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Crowning Hebrew Beauty:

Gender, Race, and (Trans)Nation in the Interwar Pageants of Warsaw, Tel Aviv, and Beyond

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Abstract

In this thesis, I draw primarily upon the local Jewish press coverage of two key examples of Zionist pageantry in the interwar period: the Miss Judaea pageants of Warsaw, Poland in 1929 and the Queen Esther pageants of Tel Aviv, Palestine between 1926 and 1929. I consider how ideas about Jewish (trans)national identity, bodies, gender, race, and nation were negotiated and arbitrated through the practice of pageantry, informed by theories and concepts from Gender Studies, Nationalism Studies, and Jewish Studies. I make the case that the nationalist fashioning of Zionist identity and femininity by urban interwar Zionists through beauty pageantry was steeped in interconnected discourses regarding Jews and their supposed bodily degeneracy, racial thought, and modern nationalism and colonialism. I also argue that the pageants allowed urban men to negotiate their own gender and sexuality in reference to the creation of Zionist femininity. Following the cessation of the pageants in Poland and Palestine, this thesis moves to consider the continuation of this practice amongst urban Jewish communities in North America and Australia between 1928 and 1977. In doing so, I establish that the negotiation of Jewish national identity was (and still is) transnational. In this thesis, I bring together different strands of Jewish history to examine the historical process of manufacturing (trans)national aesthetics, allowing us to complicate the process that was imagining the pre-state, Jewish national collective. Further, I demonstrate that settler-colonialism informed the self-fashioning of Jewish Zionists, who saw themselves in competition with the local Palestinian Arabs over, amongst other things, nativity to the land and ownership of it. Ultimately, I prove that across borders, urban Zionist men and women attempted to reconcile the contradictory elements of their collective identity through pageantry,

dealing with existential questions regarding Jewish understandings of race and gender that exist to this very day.

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Introduction

How beautiful are you, my companion,
How beautiful you are!
Your eyes, they are like doves
underneath your locks.
Your hair resembles a flock of goats
that run down Gilead Hill,[1]

Your lips are as scarlet ribbon,
and you smoothly move your mouth.
Your temples like cracks in a pomegranate
peer out from under your locks.[2]

Your neck is like David's Tower,
built to serve as an arsenal,
One thousand shields are hung up there
by heroes as arms of war.[3]

I'm black and pretty, Jerusalem's daughter,
like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's rugs.[4]

The above are only a few of the many lines from *"Shir ha-Shirim,"* or "Song of Songs" that were recited to Poland's first-ever Miss Judaea at a reception in her honour in the late winter of 1929.[5] The romantic and erotic lyrics of this ancient love ballad were a fitting emotional, artistic, and even traditional Jewish response to the project that was crowning Jewish beauty, whether in Warsaw, Tel Aviv, or beyond. They evoke an ancient lineage of celebrating 'Jewish,' or rather 'Judaic' beauty that inextricably links the feminine Jewish form with *the* land.[6] Further, the

[1] Song of Songs 4:1 translation by Carsten L. Wilke in Carsten L. Wilke, *Farewell to Shulamit: Spatial and Social Diversity in the Song of Songs*, 1st edition, Jewish Thought, Philosophy, and Religion 2 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 132-143.
[2] Song of Songs 4:3 in Wilke, *Farewell to Shulamit*, 132-143.
[3] Song of Songs 4:4 in Wilke, *Farewell to Shulamit*, 132-143.
[4] Song of Songs 1:5 in Wilke, *Farewell to Shulamit*, 132-143.
[5] 'Powitanie Miss Judaei Przez P. Posła Farbsteina [Miss Judaea Is Received by Mr. Deputy Farbstein]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 30 March 1929, 4.
[6] I use the term "*the* land" to refer to the land that is considered to be where ancient Israelite and later Jewish kingdoms once stood. At the time, much of this land was within the borders of Palestine.

imaginary woman of "Song of Songs" reconciles the masculine image of the warrior with the feminine image of the Judaic Venus; she was both strong and vulnerable. Much like her masculine partner, she was the ideal Judaic specimen that embodied romance, history, and art that could not be divorced from her habitat and her freedom. She was decidedly not fair-haired and light-eyed, but rather, she was "blackish, / … tanned by the sun."[7] She was *of* the ancient East, a true "henna bush at Engedi among the vines,"[8] not at all out of place in *her* land, the land of the upright, proud Jews. She was proud to be Jewish and her beauty was thusly of a Jewish 'type.' The Jewish woman of "Song of Songs" could and would serve as a model for "maidens of Jerusalem"[9] to come, allowing them to imagine their Jewishness as beautiful and their beauty as Jewish. As such, it was the task of Zionists[10] to travel through centuries upon centuries of Jewish history to locate a representative Jewish woman who would inspire any Jewish man to fondly recall his imagined ancient heritage and passionately exclaim: "How beautiful and comely were you, by Love!"[11]

This thesis, informed by the disciplines of history, Gender Studies, Jewish Studies, and Nationalism Studies, will explore the process that was locating female, Jewish models of beauty to embody the (trans)national Jewish collective spirit, travelling across space and time to tell the story of the process that was (and still is) constructing specifically Jewish models of the body, gender, race, and the nation. In this thesis, I draw primarily upon the local Jewish press coverage of two key examples of Zionist pageantry in the interwar period: the Miss Judaea pageants of

[7] Song of Songs 1:6 in Wilke, *Farewell to Shulamit*, 132-143.
[8] Song of Songs 4:14 in Wilke, *Farewell to Shulamit*, 132-143.
[9] Song of Songs 5:16 in Wilke, *Farewell to Shulamit*, 132-143.
[10] I use the term Zionists to refer to individuals who supported the establishment of a Jewish 'national home' in Palestine. In the interwar context, the term 'Zionist' refers to those who aimed at creating either a national autonomy or a sovereign Jewish state. 'Zionists' were not a homogenous group but fell into a Socialist, a religious, a Revisionist (right-wing), and a Centrist branch.
[11] Song of Songs 7:7 in Wilke, *Farewell to Shulamit*, 132-143.

Warsaw, Poland in 1929 and the Queen Esther pageants of Tel Aviv, Palestine between 1926 and 1929. I consider the reverberations of the pageants amongst Jewish communities in North America and Australia between 1928 and 1977, asking the following questions: Why was it so difficult for Jewish women to locate models of Zionist femininity? How did Jewish women participate in Zionist *re*imaginings of 'new' Jewish identity? How did conceptions of race and understandings of settler-colonialism or *re*turn factor into defining Jewish standards of beauty? How did women's bodies serve as sites of racial negotiation? How does my study of Zionist pageantry in the 1920s contribute to a transnational understanding of Jewish history?

I argue that, through the institution of modern, Western beauty pageantry, Zionist Jews of the urban elite could assert themselves and their national goals as both Western and modern *and* as Judaic and ancient. My thesis demonstrates that the beauty of the "daughters of Jerusalem" was used by urban Zionists to constitute and negotiate understandings about the Jewish body, gender, race, and nation. I make the case that the nationalist fashioning of Zionist identity by urban interwar Zionists through beauty pageantry was steeped in interconnected discourses regarding Jews and their supposed bodily degeneracy, racial thought, and modern nationalism and colonialism. Further, my thesis contends that these urban beauty competitions allowed both Jewish men and women to experiment with alternative conceptions of Zionist masculinities and femininities, wading their way through the murky waters of Zionist understandings of gender and race, and finding ways to harmonise disparate ideas about masculinity, femininity, and the Jewish nation. Much like the Zionists of the twentieth century, I bring together different strands of Jewish history to examine the historical process that was manufacturing (trans)national identity, allowing us to complicate

narratives of the Jewish past, the nation, and the role of gender and race in imagining the pre-state national collective.

Historiographical Review

This thesis engages with several distinct yet interwoven bodies of scholarly literature concerning the Jewish and Zionist past: that of Jewish nationalism and masculinity in Central Europe and Palestine, that of women and Zionism in Palestine and Poland, and the few existing works that have addressed the Miss Judaea or Queen Esther pageants. The first body of literature deals with the historical development of Jewish and Zionist masculinities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe and Palestine. Given the masculine nature of Zionist ideology, it is perhaps only natural that much of the scholarship produced regarding Zionism includes masculinity within its examination. In the late 1990s and first two decades of the 2000s, Oz Almog, Daniel Boyarin, Michael Gluzman, Todd Presner, and Neil R. Davison emerged as some of the leading scholarly voices on Zionist and Jewish masculinity, in which they argued for an understanding of the masculine elements of Zionism as a response to historical European antisemitism.[12] This thesis also emerged out of frustration with the aforementioned scholars' almost total neglect of femininity in their consideration of the construction of the new, Jewish body. In-depth studies deftly examined the development of Ashkenazi-Jewish manhood, yet they did not consider how that manhood

[12] Michael Gluzman, *Ha-Guf Ha-Tsiyoni: Le'umiyut, Migdar u-Miniyut Ba-Sifrut Ha-Ivrit Ha-Ḥadashah [The Zionist Body: National, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Hebrew Literature]* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2007); Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*, Routledge Jewish Studies Series (Oxfordshire, New York: Routledge, 2007), http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip073/2006035120.html; Neil R. Davison, *Jewishness and Masculinity from the Modern to the Postmodern*, 1st edition (Oxfordshire, New York: Routledge, 2014); Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=9405.

developed in relation to its perceived counter, womanhood, nor did they address the creation of bodily Zionist femininity at all.

The studies that have been published regarding women and the Yishuv[13] tend to focus on agricultural Zionists and are generally less concerned with questions of the body, gender, race, and nation. The anthropologist Deborah Bernstein, aware of the obvious lacunae of scholarship on Zionist women published in 1992 a collection of essays that considered the role of women in Zionist societies of the Yishuv, despite not addressing the construction of embodied Zionist femininity.[14] Geographer Ruth Kark, historian Margalit Shilo, and literary scholar Galit Hasan-Rokem published a multidisciplinary book in 2008 that considers gender, feminism, and race in the context of Zionist womanhood, in which the various essays craft gendered analyses of what the editors term as "Israeli society."[15] Other scholars publishing in the twenty-first century have written, albeit shorter pieces, on interwar Zionist rural femininity in Palestine. One such scholar is historian Gerald M. Berg who demonstrated that agricultural schools for the Zionist women of Palestine showed how some female Zionist actors turned to socialist solutions of eradicating gender inequality through equality in labour. Derek Penslar and Eran Kaplan, in a chapter of their co-authored work, argued that pioneer women of the Second Aliyah struggled to fulfil their role as workers because of contradictory gendered expectations of male Zionists.[16] These studies, less

[13] Yishuv, which is implied in its proper form, is a Hebrew-language term that refers to the Jewish communities of Palestine.
[14] Deborah S. Bernstein, ed., *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
[15] Kark, Ruth, Margalit Shilo, and Galit Hasan-Rokem, eds. *Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel: Life History, Politics, and Culture*. Brandeis University Press, 2008. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1k03srv, 2.
[16] Eran Kaplan and Derek J. Penslar, *The Origins of Israel, 1882–1948: A Documentary History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011); Gerald M. Berg, 'Zionism's Gender: Hannah Meisel and the Founding of the Agricultural Schools for Young Women', *Israel Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 135–65.

focused on the aesthetic and visual construction of the Zionist feminine body, also prioritise agricultural Zionism over urban Zionism and almost always neglect urban Zionist history.

In the Polish Zionist context, the few scholars who have written about Zionist women in the interwar period focus rather exclusively on the urban, bourgeois social class, precisely because most of the Zionists of interwar Poland were of that milieu. Jewish and East European Studies scholar Jolanta Mickutė recently published an article in which she aptly examines the political construction of Jewish *female* regeneration in Poland between 1920 and 1939, arguing that the bodies of Jewish-Polish women were shaped by the Zionist need for physical labour and biological reproduction, or of "giving birth to a healthy Jewish nation."[17] Just two years ago, the physical education studies scholar Joanna Bańbuła published a descriptive paper that reviews the activities of Zionist women in sports clubs between the years 1918 and 1939, with an awareness of the effect of Max Nordau's ethos of muscular Judaism on the bodily culture of women and girls.[18]

Still, even fewer scholars have considered how Zionist women and men of the interwar period contended with ideals of urban femininity in relation to developing ideals of Jewish masculinity, of the pioneer and artist alike. In several studies, however, the Zionist beauty pageants of Warsaw and Tel Aviv have served as generative prisms through which to probe and analyse the historical development of Zionist femininity. In a 2008 article, historian Eva Plach cleverly crafts a historical narrative of the Polish-Jewish beauty pageants through close readings of the hosting newspaper *Nasz Przegląd*'s archives, arguing that the Miss Judaea pageants utilised racial and nationalistic

[17] Jolanta Mickutė, 'Making of the Zionist Woman: Zionist Discourse on the Jewish Woman's Body and Selfhood in Interwar Poland', *East European Politics and Societies* 28, no. 01 (2014): 137–62.
[18] Joanna Bańbuła, 'Interwar Jewish Women Sports Clubs in Warsaw', *Israel Affairs* 26, no. 2 (3 March 2020): 273–81, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2020.1720124.

language to help build interwar Polish Zionism.[19] The historian Edward Portnoy has also published a wildly entertaining chapter in his 2017 popular history book, in which he includes riveting images from the contemporaneous Yiddish press regarding the scandal that followed the 1929 Warsaw-based beauty competition.[20]

Turning to Palestine, the Cultural Studies scholar Ḥizky Shoham published *Mordeḥai Roḥev al Sus* [*Mordeḥai Rides on a Horse*], a 2013 book that analyses the institution of Purim as a Zionist innovation in mandatory Palestine through the lens of historical anthropology.[21] In his book, Shoham devotes a chapter to the pageants in which he argues that through carnival practices, capitalist mass entertainment, bourgeois "family values" and heterosexual, patriarchal ideas about women worked in tandem to inspire political support of the Zionist movement, devoting most of his chapter to the third Queen Esther of Tel Aviv, Tsipora Tsabari.[22] Gender Studies scholar Bat-Sheva Margalit Stern has also written two articles on the pageants. In her Hebrew-language article, Stern argues that the Zionist cultural elite channelled Western practices such as beauty pageantry to project their national pride onto the bodies of women, tying gender and nationalism in their creation of new, Zionist culture.[23] Her English-language article also focuses on the Yemeni-

[19] Eva Plach, 'Introducing Miss Judaea 1929: The Politics of Beauty, Race, and Zionism in Inter-War Poland', *Polin* 20 (2008): 368–91.
[20] Eddy Portnoy, *Bad Rabbi: And Other Strange but True Stories from the Yiddish Press*, 1st edition (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017).
[21] Ḥizky Shoham, *Mordeḥai Rohev al Sus: Ḥagigot Purim beTel Aviv (1908-1936) U'Bniyata shel Uma Ḥadasha [Mordecai is Riding a Horse : Purim Celebrations in Tel-Aviv (1908-1936) and the Building of a New Nation]* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2013), https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH003542675/NLI, for an English translation of the book, see Ḥizky Shoham, *Carnival in Tel Aviv: Purim and the Celebration of Urban Zionism* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781644693285-008;
[22] See the fourth chapter "Ḥag shel Nekevot" – "Esther ha-Malka ha-Ivria" ["The Holiday of Females" – "Esther the Hebrew Queen." in Shoham, *Mordeḥai Rohev al Sus*, 136–64.
[23] Bat-Sheva Margalit Stern, 'Nadra Ha-Nava ve-Tsdudyta Ha-Marhiva: Tkesei Malkat Ha-Yofi be-Erets Israel Ke-Emtsai Le-Gibush Toda'ah Tsionit [The Beautiful Nadra and her Spectacular Profile: Ceremonies of the Beauty Queen in Erets Israel as a Mode of Forming Zionist Consciousness]', *Israel, Ḥovrot* 19–18 (Winter 2011): 31–63.

Jewish[24] Tsabari, in which she argues that the inclusion of Yemeni women within Zionist beauty pageants served to enshrine the Yemeni ethnic 'ideal' while also inspiring Yemeni collaboration with Zionism. [25] Unlike Shoham and Stern, Jewish Studies scholar Nina Spiegel devoted the first chapter of *Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine* to all the Jewish beauty queens of Tel Aviv between the years 1926 and 1931, arguing that the lack of aesthetic or physically expressed racial cohesion amongst the queens reflected the ethnic confusion of the Zionist establishment. Spiegel also concludes that the cessation of the tradition of the pageants set a precedent for religious dominance in the future Israeli state.[26]

While I draw upon the scholarship of Plach, Shoham, Stern, and Spiegel, my analysis departs from their studies in three key ways. My first intervention is my transnational understanding of Jewish identity (which I will expand upon in a later section of this introduction), through which I consider the development of the 'new, Hebrew' woman as a phenomenon that occurred across geographical boundaries, including Jews from Asia, Europe, Oceania, and America.[27] By doing so, I will prove that creating the Jewish nation and fashioning its women's (and its men's) bodies was not a process that was limited by space. Despite its geographical translations and adaptations, the Zionist movement necessarily implicated the bodies of *all* Jews in Central Europe, Palestine, and even

[24] From this point on, the term 'Yemeni' will imply Yemeni-Jewish.
[25] Bat-Sheva Margalit Stern, 'Who's the Fairest of Them All? Women, Womanhood, and Ethnicity in Zionist Eretz Israel', *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 11 (2006): 142–63.
[26] Nina S. Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), http://muse.jhu.edu/book/23025. I also am aware that an article on the Miss Judaea pageants that I do not have access to exists: Izolda Kiec, 'Pomóżcie? Nie Pozwólcie Zabijać? O Wyborach Miss Judea w 1929 Roku', no. 3–4 (n.d.): 2020 April. Also, there is an unpublished paper that I do not have access to by Emma Zohar, "'Who Is the Fairest of Them All?' Jewish Beauty Pageant in Interwar Poland", workshop *Picturing Jewish Dress*, Max Planck Institute Berlin, 28 October 2020.
[27] I argue for the integration of Israel Studies with Jewish Studies, as the Jewish history of Palestine is by no means exceptional or incomparable to that of the diaspora.

beyond. Secondly, my thesis considers the pageants as prisms through which to analyse the historical transformation of women's bodies into sites of negotiation of the gendered, racial, and national anxieties of Ashkenazi men, particularly regarding the belonging of *all* Jews to Palestine.[28] Thirdly, my thesis introduces the settler-colonial dimensions of Zionism, which Plach, Shoham, Stern, and Spiegel have thus far neglected, into scholarly consideration precisely because ignoring colonialism and Palestinian Arabs means that any analysis of constructing the new, Zionist woman is completely devoid of geopolitical context. Settler-colonialism informed the internal self-fashioning of Jewish Zionists, who saw themselves in competition with the local Palestinian Arabs over, amongst other things, nativity to the land and ownership of it.

Primary Sources

To conduct my analysis of the pageants of Tel Aviv, Warsaw, and beyond, I have relied heavily upon digitised archives of the Jewish press in Poland, Palestine, the United States, Canada, and Australia, as well as supplemental archival material, digital or otherwise, in Polish, Hebrew, and English from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the National Library of Poland, the National Library of Israel, the Lavon Institute for Labour Research, and the Municipal Archives of Tel Aviv-Yafo.[29]

In my thesis, I draw primarily upon *Nasz Przegląd* [*Our Review*], a Polish-language Zionist daily that orchestrated and hosted the Miss Judaea pageants, to reconstruct my historical narrative of

[28] The term Ashkenazi refers to Jews from *Ashkenaz*, or the medieval Hebrew term used to refer to Jews of the Rhine valley. Many Ashkenazim, the plural form of Ashkenazi, moved eastwards in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries into what is today Central and Eastern Europe.

[29] My access to the digitised Jewish press was made possible by the Judaica Division of the Harvard University Library, the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, the Goldrich Family Foundation, the Forward Association, Columbia University, New York University, MaRLI: Manhattan Research Library Initiative, the New York Public Library, the Jerusalem Post, Professor. Ronald W. Zweig, Haaretz Ownership Group, the Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labour Research, the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage, the National Library of Poland, the National Library of Australia, and the National Library of Israel.

Miss Judaea, which is supplemented by minimal coverage in the monthly periodical *Naród* [*Nation*].[30] The paper was born out of Jakub Appenszlak's frustration with his Jewishness serving as an obstacle to pursuing a career in the Polish press. Turning to Zionism as a solution to his professional humiliation, he and Natan Szwalbe, a fellow secular Zionist, co-established Poland's first Jewish, Polish-language daily in 1923, and it continued to publish up until the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939.[31] The paper, explicitly Zionist in its politics, oriented itself toward middle- and upper-class Polish-Jewry. Though, even in its name, the daily fashioned itself as a voice of *all* Polish Jews.

To explore the Queen Esther pageants of Palestine, I draw upon a variety of Hebrew-language newspapers that covered the pageants, including the urban, bourgeois daily *Ha-Arets* [*The Land*] (1918-present), the socialist-leaning daily *Davar* [*Word*] (1925-1983), and the anti-socialist, sensational daily *Do'ar ha-Yom* [*The Daily Mail*] (1919-1940), amongst others. Consulting the English-language press of Palestine, I have also turned to *The Palestine Bulletin* (1925-1932), a Zionist-Jewish paper that published in Jerusalem. Unlike in Poland, the Zionist press of Palestine was perhaps less invested in the discursive debates surrounding beauty and race in the pageants, but nonetheless reported on the beauty queens' soirees and Purim processions. The Jewish press in Palestine, which also took notice of the Queen Esther pageants in North America and Australia, treated the phenomenon of Zionist pageantry as a universally Jewish matter. I also draw upon the

[30] *Naród* was a Polish-language, Zionist monthly periodical that was published between 1928 and 1930, edited by the historian Jakub Zineman. For further reference, all translations from Polish and Hebrew into English are my own unless otherwise specified.

[31] For more on *Nasz Przegląd*, see Angela White, "Jewish Lives in the Polish Language: The Polish-Jewish Press, 1918-1939" (Indiana University, 2007).

Jewish press of the United States, Canada, and Australia, showing how the pageants were cultural texts read by Jews in varied national contexts.[32]

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework(s)

To ground my historical study of Zionist beauty pageants, I rely upon a synthesis of disciplines, including Gender Studies, Jewish Studies, and Nationalism Studies. In the last two decades, beauty pageants have made their way into the field of Gender Studies, largely in thanks to the work of Communication Studies scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser. In her book on the Miss America pageants, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*, Banet-Weiser writes that beauty pageants can be read as cultural texts in which "the meanings ascribed to individual and cultural identities are continually negotiated and often vehemently contested."[33] For Banet-Weiser, the pageant represents a "complicated arrangement of claims and embodies a variety of nationalist expressions: it is a civic ritual … and it is a mass mediated spectacle" in which gender is performed in service of the nation.[34] Further, she argues that national beauty pageants inherently mediate notions of gender and nation as well as race, which she considers as dynamic "interconstitutive categories."[35] Addressing the popular element of pageantry, she contends that popular culture is "simultaneously conventional and unpredictable," informed by material reality and also infused with fantasy and whimsy.[36] My study, concerned with the synchronous negotiation of gender and peoplehood as well as how fantasy played its role in imagining the

[32] For instance, I draw upon *The Australian Jewish Chronicle* (1922-1931), *The Australian Jewish Herald* (1921-1955), *The Australian Jewish News (Melbourne)* (1935-1999), *B'nai B'rith Messenger* (1898-1977), and *The Jewish Daily Bulletin* (1924-1935).
[33] Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), "Introduction."
[34] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*. "Introduction."
[35] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*. "Introduction."
[36] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*. "Introduction."

Jewish nation, adopts Banet-Weiser's theoretical framing of the beauty pageant as a nationalist ritual.

Though Banet-Weiser's methods are different from my own in that she relies on ethnographic methods while I draw upon archival research, her work serves as my theoretical guide to beauty pageantry. Through reading the press and analysing the discourses of beauty and national representation for Zionists of the 1920s, I demonstrate how the pageants transformed into public rituals and spectacles through which urban Zionists could confront contradictions within their own national (or transnational) milieu, striving to find a feminine model of Hebrew or Judaic authenticity. Taking Banet-Weiser's lead, I have considered beauty pageants as sites in which gender, race, and nation are performed in intimate conversation with one another.

My gendered analysis of the historical pageants is in large part indebted to the revolutionary work of the feminist historian Joan Scott. In 1986, Scott challenged Western feminist historiography by arguing that gender, what she terms as a "constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" that is a "primary way of signifying relationships of power," must be employed as an analytical category of any feminist historian to better understand diverse phenomena.[37] While some have challenged her thesis as universalizing, it is nonetheless relevant to my thesis which analyses the interconnected processes of constituting Zionist femininity and masculinity.[38]

[37] Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75, https://doi.org/10.2307/1864376.
[38] Jeanne Boydston, 'Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis', *Gender & History* 20, no. 3 (2008): 558–83, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2008.00537.x.

I am also informed by the works of Migration Studies scholar Nira Yuval-Davis, sociologist Floya Anthias, and historian George Mosse, which consider gender, race, and nation as converging elements that constitute one another.[39] Inspired by their scholarship, I argue that the Zionist pageants negotiated gender, race, and nation by using women's bodies as sites onto which men (and to a lesser extent, women) could project their anxieties, hopes, and even their fantasies. Further, I consider race and nation in the context of Jewish nationalism of the 1920s as closely interrelated phenomena that were often understood synonymously.

Broadening my idea of 'nation,' I draw upon the work of Khachig Tölölyan, an Armenian-American scholar and founder of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, who proposed a transnational understanding of diaspora in the inaugural edition of that very journal. Expanding upon historian Benedict Anderson's paradigmatic conception of the nation as an imagined [political] community,[40] Tölölyan defines transnational peoples as groups of real yet imagined which are "fabulated, brought into being, made and unmade, in culture and politics, both on land people call their own and in exile."[41] He also defines "Diasporan" existence as involving a "re-turn," or "a repeated turning to the concept and/or the reality of the homeland and other diasporan kin through memory, written and visual texts..."[42] My thesis, which also will rely on

[39] George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020); Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman-Nation-State*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-349-19865-8; Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Gender and Nation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 4 (1 October 1993): 621–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1993.9993800; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 1st ed. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997).

[40] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[41] Khachig Tölölyan, 'The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 3–7, https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1991.0008, 3.

[42] Khachig Tölölyan, 'Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies 5*, no. 1 (1996): 3–36, https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.1996.0000, 14.

Anderson's theoretical conception of the nation as an imagined community, will borrow Tölölyan's vocabulary through which to describe Diaspora communities, as imagined transnational groups. I argue that the Jewish Diaspora, as a splintered yet connected historical and spiritual body, as an *am* (עם), constitutes a *trans*nation, a collectivity of people that are united by bonds that precede the modern, nationalistic framing of nationality. As such, Tölölyan's conceptual understanding of 'transnation' has inspired this thesis's framing of Jewish history as a history that, despite its expansiveness and diversity, is connected by a transnational thread.

My thesis also adapts – rather than adopts – certain vocabularies established by the Palestinian scholar Edward Said in his seminal 1978 book *Orientalism*.[43] Without suggesting that the mechanism of Orientalism wholly describes the racial politics of the Zionist pageants and the development of urban, Zionist physical culture, I will consider how different manifestations of Orientalist aesthetics of the 'exotic East' played a role in the multi-factored processes by which Zionist peoplehood was negotiated. Of course, this thesis takes into account that Jewish Zionists were not a monolith, nor were the political and aesthetic orientations of Jews of the same ethnic, religious, and national groups homogenous and easily categorizable – not all Ashkenazi Zionists of middle-class Tel Aviv shared a stable, coherent narrative. In the case of this thesis, the East versus West divide remains unstable.

At the same time, Milica Bakić-Hayden's 1995 concept of "nesting Orientalisms" in which she argued for a liminal, gradated understanding of reproductions and translations of Said's Orientalism in former Yugoslavia has been successfully adapted to Jewish studies.[44] Magdalena

[43] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th anniversary edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
[44] Milica Bakić-Hayden, 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 917–31, https://doi.org/10.2307/2501399.

Kozłowska cleverly applies Bakić-Hayden's theory to her analysis of interwar Polish Jewish travellers' writings regarding their encounters with North-African Jewish communities. Kozłowska explains that her subjects - Polish Jewish travellers - were considered Oriental by ethnic Polish standards because of their Jewishness.[45] Within the European Jewish context, Polish Jews were considered to be in closer proximity to the 'Orient' than Western Jews. However, their journeys farther east, as Kozłowska argues, reinforced the wealthier and mostly Zionist-leaning travellers' Europeanness, allowing them to Orientalise, or objectify as an exotic 'other,' their Middle Eastern and North African coreligionists. Inspired by Kozłowska's adaptation of Bakić-Hayden, my thesis will consider how different Jews at different points in time moved through the binaries set forth by Said.

