guests, the balls resulted in heavy losses for their organizers. In fact, very few

\textsuperscript{113} An announcement on the assemblage of the committee, 29.1.1936; TAMA 04–3222; a memorandum by Moshe Halevi, program for Purim celebrations of 1936, TAMA 04–3222.

\textsuperscript{114} From the Tel Aviv and Jaffa merchants’ association to the municipality, 20.2.1936; from Palestine industrialists’ association to the municipality, 2.3.1936; from Dizengoff to industrialists’ association, 3.3.1936—TAMA 04–3222.

\textsuperscript{115} Protocol of the meeting of the city’s directorate, 3.2.1936, TAMA 04–3222; “Bney Tel-Aviv asurim bahagiga: Rak hayeladim rasha’im lismoakh” [Tel Avivians are prohibited from joy: Only the children are permitted], Doar-Hayom 3.3.1936.

\textsuperscript{116} For example: Shprut 1990.

\textsuperscript{117} “Tel-Aviv,” Doar-Hayom 8.3.1936.
of the locals came. In 1937, there were still a few thousand guests at the balls, but the balls were not “news” for the media anymore, on national or even a local level, and the economic and security conditions prevalent since April 1936 did not help either. Although Purim balls continued to exist—and actually remain in existence to this day—they are considered private parties with no national and intellectual interest. As early as 1935, when the carnival still existed, there were reports of a few dozen “private costume balls.” Eventually, these alone remained in the field.

The decline of Purim celebrations after the mid-1930s was emblematic of a general historical process of the decline of Tel Aviv as a site of Zionist identity construction. Several independent studies signify its watershed as 1936. According to Moshe Zimmerman, the historian of Hebrew cinema, Tel Aviv’s presence in the Zionist imagination as a national site—in newspapers, literature, and cinema—was at its peak during periods of relative political quiet. During wartime, the Zionist consciousness was focused on the frontier: wars, illegal immigration (ha’apala), border skirmishes, and related events. Zionist culture could envision Tel Aviv as the indulging and warm home front, or—much more often—as the decadent rear, which pioneers could question the value of defending, but Tel Aviv was no more viewed as the place where the new society and state were built. In 1936, when the “Arab revolt” broke out, there was a change in the Zionist policy regarding resource distribution. Zionist institutions decreased their involvement in leisure culture, and there was a related decrease of public interest in developing a new festive culture. Accordingly, 1936 signified a new stage in the combined history of Tel Aviv and Urban Zionism. Its rapid development persisted, and it continued to function as the Yishuv’s commercial, cultural, and even political center. However, Tel Aviv almost disappeared from Zionist cinema, literature, and historiography. The mythological discourse regarding the city as a unique place diminished during this period, and returned

118 Doar-Hayom 10.3.1936.
119 Ha’aretz 25.2.1937.
120 Ha’aretz 17.3.1935.
121 Zimmerman 2001a: 30–31.
122 See ibid.; Yekuti’eli-Cohen 1990: 7, 99–110; Shenker 2005: 77.
only toward the end of the 1950s. The rapid development of the city was not slowed in 1936, but the city’s role as a site of Zionist identity construction dramatically dwindled.

As for Purim celebrations, it could be said that their decline was a result of the decline of several prominent figures, such as Dizengoff (who died in 1936), Agadati (who retired in 1934) and perhaps also Bialik (who died in 1934). In addition, it was a result of new political circumstances and the transformations in leisure culture and economic priorities of the Yishuv caused by the Arab revolt. On a broader level, however, these determinants should be located within socio-cultural and political processes: without mass public events, the significance of the city as a national site of identity construction was diminished.

Conclusion

The definition of Purim as “Tel Aviv’s festival” by contemporaneous and current observers had a solid foundation. The city and the festival fed each other, and their rise and fall were combined.

The correlation between the city and the festival was recognized not only in Palestine but throughout the Jewish world. The Purim carnival and the balls, and the Hebrew Queen Esther in particular, were perceived as original Hebrew culture. A Purim ball in Warsaw, for example, bore the title “a night in Tel Aviv,” and ticket-purchasers were promised that “it will resemble the traditional Purim balls in Tel Aviv. The halls will be lightened in white and azure.” “Queen Esther” pageants were held throughout the Jewish world. An open letter of the JNF’s executive in North America stated that

123 Azaryahu 2007a: chapter 3.
124 See, for example: Shprut 1990.
125 For contemporaries’ observations see, for example: Arieh-Sapir 1997: 177; Gaster 1953: 227. For retrospective assessments see: Shavit & Sitton 2004: 98; Helman 2007: 84–91.
126 “Varsha” [Warsaw], Doar-Hayom 11.3.1931.
127 “Ester hamalka ha-ostralit” [Australian Queen Esther—in Melbourne], Ha’aretz 5.3.1931; “Kabalat panim le-ester hamalka mi-New York” [A reception to New Yorker queen Esther], The posters collection, national library of Jerusalem, file V1969/3; two Yiddish invitations to Purim ball in Madison-
Purim carnivals are not new. They were traditionally performed by our people since early times. Purim is a time of joy. In the large cities of Palestine, Purim carnivals are organized to benefit the JNF. We want to create this joy in our country as well, to benefit the JNF. 128

Interestingly, even non-Jewish groups in Palestine began to organize costume balls, which incidentally or not, took place around Purim. 129

In other words, Purim carnivals were understood as the unique contribution of Tel Aviv, as the only Jewish public sphere in the world, to the general Jewish culture. Purim carnivals were the first cultural practice produced in Palestine and disseminated to the diaspora, following Ahad-Ha’Am’s vision of a Jewish cultural center in Palestine (although Ahad-Ha’Am himself would probably wrinkle his nose). The rise and fall of the carnival and the symbolic status of the city were combined, in a way that makes the chicken-and-egg question pointless.

The significance of the carnival beyond Tel Aviv’s municipal jurisdiction will be analyzed in the next chapter.

128 An open letter of the JNF executive in America, no date, CZA KKL5/2452.
129 See: “Yafo” [Jaffa], Doar-Hayom 23.2.1933 (a report about a carnival organized by the Christian workers association in Jaffa); Khalidi 1984: 158.