Further, as my thesis is concerned with bodies and their historical and national resonances, I am guided by the work of the philosopher Michel Foucault, who revolutionarily asserted that the body which was "directly involved in the political field" *did* in fact have a history. [46] Though Foucault's scholarship is concerned with the inextricable relationship between the body and biopower/biopolitics, the body is a relevant site of academic analysis of a diversity of modern and contemporary phenomena, particularly nationalism. The feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's theoretical notions of emotionally charged or "sticky" objects,[47] as it was interpreted by Tuuli Lähdesmäki and Sigrid Kaasik-Krogerus's chapter on embodied European cultural heritage informs my thinking about beauty pageants as technologies that transform bodies into "body-

[45] Magdalena Kozłowska, 'East Sees East: The Image of Jews from Islamic Countries in the Jewish Discourse of Interwar Poland', *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, no. 1 (2018): 114–27. On European Jews and claiming 'Oriental' identity in Arieh Bruce Saposnik, 'Europe and Its Orients in Zionist Culture before the First World War', *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 4 (2006): 1105–23.
[46] Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 25.
[47] Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', *Social Text*, 22, no. 2 (2004): 117–39.

objects," or historical artefacts that are infused with processes of narrative interpretations of a national past and future.[48]

As I will display in the following chapters of my thesis, the use of women's bodies as spectacular, symbolic sites of inquiry allowed urban Zionists to negotiate their understandings of embodiments of gender, race, and nation. The pageants allowed Jews, a (trans)nation broken apart by tens of centuries of exile, dispersion, and at times, persecution, to begin to *see* themselves as a nation just like any other. Through the politically and emotionally charged bodies of the pageant queens, interwar Jewish men and women could begin to imagine their ancient Judaic past and visualise the future, visually reinforcing Herzl's assertion that "We are a people — *one* people."[49]

Thesis Outline

I have structured my thesis into three chapters that move through the story of the pageants both thematically and chronologically. While I am aware that subjectivities such as gender, race, class, and even religiosity are not stable nor are they necessarily distinguishable, the first chapter of my thesis focuses on gender, outlining ideas of femininity and masculinity that left their marks on European-Jewish men and set the stage for the masculinist ideology of Zionism and the emphasis on virile corporeality. Drawing upon the Zionist press, I argue that the deeply gendered beauty competitions of Tel Aviv (1926-1929) and Warsaw (1929) played an essential role in the political and national construction of national narratives about time and gendered bodies. More so, I

[48] Tuuli Lähdesmäki et al., 'Bodies in European Cultural Heritage', 2020, 187–216, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429053542-13, 189.
[49] Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, trans. Sylvie d'Avigdor and Jacob M. Alkow (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 5. Emphasis my own.

contend that the Jewish woman was transformed into a "body-object"[50] that embodied past and present, *re*turn and *re*generation.

My second chapter focuses on the gendered aspects of visualising Jewish race and nationhood through negotiating these very phenomena via the platform of pageantry. I consider how ideas about Sephardi Jews,[51] 'Semitic' identity, Yemeni Jews, Western Europeans, and Palestinian Arabs were drawn upon to curate how the regenerated Jewish nation would *look* after their return to their 'homeland.' I argue that the ambiguous negotiation between these different aesthetic ideals reflected the transnational European-Zionist balancing act between claiming native authenticity while also emulating (Western) European national models of 'modernity' and 'statehood.'

The final analytical chapter of my thesis pivots in time frame and turns to 1929 as an ending point for the Miss Judaea and Queen Esther pageants of Tel Aviv. I consider the criticism of the beauty pageants from political and religious standpoints and broader historical events, including the stock market crash of 1929 and the unrest in Palestine in the summer of that year to argue that the aforementioned factors compounded to render Zionist pageantry in Warsaw and Tel Aviv untenable after 1929. My chapter then geographically and temporally departs from the body of my thesis by positing that the spread of Zionist beauty competitions to Jewish communities in the anglophone so-called New World, or in the United States, Canada, and Australia between the years of 1928 and 1977 indicated that the project of embodying 'new Hebrew' femininity was not limited to only two national contexts. My geographical and temporal expansion serves to concretise one

[50] Lähdesmäki et al., *Creating and Governing Cultural Heritage*.
[51] 'Sephardi,' in the way in which I use the term, refers to Jews who descended from the Spanish-Iberian diaspora. In the fifteenth century, most Sephardi Jews were expelled from Spain and later Portugal and moved to North Africa, South-Eastern Europe, and West Asia.

of the main contentions of my thesis: the negotiation of Jewish national identity was (and still is) transnational.

1 - Judaic Gender: Constructing Hebrew Womanhood from the Old-New Land to Polin

"I understand," said Friedrich thoughtfully. "In your New Society every man may live and be happy in his own way."

"Every man and every woman," said Sarah.

***

"I admire a woman who remains obediently behind her lattice. On a morning like this, ladies."

"Isn't it delightful?' beamed Sarah. 'Spring days like these come nowhere but in Palestine. Life has a better savor [sic.] here than anywhere else."[52]

Encountering Jewish Beauty

The date was the 1st of March 1926. *Ha-Arets* announced that the raven-haired Lilia Rosenthal-Tcherkov, the first Queen Esther of Tel Aviv, took her throne at the Purim processions days before, marking a new tradition that would be followed for several years thereafter.[53] A month prior, on the Jewish new year of the trees (Tu bi-Shvat), *Ha-Arets* reported that "in Tel Aviv, Queen Esther, who had been kept buried in the *megillah* (religious scroll) for many years, will come back to life."[54] This *megillah*, set in the Persian capital of Shushan, took place far from the land of Israel. Choosing to symbolically resurrect this biblical, Persian-Jewish and - if I may allow myself to transplant the rather anachronistic concept of hybrid identities[55] onto Hadassah - thus diasporic, Baruch Agadati, the mastermind of spectacles and culture in Tel Aviv, and the pageant organisers subconsciously affirmed an ideology that the Jews of the diaspora, or of the dispersion (*golah*) as

[52] Quotes taken from Theodor Herzl, *Altneuland*, trans. D. S. Blondheim, Essential Texts of Zionism (United States: Federation of American Zionists, 1916).
[53] 'Purim Be-Tel Aviv [Purim in Tel Aviv]', *Ha-Arets*, 1 March 1926, 4.
[54] 'Etmol Be-Tel Aviv [Yesterday in Tel Aviv]', *Ha-Arets*, 29 January 1926, 3. All translations from Hebrew and Polish into English are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[55] See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2004), 110–14.

opposed to exile (*galut*), were inseparably linked. Diaspora and Israel were one story: Jewish, Hebrew, or Judaic, but nonetheless united by a single thread. Looking to the glorious Jewish past, the secular intellectuals of Tel Aviv selected a Jewish woman, Esther, who despite being the perfect literary and religious link between Jewish tradition and pageantry, was women of diaspora, of exile to represent their future beauty queen, also reflecting temporal, and in this case, spatial blurring. This blurring, which was perhaps intentional, cemented the inextricability of diaspora and homeland, binding the book of Jewish history and collective memory into one, united volume. The language used to describe the pageant of 1926 emphasised resurrection, or the manipulation of chronology to return to (a fantasy of) what once was, transforming the female body into a vessel of nostalgia.

That thread travelled across the vast diaspora, landing in Poland, when on one of the last days of March 1929, a Miss Judaea, queen of the Jews, was appointed. The newly anointed Miss Judaea, known by her pseudonym (or as scholar Edward Portnoy jokes, 'judonym')[56] Judyta, also known as Zofja Oldakówna, was both Polish and transnationally Jewish, representing the coreligionists of her country and of the world. [57] As such, in line with the ideology of the pageants of Tel Aviv that implicitly advocated for an understanding of a pan-Jewish story, this chapter too will consider the history of Zionist Jews across borders and turn to interwar East-Central Europe. In Poland as well as in Palestine, male, Zionist intellectuals sought to locate an embodiment of ideal and typical Jewish femininity through beauty pageantry. Cloaked in fur with her dark hair tied back in the modern fashion, the pageant queen Oldakówna asserted herself as a modern, Polish citizen and as

[56] Portnoy, *Bad Rabbi*, 129.
[57] 'Wybór "Miss Judaei" [The Election of "Miss Judaea"]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 29 March 1929, 6.

a European woman who was at the same time explicitly, unabashedly 'Jewish.' She thus represented an idea of how Jewish Poles appeared in the Polish imagination: Semitic, Eastern, and decidedly 'othered,' while also asserting herself as European. Oldakówna's pride in her corporeal form, highlighted by the editors of *Nasz Przegląd*, was hoped by the Warsaw elite to encourage Jewish women to fondly recall and reclaim their own glorious, ancient lineage, carving out a space for femininity in the Zionist movement. As a woman, she symbolised the inclusion of the so-called fairer sex in one of the most radical movements amongst European Jewry of the time: Zionism, or the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. She also asserted that Zionism had space for feminine beauty *and* masculinity, the 'Holy Land' *and* diaspora, past *and* future.

Figure 1 Zofja 'Judyta' Oldakówna published in *Nasz Przegląd*, 23 February 1929.

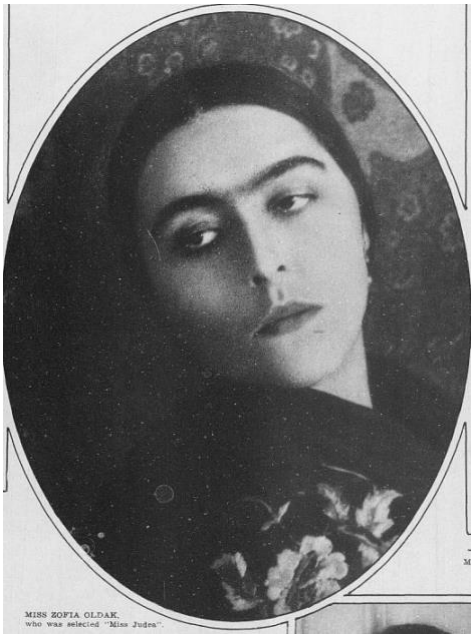

Figure 2 Oldakówna photographed by Alter Kaczyna and published *Forverts*, 28 April 1929.

Curating Zionist beauty, thus, was a matter of national interest that implicated the bodies, minds, and emotions of all Zionist Jews. Tel Aviv and Warsaw, two cities that, during the interwar period, hosted and encouraged the construction and reconstruction of Jewish and national identities, attempted to iterate a bourgeois Zionist ideal that was contrary yet complementary to the labour-focused Zionism of the mainstream. As I will argue, mainstream Zionism prioritised masculine aesthetics in reaction to European claims that Jewish men were degenerate, racially and sexually. The negotiation of a Zionist ideal for bourgeois women, whether in Tel Aviv or in Warsaw, also responded directly to antisemitic understandings of the male, Jewish body, attempting to debase anti-Jewish thought regarding degenerate Jewish corporeality and provide a model of a noble Jewish, or rather Hebrew and Judaic, woman. Her nobility hearkened back to an ancient past but also served as a symbol to her national and global coreligionists that the Jews could, would, and perhaps already did, regenerate and come to embody ideal manifestations of gender. She asserted to her Jewish sisters that they could be Zionists *and* womanly, not having to sacrifice their femininity for the national cause. The middle-class Zionist woman, as such, could evoke the glory of her Semitic roots and her Western modernity to participate in the process of (trans)national regeneration.

While these two sets of pageants discussed above occurred on different continents, they both took place in what were critical centres of urban Zionism and Zionist cultural production.[58] When considered in tandem, a study of these pageants will allow us to examine how notions of Zionist femininity was constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed across borders, as this chapter seeks

[58] On Zionist Warsaw and Tel Aviv, see Rona Yona, 'From Russia to Palestine via Poland: The Shifting Centre of Interwar Labour Zionism', *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 4 (November 2021): 513–27, https://doi.org/10.1017/S096077732100031X. While she is focused on Yiddish and Hebrew-speaking Zionists in the Polish context, her assertion that interwar Warsaw was a centre of Zionism stands.

to do. By examining how bourgeois Zionists attempted to create a mainstream model for Jewish women to follow in both Jewish Palestine and the global Jewish diaspora,[59] we may be able to grasp the intricate set of historical processes of the fashioning of a national, Jewish femininity that contains within it elements of 'old' and 'new,' of ancient past and aspirational future.

This chapter, interested in the aesthetics of bodily 'old-newness' as an expression of Jewish gender, will interrogate Zionist imaginings of pastness, futurity, and the present as displayed by these pageants. To do so, I will first explore the gendered development of Jewish national time in Europe, both in its masculine and feminine contexts, drawing upon Zimbabwean-South African feminist scholar Anne McClintock's theorisation on the construction of South African Boer temporality to understand how Zionist femininity in service of the nation was constructed.[60] Drawing upon the rich body of Polish-language press and slightly-less rich Hebrew press in Palestine,[61] I will then consider how bourgeois, urban (as opposed to pioneering and agricultural) Zionist men, and to an extent, women, of interwar Tel Aviv and Warsaw, crafted their ideal national representation against the backdrop of antisemitic perceptions, Jewish anachronism, and deviant Jewish male femininity. After briefly discussing the structural organisation of the Polish and Palestinian pageants, I will describe how the development of a feminine, Jewish aesthetic interplayed with the imagination of national time, making Jewish women into body-objects of diachronism and of anachronism, both of the past and of the present, representing a promise of a regenerated, Zionist future.

[59] I suggest, however, that these Zionist intellectuals mostly appealed to Ashkenazi-Jewish women, beyond the Palestinian context.
[60] Anne McClintock, 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', *Feminist Review*, no. 44 (1993): 61–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/1395196.
[61] As I mentioned in my introduction, the Zionist press of Palestine devoted less space to the beauty pageants than that of Poland.

This chapter also sets forth the argument that there is perhaps no better example of the artistic cultivation and negotiation of Zionist gender, ethnicity, and time than the interwar beauty pageants of Tel Aviv (1926-1929) and Warsaw (1929). While both pageants served different functions within their specific geographical contexts, they also contended with aesthetically representing Zionist 'old-newness' as embodied by Jewish women. I argue that these pageants are marked by gender, and that their gendered nature can tell us much about the role of gender in the political process that was (and is) nation-building of a people scattered across the world. To contextualise the particular role that gender played in the creation of the pageants and in the broader Zionist political movement, I will consider the historical centrality of ideas regarding gender and gender subversion that shaped the male European-Jewish understanding of gender and set the stage for the masculinist regime of modern Zionism and muscular Judaism. Then, I will highlight how gender was an essential component of imagining European Zionism and the promise of Jewish redemption. While this chapter will focus on gender as a sole axis of analysis for the interwar pageants, I am aware that national time, race, gender, and settler colonialism do not exist in vacuums and thus, I will interrogate their enmeshment in the following chapters.

Jews and Gender: A Very Brief History

As masculinity and femininity are constituted in relation to one another, any analysis of Jewish femininity must incorporate constructs of masculinity, and vice versa. Jews, or more specifically, Jewish men of the Christian world, were long considered to be living anachronisms. In the twelfth century, the theologian Joachim of Fiore wrote that "*noluerunt ipsi Judaei mutari cum tempore*,"[62] or Jews are a people who reject time, refusing to evolve.[63] Jewish men of Christian Europe were

[62] Thank you to my colleague Abdullah Mirzah for his assistance in translating Latin to Modern English.
[63] See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (University of California Press, 1993), 77-79 for arguments against the perception of Jews as anachronistic in the modern era. Also see Amos Funkenstein, 'Changes in the

thought to be deviant, whether theologically, sexually, biologically, racially, and also in the context of this chapter, temporally. For instance, medieval and early Modern European theology propagated the myth that Jewish men menstruated. Though this myth may not have been universally believed, it contributed to a cultural attitude that saw the Jewish male body as sexually and biologically perverse, which was later attributed to its perceived racialisation.[64] I contend that anti-Jewish theology, which informed *völkisch* and scientific hatred of Jews, is connected to nineteenth- and twentieth-century European treatment of the Jews as a bodily 'other,' representative of backwardness and degeneracy.

Jewish men in modern Europe were also considered to be a people trapped in books, not living in the present nor possessing a romantic past rooted in land. As Jewish men were generally barred from professions requiring labour of the land and were often associated with traditional Ashkenazic practices of religious study, and later, of secular study, they were dually read by Christian Europeans as a cerebral people stuck in ancient texts, not productive citizens interested in promoting imperial or national futurity. This assumption of Jewish male anachronism was thus directly related to antisemitic perceptions of Jewish male femininity. While much has been written about the antisemitic feminising of the Jewish male body,[65] the Jewish-born Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger's antisemitic misogyny remains a noteworthy example of the European

Patterns of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the 12th Century / Ha-Tmurot Be-Vikuaḥ Ha-Dat She-Ben Yehudim Le-Notsrim Be-Me'ah Ha-Yud"Bet', *Zion* 23, no. 3/4 (1968): 125–44, and Cecil Reid, *Jews and Converts in Late Medieval Castile: Breaking with the Past* (Routledge, 2021). For a discussion of the notion of Jewish anachronism in Christian theology. However, I hold that the traces of Christian theology that saw Jews as archaic or biological embodiments of subverted time penetrated Christian culture and European-Jewish understandings of the self.

[64] See Irven M. Resnick, 'Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses', *The Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 3 (2000): 241–63. and Jonathan Dentler, 'Sexing the Jewish Body: Male Menstruation Libel and the Making of Modern Gender', *Columbia Academic Commons*, 2009, https://doi.org/10.7916/D8H420D6.

[65] See Presner, *Muscular Judaism*; Gluzman, *Ha-Guf Ha-Tsiyoni*; Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*; Davison, *Jewishness and Masculinity*.

feminisation of Jewish men. In 1903, the same year in which he took his own life, Weininger wrote that "the Jew, like the woman, is wanting in personality…and [does] not associate as [a] free independent individual."[66] This statement would not have come as a surprise to European-Jewish men, who were so often emasculated by antisemites. The promise that Zionist statehood would prove that the Jewish nation was not a nation of "sissies," as Boyarin writes,[67] and womanly men, but rather, a nation of virility; it was so powerful precisely *because* it played to Zionist male anxieties regarding gender and sexuality.[68] Like women, Jewish men were atavistic, out of place. Like "men," Zionists would thus reclaim their masculine, progressive nature and establish themselves as brothers of a modern nation.

The feminising of 'othered' men by men of the dominant class is not unique to the Jewish context, however. Mrinalini Sinha, a historian of modern South Asia and of the British Empire, argues that the disparaging of the masculinity of colonised men by colonising men was a pointed tactic to secure colonial rule. Her book, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, makes the case for a theorisation of colonial masculinity that considers that the emasculation of Bengali men was essential to the British Imperial project's dominance in colonial Bengal.[69] While the historical relationship of ethnic European men to Jewish men living within Europe's borders could not be classified as colonial *per se*, Sinha's study

[66] Otto Weininger's "The Jew Must Free Himself from Jewishness" translated in Paul R Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 817.
[67] Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*.
[68] While it is not within the scope of this thesis to deal with Zionist sexuality, I am aware that sexuality does absolutely play a role in the construction of new, Hebrew masculinity.
[69] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526123640.

of the tactics of hegemonic masculinity can apply to the Jewish context, in which Jewish men were othered and their masculinity was called into question, as evidenced by the above.

I have thus far granted much attention to masculinity because I believe that we cannot fully grasp Zionist femininities without understanding the complicated process that was (and is) engendering Zionist gender. Antisemitic beliefs about Jewish men, as fittingly summarised by the antisemitic polemics of Weininger, shaped Jewish-Zionist understandings of the self and beliefs about gender and sexuality.[70] Cultural studies scholar Ann Pellegrini writes that, "[i]n the collapse of Jewish masculinity into an abject femininity, the Jewish female seems to disappear."[71] To add to Pellegrini's assertion, I also argue that in the Zionist emphasis on the reconstruction of a virile, masculinist Jewish national body, the Zionist woman's body faded into the margins of historiography. In what follows, I endeavour to examine these margins, reintroducing women and gender beyond masculinity to retellings of the transformation of Zionist body culture and affected gender expressions, examining different Jewish experiences to make sense of the fluid and changeable texture of Jewish biculturalism, collective identity, and conceptions of national belonging, or of 'homeland.'

Gender and the Nation: Becoming Hebrew Men and Women

Gender was an essential aspect of *fin-de-siècle* and twentieth-century Zionist ideology. Zionism offered Jewish men, who had suffered under the social weight of perceived emasculation, a solution to their gender melancholia through fitness and regeneration. The Pest-born physician Nordau, who alongside Herzl co-founded the first ever World Zionist Organisation, was one of the

[70] Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 817.
[71] Ann Pellegrini, *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 28.

most vocal commentators on the Zionist regime of masculinity and virility.[72] Nordau is most famously known for his belief that Jewish 'degeneracy' could be remedied through fitness, coining the term "*Muskeljude*," or "muscle Jew" at the Second Zionist Congress in 1898.[73] The muscle Jew refused the antisemitic, degenerative portrait of Jews as a racialised, feminine other. He rejected the weak and slight constitution thrust upon Jews due to "a thousand years of confinement to the ghetto."[74] In his 1903 "Jewry of Muscle," Nordau implored Jewish men to embody the 'authentic,' ancient Jewish physique, writing: "Let us take up our oldest traditions; let us once more become deep-chested, sturdy, sharp-eyed men."[75] He suggested that gymnastics "shall straighten us in body and in character," continuing that "it shall give us self-confidence … in our physical prowess."[76] Speaking exclusively to men, the ideology of muscular Judaism that permeated the Zionist movement signalled that the Jewish nation would re-masculinise Jewish men, leaving women on the sidelines of national aesthetic transformations.

While it was clear that the body, or rather, the regeneration of it, was a central aspect of political Zionism, the position of women, and especially femininity, was hazy. There was hardly any room for women in the national project of Jewish bodily regeneration. As I discussed in the introduction, the bodies of scholarship on Zionism and gender thusly focus almost exclusively on (European) Jewish men and their masculinity, largely neglecting Zionist femininities and womanly embodiments of the 'new' Jewish nation.[77]

[72] The Jewish Agency for Israel, 'Reclaiming the Physical Jew', Jewish Agency, 19 July 2005, https://archive.jewishagency.org/sports/content/26559.
[73] Presner, *Muscular Judaism*, 1.
[74] Max Nordau's "Jewry of Muscle" translated in Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 616.
[75] Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 616.
[76] Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 616.
[77] See for instance Presner, *Muscular Judaism*; Tamar Mayer, 'From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism', in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 283–307; Gluzman, *Ha-Guf Ha-Tsiyoni*.; Davison, *Jewishness and Masculinity*; Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*.

However, it could be argued that Herzl did provide a model for the new, Zionist woman in his imagining of Zionism's gendered horizons.[78] This chapter began with two quotes from that very guidebook, Herzl's 1902 novel *Altneuland*, which can be read as a gender utopia symbolising the Jewish man's reclaiming of his virility and rejection of his inflictions, both physical *and* mental.[79] Friedrich, the Jewish-Viennese hero of the story, is inflicted with melancholy. Only when he sees the success of Jewish settlements in Palestine does he discover his sense of pride in his Jewish identity and his masculinity, as well as his heterosexuality. Jewish manhood, per an interpretation of Herzl's novel, can only be fully regenerated and imagined through the realisation of Jewish statehood and national organising. As such, masculinity and gender are in its essence connected to subverted time, or 'old-newness.' Zionist masculinity relies on this very temporal amnesia. A critical reading of *Altneuland,* per my interpretation, can provide students of Zionism with an intimate insight into the historical imaginings of Jewish national time, in its biological and symbolic registers. Zionist men and women were tasked with embodying this dualistic national time, quite literally regenerating their very corpora to return to the fitness and beauty of their ancient ancestors while serving as bodily symbols of a Jewish future in Palestine to Zionists, Jews, and even non-Jews.

The quotations at the beginning of this chapter, exchanges between Friedrich and Sarah, protagonists of Herzl's work, are thus emblematic of the convoluted gender imagination of

[78] See Herzl's 1901 address to the Women's Zionist Association in Vienna [Wiener Zionistische Frauenverein], just a year before he published *Altneuland* in which he argues that women have not contributed significantly to Zionism. Historian Alison Rose discusses this in Alison Rose, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*, *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna*, 1st ed. (University of Texas Press, 2008), https://doi.org/10.7560/718616, 109—110.

[79] Gluzman, *Ha-Guf Ha-Tsiyoni*. 42–60. *Altneuland* translates into English as '*Old-New Land'* or into Hebrew as '*Tel Aviv*.'

Zionism, or of Jewish colonialism in Palestine.[80] As the Israeli literary scholar Gluzman points out in his 2007 book, *The Zionist Body: Nationalism, Gender and Sexuality in Modern Hebrew Literature*, *Altneuland* is not only a literary example of political utopia, but is also a fascinating case of an imagined utopia of sex, gender, and as I will argue, race and time.[81] Herzl's fictional work clearly identifies Jewish Palestine as a site of gender equality, in which women, like men, had the right to vote, to work, and to take an active and passive role in the national goals of the New Society. Yet, as seen above, the prose still demonstrates awareness of the social expectations of men and women. Gluzman argues that the work contains a dual understanding of modern *Jewish* women: on the one hand positioning them as more liberated and emancipated than Palestinian-Arab women (as shown by the sole Muslim, Palestinian-Arab, and woman character Fatma), but still womanly, domestic, and maternal, not virile and masculine like the male characters. This prescribed role for women served a dual function of normalising Jewish expressions of gender, reinforcing conventions of heterosexuality, and masculinising Jewish men, or in the words of Herzl, "len[ding] wings to the men's courage."[82]

As Gluzman and Boyarin argue,[83] the performance of distinct gender roles and heterosexuality asserts Jewish men as *men*, which I use to refer to an imagined manifestation of masculinity as upheld by dominant colonial powers of the early-twentieth century, above all. However, the woman of the Zionist imagination did not solely embody 'traditional'[84] femininity to affirm Jewish male masculinity. This sort of gender confusion or amnesia is typical of Zionism, a masculinist

[80] Herzl, *Altneuland*.
[81] Gluzman, *Ha-Guf Ha-Tsiyoni*.
[82] Herzl as quoted in Gluzman, *Ha-Guf Ha-Tsiyoni*, 41.
[83] Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*.; Gluzman, *Ha-Guf Ha-Tsiyoni*.
[84] By using the word traditional, I imply that I am referring to a hegemonic, Eurocentric understanding of 'traditional' womanhood, or a womanhood that is concerned with beauty and heterosexual desire.

ideology that struggles to locate its women within the national project.[85] In attempting to shed the feminine from the Jewish man's body, the Jewish woman's body remains a site of gender confusion, her femininity an unstable, constantly remodelled and refashioned phenomenon.

It is no mistake that the title of Herzl's renowned novel *Altneuland* and the name of the first 'Hebrew' city of Palestine (Tel Aviv) evoke language of temporal confusion and liminality. They are somewhere between old and new, which is coded as the dichotomous split between 'Semitic' and Western, Jewish, *and* modern. It is this 'old-newness' that I seek to examine in the following pages of this chapter. I will argue that the amnestic time of Zionists in Tel Aviv and Warsaw reflects the ambiguous, hybrid attitudes regarding Jewish femininity, masculinity, and in the following chapters, racial self-positioning. In attempting to craft a transnational, diasporic nation-state in a biblical era homeland that negated the "humiliation of the diaspora" or the antisemitism of the West, Zionist intellectuals and Jewish supporters alike had to enter a rather convoluted negotiation of national identity and aesthetics.

Gender Subversion for the Nation: Nonnormative Bodies of Women and Men in the Zionist Project

Urban, bourgeois Zionist men did not necessarily reflect the gender ideals of dominant forms of Zionism. In fact, urban Zionist culture as a whole was seen as a contradiction to the pioneering, agricultural values of Zionist ideology. Interwar Tel Aviv, as historian Anat Helman vividly paints in her book, *Young Tel Aviv: A Tale of Two Cities*,[86] was at once hyper-Zionist and contrary to Zionist ideology of pioneering and settling land. Helman depicts Tel Aviv as a hedonist, capitalist,

[85] Mayer, 'From Zero to Hero'.
[86] Anat Helman, *Young Tel Aviv: A Tale of Two Cities*, trans. Haim Watzman, 1st edition (Waltham (Mass.): Brandeis University Press, 2012).

and consciously urban space, somewhat at odds with the popular Zionist ethos of Hebrew labour and forging a connection between body and land.[87] Certainly, while not all residents of Tel Aviv were heterogeneous in their ethnic and economic backgrounds, nor could they be said to have shared a stable political or social identity, they were nonetheless read in opposition to the labour-focused, socialist ethos of Zionism.

For instance, historian Ari Ariel, for instance, identifies a relatively large movement of Yemeni Jews into Palestine, and more specifically, Jaffa.[88] Some of these immigrants came to form Kerem ha-Teimanim, a periphery neighbourhood between the Arab Jaffa and the European Tel Aviv, which eventually developed into an important centre of Yemeni political life in Palestine and a point of meeting with Tel-Avivian intelligentsia.[89] Local Yemeni Jews, between Helman's young Tel Aviv and Palestine's old Jaffa, would come to participate in urban Zionism, especially through Agadati's pageants.[90] As such, the Jewish residents of interwar Tel Aviv and Kerem ha-Teimanim fashioned their own brand of Zionism, as Helman displays, that embraced capitalism and nationalism, leisure, and service for the nation.

The city's elite cultural producers were intellectuals, artists, and writers, far from the Zionist ideal of the working, muscular, sun-kissed Hebrew man. In a sense, Tel Aviv offered men an alternate, bohemian mode of Jewish masculinity. The city also offered women a way in which to see themselves as New Jewesses, womanly in the hegemonic, twentieth-century Western

[87] Helman, *Young Tel Aviv*, 77.
[88] Ari Ariel, Jewish-Muslim Relations and Migration from Yemen to Palestine in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Brill's Series in Jewish Studies (Boston: Brill, 2014), 45, 46, 50, and 53.
[89] Abigail Jacobson, *Oriental Neighbors : Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine* (Waltham, Mass : Brandeis University Press, 2016), 131.
[90] See Stern, 'Who's the Fairest of Them All?'

understanding of gender. Tel Aviv was (and in some ways, still is) a utopia of bourgeois Zionist culture and gender, which may have seemed to be in opposition to traditional, rural Zionism, but was in fact its ideological complement or its urban translation.[91]

Warsaw's Zionists too, were seemingly acting in contradiction to the Zionist ethos of relocating (or returning) to Palestine to settle the land in rural workers' collectives.[92] Even more offensive to the pioneering spirit of Zionist ideology, perhaps, than the decadent Jewish Zionists of Tel Aviv, many Zionists of Warsaw did not abandon the diaspora for Palestine and maintained their support for the cause from a distance. They – the majority of the Zionist men involved in the pageants – did not return to the land and transform their bodies into masculine specimens as in the fantasies of Nordau. Rather, they stayed in Warsaw and maintained a middle-class lifestyle. Historian Kenneth B. Moss argues that Zionism in Warsaw existed as a "fairly small subculture"[93] which could be divided even further into subcultures. Though, he does affirm that Warsaw served as a "public stage for Jewish nationalism,"[94] and as a site of national fluidity in which different Jews explored their identity and politics.[95] Here, Polish plurality and relative freedom coexisted with societal and political antisemitism, allowing the incredibly diverse Jewish population of Warsaw to develop what the Jewish history scholar Samuel D. Kassow calls a strong sense of collective identification and national imagining.[96] Thus Warsaw, along with Tel Aviv, was not only an

[91] It is fascinating that in contemporary Israeli society, the tension between Tel Aviv and the agricultural Zionists of the periphery still exists.
[92] Kenneth B. Moss, 'Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw', in *Warsaw: The Jewish Metropolis*, ed. Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet, vol. 15, IJS Studies in Judaica (Brill, 2015), 390–434, https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004291812/B9789004291812_018.xml.
[93] Moss, 'Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw,' 391–92.
[94] Moss, 'Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw,' 399.
[95] Moss, 'Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw,' 434.
[96] Samuel D. Kassow, '"Oyf Der Yidisher Gas | On the Jewish Street, 1918-1939', in *POLIN: 1000 Year History of Polish Jews*, ed. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Antony Polonsky (Warsaw: Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 2014), 227–89, 227.

important centre of Zionist culture, but also of Jewish national negotiating and renegotiating. In many ways, the men of Warsaw and Tel Aviv themselves did not play by the norms of Zionist gender and attempted to carve out their own sets of norms for Zionist women through the adoption of beauty pageantry.

Women's bodies, as mentioned in the introduction, were often left out of the contemporaneous and scholarly conversations on Zionist male regeneration and fitness. As historian and Israel Studies scholar Julie Grimmeisen lays out in her 2017 article on Israeli-Jewish femininity post-1948, Israeli women were stuck between two national gender models: the masculine, shorts-wearing, land-working pioneer who was (in theory, though not in practice) equal to her male comrades; or the overtly-feminine, glamorous, dazzling beauty queen that would come to represent her nation in the style of Western, hegemonic, heterosexual femininity.[97] While Grimmeisen's article does not sufficiently probe the racialised and classed elements of such gender models, she succeeds in providing a helpful, albeit sometimes simplistic, framing of Jewish womanhood, or at least *how* Jewish womanhood *looked*, in early Israeli society. Jewish women of the latter half of the 1920s, whether in Palestine or Poland, contended with a similar dichotomy. Zionism, as a masculinising movement, overshadowed Jewish femininity in its attempt to bolster, or perhaps regenerate, Jewish masculinity.

As illustrated by the memoirs of Zionist female pioneers in the twentieth century collected in the 2002 book *The Plough Woman*, early women settlers struggled to locate a Zionist, feminine ethic

[97] Julie Grimmeisen, 'Halutzah or Beauty Queen? National Images of Women in Early Israeli Society', *Israel Studies* 20, no. 2 (2015): 27–52, https://doi.org/10.2979/israelstudies.20.2.27.

and aesthetic.[98] For instance, Batya Brenner's essay "I Become a Worker," composed sometime between 1915 and 1928, detailed the young labour Zionist's struggle to balance her femininity with her industriousness and use for the Zionist movement. She could neither embrace her long locks nor her pretty dresses, for she was seen as frivolous and vain. Yet, when she picked up her shovel and prepared to work, the men claimed that she was not fit to be a real, productive worker. The American *Forverts,* a Yiddish paper, in a 1928 photo-article, similarly depicted these women as "acting like men," rather than inventing their own colonial, pioneering version of Jewish or Zionist femininity.[99] These memoirs, concerned mostly with rural, working women, reflect the experiences of a certain type of Zionism, a relative of the dominant forms of Zionism in Tel Aviv and Warsaw, but not an exact replica. Though, urban women Zionists still had to orient themselves aesthetically within the masculinist, nationalist terrain, locating models of Zionist femininity.

There She Is, Miss Jewess: Pageants as an Interjection into the Gender Regime of Zionism

One of few ways that young, 'attractive' Zionist women found themselves able to participate in the negotiation of feminine interpretations of masculine Zionist aesthetics and broader conceptions of the Jewish nation, was through these interwar beauty pageants. Still, like many women involved in settler-colonial projects, Jewish women in support of Jewish colonisation of Palestine had to carve out their own, 'new' mode of feminine aesthetics. Unlike colonial women in settler colonies such as New Zealand or Australia, however, certain Jewish women did not and could not base their femininity on that of their home countries.[100] As social and racial outcasts in their (European) host

[98] *The Plough Woman: Records of the Pioneer Women of Palestine* in Kaplan and Penslar, *The Origins of Israel*.
[99] See 'Doing a Man's Job: Women in Various Branches of Industry, Formerly Monopolized by the "Strong Sex."', *Forverts*, 25 November 1928, sec. Art section.
[100] See Harriette Richards, 'Reading Lady Barker: Fashioning Femininity in Colonial New Zealand', *Antipodes* 31, no. 2 (2017): 291–304, https://doi.org/10.13110/antipodes.31.2.0291. for an example of a settler-colonial context in

countries,[101] their imitation of a modern femininity could not be an exact replication of hegemonic European or Arab feminine aesthetics. These women, as the Zionist belief of the Jewish origin story would have it, were *of* Palestine or *of* Erets Israel. They did not have to 'acclimate' themselves to the land, but rather 'reacclimate,' or 'return' to their ancient home. The femininity that they set out to construct, as such, reflected this ideological tension. New Jewish femininity was tasked with proving Jewish connection to the land, often by emphasising so-called Semitic features, and also with asserting itself as decidedly 'modern' or Western, far from any claims of degeneracy.

I argue that it can be helpful to think of the women both as actors *and* as artefacts, body-objects onto which men could project their nationalist fantasies and define their national boundaries. Male intellectuals negotiated their own national narratives and histories by using Jewish women as embodiments of the promise of continuity of a shared, Judaic past, whilst Jewish women, consciously or unconsciously, participated in that very negotiation. McClintock's framing of nationalist fetishism of women as symbols,[102] or in my words, embodiments, of anachronism aptly describes how the images of the queens Oldakówna, Rosenthal-Tcherkov, Chelouche, Tsabari, and Meyuḥas-Polani, and their very bodies, were transformed into "nationalist fetish objects"[103] via spectacles (like the Purim carnival or the public procession of Miss Judaea in Jewish Warsaw) or the distribution of their photographs.

which women constructed new settler femininities without the dimension of ethnic exclusion from their home countries, in this context, Great Britain.

[101] This was not necessarily the case for certain queens from the Muslim world, though they were still dhimmi and economic outcasts at the least.

[102] McClintock, 'Family Feuds'.

[103] McClintock, 'Family Feuds'.

Even the written and visual responses to the pageants were laden with sexuality. The prominent Yishuv journalist Uri Keisari described the "blush" of Tsabari's cheeks as "enhancing the beauty of the tanned skin of this blend of plums and apples that was her body and eyes," imbuing his description with subtle sexuality.[104] Of the "caressing eyes"[105] of Miriam Levinska, the runner-up to Tsabari, Keisari penned: "This was a maiden, that the ground beneath her, the skies, the sun worshipped her, dreamed of her in the night time. The waves of the sea serenaded her with love songs morning, noon, and evening."[106] While Miss Judaea was not subject to such written sexualisation by her supporters, her critics, or rather critics of Appenszlak's pageants, indicated that the men of the jury viewed her as a sexual object for consumption.[107] Clearly, sex and veneration of the past worked together to create 'body-objects' of these Zionist queens, allowing men, but also women, to *feel* pride in and desire for the nation. This patriarchal, nationalistic phenomenon of using women, or their bodies, to establish continuity with an imagined past and to naturalise invented national narratives is not at all unique to the Zionist context.[108] In this case, however, Zionists used beauty pageantry as a way of asserting a new, regenerated form of masculinity and of femininity that aesthetically countered supposed Jewish degeneracy. As arbiters of Jewish feminine beauty, Zionist men were able to objectify and consume young women, enforcing their role as dominant, heterosexual men.

Women too were active participants in the gender regime of Jewish nationalism. While some women, especially the Polonised women readers of *Nasz Przegląd*, lent their voices to this

[104] Uri Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther [From Esther to Esther]', *Kol-Noa*, 21 March 1932, Stacks 2=PA 42886, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, 66—67.
[105] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther'.
[106] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther'.
[107] See Portnoy, *Bad Rabbi*, 141. I will discuss the negative sexualization of Miss Judaea in greater detail in the third chapter.
[108] For instance, see Yuval-Davis and Anthias, *Woman-Nation-State*, 1–15.

negotiation, it is unclear if the young women who participated in the beauty pageants were totally conscious of their participation in the construction of Zionist gender. It is even harder to assume their motivations for entering the pageants, as quite lax regulations on pageant entry meant that many Jewish women across Poland could send in photos and apply to participate in the competition. For instance, the runner-up Liza Harkawi told reporters that "Admittedly, I'd always been quite fortunate amongst my friends, but I never thought that I had a chance to take part in a competition for the title of the most beautiful Jewess in Poland. It was only at the insistence of my friends that I decided to submit my photograph to 'Nasz Przegląd.'"[109] Still, even when potential queens submitted their photographs on a whim, I assume that they had some level of conscious (or subconscious) knowledge of their role in contributing to the creation of a Jewish national aesthetic, Polish or otherwise. Despite the ease of entering, the fact that most women selected to appear under biblical pseudonyms as opposed to their Polish names reflected, to an extent, an understanding of the nationalist ideology of the beauty pageants, where beauty was much more than skin deep.

For a period of two months, the paper published daily sets of photographs featuring half a dozen or so women, allowing its Jewish readership to consume their images. *Nasz Przegląd*'s readership, which Eva Plach estimates at a low of 21,000 to a high of 50,000 in 1929,[110] though as Chone Shmeruk puts forth in his study of the Polish-Jewish press, its casual readership would likely have been even higher by virtue of the paper's high circulation,[111] was clearly far-reaching. Over 20,000 households participated in the intra-Jewish competition, paying to send their votes through the

[109] 'Co Mówią Kandydatki Na "Miss Judaeę"? [What Do the Candidates for "Miss Judaea" Say?], *Nasz Przegląd*, 27 March 1929, 5.
[110] Plach, 'Introducing Miss Judaea,' 371.
[111] Chone Shmeruk, "Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture," in Gutman, Israel., Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz, and Chone Shmeruk, eds. *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*. The Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series; 10. Hanover and London: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1989, 303.

post. This participation meant that a significant percentage of the paper's readers were actively invested in taking part in the process of arbitrating a semi-coherent national entity by deciding which Jewesses would compete in the pageant's semi-final trial of Judaic beauty. As such, the women were made into spectacle objects by virtue of the sharing of their images with the Jewish masses of Poland.

In Tel Aviv, the pageants were not organised by the press but rather by the municipality itself. Baruch Agadati, a dancer and artist, in collaboration with Tel Aviv's mayor, called for young women, as long as they maintained a pristine reputation, and most importantly, spoke an almost fluent or completely fluent Hebrew, to enter the competition.[112] The emphasis on the pageant queen's linguistic abilities reflected the Zionist ideology of Hebraization, reviving a so-called ancient language for modern purposes. The women had additional barriers to their entry, including the submission of a letter of recommendation accompanied by at least fifty signatures to the selection committee, composed of members of Tel Aviv's artistic elite.

After selecting the semi-finalists, the dozen young women were invited to a ball falling on or near the Jewish new year for the trees. In an interview with the former Queen Esther of 1928, Tsipora Tsabari exclaimed "Who were the judges? Who selected [the queen]? All the people [unintelligible] with ballots chose … All those who purchased tickets to enter the ball … received a ballot … that they were meant to put in an envelope the name of the contestant along with the ballot."[113] While the final appointment of queens was meant to be more democratic, the gala

[112] Stern, 'Nadra Ha-Nava,' 37.
[113] Ya'akov Gross and Tsipora Tsabari, Tsipora Tsabari - Malkat Esther ha-Rishona shel Tel Aviv [Tsipora Tsabari - The First Queen Esther of Tel Aviv], Video, 1984.

attendees were mostly Ashkenazi and middle or upper class, as they were invited by the Zionist elite, meaning that the selection of the beauty queen was still within the hands of the elite, albeit a broader pool of individuals than the committee of judges assigned to the Miss Judaea pageant in Warsaw. Typically, a few hours after midnight, the results were announced followed by a celebration and parading of the young queen around the ballroom. Then, the queen was invited to act as Queen Esther, leading the parade of Tel Aviv's official Purim celebrations and participating in various carnivals and holiday festivities including masked balls. Unlike the election gala, the masquerades that occurred during Purim were open to the paying public, with half of the proceeds going to the Jewish National Fund.[114] The elected queen, in addition to leading the spectacle of Purim, was expected to attend a ceremony at city hall in which she was bestowed a gift by and photographed with important public figures of Zionist Tel Aviv. While save the Queen Esther of 1929 Ḥana Meyuḥas-Polani, their images were not circulated in the press as they were in the Polish context, the images of the young beauties were plastered in public spaces. The visual depictions of the queens, like in Poland, were meant for consumption and inspiration in national pride.

Figure 3 Baruch Agadati and Tsipora Tsabari after the initiation ceremony of the queen in the Tel Aviv Municipality in 1928 photographed by Shimon Korbman from Beit ha-Ir: Museum of the History of Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

Figure 4 Photograph of Ḥana Meyuḥas-Polani, winner of the Queen Esther competition in 1929 in the Adloyada Purim parade from the Central Zionist Archives.

[114] Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 27.

The Role of Gender in Creating a Narrative of National Time

Zionist time, thus, had to reflect a masculinist and/or Western notion of progression or modernity, asserting that Jewish men could leave the confines of the European 'ghetto'[115] and establish themselves as modern citizens of a Jewish state. The seemingly impossible assimilation of European Jews to their countries of residence, according to Herzl and other Zionist figures of the time, necessitated a subversion of chronology: Jews would have to return to ancient Judaean soil in order to be full citizens of any land. The Jewish men that had fought so hard for emancipation and equality with their European brethren, in certain Zionist imaginations, were always to be biologically, racially Jewish, never fully European. As Boyarin argues, Jewish men modernised themselves through "colonial mimicry," dressing in the uniform of so-called modern European men who claimed their masculinity and dominance through the subjugation of indigenous peoples in the colonies.[116] Thus, like other nationalist movements of the time, the early Zionist (and interwar Zionist) message of return was not ambivalent, but rather dually progressive and regressive, containing both venerations of the ancient territorial past and idealisations of the future in that very land. The image of bodies of Jewish men, their very corporeality, was to be shaped to inhibit that of ancient glory and modern ingenuity.

In both sets of pageants, albeit via different nationalist manoeuvres, the beauty queens were transformed into spectacular body-objects, embodied symbols of national past and future meant to be consumed by the masses and inform a sense of collective identity. McClintock has long argued for an understanding of nationalism as gendered, and of national time as gendered. She asserts that

[115] I use ghetto here in a figurative sense.
[116] Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*. In the third chapter, I will discuss other forms of colonial mimicry found in Zionism, drawing upon Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October* 28 (1984): 125–33, https://doi.org/10.2307/778467.

the seemingly contradictory nature of nationalist time can be resolved by understanding time through the lens of gender. The nation, which fashions itself as a protector of the past and guardian of the future, is somewhere between nostalgia and progression, stuck between two temporal planes. McClintock aptly notes that similarly, women are understood as atavistic, embodying the authentic ancient spirit of a nation whilst men are represented as agents of modernity, propelling the nation forward. As such, she posits that the ways in which the notion of national time is "naturalised" or "normalised" is by likening it to the so-called natural, dichotomous fissure between men and women.[117] However, this 'normalised' fissure is complicated in the Zionist context, which drew upon a legacy of externally imposed ideas that there is nothing 'natural' about Jewish embodiments of gender.

Nonetheless, I contend that as one among many experiments of the Zionist gender regime, the practice of pageantry, tried to imitate the gender practices of the West, inserting Jewish men and women into the nationalist time binary as described by McClintock. The main orchestrator of the Tel Aviv pageants, the Bessarabia-born Agadati, drew upon a modern Western tradition of pageantry, modelling the culture of Zionist settlements in Palestine after that of Europe. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the mayor of Tel Aviv, Meir Dizengoff,[118] shared Agadati's vision of the Zionist emulation of Western culture by crowning a national beauty queen. While Agadati's pageants aligned the new Yishuv with European nation states or even the United States, the events themselves still reflected a uniquely Jewish flavour. The Anglo-American and Western innovation of a national, official Beauty Queen[119] was tied to Jewish tradition, or the story of Purim, a Persian-

[117] Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*.
[118] Like Agadati, he was born in Bessarabia and relocated to Palestine.
[119] Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*.

Jewish epic, asserting that 'Eastern' Jewishness and Western culture were hardly incompatible. While inspired by Europe, Agadati, Dizengoff, and the municipality maintained a Jewish, and thus, by ethnic European standards, an Eastern, character. This 'authentic' character of the pageants hearkened to the romantic past, which served to strengthen the Zionist narrative.

Like Agadati and Dizengoff of the Jewish settlement of Tel Aviv in Palestine, Jakub Appenszlak, editor-in-chief of *Nasz Przegląd* and one of the organisers of the Miss Judaea pageant, attempted to introduce Jewish beauty to the European, and in this case, to the Polish arena, while trying to distinguish and typify a unique sense of Jewish aesthetics and national belonging. Miss Judaea served as a model of a regenerated Hebrew woman who overcame Ashkenazi racial and gendered anxiety documented by scholars such as Boyarin, Davison, and Presner,[120] not by moving to Palestine, but through bodily discipline and biological preparation in the diaspora in the style of the first steps of muscular Judaism.[121] Seen as a counter to the blonde-haired, and blue-eyed Władysława Kostakówna, the first-ever Miss Polonia, the pageant winner Zofja Oldakówna was made to represent the possibility of the Jewish woman's duality as of the East and the West, and as embodying a specifically Jewish sense of modernity and nationhood. In naming the pageant's queen "Miss Judaea," the editors of *Nasz Przegląd* semantically suggested that their beauty queen is an embodiment of a glorious and unifying idealised Judaic past, as well as a body-object or created artefact meant to symbolise a united Jewish future in Palestine. Oldakówna was transformed into a visual link between 'diaspora' and 'homeland,' reminding Jewish Poles of their

[120] Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*.; Davison, *Jewishness and Masculinity*.; Presner, *Muscular Judaism*.
[121] Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 28-29.

ancient rule over Canaan, Eretz Israel, or Palestine. She, like the other queens of Tel Aviv, came to embody a sense of dual time, atavistic and progressive at the same time.[122]

Concluding Thoughts: Gender and National Time

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the Miss Judaea and Queen Esther pageants of the 1920s were very much gendered, and their reflections of gender were inextricably linked with the specifically Jewish struggles with gender identity and the Zionist responses to the Jewish gender trouble. Through the employment of gendered imagery and symbols, Zionist men who did not necessarily fit into the desirable mode of Zionist masculinity could begin to draft models of Jewish femininity for their female comrades. Women too participated in this process, to varying degrees, staking a claim in the negotiation of a feminine aesthetic in their national movement. Though, the largely male-led of turning these young, Jewish beauty queens into what McClintock terms "nationalist fetish objects,"[123] both reified certain gender roles amongst bourgeois Zionists, placing men as dominant in the nationalist hierarchy, and served to affirm the masculinity of the once-effeminate male leaders by reinforcing that they were adhering to a hegemonic understanding of masculine roles. Nonetheless, gender is precisely the element that allowed Zionist men to turn to their national past through gendered metaphors of nationalist time and to imagine their futures, a regenerated, modern iteration of their glorious ancestors of yesteryear. Beyond configuring national time, the pageants also allowed for the very vibrant, passionate negotiation of Jewish race. It is in this context that my next chapter will explore not only the gendered elements of national time as seen through the pageants of the late-1920s, but also of space and of race, of crafting together a coherent image of Jewish peoplehood.

[122] McClintock, 'Family Feuds'.
[123] McClintock, 'Family Feuds'.

2 - The Racial Politics of Zionist Beauty: Aesthetic Ambiguity in the Miss Judaea and Queen Esther Pageants

'The time has arrived, even in the young Land of Israel, and particularly for the growing children of this country, [for them] to go out into the world with their aspirations and their demands… We are free spirits for whom the Diaspora has waited for one thousand eight hundred and fifty years. We are the young Hebrews about whom its poets composed verse and wrote its books… We are people of the Orient aspiring to remain with what we have and no matter what happens… [We are] people of the Orient as were our forefathers before us and as will surely be our sons tomorrow… and [we are] people of the West—despite all of that… our hearts yearn for enlightenment and progress… Give us electricity and lamps, give us the airplane and the wireless'[124]

Aesthetic Justice: Redeeming the Race

Aesthetic justice[125] - this is the term that *Nasz Przegląd* reader Leon Berkowicz used to describe the 1929 Miss Judaea pageant in which Polish Jewry (or part of it) participated in the important process that is choosing a visual representation of ideal *and* typical Polish-Jewish, or perhaps Judaean, feminine beauty. This beauty, linked together by a set of imagined racial characteristics that were used to claim fundamental Jewish unity would prove to the world that " the Jewish type has not gone extinct," in the words of contributor Elchanan Gitlin, inspiring people to respect the Jews as a political and national group.[126] Though Berkowicz did not address the pageants of Palestine in the paper, he would perhaps have dubbed them too to be acts of "aesthetic justice," or acts of great importance that reclaim and reinvigorate *Jewish* beauty in the eyes of the world, but most importantly, in the eyes, hearts, and minds of Jews themselves. The Jewish race, whatever that might mean, was in Berkowicz's view glorious and beautiful, despite what others held to be true.

[124] 'Toḫniteinu [Our Plan]', *Do'ar Ha-Yom,* 8 August 1919. Translated from Hebrew into English by the National Library of Israel.
[125] Leon Berkowicz, 'Zrehabilitujmy typ semicki. Glos Czytelnika,' [Let us Rehabilitate the Semitic Type. The Reader's Voice] *Nasz Przegląd,* February 9, 1929, 5.
[126] Elchanan Gitlin, 'Dlaczego Mamy Wybrać Miss Judaeę [Why We Should Select a Miss Judaea]', *Nasz Przegląd,* 19 February 1929.

These acts of aesthetic justice, or the interwar beauty pageants of Warsaw and Tel Aviv, responded in part to a belief that the Jewish 'look' was inferior, a victim of some sort of aesthetic (or otherwise) injustice. As I have argued in the previous chapter, well before 1926, Jewish men and women had a tenuous relationship with the notion of physical, corporeal beauty and health, sometimes fetishised but mostly marginalised, believed to be ugly and degenerate, in need of restructuring and improving. This chapter is dedicated to complicating the intricate processes of self-racialisation by urban Jewish Zionists of the late 1920s. First, I will consider the associations between the concepts of "beauty" and "race," arguing that modern beauty pageants, as arbitrating bodies of both beauty and typicality, are inherently engaging in racial discourse. I will then turn to explore race, nation, and beauty, considering the historical implications of, to play on Berkowicz's words, Jewish aesthetic *in*justice, looking to *fin de siècle* Zionist discussions of perceived racial inferiority of Jews. Then, I will consider various axes of Ashkenazi-Jewish reckoning with self-racialisation, unpacking the role of "Sephardiness," "Yemeniness," "Westerness," and "Palestinian-Arabness" in shaping the aesthetic decisions of the intelligentsia, with an awareness of the broader contemporary European discourses of race, antisemitism, and colonialism. By analysing how beauty ideals manifested in the Polish and Palestine-based beauty pageants, I will argue that Zionists were aesthetically torn between East and West, and that they used women's bodies to negotiate that tension, allowing Zionists to imagine how they could embody, quite literally, the best of both worlds.

The Zionist imagination of Jewish ugliness could be ameliorated by physical fitness and rootedness in an autonomous territory, especially in Palestine. Jewish beauty, hoped Berkowicz and other Zionist men and women, would be restored by Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike returning to their

ancestral 'homeland.'[127] To reverse the years of wandering and oppression that rendered the Jewish body as decidedly ugly and inaesthetic, the Jews of Europe would have to look to their ancient yet refashioned Maccabean heritage, or as Theodor Herzl wrote in the concluding lines of *Der Judenstaat*: "… a wondrous generation of Jews will spring into existence. The Maccabeans will rise again."[128] This ancient heritage was conceived of in masculine terms, with the Maccabees of Judaea only providing one of many models of ancient Jewish masculinity. [129] While effeminacy was one of the many bodily and mental flaws of which Europe's Jewish men were contemporaneously thought to embody, physical fitness and a return to Judaean soil provided Zionists with a perceived solution to their fleshly 'woes.'

By culling through the Jewish transnation's natural resources, or their women's bodies, to create a living image of an essentially Jewish queen, the urban Zionist men – and to a certain extent women – of Warsaw and Tel Aviv could participate in the process of constituting both typical and extraordinarily pleasing embodiments of modern Jewishness. Jewish beauty, in the imaginations of historical actors from the Orientalist nineteenth-century European Romantic painters and writers

[127] For instance, in 1895 Theodor Herzl wrote in his diary: "The Promised Land, where it is all right for us to have hooked noses, black or red beards, and bandy legs without being despised for these things alone." Derek Penslar, *Theodor Herzl: The Charismatic Leader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300182507-003, 76-77.
[128] Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 157.
[129] The Maccabees were adopted by Zionists as a visual, rhetorical, and literary symbol of authentic Jewish masculinity and military prowess, see for instance François Guesnet, 'Chanukah and Its Function in the Invention of a Jewish-Heroic Tradition in Early Zionism, 1880–1900', in *Nationalism, Zionism and Ethnic Mobilization of the Jews in 1900 and Beyond*, vol. 2, IJS Studies in Judaica (Brill, 2004), 227–45, https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789047402435/B9789047402435_s013.xml on the *fin de siècle* period and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, 'Hanukkah and the Myth of the Maccabees in Zionist Ideology and in Israeli Society', *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* XXXIV, no. 1 (June 1992): 5–25 on the Maccabees in the Israeli Zionism. Further, many Zionist sports organisations were named after the Maccabees, cementing the bond between the image of the Maccabee and Jewish fitness and bodily regeneration. See also Anita Shapira, *Ḥerev haYona: haTsionut ve-haKoaḥ 1948-1881 [Land and Power]* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 2002), 33 on Maccabees and Zionist aesthetics.

of *belle juives*[130] to the pageant contestants themselves, was very much racial. As illustrated by the historian Sander Gilman, bodily beauty, feminine and masculine alike, was understood in modern European thought as inexorably tied to race.[131] Ethnology of the nineteenth century, explains Gilman, described race in aesthetic terms, classifying Jews and Black Africans, amongst others, as ugly, and thus, inferior. He writes that, "[i]n being denied any association with the beautiful and the erotic, the Jew's body was denigrated."[132] While there certainly was a rich history of the concept of Jewish beauty in the European imagination, with Jewish women from the medieval to the contemporary sexualised as an exotic, alluring other (as in the trope of *La Belle Juive*), fetishisation of Jews could only exist in the context of racialisation of them. That very racialisation functioned also to mark the Jewish body as ugly and degenerate.

Sephardi Superiority: The Spanish-looking Ashkenazi in Poland

The (presumably European) Jewish man, considered to belong to a 'mongrel' race, was conceived of in turn-of-the-century and early-twentieth-century racial antisemitic thought as impure and exilic, made uglier by his 'intermixing' with other races. Interestingly, as highlighted by the Warsaw-based painter and Miss Judaea pageant judge Janusz Trefler's reflections on the difficulties of selecting the best embodiment of Jewish beauty, it was often Ashkenazi Jews who were considered to be more degenerate than their Sephardi coreligionists, as popular ethnographic

[130] For more on the trope of the Jewish beauty, see Ulrike Brunotte, 'The Beautiful Jewess as Borderline Figure in Europe's Internal Colonialism: Some Remarks on the Intertwining of Orientalism and Antisemitism', *ReOrient* 4, no. 2 (2019): 166–80, https://doi.org/10.13169/reorient.4.2.0166. and Sander L. Gilman, 'Salome, Syphilis, Sarah Bernhardt and the "Modern Jewess"', The German Quarterly 66, no. 2 (1993): 195–211, https://doi.org/10.2307/407468; Anna-Dorothea Ludewig, 'Between Orientalization and Self-Orientalization: Remarks on the Image of the "Beautiful Jewess" in Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth-Century European Literature', in *Orientalism, Gender, and the Jews: Literary and Artistic Transformations of European National Discourses*, ed. Ulrike Brunotte, Anna-Dorothea Ludewig, and Axel Stähler, vol. 23, Europäisch-Jüdische Studien – Beiträge (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 221–29, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110339109.221.

[131] Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, 1st edition (New York: Routledge, 1991), 173.

[132] Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, 174.

belief held that the Ashkenazi-Jewish bloodline had been most diluted with foreign "penetration."[133] Sephardi Jews, although still not 'purely' Jewish, had best maintained the Semitic bloodline and thus, according to Trefler and many other Ashkenazi thinkers of the time,[134] the aesthetic character of the Jewish race.[135] Amongst the Ashkenazi intelligentsia of Poland, and more broadly, of Europe, the imaginary Sephardi Jew represented an aspirational aesthetic ideal, an improved version of the decidedly unattractive Ashkenazi form.[136]

Figure 5 Collage of Photographs featuring winner Oldakówna and runners-up Marja Łobzowska and Liza Harkawi published in *Nasz Przegląd*, 29 March 1929.

The Sephardi ideal was certainly dominant in Zionist art and iconography as early as the *fin de siècle.* Ephraim Moses Lilien, a Galician-Jewish art nouveau artist and confidante of the father of

[133] Janusz Trefler, 'Piękność Żydowska: Ankieta "Naszego Przeglądu" Wśród Artystów, Malarzy I Rzeźbiarzy [Jewish Beauty: "Our Report's" Survey of Artists, Painters, and Sculptors]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 13 February 1929, 5.
[134] For instance, see Maurice Fishberg, *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment*, Contemporary Science Series ; [Unnumb.] (London, New York: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., 1911).
[135] Józef Gabowicz, 'Piękność Żydowska: Ankieta "Naszego Przeglądu" Wśród Artystów, Malarzy I Rzeźbiarzy [Jewish Beauty: "Our Report's" Survey of Artists, Painters, and Sculptors]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 13 February 1929, 5.
[136] It is interesting to note that Sephardi aesthetics were seen as superior well before the 20th century by earlier, quasi-Orientalist German-Jewish conceptions of Sephardi superiority. While it is true that European Jews of the Sephardi diaspora, from the Enlightenment up until the twentieth century, were understood by Europeans as more civilised, and thus more deserving of civil rights than Ashkenazim, as scholar John Efron argues in *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic*, Ashkenazi Jews of the German Haskalah romanticised an exotic, medieval Iberian past to explicate their perception of the superior psychological state and corporeality of Sephardim. As Efron explains, Maskilic German Jews saw medieval Sephardi Jews as proof that a Jew may be both Spanish, or German, and very much Jewish. For more, see John M. Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

political Zionism Theodor Herzl, often depicted the Zionist leader as overtly Judaic and masculine, his virile beauty a testament to his ancient roots.[137] Lilien's representations of Herzl's figure, burly and muscular, with sinuous arms and legs, prominent abdominal and pectoral muscles, signalled to Jews and Christians alike that the contemporary Jewish man could embody masculinity and racial beauty. The Galician illustrator rendered Herzl into a muscular "King of the Jews" whose fleshly image evoked both the glory of the Judaean past and the promise of a future in Palestine. Herzl's flesh, which was emotionally charged with centuries of antisemitism and the project of resurrecting Jewish pride, allowed Jewish men to imagine themselves as masculine, per hegemonic standards, but also as 'Oriental' and nobly Sephardi.

As recounted by Derek Penslar in his 2020 biography on Herzl, despite his Bohemian, Moravian, and Silesian roots, the Zionist leader preferred to fashion himself as a Sephardi, or as a descendant of noble Spanish Jews. According to Penslar, Herzl told his first biographer Reuven Brainin that he was the direct descendant of Sephardi crypto-Jews that returned openly to their Judaism when they were sent as missionaries to Innsbruck.[138] As Penslar argues, Herzl's 'creative' family tree cannot be divorced from the nineteenth-century central European Jewish veneration of medieval Sephardi Jewry that saw the Jews of Iberia as noble, respectable, and able to act both as Jews and as secular citizens. This hybridity was coveted by many upwardly mobile European Jews, who sought to find solutions to the Jewish question, including Herzl, who in his early life, sought very much to meld into his Austro-Hungarian milieu. Though, what Penslar does not consider in his

[137] For more on women and Orientalism in Ephraim Moses Lilien's art, see Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle*; Lynne Swarts, 'Lilien's Sensual Beauties: Discovering Jewish Orientalism in Ephraim Moses Lilien's Biblical Women', *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 33 (2018): 90–120, https://doi.org/10.2979/nashim.33.1.05.
[138] Penslar, *Theodor Herzl*, 12–14.

analysis of Herzl's wish to be associated with Sepharad is that, as supported by the visual depictions of E.M. Lilien, perhaps he also sought to racialise himself as Sephardi, as an aesthetic counter to Ashkenazi degeneracy who possessed more 'pure Judaic blood' and as such, was better suited to lead his coreligionists to racial regeneration. With his dark beard and piercing brown eyes, Herzl reminded Jewish Zionists of their imagined ancient ancestry. The rumour that he was of Sephardi ancestry only strengthened the leader's 'Judaic' look and feel.

In the turn of the century Zionist imagination, being, or at least looking, Sephardi was aesthetically desirable, while the imaginary Ashkenazi was considered to be of inferior, lesser flesh. Decades later, in Warsaw, Tel Aviv, and beyond, the discourse on Jewish racialisation lived on. The pageants of Tel Aviv, and even more so of Warsaw, serve as rich prisms with which to understand and trace the development of Zionist racial thinking and the influence of the Orientalist Sephardi on Jewish national aesthetics and gendered embodiments of race.

In North America, notions of Sephardi superiority were also steeped in gender, often focused on the particularity of feminine as opposed to masculine beauty. In 1911, almost two decades before the pageants in Tel Aviv and Warsaw, an American-Jewish ethnographer and assimilationist Maurice Fishberg published *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment*, a study that employed pseudoscientific racial science to categorise and show the diversity of world Jewry, in the style of other racial, ethnographic publications of the time.[139] His study, comprehensive and detailed, provides valuable insight into the racial thinking of early-twentieth-century acculturated Jews, and

[139] Fishberg, *The Jews*.

how Jews themselves both internalised racial antisemitism to an extent and transformed the earlier Sephardi ideal to suit the racial politics of the time.

Indeed, Eva Plach draws upon Fishberg in her analysis of the racial politics of the Miss Judaea pageant, noting how the trope of Sephardi feminine beauty was not unique to the Zionist elite of Warsaw.[140] In dealing with the question of attractiveness, which as mentioned earlier is very much tied to race and racialisation,[141] Fishberg paid particular attention to feminine beauty, writing that:

> The traditional Semitic beauty, which in women often assumes exquisite nobility, is generally found among [Sephardi] Jews, and when encountered among Jews in Eastern or Central Europe, is always of this type. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a beautiful Jewess … presenting as any other physical type.[142]

This is one of many instances in which Fishberg stresses the feminine Sephardi aesthetic as a more appropriate visual representation of Jewishness than that of European-appearing Jewesses. While he does also consider the masculine Sephardi as nobler than Ashkenazi men in aesthetics and manners,[143] Fishberg's book reflects that notions of beauty (and as such, race) were often gendered, whether as feminine or as masculine, as well as defined by race and nation. Despite Zionist artistic attempts to aestheticize the (Ashkenazi) Jewish male body in turn of the century Europe,[144] it is significant that in Fishberg's eyes, only Ashkenazi women could transcend the confines of the inaesthetic, weak, and neurotic Ashkenazi corporeality, for Sephardi-looking Ashkenazi women, had the potential to be beautiful in a uniquely Jewish way. This suggests that the woman's body,

[140] Plach, 'Introducing Miss Judaea,' 381.
[141] Gilman, *The Jew's Body*.
[142] Fishberg, *The Jews*, 109–110.
[143] For instance, "Only very rarely is to be seen a Spanish Jew displaying a servile or cringing attitude in the presence of superiors, as is often to be seen among German and Polish Jews. The Sephardim are very proud ... These traits, which they acquired while living for centuries among the Castilians, have been transmitted to their descendants of today. [In addition], they look down on their German co-religionists and consider them an inferior race." in Fishberg, *The Jews*, 109–110.
[144] See my earlier discussion of the artist E.M. Lilien in the first chapter.

in some cases, was able to permeate boundaries that the man's could not, especially when it came to racialisation and perceived racial or national aesthetics.[145] That Fishberg, a non-Zionist American Jew who published his research over a decade before the start of the pageants, came to the conclusion that Sephardi-looking women, even if they were Ashkenazi, embodied true Jewish beauty, points to the fact that the conversation on beauty, femininity, and race transcended time, space, and even political boundaries.

The Miss Judaea pageant of Warsaw certainly oriented itself aesthetically, according to the aesthetic preference for Sephardi-looking beauty as touted by Fishberg and other Ashkenazi thinkers of the time. Published days after the first and only Miss Judaea was selected, "Uroda Miss Judei [The Beauty of Miss Judaea]" by *Nasz Przegląd* contributor, esteemed art critic, and head of Warsaw-based Jewish Society for the Promotion of the Fine Art (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych)[146] Michał Weinzieher, attempted to flesh out a historical tradition of Jewish beauty. He noted that most accounts of Jewish beauty were enshrined through literature or oral tradition, rather than through visual representations. Discussing the specific visuality of a Jewish feminine aesthetic, Weinzieher wrote that:

> In these rare relics of paintings, we can find two different fundamental types of beautiful Jewish women in Europe. One grew up under the sun of Spain the other represents the countries of the north. "Miss Judaea" is a type of Sephardic beauty. We can find examples of this beauty in the works of art of the Spanish Renaissance, or in the profound paintings of [Ignacio] Zuloaga. The Sephardic type, in spite of the nobility and subtlety of its features, retained the power of the ancient "Judith." Judith was an apt nickname for "Miss Judaea." It is distinctly characteristic that in the election of "Miss Judaea"" the type of "Judith" and not of "Jessica" prevailed. This proves a fundamental change in the attitudes to and perceptions of the Jewish aesthetic.[147]

[145] See 'The Egyptian Belly Dancing Sisters with a Secret Jewish Identity', *The Librarians* (blog), 9 July 2018, https://blog.nli.org.il/en/jamal_sisters/.
[146] Jakub Appenszlak was also a founder of the Jewish Society for the Promotion of the Fine Art [Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych].
[147] Michał Weinzieher, 'Uroda Miss Judei [The Beauty of Miss Judaea]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 31 March 1929, 5.

Oldakówna, whom Weinzeher described as a dark-haired, dark-eyed, unibrowed, painterly beauty, was thus seen as the embodiment of a Sephardi racial and national ideal. Warsaw's Miss Judaea was, like Herzl, seen as a descendant of the glorious ancient Judaic past by virtue of her association with an imagined Sephardi bloodline and visual tradition of 'Oriental' beauty. That Miss Judaea was of a Sephardi, rather than what Weinzeher describes as "northern Jewish type,"[148] meant that she visually served as a marker of Jewish difference from her Polish neighbours, who were conceived of as fairer, with cheeks that had not seen the imaginary sun of Sephardi Al-Andalus.

The art critic also presented two Jewish woman archetypes: that of Judith, a strong Israelite woman who saves her fellow people from the wrath of the Assyrian general Holofernes by using her feminine charm; and that of Jessica, the beautiful daughter and *belle juive* turned convert to Christianity of Shakespeare's canonical play *The Merchant of Venice*.[149] As the fictional Jessica is likely to be an Italian or Sephardi Jewess herself, it is curious that Weinzeher references the Venetian Jessica as an example of an aesthetic contrast to the native Judith, despite the fact that Jessica in the European painterly tradition has been portrayed as a dusky Sephardi beauty.[150] In an earlier article by Trefler, the Jewish artist wrote that Maurycy Gottlieb, a Jewish protege of famous Polish artist Jan Matejko, portrayed the fictional Jessica and her father Shylock in his 1867 painting *Szylok i Jessyka*[151] as "a classic type of Jewish beauty,"[152] not unmarked by foreign influence, but still of the *true* 'Jewish race.' Despite the ambiguity of his cultural references, Weinzeher wanted

[148] Weinzeher does not explain how he understands "northern" Jewish types of feminine beauty.
[149] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Dr Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine Ph.D (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).
[150] Perhaps, Weinzeher is referencing the difference in habitat between Judith of Judaea and Jessica of the Venice ghetto, suggesting that environment plays a role on shaping Jewish beauty.
[151] Maurycy Gottlieb, *Szylok i Jessyka*, 1867, oil on canvas, 166.5 × 109.5 cm, 1867.
[152] Weinzieher, 'Uroda Miss Judei,' 5.

to prove to his readers that a crowning a beautiful woman who *looked* like the darker, Sephardi Jew of the Jewish artistic tradition in Poland's capital in 1929 would mark the dawn of a renaissance of Jewish beauty. As Berkowicz had termed it, crowning a Sephardi-looking beauty stood as an act of "aesthetic justice" that celebrated a denigrated understanding of a so-called Jewish type took place.[153]

When an anonymous woman, who described herself as a Constantinople-born daughter of a Polish Jew and a Turkish-Sephardi Jewess, wrote into *Nasz Przegląd* to ask if she would be a qualified applicant for the pageant, the editors' published response to her letter did not simply encourage the hopeful contestant to send in an application. Further, they raved about the woman's potential to represent a physiological, racial, and even mental synthesis of the Ashkenazi with the Sephardi, and to stand in as an embodiment of modern Jewish beauty in Poland that could unite Sephardim and Ashkenazim under (pan) or (trans)national Jewish pride.[154] The paper's editors, of course, were excited by the aesthetic possibilities of a truly Sephardi, rather than Sephardi-looking, beauty queen. Though, as this next section will consider, the Sephardi beauty of Appenszlak's publication was imaginary, and as such, she was representative of so much more than the borders of medieval Spain.

Between Sepharad and Judaea: The Blurring of Sephardi and Semitic Beauty Ideals

As mentioned earlier, pageant judge and prominent artist Trefler, as well as anthropologist Maurice Fishberg, both believed that while Sephardim maintained a purer bloodline than their Ashkenazi coreligionists, the Jews that descended from Spain were far from the Judaic ancestors of the ancient

[153] Berkowicz, 'Zrehabilitujmy typ semicki,' 5.
[154] 'Odpowiedzi Redakcji [Editor's Response]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 27 February 1929, 7.

Erets Israel and the kingdoms of Judaea and Israel. Trefler, in his short contribution to one of the first instances of coverage of the Miss Judaea pageants on the pages of *Nasz Przegląd*, wrote that "The type of Jewish beauty that is most recognisable and identifiable to its original prototype is undoubtedly that of the Sephardi Jewess. It is in my opinion that this is the type we should look for."[155] In scientific and artistic thinking, the Sephardi Jewess stood not as a perfect ideal, but as the only living and imagined visual reminder of ancient Judaic blood.

In painter Wincenty Brauner's 1929 discussion of the racial and national implications of Jewish beauty, he wrote that: "The *type of* Jewish women differs greatly from that of the beauties of other nations. The distinctive racial character and particularity of the Semitic women is manifested above all in the original rhythm of the body lines and in the temperament of the Eastern races."[156] In Brauner's eyes, the ideal Jewish, or rather Semitic, woman was a synthesis of two distinct attributes: a unique Judaic aesthetic with the charm and allure of the 'Orient.' He continued that externally, "the Jewish beauty is a brunette, with the expression of the eyes of women so well known to us from Spain. This beauty is characterised by a specific frame of the eyes that give a sad tone to the gaze.[157] In this gaze is hidden a sensuality excited by the heat of the sun and cultivated in the atmosphere of religious rites."[158] This type of beauty was, according to Brauner,

[155] Trefler, 'Piękność Żydowska,' 5.
[156] Wincenty Brauner, 'Piękność Żydowska: Ankieta "Naszego Przeglądu" Wśród Artystów, Malarzy I Rzeźbiarzy [Jewish Beauty: "Our Report's" Survey of Artists, Painters, and Sculptors]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 12 February 1929, 5.
[157] See Plach, 'Introducing Miss Judaea,' 379 for a discussion of the significance of eyes in the Miss Judaea pageants. Sadness is also a significant trope in imagining modern, Jewish beauty. For an example, see the unfinished novel Heinrich Heine, 'The Rabbi of Bacharach', in *The Works of Heinrich Heine*, trans. Charles Godfrey Leland, vol. 1, 1906, 175–240, 185 in which Heine writes "The beautiful Sara, who sat on the same high velvet cushion as her husband, wore, as hostess, none of her ornaments—only white linen enveloped her slender form and good and gentle face. This face was touchingly beautiful, even as all Jewish beauty is of a peculiarly moving kind; for the consciousness of the deep wretchedness, the bitter scorn, and the evil chances amid which her kindred and friends dwelt, gave to her lovely features a depth of sorrow and an ever-watchful apprehension of love, such as most deeply touches our hearts."
[158] Brauner, 'Piękność Żydowska,' 5.

also adorned with eyebrows, drawn together, forming almost a single line, in contrast to the Chinese and Japanese women, whose "eyebrows arched, moving away from each other."[159] Here, Brauner evoked a larger imaginary Orient in his discussion of Jewish beauty. Like other men involved with the Warsaw pageant, Brauner also created a synthesis of 'Oriental' and 'Spanish,' imagining a Jewish beauty that is Sephardi, romantically emitting the pain of Jewish dispersion through her large, brown eyes but also basking in the Mediterranean sun of her ancestors.

Brauner also noted that there is a secondary 'Semitic' type that "dates from (ancient) Egyptian times."[160] She was copper-haired, green- or grey-eyed, and lively, though as Brauner pointed out, it is perhaps a lesser-known but all the more essential type of Jewess. Their contemporary descendants, the artist added, were perhaps the third type of Jewesses who did not constitute a true type of Jewish beauty: blondes. He articulated that, "the blonde type is unknown among the real typical Jewish beauties. And yet, there are beautiful blondes among Jewish women. I have encountered them on more than one occasion," acknowledging that while there certainly were blonde, beautiful Jewesses, their beauty was not of a Jewish flavour. The artist continued: "Perhaps they will be hurt by the fact that I devoted attention to two basic types of Jewish beauties, but let them console themselves. For their beauty has much in common, and perhaps even descends directly from those copper-haired women who once captivated with their beauty." Concluding his thoughts with words of *comfort* for the light-haired girls and women of Jewish Poland, he wrote: "And I love them still".[161]

[159] Brauner, 'Piękność Żydowska,' 5.
[160] Brauner, 'Piękność Żydowska,' 5. "Pochodzi on z czasów egipskich"
[161] Brauner, 'Piękność Żydowska,' 5.

If these comments did not hurt the feelings of young, blonde Jewish women, they surely inspired a sense of nervousness and inability to accurately represent their people. Answering a letter to the editor from Zorza of Krakow, a doubtful, presumably blonde potential pageant contestant, the paper assured her that "Blonde hair does not at all preclude you from the chance (to win the title of Miss Judaea.) In our surveys on Jewish beauty, one of the painters rightly pointed out that one should distinguish between purely Semitic and Jewish beauty."[162] In their answer to Zorza, the editors of *Nasz Przegląd* recognised that while "there may be some disagreement as to the essential characteristics of Jewish beauty," the jury, consisting of "eminent artists, writers, who will undoubtedly justify their opinions adequately," should be trusted to decide the phenotypic racial characteristics of the essential Jew.[163] The daily concluded that: "Therefore, since nothing else stands in the way - including blonde hair - we await the photographs (of the potential contestant)."[164]

Despite this disclaimer, the paper displayed the images of mostly 'Semitic'-looking, dark-featured, young Jewish women. In fact, all but one of the finalists were of the 'Sephardi-Semitic' type described in great detail by artists and intellectuals involved in *Nasz Przegląd*. One such woman was Liza Harkawi, second runner-up, winner of the popular vote of the pageant, and title-holder of the most beautiful Polish woman according to the *Forverts* in 1928.[165] She was described by *Nasz Przegląd* journalists as visually reminiscent of the aristocratic, noble Jewesses of Sephardi Salonika.[166] A woman writing into the paper who identified herself as Eliza from Warsaw

[162] 'Odpowiedzi Redakcji,' 5.
[163] 'Odpowiedzi Redakcji,' 5.
[164] 'Odpowiedzi Redakcji,' 5.
[165] 'Kim Są Kandydatki Na "Miss Judeae"? [Who Are the Candidates of "Miss Judaea?"]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 24 March 1929, 5.
[166] 'Co Mówią Kandydatki,' 5.

commented on Harkawi's photograph, writing that "if it were up to my decision, I would first and foremost award Ms. Liza Harkawi. She perfectly embodies Semitic beauty".[167] Eliza's commentary shows that while male voices dominated the process of imagining an ideal Jewish race, women too found themselves invested in the negotiation of an authentic model of Jewish beauty. While Eliza's comment might suggest that Harkawi was uniquely 'Semitic,' the young queen's photograph was only one of the hundreds of photographs in *Nasz Przegląd* that depicted youthful, dark-featured Polish-Jewish women. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, some of these women, including the pageant winner, adopted biblical, Hebraic pseudonyms, verbally motioning to the fact that they were fashioning themselves as truly, authentically Judaic.

Figure 6 Harkawi photographed by Alter Kaczyna and published in *Forverts*, 28 April 1929.

Figure 7 Roma Gliksmanówna published in *Nasz Przegląd*, 23 February 1929.

The only semi-finalist with relatively fair features described feeling aesthetically excluded from her people. Her name was Roma Gliksmanówna, and she went on the record saying that she was

[167] 'Jutro Ostateczby Rezultat Głosowania [The Final Result of the Vote is Tomorrow]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 23 March 1929, 6.

delighted that she received so many votes, though she could not help but feel pain in knowing that "everyone sees me as a pure Aryan type."[168] She lamented her blonde locks and blue eyes precisely because they marked her as not of the ideal Jewish type, despite being the preferred mode of beauty in the general context of twentieth-century Europe.[169] The young Gliksmanówna concluded her interview with the wish to marry "a Semitic type, hoping that "such a husband would probably redeem my non-Jewish appearance in the eyes of the world".[170] Clearly, even hair and eye colour were politically and emotionally charged, holding deep significance in a society dominated by discourses of race and nation. The imagined Semitic-Sephardi beauty dominated the discourses on the Miss Judaea pageants. *Nasz Przegląd*'s pages were filled with active, vibrant, and detailed negotiations of what constituted Jewish beauty. The words "Aryan" and "Semitic" sprawled over the paper's discussions of the lofty goal that was selecting Jewish beauty, as contributors, readers, and pageant judges alike considered one of the most pressing questions of the time: is the prettiest Jewish woman blonde or brunette?[171]

Reflecting on *Nasz Przegląd*'s consistent racial language in its coverage of the pageant, it becomes apparent that the line between Sephardi and Judaic or authentically Jewish was not so clear cut and that there was no perfectly homogenous understanding of what constituted Sephardi, Eastern, Semitic, and modern Jewish beauty. While the Sephardi was not considered to be biologically identical to the romantic, 'authentic,' 'Semitic' women of ancient Judaea, she represented a visual connection to the past that would serve to inspire Jews and remind them of their glorious, shared

[168] 'Co Mówią Kandydatki,' 5.
[169] 'Co Mówią Kandydatki,' 5.
[170] 'Co Mówią Kandydatki,' 5.
[171] Even the editor in chief published articles in which he promoted favourable, nuanced views of the sensual and poetic beauty of brunettes, Jewesses included of course, see Jakub Appenszlak, 'Na Marginesie Konkursi: Brunetki [On the Margins of the Contest: Brunettes]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 24 February 1929, 5.

history. Thus, the imaginary Sephardi became a synonym, to some, with the imaginary Jew of the ancient Near East, showing a transformation of or ambiguity in just *how* Oriental imagination operated in the bourgeois, Zionist, Polish-Jewish context. Despite her acknowledged, "foreign penetration" and 'impure' bloodline to use Trefler's language,[172] the Sephardi could be read as aesthetically an Israelite or of Judaea. The Sephardi female phenotype was thought to best visually reflect Jewish history and origins. The figure of the Sephardi woman allowed the Jews of Poland and Central Europe to imagine a past as well as a future of a Jewish state in Palestine, inspiring them to visually interpret what regenerated Jewish bodies and faces would look like in the land of their ancient ancestors.

On the 29th of March 1929, a pair of dark, almond eyes framed by a black monobrow and a crown of long raven hair, parted in the middle, gazing over a fur-adorned shoulder, graced the pages of *Nasz Przegląd*.[173] The eyes belonged to the newly anointed Miss Judaea, Zofja Oldakówna, who was chosen to represent the modern Polish Jewess and lead her coreligionist sisters to modernity, regeneration, and national awakening. Oldakówna's image beckoned Polish Jews to look back to the ancient land of Judaea, where olive-skinned, dark-haired, long-faced Jewesses roamed free in a land of their own. Her eyes, however, looked to the future, imagining a Polish-Jewish modernity that fused biological, ancient 'Semitic' beauty with bourgeois European conventions of femininity. A woman between East and West, Oldakówna embodied both modern and (modern understandings of) ancient beauty, garnering a sense of national pride amongst Jews in Poland and beyond. Referred to as the "most beautiful Jewess in Poland,"[174] Miss Judaea embodied the many

[172] Trefler, 'Piękność Żydowska,' 5.
[173] 'Wybór "Miss Judaei",' 5.
[174] '"Miss Judaea" Najpiękniejsza Żydówka w Polsce ["Miss Judaea" The Most Beautiful Jewess in Poland]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 17 March 1929, 5.

contradictions of Polish, Jewish, and Zionist identity; she was both Jewish and Judaic, Diasporic and Zionist, signalling to her coreligionists that being Polish, Jewish, and of Palestine could coexist. She was Polish, though her body and photographic representations of it served as visual, material proof of the existence of an essential, transnational Jewish aesthetic, marked by exotic beauty and the romance of oppression and wandering, a true *Sephardi* and *Semitic* beauty. That the Sephardi-looking Oldakówna was chosen as the beauty queen is not a source of surprise, for as this section has shown, discourses of Sephardi or Semitic beauty dominated the press since at least the moment of the pageant's inception.

Jewish Beauty Beyond Europe's Borders: The Sephardi Ideal in Tel Aviv

Published in 1917 and 1918 in Palestine, Eliezer Ben Yehuda's memoir confirms that the notion of Sephardi superiority was alive and well across space, or in Palestine as well as in Central Europe. The Ashkenazi Zionist and Hebraist praised the Sephardi Jews of Palestine, writing that "most of them were handsome, all were elegant in their oriental apparel … they spoke [Hebrew] fluently and naturally, with a wealth of vocabulary and idiom, and their pronunciation so original, so *wonderfully oriental*!"[175] Sephardim *looked* and perhaps even more importantly to Ben Yehuda, *sounded* like native Hebrews. Their 'Easternness' is precisely what marked them as ideal embodiments of Jewishness, as opposed to the "Ashkenazi visitors," whom Ben Yehuda stated, "looked like people from the ghetto."[176] In Ben Yehuda's eyes, the 'Sephardi' represented the Zionist aesthetic ideal. "I tried as hard as I could to *look* like all the Jews of Palestine," Ben Yehuda confessed.[177] He continued: "I grew my beard. I removed my European clothing and wore long

[175] Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, *A Dream Come True*, ed. George Mandel, trans. T. Muraoka (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), https://www.routledge.com/A-Dream-Come-True/Ben-yehuda/p/book/9780367157449, 65–66. Emphasis my own.
[176] Ben-Yehuda, *A Dream Come True*, 66.
[177] Ben-Yehuda, *A Dream Come True*, 77–78.

gowns, as was the custom of the Jews, and I wore a turban on my head in place of a European hat."[178] Looking back on his attempts at visual imitation, he wrote that it "was all in vain," [179] but nonetheless, the Zionist figure saw Sephardim as authentic, regal Jews, aesthetic models for the degenerate Ashkenazi man, though he does not discuss feminine beauty and women.

Despite the fact that the issue of Jewish racial expression was not foreign to the European-Jewish settlers in Palestine, the press of the new Yishuv did not engage in such dedicated and detailed written debate on the essence of true Jewish beauty. Still, the politics of pseudo-biology, physical attractiveness, and Jewish, Judaic, or Hebrew authenticity played a starring role both in the pageants themselves and in the Ashkenazi Zionist press's perception of those pageants. The fantastical Sephardi Jewess, however, was only one of the few alluring 'types' from which the Zionist elite of Tel Aviv could draw in crafting "typical, Hebrew beauty"[180] in a society that, unlike that of Jewish Poland, was generally ethnically heterogeneous.

It is true that the second Queen Esther of Tel Aviv elected in 1927, who per *Ha-Arets* received 261 out of the 456 votes,[181] was Riquetta Chelouche, a Sephardi woman descended from Algerian-Jewish immigrants to Palestine. According to the grand-nephew of the Rabbi of the same name,

[178] Ben-Yehuda, *A Dream Come True*, 77–78.
[179] Ben-Yehuda, *A Dream Come True*, 78.
[180] This phrasing appeared *Do'ar ha-Yom* (27 January 1926, 3) as well as in other newspapers at the time. It is interesting that in Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 29, note 49. Spiegel identifies that in 1926, *Ha-Arets* published: "At this gala 'Queen Esther' will be chosen—the most beautiful and typical Jewess [*ha-yehudia ha-yaffa ve ha-tipusit be-yoter*] See *Ha-Arets*, 22 January 1926, 4. She notes that the Hebrew term *yehudia* (Jewess) was used by *Ha-Arets* in one instance in 1926, but in the other ads that year and in the following years, the term *ivria* (Hebrew woman) was used instead. She writes that this terminology can be understood as "indicating that the search is for the most typical Hebrew, rather than Jewish, woman." She continues that "This represents the ambivalence between the concept of Jewish and Hebrew that was part of the larger dilemma of what these terms meant to whom." Here, I take issue with Spiegel as I believe that the use of "Hebrew" as opposed to "Jewish" woman is significant in its racial overtones.
[181] 'Ḥag Tu bi-Shvat be-Tel Aviv [The Festival of Tu Bishvat in Tel Aviv]', *Ha-Arets*, 19 January 1927, 4.

her ancestors were descended from Portuguese Jews who left Portugal for North Africa before 1492.[182] Her grandfather, Rabbi Aharon Chelouche of Oran, arrived in Palestine as a child at some point during the mid-nineteenth century,[183] and in 1887, he founded what would later be called Neve Tsedek, a neighbourhood north of Jaffa for middle-class Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews.[184] The Chelouche maiden's grandfather also played an important role in the construction of the Jaffa-Jerusalem railway in 1892.[185] Her uncle, Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche, drew upon his position as a Palestinian Jew and Zionist to help build what he called "the first Hebrew city in our country and in the whole world itself, Tel Aviv."[186] While Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche was a vocal critic of European Zionists, he and his family were nonetheless of massive significance to the landscapes of both Sephardi Palestine and the Zionist Yishuv, meaning that Chelouche's family pedigree held currency in Tel Aviv society and marked the fair Riquetta a worthy candidate for Queen Esther.

Figure 8 Riquetta Chelouche as the second Hebrew Queen in 1927 from the Pomrok collection (90) in the National Library of Israel.

[182] Aharon Chelouche, *Mi-Galabiya le-Kova Tembel [From A Traditional Arab Garment to an Israeli Hat]* (Tel Aviv: Kol Seder, 1991), 13. Interestingly there is not even one mention of Riquetta in the whole book.
[183] Evyatar Chelouche, 'The Mystery of the Second Joseph Chelouche', *Sharsheret Hadorot (Journal of Jewish Genealogy)* 24, no. 1 (n.d.): viii–xviii.
[184] Johann Büssow, *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2011), 253.
[185] Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche, *Parashat Hayyai [Chronicles of my Life]* (Tel Aviv: Stroud & Sons Ltd, 1931), https://benyehuda.org/read/9421/read.
[186] Chelouche, *Parashat Hayyai.*

Decades after the pageant, the Hebrew daily *Davar*, in a retrospective article on the Purim beauty pageants of pre-state Zionists, referred to Chelouche as "a sabra who was the daughter of sabras," descending from an important Jewish family in Palestine.[187] Keisari published in 1932 in the fortnightly magazine *Kol-noa* that Chelouche was a "native golden woman, daughter of the daughter of a golden woman."[188] Keisari remarks on her body that "this is the vigorous and upright body" that was a product of her noble Sephardi lineage, not of an imaginary Greece or Spain but of Algeria and Palestine.[189] He comments on the raven-haired beauty's body in rather general terms, only referencing her "golden" skin tone and perceived superior posture. While Keisari does not provide vivid descriptive detail on the physicality of the young Chelouche, it is clear that her impressive lineage, Sephardi background, and 'nativeness' to the land make the second Queen Esther worthy of remark. Interestingly, there is close to no mention of Chelouche in the Zionist press in Palestine in 1927. Nonetheless, she was not only Sephardi-looking but also *was* Sephardi, a Palestinian Sephardi at that, and as such, she was upheld as an example of typical Hebrew beauty. As I have displayed, Ashkenazi Zionists in Palestine certainly were enthralled with the imaginary Sephardi and with their perception of the authentic, Palestinian Sephardim who seamlessly blended into the fabric of Palestinian-Arab society. The European Zionists, upon reaching Palestine, also found themselves in contact with Jews (and others) from diverse backgrounds, and as such, flirted with aesthetic ideals beyond that of the Sephardi.

[187] Shlomo Sheba, 'Yafot, Yafot, Kol Kaḥ Yafot [Beautiful Women, Beautiful Women, Oh Such Beautiful Women]', *Davar*, 20 March 1970. "צברית בת צברית" Sabra or Tsabarit is a word used to refer to Jews born in *Erets Israel*. On the Sabra, see Oz Almog, *The Sabra*.
[188] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther.'
[189] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther.'

The Yemeni Aesthetic Ideal: On the Road to 'Arabness'

In fact, the candidate that received the most attention for her visible 'racial characteristics' was the Yemeni Tsipora Tsabari. Reporting on the Purim carnival of 1928, the Ashkenazi-dominated *Ha-Arets* expressed genuine surprise that a poor, orphaned Yemeni girl had come to represent Hebrew beauty in Tel Aviv. The paper stated that "it was truly a particular surprise, that was unprecedented and strayed from the legacy of the carnivals of years prior."[190] Clearly, Tsabari's crowning came as quite a shock. Bringing attention to their disapproval of the selection of a Yemeni queen, the paper snidely declared that "[t]he whole affair of the 'Queen' that was chosen from amongst *them* [the Yemeni community] assumed an almost 'serious' air,"[191] as if a Yemeni girl could not be understood as a serious representation of the Yishuv's desired aesthetic. The paper described the gathering of Yemeni Jews to support "*their* 'Queen Esther,'" at the municipal carnival on Allenby Street. When Tsabari emerged, the daily reported that she "brought them to their feet and prompted the attention of the Yemenis, young and old."[192] The (Ashkenazi) Zionist press of Palestine did not focus on Tsabari's physical features, but rather concerned themselves with a derogatory understanding of Yemeni Jews, questioning that a working-class, Yemeni girl was chosen to represent the Yishuv.[193]

[190] 'Purim be-Tel Aviv: ha-Karnival ba-Reḥovot, [Purim in Tel Aviv, the Carnival in the Streets]' *Ha-Arets*, March 7, 1928, 4.
"התעוררות רבה וחגיגית הכניסה לקארניוואל הרחוב הופעה תימנים עם 'אסתר המלכה שלהם.' זו היתה באמת הפתעה מיוחדת במינה. שלא ראו כדוגמתה בקארניוואלים של השנים הקודמות. ענין המלכה שנבחרה משלהם קיבל צורה 'כמעט רצינית.' השמחה הזאת הקימה על רגליהם את כל ערת התימנים, בנעריהם ובזקניהם."

[191] 'Purim be-Tel Aviv: ha-Karnival ba-Reḥovot.' Emphasis my own.

[192] 'Purim be-Tel Aviv: ha-Karnival ba-Reḥovot.' Emphasis my own.

[193] Though, as I will expand upon later in this chapter, *Ha-Arets* also found positive elements in Tsabari's queenship.

Discussing the crowing of Tsabari at the gala for selecting Queen Esther in February of 1928, *Ha-Arets* penned that "only 'Shkenazim' [Ashkenazim][194] voted for her as queen, because Yemeni people -- save the queen herself -- were hardly present."[195] This report hints at the fact that those who made the symbolic decision to crown a Jewish queen in Palestine were certainly not those at the margins of the Zionist establishment, as they were mostly Ashkenazi and relatively wealthy.[196] The article also reveals that Yemeni Jews, and non-Ashkenazi Jews in general, were in topographical respects very much on the periphery of Zionist society in Tel Aviv, Neve Tsedek, and Jaffa. Historians might also take interest in this singular sentence, as it traces how the word "Ashkenazi," whether referring to Jews of Polish, Russian, German, or broadly European ancestry, crystallised into a racial and social category that defined itself in opposition to non-European Jews well before the establishment of the Israeli state. Further, this sentence suggests what is now a well-established fact in the world of Jewish studies: that in the Ashkenazi imagination of the Zionist Yishuv, the image of the Yemeni Jew invoked authenticity, romance, and most of all, connection of the new Jews to the Arabic-speaking world.

Aḥad Ha'am (born Asher Ginsberg), known as the father of cultural Zionism, published in a 1912 essay that the Yemeni Jews' "cultural status and entire spirit were so different from *our* own, to the extent that the question arises whether the whole character of the settlement will be changed by the hands of the many [Yemeni Jews], and if it will change for the better".[197] In a sense, Aḥad Ha'am was prophetic in his early consideration of the effects of Yemeni-Jewish culture on that of

[194] This is a tongue-in-cheek, condescending joke poking fun at how Yemeni Jews were thought to pronounce the word "Ashkenazim."
[195] A.Z. V.B., 'Ḥalom ha-Malḥut [Dream of the Crown]', *Ha-Arets*, 9 February 1928, 3.
[196] Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew* Culture, 27.
[197] Ahad Ha'am, 'Saḥ ha-Kol [All in All]' 1912, https://benyehuda.org/read/8637. Emphasis my own.

the European Yishuv. However, the Yemeni cultural influence was not exclusively imparted "by the hands" of Yemeni Jews themselves and was also appropriated by European Zionists in Palestine. This appropriation, as I will demonstrate below, relied not only on race, but also on ideas about gender to allow the imagined Yemeni-Jewish woman to transform into a potential ideal or model of authentic beauty in the minds and hearts of the Ashkenazi Zionists of the Yishuv.

Figure 9 Baruch Agadati in the dance "Yemenite Ecstasy" photographed in the late 1920s Vienna studio of Leszlo Willinger from the Bat Sheva and Yitzhak Katz Archive in the Information Center for Israeli Art, Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Yael Guilat, a scholar of visual studies, also remarked on the gendered nature of the incorporation or appropriation of Yemeni culture into that of urban Zionism. In a 2006 article "Between Lulu and Penina: The Yemenite Woman, Her Jewelry [sic.], and Her Embroidery in the New Hebrew Culture," she considers how European Zionists, in the creation of pre- and early-state Hebrew culture, appropriated Yemeni-Jewish aesthetics of jewellery and embroidery, both of which are very much tied to femininity. The introduction to Guilat's study begins with a quotation from the

French painter Eugene Delacroix's 1832 reflections on Morocco as a segue to addressing the ambivalent attitude of Westerners to the 'Orient' as at once beautiful and backwards, picturesque and primitive.[198] She suggests that Zionist culture too perceived non-European Jews, and especially those of a Yemeni background, as worthy of aesthetic admiration on the one hand; on the other, as bearers of an inferior culture and worldview,[199] and to borrow Palestinian scholar and intellectual historian Joseph Massad's language, were Zionism's internal others.[200]

Guilat's configuration is useful in explaining the Zionist press's seemingly split attitude toward Tsabari's coronation in 1928. She was, in the eyes of Ashkenazim, certainly an 'other.' In the Yiddish-American daily *Forverts,* Tsabari's image, in which she was dressed in European-style garb, with the caption "A JEWISH BEAUTY of Palestine, who was crowned 'Queen Esther' at a Purim Festival in Tel Aviv, several years ago" was displayed in a collage of photographs entitled "Exotic Beauties of Exotic Lands," alongside Indigenous-American, Asian, African, and Middle-Eastern women.[201] Though identified as a Jew, she was also seen as exotic, a racialised other foreign to American, Yiddish-speaking Jews.

[198] Yael Guilat, 'Between Lulu and Penina: The Yemenite Woman, Her Jewelry, and Her Embroidery in the New Hebrew Culture', *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, no. 11 (2006): 198–223, 198—199.

[199] This is not uncommon of nationalist ethnography, in which the least "modernised" group of a certain nation is seen as the group that has best maintained the nation's authentic spirit, heritage, and way of life. For examples in German, Mexican, and Hungarian contexts, see the following: Todd Kontje, 'Romantic Nationalism and Imperial Nostalgia', in *Imperial Fictions*, German Literature Before and Beyond the Nation-State (University of Michigan Press, 2018), 119–42, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9771990.9; Francie Chassen-López, 'The Traje De Tehuana as National Icon: Gender, Ethnicity, and Fashion in Mexico', *The Americas* 71, no. 2 (2014): 281–314; Judit Frigyesi, 'Béla Bartók and the Concept of Nation and "Volk" in Modern Hungary', *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (1994): 255–87.

[200] Joseph Massad, 'Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 53–68, https://doi.org/10.2307/2538006.

[201] 'Exotic Beauties of Exotic Lands', *Forverts*, 10 January 1932, sec. Art Section, 16.

As such, Tsabari was seen as both dazzling and crude, an ideal yet contentious representation of true Hebrew beauty. What Guilat does not consider, however, is that unlike the French-Christian painters who flocked to North Africa, the European Jews of the Yishuv not only admired Yemeni aesthetics or "invented Yemeniteness"[202] from afar, but they also saw their own histories as enshrined and embodied by Yemeni-Jewish men and especially women. It is in this context that images of Yemeni Jews come to dominate Zionist culture and as Guilat argues, an invented prototype of the Yemeni Jewess emerged in literature, art, and performance came to define the Jewish nation.[203]

The ideal of the beautiful, authentic Yemeni Jewess transcended borders, reaching European-Jewish Zionists in Poland. A quote from the *Nasz Przegląd* reflects my assertion that European Jews saw themselves, both their histories and their futures, in Yemeni-Jewish women. In a response to a letter to the editor regarding the 1929 pageant in Warsaw, the paper claimed: "Amongst Sephardi and Yemeni Jews, who outwardly have preserved the purity of the *Semitic race*, we admittedly do not find any blondes."[204] Thus, in the Zionist-Polish context, the Yemeni was imagined as a preserver not of culture, but of biological race. Despite little mention of Yemeni Jews in Warsaw's press, this instance shows how the Yemeni ideal was translated into a similar yet different context. Perhaps not dominant amongst Zionists of the "diaspora," the Yemeni ideal existed and informed Jewish self-perception, whether racial or cultural. That these ideas of beauty spread transnationally and were relativised and translated according to local contexts testify to the

[202] Guilat, 'Between Lulu and Penina,' 199.
[203] Guilat, 'Between Lulu and Penina,' 200. See also Nitsa Druyan, 'Yemenite Jewish Women - Between Tradition and Change', in *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel*, ed. Deborah S. Bernstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Yael Guilat, 'The Yemeni Ideal in Israeli Culture and Arts', *Israel Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 26–53; Gurit Kadman, 'Yemenite Dances and Their Influence on the New Israeli Folk Dances', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 4 (1952): 27–30, https://doi.org/10.2307/835838.
[204] 'Odpowiedzi Redakcji,' 5.

fact that (some members of) the Jewish nation, despite existing in disparate geographies, were nonetheless dynamically interlinked and imagined themselves in a (semi-)united national community.

To return to Tel Aviv, Baruch Agadati, the Bessarabia-born Zionist dancer and choreographer, as a producer of *Yishuv* culture, was an active agent of the appropriation of Yemeni culture. In fact, Yemeni aesthetics occupied a major thematic role in Agadati's creative oeuvre, including his travelling solo show entitled "Yemenite Ecstasy," in which he featured Yemeni-Jewish 'inspired' dress and dance.[205] Despite being European, he quite literally donned interpretations of Yemeni garb as a costume, embodying "invented Yeminiteness" through the physical, corporeal act of dance.[206] It is of no surprise then that as pageant organiser, Agadati crowned all of the queens in Yemeni-inspired jewellery and headdresses, regardless of their ethnic identity. In Agadati's eyes, Yemeni dress and accessories, in addition to literal bodies, evoked a visual continuity between ancient, authentic, Jewish beauty and contemporary Hebrew women of the Yishuv.

[205] See figure 9. Leszlo Willinger, *Baruch Agadati in the Dance '"Yemenite Ecstasy"'*, c 1924, Photograph, 13.2 x 8 cm, c 1924, Bat Sheva and Yitshak Kats Archive, Information Center for Israeli Art, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, https://museum.imj.org.il/artcenter/includes/item.asp?id=507346.

[206] As scholar Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman writes, the imagined Yemeni Jew "was characterized as free, courageous and enterprising, contrasting with the images of the 'exilic' Jew, who was seen as downtrodden, submissive and passive." in 'Challenging the Zionist Enterprise and Ethos', in Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, *Traditional Society in Transition: The Yemeni Jewish Experience*, vol. 39, The Brill Reference Library of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004272910_006, 127. I believe that this image of bohemian, free-spiritedness associated with Yemeni Jews was especially attractive to artists like Agadati.

Figure 10 Tsipora Tsabari on a donkey selling milk photographed by Shimon Korbman in 1928 from the Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv Collection.

Figure 11 Tsabari posing with her gifts from the Tel Aviv municipality photographed by Shimon Korbman in 1928 from the Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv Collection.

Figure 12 Tsabari pictured in bottom left-hand corner published in 'Exotic Beauties of Exotic Lands', *Forverts*, 10 January 1932.

Tsabari, as a pageant queen, served as an embodiment and enshrinement of the Yemeni ideal amongst the urban Zionists of Palestine.[207] could be read as an example of an embodied, living prototype of the Yemeni Jewess, as described by Guilat, in Palestinian-Zionist culture. Tsabari was not a literary figure nor a subject of a painting. Rather, she was a living, breathing person who made a choice to participate, whether consciously or subconsciously, in the negotiation of Jewish beauty and peoplehood, or race. As a Yemeni woman with long black hair, deep brown eyes, and a skin tone that marked her as non-European, Tsabari symbolised the primordial Yemeni Jewish woman or girl who was, while very much Yemeni, a natural display of authentic, pre-exilic Jewishness, unmarred by the dispersion and subsequent humiliation across the diaspora. Tsabari was symbolically associated with both the land of the present and the land of the past.

As a Yemeni woman, Tsabari was also seen as a 'natural worker,' able to embody the Zionist ethos of labour. Yemeni-Jewish men were also seen as 'natural workers' by both agricultural and urban European Zionists. As journalist Yair Ben Avraham of *Ha-Arets* published in 1923, Yemeni Jews were "the fittest *material* for physical labour in this land."[208] As such, male Jews of Yemeni origin were seen as a labour force that could replace Palestinian *fellahin* for even lower wages while also contributing to the goal of 'Hebrew labour' in the land, ensuring that those doing the work would be Jews.[209] Tsabari, though she was an urban woman as opposed to an agricultural man, was

[207] Guilat, 'The Yemeni Ideal.'
[208] Yair Ben Avraham in *Ha-Arets* as translated from Hebrew and quoted in Klorman, *Traditional Society in Transition: The Yemeni Jewish Experience*, 124. Emphasis my own.
[209] On the racialisation of Yemeni labour in Zionist settlements in Palestine, see Nimrod Ben Zeev, 'Palestine along the Colour Line: Race, Colonialism, and Construction Labour, 1918–1948', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44, no. 12 (26 September 2021): 2190–2212, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1885723 and Guilat, 'The Yemeni Ideal in Israeli Culture and Arts,' 36. See also sociologist Gershon Shafir's translation of a collective 1913 letter of Yemeni-Jewish workers from Ness Tsiona, writes that "you gave us work like to the *goyim* [Gentiles], and meager wages . . . We are contemptible and abject in your eyes: and you say to us: dogs, *goyim*!" in 'The Meeting of Eastern Europe and Yemen: "Idealistic Workers" and "Natural Workers" in Gershon Shafir, Early Zionist Settlement in Palestine', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 2 (1 April 1990): 172–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1990.9993668.

nonetheless also associated with the image of the labouring Yemeni Jew. That she was a milkmaid, and thus as a worker herself, contributed to her 'authentic' image. She, unlike any of the queens before or after her reign, managed to symbolically embody the marriage of the female worker and the beauty queen. While labour was arguably not a primary concern for the bourgeois Ashkenazim of Tel Aviv, Tsabari's election proved to the Zionist Yishuv that an ideal Hebrew woman could be both Yemeni and Zionist, beautiful and capable of physical labour, and even of the Arab world *and* Jewish.

As Keisari wrote four years after Tsabari's coronation, "She was beautiful, in Allah!,"[210] employing a tongue-in-cheek nod to Arabic phrasing to highlight the young queen's perceived 'Arabness' and thus a sense of belonging to the local landscape. Despite being Yemeni and not Palestinian, Keisari bombastically declared that "when you looked at her, you were compelled to bite your lips with your teeth. This was a 'product of the Land,'[211] gentlemen, one hundred per cent!".[212] Laden with sexuality, his description of the "Yemeni bombshell"[213] revealed how Zionist men projected their erotic, racial, and national fantasies onto the bodies of the young queens, salivating at the image of authentic, Hebrew beauty.

Beyond embodying Hebrew beauty, the young Tsabari also served as a model for the inclusion of Yemeni Jews within Zionist national community and Jewish racial imagining. *Ha-Arets* depicted a scene in which the Yemeni participants collected "wagons, trucks, horses, camels, donkeys, and

[210] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther,' 6 "היא היתה יפה, באללה!"
[211] "תוצרת הארץ"
[212] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther,' 67.
[213] As she was nicknamed in Uri Keisari, 'Haya Hayta Adloyada! [There Was the Purim Parade!]', *Ma'ariv*, 4 March 1955, 3.

bicycles. In the front of the parade, horsemen [of the community] carried a big, blue-white versed banner [that read]: 'And God will sound the horn . . . through the storms of Yemen.'"[214] The journalist's description of the Yemeni community's display of excitement reads as if it could be a passage from the Bible, whilst also attesting to the modernity of the event-goers who mounted wagons and trucks to attend a nationalist event as Jews and as subjects of the British Mandate.[215] The *Ha-Arets* reporter considered the choice of Queen Esther as an attempt to "redeem" the Yemeni community and to include them within the Zionist project.[216] As Guilat argues, to the creators of Hebrew culture, the Yemeni woman stood as "an agent of change and a herald of national revival,"[217] in opposition to the Yemeni man, who was conservative and apathetic.[218] Tsabari, as a Yemeni woman, was thus understood by some Ashkenazi Zionists as uniquely positioned to inspire a shift in Yemeni-Zionist relations.

Yemeni Jews, even more so than other non-Zionist Jews, were seen as isolated from the larger Jewish community of the Yishuv. As Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor describe in *Oriental Neighbors: Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine*, Yemeni-Jewish structures such as the Yemeni Association (Hitaḥdut ha-Teimanim), also founded in 1923, unified and politically organised the Yemeni community, separating them from other communities of the Yishuv, new or old.[219] Historian Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman also argues that the Yemeni Jews of

[214] 'Purim be-Tel Aviv,' 4.
[215] In fact, the words displayed on the banner were taken from Zachariah 9:14 which is translated by Chabad.org as "And the Lord shall appear over them, and his arrows shall go forth like lightning. And the Lord God shall sound the shofar, and He shall go with the whirlwinds of the south." The original is below:
וַיהוָה עֲלֵיהֶם יֵרָאֶה וְיָצָא כַבָּרָק חִצּוֹ וַאדֹנָי יֱהוִה בַּשּׁוֹפָר יִתְקָע וְהָלַךְ בְּסַעֲרוֹת תֵּימָן
[216] 'Purim be-Tel Aviv,' 4.
[217] Guilat, 'Between Lulu and Penina,'199.
[218] Guilat, 'Between Lulu and Penina,'199.
[219] Jacobson, *Oriental Neighbors*, 131. For more on Hitaḥdut ha-Teimanim see Klorman, *Traditional Society in* Transition, 120–22. On Yemeni involvement in the politics of the 1920s Elected Assembly of the Jewish Yishuv,

1920s Palestine were seen as occupying a unique narrative and subjectivity, even though some vocal community activists sought to be seen like Ashkenazim, as central voices in the Zionist narrative.[220]

Thus, the selection of a Yemeni Jewess as winner of Tel Aviv's 1928 Purim Pageant can be understood, in part, as an invitation to the more insular Yemeni community to join the process of a national or ethnic imagining of 'the Jewish people.'[221] As a 1928 *Ha-Arets* article framed it, the election of Tsabari was a marker that "finally, the last division between the big and well-socialised tribes in Israel and the small and pauperised tribe [the Yemeni community] had fallen."[222] Spiegel maintains that Tsabari allowed Yemeni Jews, and poor Jews, to momentarily play a starring role in Zionist nation-building, though she concludes that they were soon after pushed back to the periphery of Jewish society as a minority group.[223] This did not mean that the Yemeni Zionist bond was severed, however.

As Bat-Sheva Margalit Stern argues, Tsabari allowed Yemeni men, women, and children to see themselves as essential to the Ashkenazi Zionist project. Inspired by Tsabari's glorious crown, the Yemeni communities in Kerem ha-Teimanim and beyond continued to hold beauty pageants in which one Yemeni Jewish girl or young woman would be crowned as Purim queen.[224] Tse'irei ha-Mizraḥ [The Youth of the East], an association of Yemeni youth, had organised community Purim

see Donna Robinson Divine, 'Zionism and the Transformation of Jewish Society', *Modern Judaism* 20, no. 3 (2000): 257–76, 265–66.

[220] Klorman, *Traditional Society in* Transition.

[221] On Yemeni Jews and the press in the wake of Tsabari's election, see Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 41–43.

[222] V.B., 'Ḥalom ha-Malḥut,' 3.

[223] Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 40–41.

[224] Stern, 'Who's the Fairest of Them All?,' 150.

celebrations years before 1928,[225] but began to hold annual balls in Neve Tsedek that included a beauty pageant in which the mayor of Tel Aviv and other important figures would vote for the Yemeni Queen Esther. Thus, as recalled by Stern, mostly wealthy, Ashkenazi men were invited by Yemeni men to scrutinise young 'Oriental' women in a Yemeni-specific continuation of a Zionist practice. While these separate pageants made it clear that Yemeni Jews were still within a minority in the Zionist Yishuv, they reinforced their position within it by establishing a tradition of Ashkenazi-Yemeni co-negotiation of feminine beauty.

In a 1984 interview conducted by Israeli cinema expert Yaakov Gros, a white-haired Tsabari, the former Queen Esther, reminisced on her sensational pageant win in 1928. She recounted that despite the fact that a gala organiser who had access to the ballots had hinted to the young Tsabari that she was a crowd favourite, she was still surprised when, out of the other five contestants, she received a majority of 300 votes and secured her queenship over Tel Aviv.[226] "How did they choose you specifically?,"[227] the interviewer asked. With a twinkle in her eyes, she joked, "Why me? How do I know? Luck?,"[228] then switching from her breathy Hebrew to a rhyming Yiddish, she joked: "*A mazel, a shlimazel,*"[229] which roughly translates to "a good luck, an unlucky one," or idiomatically, "dumb luck." Tsabari's use of specifically Yiddish colloquialisms is doubly humorous, poking fun at Ashkenazi hegemony and the attempt to bring a young, poor Yemeni Jewess like herself into the imagined Jewish nation. On the one hand, she was a recipient of *mazel*, of good luck, as she was able to use her moment in fame to pursue an acting career in Europe,

[225] 'Moda'ah Shel Agudat "Tse'irei Ha-Mizraḥ" Be-Yafo al Neshef Purim (1914) [A Flyer from the "Youth of the East" Association in Jaffa on the Purim Ball (1914)]', 1914, 181200, Anu: Mozeyon ha-Am ha-Yehudi, Itsḥak Einhorn Collection.
[226] 'Bḥirat "Ester ha-Malka" le-Purim [Selecting "Queen Esther" for Purim,]' *Ha-Arets*, February 7, 1928, 4.
[227] Gross and Tsabari, Tsipora Tsabari - Malkat Esther.
[228] Gross and Tsabari, Tsipora Tsabari - Malkat Esther.
[229] Gross and Tsabari, Tsipora Tsabari - Malkat Esther.

mostly playing Romani or Indigenous-American women in films and even landing a role in a film with the up and coming film star Marlene Dietrich.[230] On the other hand, her life was certainly not easy nor was it filled with fortune, as days before the Purim parade her father died, and as an adult, she experienced the growth of fascism in Europe. As pointed out by journalist Yinon Royḥman, it is still unclear how Tsabari survived Nazism as a racialised, Jewish woman living in Germany.[231] She returned to Palestine, or rather the state of Israel, in 1966, finding work as a cleaner for the municipality of Tel Aviv and caretaker, industries that relied on Yemeni, female labour. Tsabari, once a queen of Tel Aviv, spent her later years mopping up after the city's elite.

Perhaps, too, the former queen's joking use of Yiddish also hinted toward the impossibility of Ashkenazim to completely shed themselves of their undesirable, inaesthetic past, as embodied by the Yiddish sounds of the 'shtetl,' despite the attempts of the Ashkenazi establishment to align themselves with the modern, global West. In fact, the adoption of beauty deals that were definitively not Ashkenazi and rather Sephardi or Yemeni illustrates that Ashkenazi Zionists were uncomfortable with their own physicality, or the perception of it, and as such, looked to other groups to embody ideal Jewish racial expression and physicality. As this chapter has argued thus far, these racialised beauty ideals often relied on women and their bodies to represent Jewish beauty. Though, as I have discussed above, the fetishisation of the Yemeni woman's body did not mean that Yemeni Jews (and Jewesses) did not experience intense racial denigration at the hands of the Ashkenazi Jews. That Ashkenazi Jews of the Yishuv could not decide whether to idolise or demonise Tsabari reflects one of the many tensions of Zionist ideology that strove to at once restore

[230] To read more on Tsabari's time in Europe, see Stern, 'Who's the Fairest of Them All?'
[231] Yinon Royḥman, "Le-an Ne'elma Tsipora Tsabari?," October 26, 2006, https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3315629,00.html.

Jewish authenticity and cement Jewish connection to the land of Palestine while also aligning itself with the 'progressive' West and the moralising missions of European colonialism. Zionists wanted to both *be* native and Westernise the very notion of nativeness. To negotiate this process, Tel Aviv turned both to the bodies of 'native-looking 'women, and as I will discuss below, to the bodies of 'Western-looking' women as well.

Queen Esther and Miss Judaea: East Meets West

On the 27th of March 1929, Ḥana Meyuḥas-Polani, "a fair woman, with hair the colour of gold"[232] appeared on the front page of *Ha-Arets*, proudly peering into the eyes of viewers as the queen of Hebrew beauty in Palestine.[233] She was the first Queen Esther of Tel Aviv to have her image in any paper in Palestine,[234] as well as in the American *Forverts.*[235] Further, there were even stamps produced with her image.[236] When she was crowned queen a month earlier, *Ha-Arets* introduced her as a "Jerusalem native, the daughter of the writer and mayor of Jewish Jerusalem Sir Yosef Meyuḥas, and on her mother's side - granddaughter of Yeḥiel Miḥael Pines Z"L (may he rest in peace.)"[237] Her maternal grandfather Pines, was a prominent Russian-born writer and religious Zionist who produced much literature that promoted Zionism. Her father, a descendant of a Sephardi-Jewish line of rabbis who came to Palestine from Izmir in the seventeenth century, also was a faithful student of Arabic and Arabic folklore, a prolific writer, and even a journalist in the Hebrew press of Jerusalem.[238] Like Chelouche, Meyuḥas-Polani descended from a prominent family. She also was Sephardi via her father, though she was to visually represent the West as

[232] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther.'
[233] 'Purim Be'Tel Aviv', *Ha-Arets*, 27 March 1929, 1.
[234] *Ha-Arets*, 27 March 1929, 1 and *Do-ar ha-Yom*, 26 March 1929, 2.
[235] Alter Kaczyna, 'A Contest of Jewish Beauties of Poland', *Forverts*, 28 April 1929, sec. Art section.
[236] As seen in 'Ha-Nadun: Kabala Pnei "Esther Ha-Malkah" be-Eiyarah (In Question: Reception of "Queen Esther" at the Municipality', 3 November 1929, A(א) 46, Tel Aviv Municipal Archives.
[237] 'Be-Tel Aviv u-be-Yafo [In Tel Aviv and Jaffa]', *Ha-Arets*, 27 January 1929, 4.
[238]Yosef Yoel Rivlin, 'Yosef Meyuḥas', *Moznaim* 16, no. 2 (1942): 131–33.

pageant queen. In this sense, I understand Meyuḥas-Polani's election as a symbolic synthesis of European and native qualities, embodying the contradictory split between West and East, European *and* Palestinian.

Keisari, in a piece published three years after Meyuḥas-Polani's reign, wrote of the blonde queen that "It seemed clear that in the selection of the new queen we wanted to take revenge on the West and to show it that we also have beautiful women in the style of Europe."[239] In his previous discussion on Tsabari and her career in Europe, he caustically teased that: "the West stole her from us. And we, the sons of the East, are zealots who will not forgive."[240] Keisari joked that the Yishuv, which he identifies as Eastern, sought to take revenge on the West for usurping the Yemeni queen, proving that Tel Aviv's Zionists too could procure a woman fit to the standards of Western Europe.

The same year in which Meyuḥas-Polani was granted the honour of queen of Tel Aviv, Böske Simon won the very first *Miss Magyarország* or Miss Hungaria pageant, and thus represented Hungary as a blonde, blue-eyed, *and* Jewish woman. Just a few weeks later, the twenty-year-old Simon was crowned as Miss Europa in Paris, with Władysława Kostakówna representing Poland as her runner-up.[241] As multidisciplinary scholar of Hungarian studies Louise O. Vasvári points out, the Jewish press in Europe, and per my findings,

Figure 13 A stamp featuring Meyuḥas-Polani identifying her as Queen Esther of 1929 from the Tel Aviv Municipal Archives (46A).

[239] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther,' 67.
[240] Keisari, 'Mi-Esther Ad Esther,' 67.
[241] Marek Teler, 'Władysława Kostakówna: Pierwsza Miss Polonia i Zapomniana Bohaterka Ruchu Oporu (Władysława Kostakówna: The First Miss Polonia and a Forgotten Heroine of the Resistance Movement)', Hist Mag, Czytaj więcej: https://histmag.org/Wladyslawa-Kostakowna-pierwsza-Miss-Polonia-i-zapomniana-bohaterka-ruchu-oporu-14283, https://histmag.org/Wladyslawa-Kostakowna-pierwsza-Miss-Polonia-i-zapomniana-bohaterka-ruchu-oporu-14283.

in Palestine as well, took notice of this Jewish beauty queen, that despite not *looking* 'Jewish,' was both beautiful and proud to be of a Jewish background.[242] Antisemites too, in Hungary and across Europe, took notice to Simon's Jewishness and thusly protested her reign as beauty queen of Hungary and of Europe, referring to her rather and "Miss Palestina," a "spoiled Jewish girl," and *not* Hungarian.[243]

Figure 14 Böske Simon as Miss Europa, seated by Miss France to her left, and Miss Germania to her right as reproduced in Vasvári, 'Böske Simon, Miss Hungaria and Miss Europa (1929)'.

This antisemitic abuse, perhaps not surprising, still resonated in the press of European Jewry. Though some Jews maintained hope in the power of Jewish beauty. Just ten days after her massive win in Paris, *Nasz Przegląd* remarked on her non-Jewish look, fantasising that "Thanks to the victory at the global congress in Paris, our maidens will no longer be ashamed of their Jewish

[242] Louise O. Vasvári, 'Böske Simon, Miss Hungaria and Miss Europa (1929): Beauty Pageants and Packaging Gender, Race, and National Identity in Interwar Hungary', *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 12, no. 0 (1 August 2019): 193–238, https://doi.org/10.5195/ahea.2019.360, 197.
[243] Vasvári, 'Böske Simon,' 199–200.

appearance henceforth. Maybe it will no longer be a compliment for a Jewish girl to be told that she looks like a real Christian woman. Rather, a Christian woman will start to feel proud when she is taken for a Jewess."[244] Perhaps then, the Jewish Yishuv choosing a Germanic-looking queen in 1929 could act as Keisari's interpretation of an act of aesthetic 'revenge,' showing the West that Miss Europa of 1929 was not the sole fair, Jewish girl to represent national beauty and that Jewish women, who embodied different physical 'types,' could aesthetically compete with the beauties of Europe.

In the pageants of Tel Aviv, despite self-Orientalisation, there was also a conscious effort of fashioning Jewesses as Western beauty queens, reflecting the tension between Zionist Orientalisation and Occidentalisation. Mayor of Tel Aviv Meir Dizengoff addressed the 1929 winner of Agadati's pageant: "Today you are the queen of Tel Aviv, and your rule is from the Yarkon [River] to the borders of Jaffa–Tel Aviv. The whole crowd bows before your beauty and greets you not as the queen of Tel Aviv alone but as the queen of *all* of Erets Israel. In the style of Europe— you are Miss Erets Israel."[245] His words make clear that these pageants suggested Zionist adjacency to Europe, while also subtly suggesting that 1929's queen was most visibly similar to an imagined beauty of the European style.

In fact, both Appenszlak and Agadati drew upon a modern Western tradition of pageantry, modelling the cultural representation of Zionist Jews in Poland and in Palestine after that of

[244] B. Jeuszzon, 'Miss Europa', *Nasz Przegląd (Our Report)*, 17 February 1929, 13.

[245] Meir Dizengoff in 'Kabalat Pnei Ha-Malkah Be'Eiyeret Tel Aviv (Reception of the Queen in the Tel Aviv Municipality)', *Do'ar Ha-Yom*, 26 March 1929, 3.

"היום את מלכת ת"א וממשלתך מהירקון עד גבול יפו-ת"א. כל ההמון הזה משתחוה לפני יופיך ומברך אותך לא בתור מלכת ת"א בלבד כ"א בתור מלכת א"י כלה לפי סגנון אירופה — הנך 'מיס ארץ ישראל.'"

In a report on the same speech in *Ha-Arets*, 26 March 1929 Dizengoff stresses her Jerusalemite heritage as a sign of her authenticity to Hebrew/Judaic identity. Emphasis my own.

European nation-states, while at the same time forging visual connections to Palestine and the broader imaginary culture of the 'East.' The Miss Judaea pageant, which in its name recalled a land in the ancient Near East, chose Oldakówna as a representative of a woman who, despite having 'Semitic' features, was visually *modern*, dressed in the latest fashions of the West. The four queens of Tel Aviv too were photographed in costumes that incorporated elements of Arab and European fashion, showing that they were meant to be perceived as bodies of the East and of the West, enshrining the best feminine beauty of both worlds.

Encountering Palestine's Arabs: Ideals, Mimesis, and National Aesthetics

As historian Rashid Khalidi frames the role of the "Other" in national identity in his seminal book *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness,*[246] the imagining of a collectivity is a process that, in part, draws upon a distinction between an in group and an out group. He cites Stuart Hall who argues that identity "is partly the relationship between you and the Other,"[247] following with an excerpt from Edward Said's 1994 edition of *Orientalism:*[248] "the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another, different and competing *alter ego*. The construction of identity … involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from 'us.'"[249] In the curation of Zionist identity, the cultural elite did not deal solely with internal others, but with external others as well: Palestinian Arabs, the people who

[246] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). Khalidi is discussing the formation of Palestinian national identity as, in part, a reaction to Zionists and Zionism. In using his framing, I argue that the reverse is also true, in that Zionists developed their own culture in response to that of the Palestinian Arabs.
[247] Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 9–10
[248] Said in Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 11
[249] Said in Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 11

lived in the supposed ‘homeland.’ As such, distinction from, imitation of, and competition with Palestinian-Arabs shaped Zionist aesthetics.

Figure 15 Jewish woman dressed in Palestinian-Arab traditional clothing from the Abrabaya-Levinski collection (80) printed in Carmiel, *Tel-Aviv be-tahposet ve-kheter*.

While the costumes of the pageant queens of Tel Aviv were not necessarily modelled after an interpretation of local Palestinian-Arab dress, they were, as discussed earlier, fashioned as partly Arab, whether Yemeni or more broadly ‘Oriental.’ It is notable that the male and female costumed attendants of Agadati’s Purim festivities sometimes dressed in (their interpretation of) local,

Palestinian-Arab garb, seeming to, for one day, step into the shoes of the natives.[250] Like the rural Zionists of groups such as *HaShomer,* who wrapped their heads with a *keffiyeh* and an *ʿiqāl,*[251] or the young women who posed in a *thawb, smadeh,* and *shambar*[252] for Avraham Soskin, the "photographer of Tel Aviv" as he was called,[253] Purim was a day in which urban Ashkenazim of Tel Aviv could flirt with 'trying on' another culture that was exotic, alluring, and most of all authentic.

Even in Poland, Zionist Jews saw the figure of the Arab as alluring and desirable. In a response to a submission by a woman with the pseudonym "Amra" from Warsaw, *Nasz Przegląd* published: "Beautiful Arab name and even more beautiful is the candidate who bears it. But this, by Allah, is not enough."[254] In asking her to provide her "age, profession, place of residence, etc.," the editors saw it fit to comment on her "Arab" sounding name, emphasising their fascination with her perceived 'Arabness' by using the world "Allah." The fact that Amra fashioned herself, whether knowingly or unknowingly, as Arab, was not seen as contradictory, but rather as a reinforcement of an authentic, Semitic essence. As such, the Arab (but not necessarily the Palestinian-Arab) ideal transcended Palestine's borders and existed in the minds of the Polish, Jewish, Zionist intelligentsia of Warsaw.

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[250] On self-indigenisation, see Ronald Ranta, Alejandro Colas, and Daniel Monterescu, eds., *'Going Native:'? Settler Colonialism and Food*, 1st ed. (Verlag: Springer International Publishing, 2022), https://www.lehmanns.de/shop/sozialwissenschaften/58545311-9783030962678-going-native.

[251] *Untitled*, c 1913, Photograph, c 1913, P-51055, Pinchas Lavon Institute, Avraham Soskin Photo Collection. A *keffiyeh* is a cotton scarf, often patterned, that has historically been worn as a head covering by farmers, which in the 1930s, started to become a symbol of Palestinian culture and nationalism, which was solidified by leader Yasser Arafat in the 1960s. The *ʿiqāl* is a cord that is often worn with a *keffiyeh* to keep it in place. To see more on the *keffiyeh* and national identity, see Widad Kamel Kawar and Tania Nasir, 'The Traditional Palestinian Costume', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10, no. 1 (1980): 118–29, https://doi.org/10.2307/2536487.

[252] A *thawb* is a long tunic/dress traditionally worn by Palestinian women, a *smadeh* is an intricate headdress adorned with coins, and *a shambar* is a type of veil.

[253] Batia Carmiel, *Tel-Aviv be-Taḥposet ve-keter: Ḥagigot Purim ba-Shanim 1912-1935 [Tel Aviv in Costume and Crown: Purim Celebrations in the Years 1912-1935]* (Tel-Aviv: Muzeon Erets-Yisrael, 1999), 51.

[254] 'Odpowiedzi Redakcji [Editor's Response]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 26 February 1929, 5.

Until this point, I have referred to the fascination with and emulation of Arab(-Palestinian) aesthetics as an ideal, on par with that of the 'Sephardi ideal' or the 'Yemeni ideal.' However, it is more accurate to describe it as an instance of colonial mimicry. Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha, in his 1984 *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, frames colonial mimesis as "a desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry - through repetition."[255] Building upon Bhabha's construction of colonial mimicry, Australian theorist Alan Lawson aptly argues that "in settler cultures, mimicry is a necessary and unavoidable part of the repertoire of the settler," explaining that, "this comes about because the 'settler' subject exercises authority over the indigene and the land at the same time as translating desire for the indigene and the land into a desire for native authenticity."[256] Though in the 1920s, European Zionists did not yet have a state, they did arrive to Palestine with the intention of settling in the land and, as can be observed by the imitation of Palestinian-Arab culture, they desired to *feel* and sometimes to *look* native. As such, they engaged in settler-colonial mimicry of the fashions of local populations, whether Jewish as we saw in the case of Ben Eliezer, or Arab, as this chapter will explore.

Embodying authentic 'nativeness' coexisted (and coexists) with a disdain for local culture in the settler-colonial paradigm. In line with the ethos of European settler colonialism, many left-wing Zionist immigrants of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw themselves as agents of improvement, bringing modernity to 'civilise' the Arabs, or the city dwellers, Bedouin, and

[255] Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man,' 129.
[256] Alan Lawson, 'The Anxious Proximities of Settler (Post)Colonial Relations', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd ed. (United States, United Kingdom, and Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 1210–24, 1215-16.

fellahin, or agricultural class of workers.[257] According to historian Yosef Gorny, Zionist settlers were often hostile to Arabs, viewing themselves as superior to the natives of the land and wishing to avoid 'contaminating' cultural influence.[258]

At the same time, however, Zionists often understood themselves as participating in a racial and spatial homecoming of sorts, and thus some saw themselves quite literally in the Arab populations. Historian Yael Zeruvabel even noted that some Zionists saw *fellahin* as the descendants of Jewish farmers who stayed in the ancient lands of Israel and Judaea after mass Jewish exile.[259] She points out that a number of Zionist figures, including Dov Ber Borochov, Ahad Ha'am, and even David Ben Gurion, embraced this genealogical theory that saw *fellahin* as of 'Jewish blood.'[260] Thus, Zionist settlers who mimicked local culture to *look* and *feel* native, perhaps thought of themselves not as imitators, but as a people returning to an authentic culture that was of their very blood and flesh. In this sense, settler-colonial, or to use critical theorist Anthony Moran's terminology, settler-national mimicry in crafting Zionist aesthetics, [261] which influenced to whatever extent the pageants of Tel Aviv and Warsaw, is complicated by the fact that the settlers themselves understood themselves not as strangers, but as close but removed relatives of the natives of Palestine.[262]

[257] Walter Laqueur, 'Zionism and Its Liberal Critics, 1896-1948', *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 4 (1971): 161–82, 177.
[258] Yosef Gorny, *Zionism and the Arabs 1882-1948: A Study of Ideology*, trans. Chaya Galai, 1st edition (Oxford Oxfordshire: New York: Clarendon Press, 1987), 34.
[259] Yael Zerubavel, 'Memory, the Rebirth of the Native, and the "Hebrew Bedouin" Identity', *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 315–52, 320.
[260] Zerubavel, 'Memory, the Rebirth of the Native,' 321.
[261] Anthony Moran, 'The Psychodynamics of Australian Settler-Nationalism: Assimilating or Reconciling with the Aborigines?', *Political Psychology* 23, no. 4 (2002): 667–701.
[262] This is a fruitful discussion but alas the scope of this thesis does not allow for a deeper delve into the issue.

Concluding Thoughts: Race and Settler-Nationalism Meet Beauty

As this chapter has shown, the Zionist imagination of race and peoplehood was vibrant, diverse, and filled with fantasy. The obsession with Sephardi, Semitic, Yemeni, or Palestinian-Arab beauty reflected a transnational European-Zionist reckoning with feeling, or perhaps manufacturing, native authenticity, while the emulation of (Western) European culture indicated a political alignment with the West and its empires. While this tension between East and West is not unique to Zionists of the 1920s, it nonetheless informed understandings of Jewish, Hebrew, or Judaic beauty, crafting the ideal Jewess into a hybrid of 'Oriental authenticity' and 'Occidental superiority.' Men, as judges and juries, and women, as participants, inserted themselves into these pressing debates by participating in what some may consider to be frivolous: beauty pageants.

As we know, however, beauty is almost always political, despite paradoxically being seen as something that can transcend political boundaries and national borders. Through these beauty pageants, Zionists were able to inspire nationalist sentiment, to address European-Jewish anxiety regarding antisemitic notions of Jewish bodies, and to fashion a national narrative that would reconcile that Jews authentically *looked* and even *were* native and that they were aligned with the colonial ethos of the West. It is also significant that these conversations, despite taking on different tones in different contexts, clearly played a dominant role in the Zionist pageants of two cities on two different continents, demonstrating the transnational nature of the development of Jewish nationalism. My next chapter, which explores the cessation of the invented tradition of Jewish pageantry in Zionist Warsaw and Tel Aviv, will push the spatial and chronological boundaries of my thesis even further, by looking at the proliferation of Zionist pageantry in North America and Australia in the 1930s. The politicised, racialised beauty pageants of the Zionist movements in Poland and Palestine may have physically travelled thousands of kilometres, but their travel and

adoption signalled an important paradigm of transnational, bourgeois Zionism: beauty pageantry would continue to be a tool of the Zionist movement even after the Second World War.

3 -1929 and Beyond: Miss Judaea and Queen Esther Across Borders

Truth is bitter, but with all its bitterness it is better than illusion. We must confess to ourselves that the "ingathering of the exiles " is unattainable by natural means. We may, by natural means, establish a Jewish State one day, and the Jews may increase and multiply in it until the country will hold no more: but even then the greater part of the people will remain scattered in strange lands. "To gather our scattered ones from the four corners of the earth" (in the words of the Prayer Book) is impossible. Only religion, with its belief in a miraculous redemption, can promise that consummation.[263]

Saying Goodbye to Beauty Pageants

"Miss Palestine," as Tsabari was called in a 1929 article that poked fun at the scandalous "brown-faced, Oriental" beauty queen turned-actress made the biggest splash on the Yishuv of Tel Aviv, with the ripples of her wave still felt months, years, and even decades after her coronation.[264] Her successor Meyuḥas-Polani, the last democratically-elected Queen Esther of Palestinian Tel Aviv, was perhaps just as beautiful, but proved to be not as memorable as Tsabari, the "Yemeni bombshell."[265] Oldakówna, the first and last Miss Judaea, went on to participate in philanthropic efforts,[266] promote Zionism,[267] and even to receive a fund specially created for the promotion of her charitable donations to hospitals, nursing schools, orphanages, homes for the elderly, as well as redistribution of funds to individual families.[268] She too eventually faded from the pages of *Nasz Przegląd*, as did the title which she so gracefully won. This begs the question: What happened to these dazzling, Hebrew queens and their crowns?

[263] Aḥad Ha'am, *The Jewish State and Jewish Problem (1897)*, trans. Leon Simon, Essential Texts of Zionism (United States: Federation of American Zionists, 1916).
[264] A N, '"Esther Ha-Malka" Motsiya Monitin Le-Tel Aviv ["Queen Esther" Gives Tel Aviv a (Bad) Reputation,]'*Ha-Arets*, February 21, 1929, 4 and 'Po ve-Sham [Here and There]', *Ha-Arets*, 28 1929, 4.
[265] As she was nicknamed in Keisari, 'Haya Hayta Adloyada!,' 3.
[266] See 'Fundusz Społeczny Miss Judei [Miss Judaea's Social Fund]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 1 April 1929, 4, 'Miss Judea Wśród Sierot [Miss Judaea Among Orphans]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 4 April 1929, 4, 'Między Wierszami, Filantropja [Between the Lines, Philanthropy]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 23 April 1929, 4.
[267] 'Miss Judea Śród Chaluców [Miss Judaea Among the Chalutzim]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 3 April 1929, 4.
[268] Plach, 'Introducing Miss Judaea ,' 387, see note 97.

This chapter, in continuing to weave together the vibrant and dynamic tapestry that is the creation and negotiation of transnational, Jewish peoplehood through the bodies of young women, will consider *why* the pageants of Warsaw and Tel Aviv ceased to exist, whether in their original form or at all, after 1929. To do so, I will briefly consider how the socialist and/or Orthodox Jewish critics of the pageants in both cities may have influenced pageant orchestrators in both cities to discontinue their newly invented traditions, considering both class and religiosity in my analysis. Further, I will consider the press's responses to contemporary social and political conditions to understand how the urban Zionist ecosystems of Tel Aviv and Warsaw responded to significant events in 1929, including the Great Depression and the Buraq Uprising or *Meora'ot Tarpat*. I will argue that these events and their lasting impacts also contributed to the end of the Zionist beauty competitions and a decentralising of the negotiation of Zionist womanhood in these two hubs of Jewish nationalist culture. Though my research allows me only to provide an educated guess and not a definitive, clear answer as to why the Miss Judaea and Queen Esther pageants ceased to exist, I will consider the inextricable political, social, and economic dimensions that ushered in the demise of the tradition of Zionist beauty pageants and the fading of the spotlight on Jewish femininity in Poland and in Palestine.

However, the conditions that rendered Zionist beauty pageantry untenable in Poland and Palestine did not necessarily exist across the Atlantic and Pacific. The second part of this chapter will introduce a new temporal and spatial dimension to my analysis of Zionist femininity's construction across broader borders: settler colonies in what is referred to as North America and Australia. Tracing how national Jewish femininity developed across borders, I will consider the Queen Esther pageants of Melbourne, Los Angeles, New York, and Montreal as reinterpretations of the beauty

competitions of Palestine, comparable to the Miss Judaea pageants in being both diasporic *and* Zionist. To do so, I will rely on the historical Jewish Palestinian, North American, and Australian press. While Queen Esther pageants also appeared in Cuba and Mexico at this time,[269] I am choosing to focus on the pageants in the anglophone contexts.[270] In doing so, I will argue that Zionist pageantry did not necessarily come to a full pause in 1929, but rather, it took on a life in different continental contexts, indicating that the interwar Zionist quest for a model of Jewish, Judaic, or Hebrew femininity had not disappeared.

Not in My Name: Jewish Opposition to the Zionist Pageants

Miss Judaea, whom *Nasz Przegląd* declared as the queen of *all* of Poland's Jews, was not necessarily accepted by the entirety of her coreligionists. In Plach's analysis of the Miss Judaea pageant, she writes that the Zionist daily published only positive reactions to the beauty contest, save the negative comments from "predictable voices in the Polish antisemitic press."[271] According to Plach, the antisemitic comments made regarding Miss Judaea were used by the paper to remind the Jews of Poland that they did not have a comfortable, stable home in Polin, where their medieval ancestors were said to rest after years of wandering.[272] This underscored *Nasz Przegląd* 's belief in the necessity of Zionism. While antisemitic responses to the pageants were certainly published in the press, and that *Nasz Przegląd* chose to report on these responses could be understood as telling of the paper's political agenda; one aspect of the author's closing arguments fall flat: that

[269] See 'The Most Beautiful Jewish Girls in Mexico', *Forverts*, 26 April 1931, sec. Art, 20; 'The Most Beautiful Jewish Woman in Mexico', *Forverts*, 17 April 1932, sec. Art, 20; 'Beauty Prize Winners of Jewish Community in Cuba', *Forverts*, 16 April 1933, sec. Art, 20; On Queen Esther pageants in Mexico City and Philadelphia, see also 'Two Queen Esthers of 1936', *Forverts*, 29 March 1936, sec. Art, 20.
[270] In part, my choice is informed by my inability to read Spanish.
[271] Plach, 'Introducing Miss Judaea,' 391.
[272] For more on Polish-Jewish mythology of origin, see Haya Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland—Legends of Origin: Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

the paper ignored all Jewish criticism of Miss Judaea. Plach argues that the paper neglected any mention of intra-Jewish criticism in an attempt to reinforce the pageant's message of Jewish unity.[273] After all, the title of the newspaper translated into English is *Our* Report, not *Their* Report or *His* Report. The figure of Miss Judaea as fashioned by *Nasz Przegląd* indeed strove to put forth a united Jewish front.

While this observation holds logically, the paper did in fact report on (some) Jewish protests to the momentous "beauty Olympics."[274] More specifically, the journalists of *Nasz Przegląd* covered, albeit sparingly, the reaction of some Jewish members of Agudas Yisroel, or Aguda, a prominent anti-Zionist Hasidic and Orthodox Jewish political body with seats in the *Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [the parliament] and in a variety of *kehillot* [Jewish community councils].[275] In the article " Echa Skandalu [Echoes of a Scandal]," published on the 21st of April 1929, the daily addressed the loudly reverberating gossip surrounding Yehoshua Heschel Farbstein. Farbstein, an ardent Zionist and traditional Jew, was a Warsaw-based member of Ḥibat Tsiyon, a proto-Zionist movement[276] and later served as president of Mizraḥi, an Orthodox Zionist political and religious faction that developed, in part, in response to the vocal anti-Zionism of the larger Polish-Jewish Orthodox community.[277] He also served as a member of the Zionist executive and president of the Polish branch of Keren Hayesod, a fund for raising money to sponsor the Jewish colonial project

[273] Plach, 'Introducing Miss Judaea,' 391
[274] Berkowicz, 'Zrehabilitujmy typ semicki,' 5.
[275] For more on Agudat Israel, see Gershon C. Bacon, 'Agudat Israel in Interwar Poland', in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Israel. Gutman et al. (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), 20–35.
[276] Michael Stanislawski, 'Ḥibat Tsiyon', in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 12 August 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hibat_Tsiyon.
[277] Asaf Kaniel, 'Mizraḥi', in *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2 September 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Mizrahi.

in Palestine, between 1927 and 1931. Though, Farbstein managed to find himself in murky waters in the early spring of 1929 when he hosted a banquet in Miss Judaea's honour.

As announced in *Nasz Przegląd* on the 31st of March of that year, Farbstein formally welcomed Miss Judaea on behalf of the Jewish community and, as reported by the paper, "at the same time, as a representative of a religious party that strives to reconcile the traditional forms of Jewish culture with the requirements of modern Jewish life that acknowledges the universal principle of harmonising the beauty of the body with the beauty of the spirit."[278] In writing that Farbstein was of an unnamed religious group that sought to embrace modernity, the paper implicitly acknowledged that most traditional Jews would not have agreed with their practice in pageantry.[279] The report on Farbstein continued: "He who marvelled at the beauty of women in the 'Song of Songs' also recognized that the song was more than sacred,"[280] referencing Farbstein's serenade to Oldakówna.

That he sang "Song of Songs" is not without significance. As many scholars have argued, "Song of Songs" is a collection of poems that is not afraid to consider sexuality and spirituality as intertwined. While the eroticism of the text is outspoken, "Song of Songs" is nonetheless an integral part of the Jewish, spiritual repertoire. That Farbstein chose to recite the song to Miss Judaea indicates a cultural fusion of secular and religious. Biblical studies scholar Kenton L. Sparks has made the case for an understanding of "Song of Songs" as a medley of love songs

[278] 'Powitanie Miss Judaei,' 4.
[279] Here we might observe traces of party politics as Mizrahi (the political party of Farbstein) and Aguda (the political party that opposed the pageants) were political adversaries.
[280] 'Powitanie Miss Judaei,' 4.

compiled with the purpose of teaching young, Jewish women about love and sex.[281] If we are to accept Sparks's hypothesis, it becomes clear that the religious, sixty-year-old Farbstein singing these words to Oldakówna, who was just one third his age, could be read as improper by contemporaneous commentators. Further, Ancient Near Eastern scholar M. L. Case, in their cheekily titled "Cunning Linguists: Oral Sex in the Song of Songs,"[282] makes the case for an understanding of cunnilingus as a motif in the "Song of Songs" by drawing comparisons between ancient Egyptian and Sumerian love poetry and the biblical song itself. Portnoy sardonically describes the iconic "Song of Songs" as a hymn "presented by some as a paean to God," which he qualifies as "pretty unlikely, unless Adonai [God] also has a nice rack."[283] That a well-known, married, Orthodox figure in Warsaw's Jewish world recited verses that alluded to oral sex to a beauty queen was optically questionable, to say the least.

After Farbstein's serenade, the gossip *oyf der yidisher gas*[284] of Warsaw started. As Portnoy recounts in his popular history of scandals in the Ashkenazi world, Agudas Yisroel, to put it lightly, "went berserk."[285] Aguda representatives took to the Yiddish press and the streets to protest Farbstein and the Miss Judaea pageant, decrying the notion of a beauty queen as decidedly un-, or even anti-Jewish. Series of cartoons poking fun at Oldakówna and her breasts emerged in the Yiddish press of Poland.[286] *Nasz Przegląd* could not ignore the noise that echoed through the Jewish courtyards of Warsaw weeks after the scandalous event. Less than a month after the banquet, the daily published that "the Aguda scandal over the acceptance of Miss Judaea by Mr.

[281] Kenton L. Sparks, 'The Song of Songs: Wisdom for Young Jewish Women', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2008): 277–99.
[282] M. L. Case, 'Cunning Linguists: Oral Sex in the Song of Songs', *Vetus Testamentum* 67, no. 2 (2017): 171–86.
[283] Portnoy, *Bad Rabbi*, 137.
[284] This is Yiddish for "On the Jewish street."
[285] Portnoy, *Bad Rabbi*, 138.
[286] See figure 16.

Farbstein, president of the community, is not yet off the pages of the Jewish press - the capital and provincial Jewish press."[287] An article published on the 21st of April 1929 reproduced the criticism of an *Ekspresie* journalist who challenged Aguda leaders by declaring that: "You had better go to your municipal council meeting and have a look at the galleries of exasperated synagogue boys who are whistling and making noise at the command of your leaders, and you will see into what abyss you are leading your 'army.'"[288] Berating the young boys "who had been raised on 'Judah,'"[289] the journalist continued: "we saw their cynical smirks and intermittent shouts (interrupting) when Miss Judaea was mentioned, and then the thought surfaced, 'These are the people who raise such punks who still dare to say anything about ethics, morality, virtue.'"[290] Avoiding writing the words themselves, *Nasz Przegląd* editors nonetheless found a way to reproduce scathing criticism of Aguda, undermining the supposed moral superiority of religious

Figure 16 A 1929 Yiddish cartoon poking fun at the pageant by showing Miss Judaea serving pageant judges the traditional Passover food of matza balls with her bulbous breasts on display, courtesy of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research as reproduced in Portnoy, *Bad Rabbi*.

[287] 'W Młynie Opinji [In the Opinion Mill]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 21 April 1929, 6.
[288] 'W Młynie Opinji,' 6.
[289] In the original Polish, it was termed as "na 'Judzie.'"
[290] 'W Młynie Opinji,' 6.

Jews. In doing so, they asserted that their ideological opponents were unworthy, invalidating their critique of the iconic Miss Judaea.

In an attempt to absolve Farbstein of his alleged wrongdoing, that same section introduced "a well-known columnist, Mr. P. Kaplan, editor of 'Dos Naje Leben' published in Białystok, [who] speaks on the same issue."[291] In defence of Farbstein, Kaplan declared that the community leader, "while hosting the most beautiful daughter of Israel in Warsaw, Miss Judaea, pointed out during his speech that Jews have always had a taste for beauty, to which he referred to the Song of Songs."[292] He asked his readers: "What is the sin in this? True, the religious tradition has commented on the Song of Songs as a parable about intercourse [of God] with the Jewish people… But, after all, that very tradition has implemented the custom of reciting the Song of Songs on Friday evening in addition to the hymn of praise 'Woman of Valour.'"[293] The journalist persisted to shield Farbstein from further attack, arguing that the "Song of Songs" has long inspired artists and poets with what he termed as "oriental creativity," and can thus be seen as a song of innocent aesthetic value.[294] Kaplan acknowledged that while Farbstein, an Orthodox Jew, certainly was aware of the hymn's sexual tone, his serenade was not at all inappropriate. Rather, Farbstein performed what Kaplan saw as a proper veneration of Jewish beauty. Clearly, fellow Zionists were more than ready to publicly support their colleague and to assert the legitimacy of the pageants themselves. *Nasz Przegląd* readily publicised the support of their fellow journalists, and thus tacitly acknowledged the criticism of Orthodox Jews, admitting that not every Jew accepted Miss Judaea as his (or her) queen.

[291] 'W Młynie Opinji,' 6.
[292] 'W Młynie Opinji,' 6.
[293] 'W Młynie Opinji,' 6.
[294] 'W Młynie Opinji,' 6.

Religious Jews were not the sole critics of Appenszlak's pageants, though *Nasz Przegląd* preferred to ignore that inconvenient fact. Even fellow Zionists did not always agree with the methods of *Nasz Przegląd*. In the Zionist Polish-language Warsaw-based periodical *Naród,* the professor of sociology Dr. Arieh Tartakower,[295] in his own words, "delves into the problem of the mission of Jewry" while "others prefer to discuss the issue of 'miss' Jewry - our domestic beauty queen."[296] In a cheeky tone, Tartakower wrote: "As we all know, *de gustibus non disputandum est,*[297] especially considering that the mission of Jewry is costly, while 'miss' Jewry can be a very lucrative venture,"[298] perhaps referencing Oldakówna's social fund of over 2.000 złoty. He continued his tongue-in-cheek denunciation of the Miss Judaea pageant, writing that "aesthetes, doctors, writers, and," adding caustically, "other experts in women's charms"[299] preached that a Jewish beauty queen was an essential part of the nationalist struggle of Polish Jewry.

Tartakower believed the 1929 pageant to be a distraction from the centralised mission of Zionism. He humorously added that perhaps "national pride," as framed by the editors of *Nasz Przegląd*, "requires us to sacrifice (a more or less) lovely Israelite virgin," hinting that the Zionist queen was not necessarily beautiful.[300] In yet another subtle judgement of Oldakówna's beauty, or rather lack thereof, the impassioned Zionist wrote that, "to a starving man, who has not eaten anything for days, whose head is unwashed with dishevelled hair, whose clothes are torn to shreds, whose feet protrude from his worn out shoes," Miss Judaea was a welcome and joyous twist of fate. She was

[295] For more see Daniel J. Elazar, 'Z"L Prof. Arieh Tartakower', *Newsletter (World Union of Jewish Studies)*, no. 22 (1983): 11–13.
[296] 'Na Marginesie ″Narodu″ (On the Margins of "Naród")', *Naród (Miesięcznik)* II, no. 5–6 (July 1929): 38–48, 41.
[297] In English, this is often translated into "in matters of taste, there can be no disputes."
[298] 'Na Marginesie,' 42.
[299] Na Marginesie,' 42.
[300] Na Marginesie,' 42.

"a shining elegant hat" that he could proudly place on his "dishevelled head," serving only to superficially cloak the disarray of world Jewry.[301] His biting commentary suggested that the Jewish-Polish beauty queen was no true beauty, and that she was only seen as such because the Jews of Poland so desperately sought superficial markers of national legitimacy. Clearly deriding the pageants as superfluous, he acquiesced that for nations like England and France who "have no other concerns,"[302] crowning a national beauty does no harm, yet for the Jews, who have no land, no government, and no centralised organisation, more worthy endeavours must be privileged. Some Zionists and Jews, Tartakower's argument concluded, kept the true mission of Jewry close to their hearts. He regretfully stated, however, that "others fight heroic battles for 'miss' Jewry, whilst the body of our nation is covered with scraps and fragments while its bloodied feet protrude from its shoes."[303] Evidently, Tartakower and the editors of *Naród* thought that the Miss Judaea pageant was an exercise in bourgeois vanity that distracted from the paltry state and material condition of world Jewry. The focus on beauty, Tartakower contended, also served as a distraction from the mission that Jews, in his opinion, should really prioritise: the pursuit of *building* an actual, physical nation as opposed to *just* imagining one. A beauty queen, no matter how charming, could not secure statehood for her people, nor could she alone rehabilitate the entirety of diaspora Jewry. Thus, in the eyes of some Polish Zionists, Miss Judaea was a distraction – and a sorry one at that – from the true goals of the Zionist movement.

Agadati's pageants in the first Hebrew city were also not without their critics. Zionist voices came out against the pageants in the Jewish press of Palestine, publishing their criticism of Agadati's

[301] Na Marginesie,' 42.
[302] Na Marginesie,' 42.
[303] Na Marginesie,' 42.

mission of vanity. One such voice belonged to Aleksander Ziskind Rabinovitz, a socialist Zionist, a fervently religious former member of Ḥibat Tsiyon (the same organisation to which Farbstein belonged), and a pioneer of Hebrew socialist literature. He took to the Zionist press, turning to the socialist-oriented daily *Davar* to publish his vehement opposition to the beauty competition. According to Spiegel, Rabinovitz's critical voice was the first to appear in the press, sparking fierce debate amongst Jews of the Yishuv.[304] His seminal article, which first extolled the virtues of the Esther of the holy scriptures, turned to "the traditional ball – *oy vavoy*[305] to this tradition – in which they choose some naive Yemeni girl,[306] Tsipora Tsabari[307] or another, they present her to the eyes of the qualified judges in the tractate of *Sota*,[308] they strip from her the crown of modesty, that which decorates the daughters of Abraham our forefather and they declare upon her: here is Queen Esther."[309] Like the critics of the Miss Judaea pageant, Rabinovitz suggested that the participants in the pageants of Tel Aviv were perverse and immodest, contrary to the Jewish tradition. Additionally, despite the Tel Aviv elite having elected only one Yemeni queen, it is curious that Rabinovitz wrote the whole pageant off as "Yemeni." In doing so, he seems to have suggested that Tsabari, both for her immodesty as a woman and her inferiority as a poor, Yemeni Jew, sullied the reputation of the pageants. Perhaps the writer also sought to appeal to those who did not agree with the choice of a Yemeni queen by including a reference to Tsabari's ethnicity,

[304] Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 46.
[305] An expression that, in this context, conveys a warning and disapproval.
[306] Yemeni is gendered as female in the original text, though it does not specify if it is referring to a woman or a girl. For the purposes of conveying the gendered dimensions of the text, I chose to select the word "girl" so that the gendered language will come through via my translation.
[307] Rabinovitz misspelled Tsabari's name. He wrote "צבארי" instead of "צברי." This error, I believe, indicates a level of disrespect or lack of care as the writer did not even spell Tsabari's family name correctly.
[308] *Sota* is a tractate in the Mishnah, found in the book of *Nashim*, or *Women.* It discusses a trial of a woman suspected of adulterous relations. For more on *Sota*, see Lisa Grushcow, *Writing the Wayward Wife: Rabbinic Interpretations of Sotah* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006).
[309] Aleksander Ziskind Rabinovitz, 'Harhurim (Reflections)', *Davar*, 5 March 1929, 3.
"יש נשף מסורתי — אוי ואבוי למסורה זו — ובה בוחרים איזו תימנית תמימה, צפורה צבארי או אחרת מעמידים אותה לעיני בוחנים הבקיאים במסכת סוטה, מסירים מעליה את עטרת הצניעות, המקשטת את בנות אברהם אבינו ומכריזים עליה: הנה אסתר המלכה."

which somehow further marked the character of the pageants as shameful and undesirable. True daughters of Abraham, according to Rabinovitz, are modest, and perhaps, we might gather, *not* Yemeni.

As Spiegel highlights, another voice contributed to the opposition to Queen Esther(s). Less than a month after Rabinovitz's piece was published, Y. Avizohar of the bourgeois paper *Ha-Arets* also questioned the merit of a cultural practice that valued a woman "just for the fact that she was born with a pretty face," and not for her "good deeds, not for her strength, not for her healthy and successful children that she gave birth to and nurtured."[310] While regarding a woman for her ability to biologically reproduce a nation was, in fact, worthy in Avizohar's eyes, her perceived beauty should not have been celebrated, even if this beauty were to symbolise another form of national reproduction: the reproduction of values,[311] which were (and are) so closely intertwined with aesthetics.[312]

Interestingly, Avizohar also evoked notions of racial and national conventions, writing: "And I know, they will tell me 'they do so in Europe as well,'" to which he answered: "To whom is it not clear that our attitude toward women was always different from the Aryan attitude,"[313] characterising the Jewish traditional approach to women as incompatible with that of the West. Avizohar encouraged his Jewish readers to differentiate themselves from Europe. He ended his passionate polemic with an appeal to the Jewish National Fund, the primary financial beneficiary

[310] Y. Avizohar, 'Yemei Ha-Purim be-Tel Aviv [The Days of Purim in Tel Aviv]', *Ha-Arets*, 1 April 1929, 3.
[311] Yuval-Davis and Anthias, *Woman-Nation-State*, 1—15.
[312] Ironically, this article appeared on the same page and row as an article entitled 'Shiurim le'Imahot [Lessons for Mothers].'
[313] Avizohar, 'Yemei Ha-Purim be-Tel Aviv,' 3.

of Agadati's Purim celebrations, to cancel the practice of pageantry to preserve the Jewish spirit of the Yishuv.

Despite Avizohar's criticism, religious responses to Agadati's beauty competitions were not entirely homogenous. Spiegel identifies that while socialist Zionists found the Queen Esther pageants to be an offence to their values, traditional Jews were the most vocal opponents of the institution of the Queen Esther pageants.[314] Though, rabbinic authorities in Palestine did in fact intervene in favour of the pageants when in 1928, they granted Tsabari permission to participate in the parade days after the death of her father and sister. According to the conventions of traditional Judaism, a Jew who is mourning the death of a parent is forbidden to rejoice and participate in festivities. Thus, the death of Tsabari's father presented a significant dilemma. To solve this dilemma, the municipality summoned a group of rabbis, who were neither specified as Yemeni nor as Ashkenazi, to consult on the issue. Collaborating with secular Zionists, these traditional rabbis found a loophole in Jewish law that allowed the young queen to play her role in Agadati's procession.[315] This would be the last time that a rabbinical voice would lend its support to the beauty pageants, and in fact, future rabbinical interaction with Queen Esther would condemn, rather than facilitate, the civic ritual of beauty pageantry. In 1930, the pageants indeed came to a pause.[316] In part, the fierce criticism of both fellow Zionists and of Orthodox Jews in both the Palestinian and the Polish contexts facilitated the pageants in reaching their premature demises, though as I will elaborate below, other forces also played a role in the pageants' cancellations.

[314] Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 47.
[315] Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 47—48
[316] To read more on criticism of the pageants see Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 202, Note 99.

One such force was gossip. Disapproving yet juicy and enticing whispers, which in part provided material for critique and allowed for its spread, aided in the downfall of the beauty competitions in both settings. As I have already demonstrated in the case of Miss Judaea, the whispers (turned shouts) of the sexual impropriety of the pageants certainly affected Jewish perception of *Nasz Przegląd*'s experiment. Shoham suggests that the gossip surrounding Tsabari, the 1928 Queen Esther, made the phenomenon of Jewish beauty into something of a sensation in Central Europe.[317] Her fame in Europe, which I mentioned in the first lines of this chapter, certainly left its mark on the Zionists of Tel Aviv. Some of the men saw Tsabari's career in Europe and the gossip surrounding it as improper and as a national disgrace of sorts.[318] When, as mentioned above, Rabinovitz derogatorily classified the pageants as choosing "some naive Yemeni [girl],"[319] he may have made a veiled reference not only toward derogatory attitudes toward Yemeni, working-class Jews, but also to the 'disgraceful' gossip surrounding Tsabari and her career abroad. That Tsabari was a poor, Yemeni woman who implicitly challenged Zionist ideology by leaving Palestine for Europe and defied notions of Jewish modesty by pursuing a career in film that placed her in the spotlight was extraordinary. It also marked the young queen an easier and more visible target of gossip. She was an "internal outsider," to borrow Massad's language,[320] and an unruly woman, who took her career into her own hands at the chagrin of some men of the Yishuv, using her body and her physicality to her advantage. It is remarkable that gendered (and in the case of Tsabari, gendered *and* racialised) gossip regarding respectability and propriety featured so dominantly in

[317] Shoham, *Carnival in Tel Aviv*, 160—62.
[318] See in N, '"Esther Ha-Malka" Motsiyah Monitin,' 4. Also in 'Po ve-Sham [Here and There]', *Ha-Arets*, 28 1929, 4.
[319] Rabinovitz, 'Harhurim (Reflections),' 3.
[320] Massad, 'Zionism's Internal Others.'

the immediate legacy of the pageants of Tel Aviv and Warsaw. Both Tsabari and Oldakówna, despite their differences, were read by some as especially immodest and scandalous, unsuitable representatives of ideal Jewish femininity. In both cities, the phenomena of gossip – which often coincided with religious, political, and practical criticism of the pageants – contributed to the downfall of the practice of crowning a Zionist beauty queen in Palestine and in Poland.

1929: Oh, How Times Have Changed!

The internal criticisms of and gossip regarding the pageants, however, were probably not the primary reasons why this invented tradition in Tel Aviv and Warsaw was cut short. 1929 marked a series of watershed events for Palestinian Arabs and Jews, Zionists, Jewry in general, and of course, the world at large. These events, as I will argue below, contributed to the reinvigoration of masculinist discourses amongst the Zionist press, which in turn, re-relegated the creation and curation of femininity and its aesthetics to the margins.

On a global scale, 1929 was the year that marked the start of the Great Depression, a major economic crisis originating in the United States, which came to devastate the economies of virtually every nation in the world. Poland was one such economy that crumbled under the pressure of mass economic instability. Economic historian Nikolaus Wolf, in his study of the Great Depression in Europe, identifies that Józef Piłsudski, whose government had accomplished the great feat of stabilising the national currency in 1926 and joining the gold-exchange standard in 1927,[321] was later devastated by the economic depression. Poland's economy, which had experienced serious hyperinflation following the First World War, had finally begun to grow

[321] Nikolaus Wolf, 'Europe's Great Depression: Coordination Failure after the First World War', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 26, no. 3 (2010): 339–69, 349.

stronger under the rule of Piłsudski.[322] However, the Depression interrupted the relatively short period of economic growth. In his discussion of the effects of the Great Depression on European countries, Wolf argues that "Poland experienced the deepest and longest decline of industrial production in Europe," maintaining that the period of economic stability uniquely threatened the trajectory of the new Polish republic.[323] While I am no economic historian, it is indisputable that the depression was not good for Poland, nor was it 'good for the Jews.'

As R.F. Leslie et. al. argue in their survey of modern Polish history, the Jews of Poland were not immune to the economic troubles of their country and Jewish traders and industrialists especially felt the consequences of the financial slump.[324] Their study also identifies the economic depression as a source of growing antisemitism in Poland and in the European continent at large. While Leslie et. al. mention that Piłsudski's government "resisted demands for anti-semitic [sic.] measures," such as limiting the number of Jews admitted to universities, this did not quell antisemitism in the period following the crash of 1929. Ezra Mendelsohn, in his well-known essay "Interwar Poland: Good for the Jews or Bad for the Jews?," argues against a lachrymose understanding of Jewish-Polish interwar history, positing that relative plurality coexisted alongside antisemitism which tended to ebb and flow.[325] Still, the market crash certainly inspired hatred of Jews. Historian Yisrael Gutman in his study of interwar Polish antisemitism notes that many Jewish scholars see the "struggle for bread" or the trial of trying to survive a chronically impoverished economy as the

[322] Wolf, 'Europe's Great Depression,' 349.
[323] Wolf, 'Europe's Great Depression,' 359.
[324] R. F. Leslie, ed., *The History of Poland since 1863*, 1st ed., Soviet and East European Studies (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 182.
[325] Ezra Mendelsohn, "Interwar Poland: Good for the Jews or Bad for the Jews?," in Chimen Abramsky, Maciej Jachimczyk, and Antony Polonsky, eds., *The Jews in Poland* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03612759.1990.9945679.

principal factor that inspired increased antisemitism in the interwar Polish context.[326] He agrees with this characterisation to an extent, citing Polish political and propagandist literature that positioned Jews as orchestrators of the economic devastation, who through their control over financial markets and the Polish economy, wreaked havoc upon the Polish nation.[327] This was a less than ideal situation for Polish Jewry, to say the least. I argue that rising antisemitism was one of the few elements that rendered the Miss Judaea pageants superfluous, as this renaissance of anti-Jewish attitudes presented the Jews of Poland with more pressing, material concerns.

1929 did not only mark the Great Depression and the subsequent spike in Polish antisemitism. For Jewish Zionists, 1929 was also a year in which the plan for establishing a Jewish settler-colony or state in Palestine was put to the test with an eruption of violence at the Western Wall that cost the lives of 133 Jewish souls and 116 Arab souls.[328] A report from the Shaw Commission, established by the British to examine the riots of 1929, characterised the events of 1929 as "religious frenzy arising out of differences between Arab Mohammedans and Jews."[329] Historian Alex Winder adds that the violence, which was neither entirely religious nor entirely political, took place against the backdrop of rising concerns over the deteriorating economy, British colonial policy, and an

[326] For instance, see Jacob Lestschinsky, 'The Anti-Jewish Program: Tsarist Russia, the Third Reich, and Independent Poland', *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 2 (1941): 141–58; Raphael Mahler, *Yehudei Polin Ben Shtei Milḥamot Olam (The Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars)* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1968).
[327] Yisrael Gutman et al., eds., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1989), 102.
[328] See Rana Barakat, 'Criminals or Martyrs? Let the Courts Decide!-British Colonial Legacy in Palestine and the Criminalization of Resistance', *AlMuntaqa* 1, no. 1 (2018): 84–97, https://doi.org/10.31430/almuntaqa.1.1.0084; Hillel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1929*, trans. Haim Watzman (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv102bh1n.6.; Tom Segev, *Yemei ha-Kalaniot: Erets Israel be-Tkufat ha-Mandat [Days of the Anemones: Palestine During the Mandatory Period]*, 1st ed. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1999), 241-293; Alex Winder, 'The "Western Wall" Riots of 1929: Religious Boundaries and Communal Violence', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 1 (2012): 6–23, https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2012.xlii.1.6.
[329] Barakat, 'Criminals or Martyrs,' 91. See note 39.

increase in Zionist land buying and immigration.[330] These events also marked a militarist turn in Yishuv society, impacting Jewish society in Palestine and their relation to their Arab neighbours.[331]

In August 1929, the violence in Palestine was inescapable and all-encompassing. On Sunday, the 25th of August, the bloodshed of Jerusalem and Hebron spilt into Jaffan soil. *Ha-Arets*, which did not publish the entire week of the riots in August, returned to its normal operations on the first of September with a headline in big, bold letters that read: "The Bloody Days in the Land."[332] In their reporting on Jaffa and Tel Aviv, *Ha-Arets* journalists described that "thousands of Arabs gathered in the mosque of Jaffa[333] to pray," noting that their prayers turned into "speeches of incitement and revolution."[334] According to their report, there was a Jewish unarmed policeman on duty who was met with a group of Arabs who left the mosque "armed with guns, swords, knives, and bats and tried to break into Tel Aviv,"[335] creating a menacing image of Palestinian-Arabs for their readers. The same article also mentioned the brutal beating and murder of the elderly Baruch Rozin, a Jewish wagoner, who found himself near the Hasan Beq Mosque just as the Palestinian Arabs began their march toward Tel Aviv. Also, *Ha-Arets* described the bloody clashes between Jews and Arabs in Abu Kabir, a neighbourhood of Jaffa, in which Jewish workers were trapped in a factory by Palestinian Arabs. Members of the Zionist military organisation Hagana, according to *Ha-Arets*, arrived at the scene to rescue the Jews but ended up engaging in bloody clashes with Jaffan Arabs. Unsurprisingly, *Ha-Arets* did not mention the horrifying event in which several Jews, accompanied by the policeman Simḥa Hinkis, stormed into the residence of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ghani

[330] Winder, 'The "Western Wall" Riots,' 6—7.
[331] On the turn to militancy in the Yishuv, see Shapira, *Ḥerev haYona*.
[332] 'Yemei Ha-Damim Ba-Arets [The Bloody Days in the Land]', *Ha-Arets*, 1 September 1929, 4.
[333] Hillel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1929*, trans. Haim Watzman (Brandeis University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv102bh1n.6, 10.
[334] 'Yemei Ha-Damim Ba-Arets,' 4.
[335] 'Yemei Ha-Damim Ba-Arets,' 4.

'Awn, an imam in a mosque in Abu Kabir, ruthlessly murdering him and his family in the very space that they were meant to be the safest: their family home.[336] Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and all of Palestine were never to be the same again, nor were the Queen Esther pageants.

The Polish Zionists of *Nasz Przegląd*, despite a distance of 2.500 kilometres, concerned themselves with August 1929. In February and March of 1929, the paper's pages were filled with pictures of hopeful beauty queens and fiery discussions of Jewish beauty. In August of that same year Appenszlak, the paper's editor, dedicated pages upon pages of coverage to the violence in Palestine, in which Polish Jewish Zionists reckoned with the events in Palestine not necessarily through the lens of religion, but *as* Jews, and politically, as Zionists.[337] Jewish beauty was (obviously) less of a concern in the face of such dramatic violence. While the press coverage of the pageants in *Nasz Przegląd* zoomed in on Jewish femininity, the reporting on the riots featured Zionist discourses of masculinity, almost overshadowing Jewish femininity and as follows, Jewish women.

In a dense article by Appenszlak, the editor warned that "the words that define the course of events in Palestine are of vital importance for the new, reborn consciousness of the nation."[338] He continued: "When it comes to the battle taking place there - reject the terminology of our sorrowful tradition. With heart-wrenching pain, *we* counted the dead, the wounded, and the buildings turned

[336] Cohen, *Year Zero*, 10.
[337] 'Krwawe Zajścia w Palestynie Winny Wstrząsnąć Sumieniem Świata [Bloody Events in Palestine Should Shock the Global Consciousness]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 26 August 1929, 3; 'Jak Minęła Ostatnia Noc w Palestynie [How Last Night in Palestine Passed]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 29 August 1929, 3; 'Uspakajające Wieści z Palestyny [Reassuring News from Palestine]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 30 August 1929, 4; Jakub Appenszlak, 'Wojna Czy Pokój [War or Peace]', *Nasz Przegląd*, 31 August 1929, 6.
[338] Appenszlak 'Wojna Czy Pokój,' 6.

to rubble - but *our* pride defies the word 'pogrom' in this case."[339] It is telling that despite not being in Palestine, Appenszlak used "we" pronouns and language of fraternity to refer to the experience of violence, as if this trauma was experienced by Jews (and by Zionists) worldwide. In doing so, he emphasised *Nasz Przegląd*'s values of collectivity and of Jewish unity, much like the message Miss Judaea presented to the Jewish world of Poland. Though, he still recognised that the situations of Palestinian and Polish Jews were not identical, nor should they be written about using the same language. The word pogrom, Appenszlak argued, "has a special meaning in the terminology of Jewish martyrdom, written in bloody letters on the walls of the ghetto, where there was the martyrdom of the innocent victims, the death of a defenceless Jew under the axe of a criminal." Preceding the popular Zionist view that saw victims of the Holocaust as, according to a popular Zionist saying, weak, diaspora Jews that "went like sheep to the slaughter,"[340] Appenszlak seems to have pre-emptively mirrored the Israeli discourse on the Holocaust that sees diaspora Jews as weaker, and thus as feminised, in comparison to the virile, militant, valiant Sabra.[341] The editor added that "there was no 'pogrom' in Palestine and there could never have been one in the Golus [diaspora/exile] sense,"[342] suggesting to his readers that the Jews of Palestine were no, to play on Boyarin's words, "sissies."[343] "In Eretz Israel," Appenszlak reported, "our *brothers* - wherever they could - fought heroically, setting the noblest example of valour, a model of attachment to the homeland and its soil; whose bonds can be torn only by death. Attacked, they

[339] Appenszlak 'Wojna Czy Pokój,' 6.
[340] Dan A. Porat, 'From the Scandal to the Holocaust in Israeli Education', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 4 (2004): 619–36, 622.
[341] For a contrast between the feminised diaspora Jew and the masculinised Israeli Jew, see Amit Pinchevski and Roy Brand, 'Holocaust Perversions: The Stalags Pulp Fiction and the Eichmann Trial', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 5 (1 December 2007): 387–407, https://doi.org/10.1080/07393180701694598. – What we see in Appenszlak's article is a primordial, pre-state example of this playing out.
[342] Appenszlak 'Wojna Czy Pokój,' 6.
[343] Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*.

defended themselves."[344] Romanticising and aestheticizing the heroism and military prowess of his "brothers" and ignoring his "sisters," Appenszlak reinforced that Zionist men, upon reaching Palestine, were heroic and masculine, in stark opposition to the unheroic and perhaps even pathetic victims of antisemitism in the shtetls of Poland and its neighbouring countries.

I hypothesise, in part, that the resurrection of discourses of masculinity contributed to a decline in the importance placed on the Zionist pageants. Romantic, nationalist masculinity became a primary concern in the wake of the riots and as such, beauty pageants took a back seat and were no longer seen as nationally significant. Jewish-Palestinians, meant to stand as masculine counters of their diaspora brethren, were once again made into trembling victims by the events of 1929. The image of the Jewish man, which European Zionists worked so fastidiously to rehabilitate, was once again emasculated by external violence. It is in this context that an aesthetic shift took place in which the masculine once again overshadowed the feminine.

The collective grief over the violence amongst the Polish Zionists of Warsaw was reason enough to abandon Miss Judaea. Appenszlak's article came to a close with the following statement: "*Our* pain is immeasurable, the grief over the death of *our* national heroes is grave, *our* anger at the injustice we have suffered is still unmeasured – but stronger than anything else is the implacable and judicious necessity of life – the necessity of two nations to coexist in one land."[345] Again, by using collective pronouns, Appenszlak reinforced the ideal of Jewish unity and suggested that the grief felt was not local nor was it constrained by geographical borders. The pain of 1929, according to Appenszlak, was transnational, "*our* pain" felt by *all* Jews, not "*their* pain," felt only or even

[344] Appenszlak 'Wojna Czy Pokój,' 6.
[345] Appenszlak 'Wojna Czy Pokój,' 6. Emphasis my own.

mainly by the Jews living in Palestine. Undoubtedly, the pain caused by the drastic violence shook the Zionist Jews of Poland. In a sense, 1929 represented to *Nasz Przegląd* editors not only the death of 133 Jewish souls, but also the necrosis of a peaceful path to Zionism in Palestine.

After 1929: Beauty in Palestine

The mass grief that enshrouded the Yishuv with a black veil of mourning rendered the Zionist elite of Tel Aviv reluctant to host their usual Purim festivities. On the fifth of February 1930, Agadati, without explicitly mentioning the recent developments in Palestine, announced that:

> Due to the complaints that have been expressed on the pages of the press on the selection of a Purim queen as of late, I have come to the decision to announce to the community the following: Without entering into the arguments regarding the selection of a Purim queen and without changing my mind regarding the appropriateness of this election to the character of the holiday of Purim … I have decided to cancel the election of a Purim queen at the ball … and to abandon the issue of the elections in the future.[346]

As Spiegel displays in her chapter on the pageants of Tel Aviv, Agadati was not at all pleased with the fact that he had to cancel his beauty pageants.[347] Perhaps, by focusing on the complaints of the public (or rather, of the religious Jews), Agadati could avoid admitting that the events of 1929 shook the Zionist spirit while simultaneously suggesting to his readers to place blame on his critics as opposed to the geopolitical circumstances. Though his announcement did not address specific complaints against the pageants, it is fair to assume that the announcement referred to the religious community's protest of what they perceived as an immodest, un-Jewish event. The relatively recent bloodshed, coupled with rabbinical and Orthodox opposition, meant that Agadati knew he could not justify a lavish beauty pageant, let alone a joyous parade.

[346] Identical letters were published in Baruch Agadati, 'Lo Tihiyena Bḥirot Le-"Esther Ha-Malka" [There Will Not Be Elections for "Queen Esther"]', *Do'ar Ha-Yom*, 5 February 1930, 4; Baruch Agadati, 'Al Malkat Purim [On the Queen of Purim]', *Do'ar Ha-Yom*, 5 February 1930, 1.
[347] Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture*, 51-54.

Indeed, the Purim parade on the streets of Tel Aviv, a festivity in which the Jews and Arabs from Palestine both took part,[348] was cancelled in the winter of 1930, alongside the Queen Esther competition. A headline in *The Palestine Bulletin* published on the 7th of February 1930 read: "No Elections for Miss Palestine this Year: There will be no choice of Queen Esther this year in Tel-Aviv."[349] The same paper in 1931 published that "the ghosts of too many unhappy souls wandered from Hebron and Safed, up and down Palestine. So much so that Tel Aviv decided to abandon the annual Purim Carnival in spite of the spiritual and material loss which such abandonment entailed."[350] *Davar,* the socialist-leaning paper, publicised a public sermon against the iconic queen in Mea She'arim, an Orthodox neighbourhood.[351] The recent events granted the pageants' critics even more legitimacy, as the practice of beauty pageantry was overshadowed by violence and loss. It seemed as if, because of August 1929, Queen Esther had been erased from the landscape of Tel Aviv.

The Palestine Bulletin, in an aforementioned report on Purim in 1931, rejoiced in the fact that the Purim Carnival would resurrect that year, even writing "I presume Queen Esther will be chosen as usual." [352] The paper followed that statement with: "It has been said that the Jew is a millionaire of tears; in Palestine he laughs,"[353] reflecting the sentiment that in Palestine, the Jewish response to trauma and violence countered that of the diaspora. The following year it seemed that the Jews of Tel Aviv chose laughter over tears and the famous parade indeed returned with a beautiful Purim queen to lead it. Fret not, Agadati did not go back on his word. He did not host a public election

[348] 'Palestine From Day to Day', *The Palestine Bulletin*, 8 March 1928, 4.
[349] 'No Elections for Miss Palestine This Year', *The Palestine Bulletin*, 7 February 1930, 4.
[350] 'Carnival', *The Palestine Bulletin*, 2 February 1931, 4.
[351] 'Neged Bḥirot Esther Ha-Malka (Against the Election of Queen Esther)', *Davar*, 29 January 1930, 3.
[352] 'Carnival,' 4.
[353] 'Carnival,' 4.

of a beauty queen in 1931, nor did he host a gala and ball in her honour. Rather, he privately chose Rachel Blumenfeld, a young, light-eyed girl, to represent the Purim queen and lead her people to the Tel Aviv municipality.[354] Evidently, she did not warrant much attention from the Zionist press. *Ha-Arets* mentioned that the "traditional ceremony of the presentation of "Queen Esther" will take place at midnight,"[355] devoting no more space in the pages of their paper to Agadati's 1931 beauty. To the editors of *The Palestine Bulletin*, Blumenfeld's queenship served as a respite from the grief of 1929, a testament to the resilience of the Jewish Zionists of Palestine. A dispatch from the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* sent out after Purim boasted: "A Merry Purim in Palestine: Thousands of Arabs come to Tel Aviv for celebrations."[356] It seems as if the joy of Purim delivered an inkling of a promise of future coexistence and flirted with the continuation of the tradition of Jewish pageantry. Indeed, Queen Esther had returned to Tel Aviv, but only for a moment. Queen Esther just as quickly faded into the cityscape, never to grace the streets of Tel Aviv again.

Thus, I argue that *both* the Queen Esther pageants of Tel Aviv and the Miss Judaea pageants of Warsaw never truly returned in their original forms after 1929. While we will perhaps never truly know exactly why these invented traditions ended so abruptly, I have suggested my own hypothesis: Religious opposition, political criticism, cultural incompatibility, a global economic crash, a rise in antisemitism in Europe as a result, in part, of that crash, and especially the bloody events in Palestine which greatly affected the Jews of Palestine and the Zionists of Poland compounded to create a political and social situation in which beauty took a backseat. Not only

[354] Carmiel, *Tel-Aviv be-Taḥposet ve-Keter*, 151.
[355] 'Purim Be-Tel Aviv [Purim in Tel Aviv]', *Ha-Arets*, 5 March 1931, 1.
[356] 'Daily News Bulletin (Cable and Mail Despatches) Issued by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Ltd.' xii, no. 54 (5 March 1931): 1—5.

did notions of beauty take a back seat, but the image of the strong, resilient, and eternally masculine Jewish-Palestinian seemed to have replaced Miss Judaea and Queen Esther in Warsaw and in Tel Aviv. Though, that did not mean that the need for a coherent model of Zionist femininity ceased to exist locally or even transnationally. As I will elaborate, the quest for national representations of womanhood lived on.[357]

Pageants No More?: Zooming Out on Zionist Beauty

"Also in New York they are preparing to select a 'Queen Esther' for Purim of this year,"[358] announced *Ha-Arets* in January of 1929. Two years later, the same paper covered the Ivriah's Queen Esther pageants in Melbourne, writing that "the custom of choosing 'Queen Esther,' which originated in *Eretz Israel*, goes and spreads to all corners of the Jewish Diaspora," drawing a direct line from the pageants of Australia to those that occurred on Palestinian soil.[359] Clearly, the urban Zionist legacy of women's beauty competitions transcended the spatial and temporal confines of 1929 Warsaw and Tel Aviv and as such, the institution of Zionist beauty pageantry lived on in the communities of Zionists across the world. Urban Zionists of various cities in North America and Australia adopted the tradition of putting Jewish femininity in the spotlight through pageantry, dually spreading material and moral support for the Zionist cause and asserting North-American and Australian Jewish communities as Western, culturally compatible with the conventions of their home countries through imitation of a cultural form that has its roots in the United States: pageantry. The pageant's dual function mirrors the seemingly paradoxical ethos of diaspora Zionism: developing (trans)national Jewish consciousness while also nurturing local, non-

[357] As I mentioned earlier, the Yemeni community of Tel Aviv continued with this tradition in the 1930s, well after the violence of 1929. Though, my thesis is rather focused on the mainstream, local or national pageant model.
[358] 'Esther Ha-Malka Be-New York [Queen Esther in New York]', *Ha-Arets*, 31 January 1929, 2.
[359] 'Malkat Purim Be-Ostralia [Queen Esther in Australia]', *Ha-Arets*, 5 March 1931, 1.

Palestinian Jewish communities and maintaining diasporic continuity. The bourgeois Zionism of Tel Aviv provided a model of Jewish nationalism that allowed middle-class Jews in settler colonies abroad to reconcile diaspora with Zion, urban life with pioneering, 'Westerness' with Jewishness, and femininity with Jewish beauty.

One might ask herself: "What does an Anglo-Jewish beauty queen have to do with the Queen Esthers of Tel Aviv and the Miss Judaea of Warsaw?" It is true that North America and Australia are geographically far from Palestine and Poland. It is also true that save 1929, the different pageants did not materialise during the same years. However, I argue that the Zionist beauty competitions of New York City, Montreal, Los Angeles, Melbourne, and even Sydney are indeed reiterations, or rather retranslations, of the pageants of Tel Aviv and Warsaw that transformed beautiful women into symbols of the nation. As I will demonstrate in the following pages of this chapter, the Queen Esther pageants in the English-speaking world were a continuation of bourgeois, urban Zionist pageants of Tel Aviv that invited women and femininity into the masculinist, political world of Zionism. As pageants of the diaspora, the North-American and Australian competitions are inherently comparable to the Miss Judaea contest of Poland. By considering these pageants as interconnected, I will show how the negotiation of Zionist beauty was truly a transnational phenomenon, with Jewish participants from all over the world taking a stake in the pressing conversation.

In 1929, the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* proudly declared that the tradition of Queen Esther lived on in the United States and Canada, with thousands of Jewish women expected to participate in the

chance to be judged by "prominent Jewish artists and men of letters,"[360] in the style of the Miss Judaea pageants which were similarly judged by a highly curated jury of Jewish artists and intellectuals. However, as mentioned by a report on the American Queen Esther pageants by *The Australian Jewish Chronicle,* the jury consisted of "twelve prominent men *and* women,"[361] in a surprising deviation from the male-dominated jury model seen in Warsaw, for instance. In North America, it seems that (some) women were allowed to be arbiters of Jewish beauty, though the extent of their involvement with the pageant remains unclear.

Even the Hebrew press in Palestine reported on these pageants. *The Palestine Bulletin* declared on its first page: "A Jewish beauty contest is announced by the Jewish National Workers' Alliance of New York City in conjunction with the Yiddish daily *Der Tog*, or as it was written in the English-language press, *The Day*. The two winners will be crowned Queen Esther and her Lady-in-Waiting at a ball to be given on April 6th. The winners will also be given a free trip to Palestine," adding that "[t]he contest is open to every Jewish woman in America."[362] *Ha-Arets* explained that "the conditions of the elections there are different than that of Tel Aviv, according to the American custom."[363] The paper reported that according to the press in New York, any young, Jewish girl could apply to be considered as a beauty queen. She just had to pay a fee of two dollars to enter

[360] I cannot locate any archival information on the first ever pageant in 1928, but the press refers to the pageant in 1929 as the second of its kind. See 'Jewish Beauty Contest to Be Conducted by Workers' Alliance', *The Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 16 January 1929, 2, which reported that: "The two winners will be crowned Queen Esther and her lady-in-waiting at a ball to be given on April 6. The winners will also be given a free trip to Palestine. Twelve judges will make the selections from the applicants. The contest is open to every Jewish woman in America. All contestants must register at the office of the Alliance not later than February 15 and submit their photographs. The "Day" will publish the pictures and readers of the paper will cast ballots." This seems to be a mistake in reporting because in the other articles regarding this, the pageants were reported to be judged by juries, not popular votes. Also, see 'Second National Beauty Contest for Jewish Women Under Way', *The Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 30 December 1929, 2.

[361] 'Current Comment, *The Australian Jewish Chronicle*, 25 April 1929, 6. Emphasis my own.

[362] 'Beauty Contest Winners to Get Free Trip to Palestine', *The Palestine Bulletin*, 6 February 1929, 1.

[363] 'Esther Ha-Malka Be-New York,' 2.

the competition in hopes of becoming one of the twenty-five semi-finalists who would be judged by twelve "worthy" jurors. Like in *The Palestine Bulletin*, the reporters of *Ha-Arets* remarked that Queen Esther and her companion would receive a round trip to Palestine, free of charge.[364] The American Queen Esther was very much connected to the tradition of Palestine, and in 1929, she was even received by Meyuḥas-Polani upon her arrival to the first Hebrew city, cementing the bond between North-American and Palestinian beauty queens.[365]

Figure 17 Ena Basil, the 1937 Queen Esther of Melbourne, published in *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 18 February 1937.

Figure 18 Melvyn Douglas, pageant judge and the 1939 Queen Esther of Los Angeles Sonia Shirley Cohen, with two ladies-in-waiting by her side published in the *B'nai Brith Messenger*, 17 March 1939.

[364] 'Esther Ha-Malka Be-New York,' 2.
[365] 'American "Queen Esther" Arrives', *The Palestine Bulletin*, 24 April 1929, 1; 'Tel Aviv Entertains U.S. Beauty Winners', *The Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 29 April 1929, 3.

The press did not dedicate much attention to the individual Jewish contestants' beauty, nor were there the vibrant negotiations of race and peoplehood that we witnessed in the cases of Tel Aviv and Warsaw. However, the pageants themselves did orient the Jews of North America to the East, to Palestine. The Hebrew-language, Palestine-based *Davar*, writing on the New York pageant of 1931 that "every young girl *of* Israel who finds herself in America can participate in the pageant,"[366] transparently emitting the message that Jewish women, and Jewish people in general, were of the diaspora; merely guests in their nations that were truly of the Jewish 'national home' in Palestine. That the women received 'homecoming trips' to Palestine was also very telling regarding the nationalist convictions of the pageants, as well as the ideological goal to reinforce transnational Jewish connection to Palestine. Jewish feminine beauty took on a Zionist meaning, serving as a factor that tied American Jewesses to *the* land.

The Queen Esther pageants of New York, which seemed to advertise themselves as pageants for all the young Jewesses of the United States and Canada,[367] were not the sole Zionist Queen Esther beauty competitions on the continent. In 1934, the Jewish community of Montreal and its branch of the United Zionist Socialist Labour Party Poale-Zion Zeire Zion[368] also put on a Queen Esther

[366] 'Ba-Tfutsot [In the Diaspora]', *Davar*, 1 March 1931, 2.
[367] On representing the pageant as US and Canada-based, see 'Opening of Entry List For [sic.] Queen Esther Contest', *The Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 9 January 1933, 2.
[368] On Poale Zion, see 'Approve Merger of American Poale Zion and Zeire Zion', *The Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 29 July 1931, 2, in which the paper explained that "the union of the American Poale Zion party and the Hitachduth Zeire Zion has been approved by the Poale Zion world conference recently held in Vienna, according to a cablegram just received here at the headquarters of the American Poale Zion. The Poale Zion world conference also adopted a resolution favoring a union of the two Jewish labor parties throughout the world. Last March a referendum among the members of the two parties in this country approved the union. A united Poale Zion-Hitachduth convention will be held in this country during the middle of October. Philadelphia, where the Poale Zion movement in this country was founded, was selected as the convention city. The Poale Zion party in this country was founded in 1904. In 1907 a world federation of all Poale Zion parties was established at a conference in The Hague, Holland. The Hitachduth, which was founded in 1920, favors a Socialist Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, although it opposes the Marxian class struggle idea. The Poale-Zion and Hitachduth parties in Palestine itself united into one Jewish Labor Party in 1929. Among the leaders of the Poale Zion-Hitachduth movement are Berl Locker in America (now a member of the

ball and beauty contest in the Mount Royal Hotel that sent its winners, free of charge, to the "Jewish Homeland."[369] That same year, *The Jewish Daily Bulletin* boasted that for the fourth time, "Canadian 'Queens'… will receive free trips to Palestine."[370] Evidently, Canadian Zionists too had their own national pageants in which they elected feminine symbols of the nation to ascend to Palestine, even if only for a visit, and to strengthen their Jewish connection to the land.

On the west coast of the North-American continent, the local Yiddishe Folk Shul and the Zionist Socialist City Committee organised pageants[371] which claimed to select a queen "who will reign over Los Angeles and Southern California Jewry" between the years of 1934 and 1939.[372] She was to be judged by her fellow coreligionists, like in Agadati's Purim soirees. An announcement in the B'nai Brith's newsletter of March 1935 noted that the proceeds from the beauty pageant would be "shared equally by the Yiddishe Folk Shul and the Jewish National Fund," [373] meaning that these pageants contributed materially to Zionism. Like the pageants of the east coast, the winner would "receive a free passage to Eretz Israel,"[374] linking Jewish beauty to Palestine yet again. The newsletter explained that: "Everybody can vote for his or her own choice. The cost of a vote is 5 cents. As many votes as desired can be given to any one contestant for any attribute desired, such as: beauty, popularity, social merit, character, etc. … Los Angeles Jewry is cordially requested to cooperate in promoting this affair, and all organizations [sic.] are asked to reserve March 7 for the

Zionist World Executive), David Ben Gurion, I. Ben-Zevi, Berel Katzenelson, Dr. Chaim Arlosoroff (now head of the Zionist Executive in Palestine) and Joseph Sprinzak, all in Palestine."

[369] 'Queen Esther Ball Will Feature Beauty Contest', *The Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 18 January 1934, 4.

[370] 'Canadian "Queens" Win Free Trip to Palestine', *The Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 28 February 1935, 5.

[371] 'Queen's Contest and Purim Ball Plans Announced', *B'nai Brith Messenger*, 20 December 1935, 9.

[372] 'Broad Community Participation Seen for Queen Esther Pageant, Contest', *B'nai Brith Messenger*, 24 February 1939, 6.

[373] 'Purim Celebrants Aid National Fund's Land Buying Efforts', *B'nai Brith Messenger*, 22 March 1935, 10.

[374] 'Purim Celebrants,' 10.

affair."[375] Interestingly, the Los Angeles pageants too were not as concerned with physical beauty and aesthetic justice, nor did they proliferate many photographs and visual representations of their Jewish beauties. Still, they were indeed invested in Zionism and in recruiting the local Jewish community to participate in these pageants as a material and emotional reinforcement of Jewish nationalism.

In another piece by B'nai Brith published in 1936, the organisation discussed the necessity of buying land for exclusive-Jewish use in Palestine, writing that: "This year the recital of the dramatic story of how Queen Esther saved the Jews of Persia from extinction particularly brought to mind what Palestine is now doing to save Jewish victims of persecution and oppression."[376] They asked for their community to send donations to the Jewish National Fund so that they may aid European Jews in escaping the claws of Nazism by providing them with plots of land in Palestine.[377] Here, the JNF is likened to Queen Esther, who saved her coreligionists from the evil, Jew-hating Haman, imbuing the image of Esther with even stronger Zionist overtones. Though, in 1939 the trip to Palestine was no longer offered to pageant winners and were replaced with prizes fit for a Hollywood queen, including "a motion picture screen test and one-week contract with a major studio, a complete selection of wearing apparel valued at $200, and an attractive silver loving cup."[378] These Hollywood-esque prizes reflected the particularly American nature of the pageants, treating 1939's Queen Esther as an all-American girl who was Zionist in name but Californian in action. Though, I assume that the global situation and the beginnings of the 1939 White Paper made international travel quite difficult, as this shift in the prizes certainly did not

[375] 'Queen's Contest,' 9.
[376] 'National Fund Holiday Plans', *B'nai Brith Messenger*, 6 March 1936, 2.
[377] 'National Fund Holiday Plans,' 2.
[378] 'Broad Community Participation,' 6.

indicate that the pageants had ceased to support the Zionist cause, nor had it changed its position on Palestine as a Jewish homeland and of Jewish beauty queens as particularly linked to the homeland's soil. Rather, the pageant adapted to its circumstances and celebrated the dual nature of its beautiful women, who were both "daughters of Israel"[379] and local fixtures of the Golden State.[380]

Beyond North America, the tradition of the Queen Esther pageant took hold in Australia, and more specifically, in Melbourne, in which it was dubbed "worthy of the whole hearted support of every Jew and Jewess"[381] and "absolutely one of the best and finest functions annually attended by the Melbourne Jewish Community,"[382] and later in Sydney.[383] On the fourth of December 1930, *The Australian Jewish Chronicle* announced that the Ivriah Society, a Jewish Zionist women's group in Melbourne, was hosting a first-ever Queen Esther pageant in honour of the holiday of Purim.[384] Mirroring the format of Agadati's pageant, the beauty pageant would serve as a fundraiser for the Jewish National Fund[385] and feature an event preceding Purim in which "the Queen will be chosen

[379] 'Ba-Tfutsot,' 2.
[380] The Queen Esther pageants of Los Angeles continued through the second World War, until the 1970s. During and immediately after the war, the pageants redirected their fundraising to support Allied war efforts as opposed to the Jewish National Fund. In 1947, the Zionist women's group "Pioneer Women" came to organise the pageants. The last city-wide general Zionist Queen Esther pageant to be hosted seems to be in 1977. See 'Coronation Ceremony Sunday at Pioneer Women's Ball', *B'nai Brith Messenger*, 18 March 1977, 25. While it is not within the scope of this project to trace the development of Zionist pageantry, further studies might take interest in the development of Sephardi Zionist Queen Esther pageants in 1977 to understand the development of racial ideas, beauty, and intra-Jewish dynamics in the United States.
[381] 'The Poorim Ball', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 16 January 1936, 2.
[382] 'Queen Esther Coronation Ball', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 2 March 1933, 5.
[383] In 'Sydney J.N.F. Ball', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 3 March 1938, 7, the paper published that: "The proceeds of the ball will benefit the Jewish National Fund, which purchases land in Palestine and which becomes the sole property of the Jewish people of the whole world. Over ten thousand Jews have entered the Land of Israel during the eleven months ending on the 30th November last, and there is still a great deal more land to be purchased in Palestine when the money is available. Help this worthy cause by supporting the ball committee to make their first big social event both a financial and social success."
[384] 'Ivriah Society', *The Australian Jewish Chronicle*, 4 December 1930, 3.
[385] On the Jewish National Fund and Australian Queen Esther pageants, see 'Sydney J.N.F. Ball', 7; 'Purim Ball on Wednesday', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 2 March 1939, 4; 'Queen Esther and Purim Ball', *The Australian Jewish News (Melbourne)*, 11 February 1939, 5. Though, in 1936, the press reported that only "Approximately half

by popular vote at a dance to be held prior to the Purim Ball."[386] The paper continued that the ball's organising committee will feature "several people who gained their experience with such functions at Tel-Aviv."[387] Though it is unclear if these individuals mentioned worked precisely on Agadati's pageants, this morsel of information allows us to understand that these Australian pageants looked closely to Tel Aviv for inspiration, seeking to emulate the bourgeois Zionism of the Hebrew city. Even the press in Tel Aviv remarked on the Melbourne-based pageant's connection to their own local Purim traditions, showing how these Zionist pageants were truly transnational phenomena.[388]

As such, the Australian Zionist press was certainly aware of Agadati's pageants and the legacy of Purim in Tel Aviv. An article in *The Australian Jewish Chronicle* published in 1926 noted that: "In Tel-Aviv they chose the lady to be Queen Esther in this year's Purim parade, by popular acclamation. Agadati, the Jewish folk dancer, prepared his annual Neshef [soiree], when he presents character and popular jigs, and old Chassidic and oriental dances which have nearly been forgotten by Jews in the West."[389] They presented Agadati and his pageants as 'Oriental' and 'authentic,' adopting a tone of admiration rather than ridicule. That Tel Aviv refused to assimilate completely to the west was indeed inspiring for the Australian publication. The article continued that: "Masked faces and costumed figures dart among the gay throng; everyone is in good spirits; friendly Arabs come to join the happy throng. Thus Purim, with its ancient story of Persia, of the saving of the remnant of Israel, is also celebrated as the harbinger of spring in the new Eretz

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the proceeds will go to the Jewish National Fund, and the remainder for the upkeep and purchase of Jewish Cultural Books and papers." in 'The Poorim Ball,' 2.

[386] 'Ivriah Society', *The Australian Jewish Chronicle*, 4 December 1930, 3.

[387] 'Ivriah Society,' 3.

[388] 'Malkat Purim Be-Ostralia', 1.

[389] 'Purim in Palestine', *The Australian Jewish Chronicle*, 15 April 1926, 5.

Israel."[390] This scene, almost utopian in its description of Tel Aviv, set the stage for the Queen Esther pageants that ensued in Melbourne between the years 1930 and 1941.

Despite not offering the Australian-Jewish beauty queens complimentary trips to Palestine, the Ivriah Society was just as concerned with Palestinian-Jewish continuity as the organisers of the North-American pageants were with ensuring that their queens visit the so-called homeland. The 1931 pageant, as highlighted by the press, even featured a Hebrew speaker who gave thanks in Hebrew and motioned to the pageant-goers that the Jewish language was truly reborn.[391] In an advertisement for the Melbourne Queen Esther pageant in 1932, *The Australian Jewish Herald* boasted that the coronation of Queen Esther will be a "real Palestine festival! Do not forget!!!," reminding readers to invite their friends to the Purim soiree.[392] That same paper three years later published an article on Palestinian craftsmanship, in which they described the attractive and exquisite "pictures in brass, novelty carvings in olive wood, woven carpets from an Art School in Palestine, and some beautiful hand-made jewellery,"[393] promoting their Palestinian cultural week. The report continued: "Some of the most unusual of this jewellery—a necklace, bangle and ring of filigree silver and opals— is to be presented to the newly elected 'Queen Esther.'"[394] Without bringing their beauty queen to Palestine, the Australian Zionists of Melbourne were quite literally adorning their pageant winner *with* Palestine, dressing her neck, wrists, and fingers with shining jewels that evoked *Erets Israel*. The 1936 pageant promised a night filled with "folk dances from Palestine" to all its attendees.[395] In an announcement for the ball in 1939, the herald promised that

[390] 'Purim in Palestine,' 5.
[391] 'Ivriah Society', *The Australian Jewish Chronicle*, 19 March 1931, 12.
[392] *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 18 February 1932, 8.
[393] 'International Club Stages Palestine Exhibition', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 12 December 1935, 10.
[394] 'International Club Stages Palestine,' 10.
[395] 'Novelties at the Fancy Dress Ball', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 20 February 1936, 6.

"[a] novelty at the Ball will be a number of new Palestinian songs,"[396] tantalising its readers with vivid descriptions of cultural items from the "Holy Land." Evidently, Jewish-Zionist culture from Palestine was one of the stars of these fancy-dress balls. Beyond lending material support to the Jewish National Fund, the Ivriah Society bound itself to the culture of Tel Aviv, asserting that Jewish beauty was political.

Like in North America - and in contrast to Palestine and Poland - the Australian-Jewish press hesitated to engage with racial language and racial aesthetics. They too rarely published photographic depictions of the pageant winners, nor did they describe the physicality of the contestants in any detail. In a 1938 article regarding the upcoming seventh annual Queen Esther Ball, *The Australian Jewish Herald* declared that candidates will be chosen by "judges who will select those who are of the 'Esther type.'[397] The following year, the Australian daily also made a veiled connection to race and aesthetic ideals, repeating the exact sentence regarding the "Esther type" mentioned in 1938.[398] This type, the "Esther type," was not defined by the press, and rather allowed Jewish readers to speculate and imagine for themselves *how* such a type would manifest, and what she would *look* like. Perhaps, the "Esther type" was Persian-looking, or maybe she was a proper Semitic-looking Jewess of Palestine. It seems to me that the language of "Esther type" implied that the queen should embody a vaguely Eastern, Hebrew aesthetic. Though, perhaps the Ivriah Society and the Australian-Jewish press purposefully kept their physical description vague in an effort to be inclusive and to allow *all* Jewesses to imagine themselves as Zionist queens. In

[396] 'Purim Ball on Wednesday', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 2 March 1939, 4.
[397] 'Queen Esther Ball', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 17 February 1938, 5.
[398] 'Queen Esther Ball', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 26 January 1939, 9.

1942 the pageants of Australia came to a close when the Jewish National Fund decided that the "war situation"[399] made continuing with the pageants untenable.

Nonetheless, the message was clear: beautiful, feminine women had a starring role in the imagining of a Jewish nation, whether in New York, Montreal, Los Angeles, Melbourne, or Sydney. The urban Zionist of the English-speaking settler-colonial world could be feminine and celebrate her femininity to inspire national pride, despite the historical antisemitic legacy of Jewish emasculation. Jewish womanhood carved out its space, no matter how marginal, in the fabric of transnational Zionism. Queen Esther, if only for a few more years, lived on!

Farewell Forever, Queen Esther!

These series of pageants in the 1930s and early 1940s prove that even after 1929, Jewish beauty was still used as a tool through which urban Zionists could encourage and inspire support for their cause, and for the broader goals of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. These pageants continued the tradition of using women and their bodies as national symbols and sites of national unity, inspiring Jewish viewers to have pride in their people, while also cementing Jewish connections to the land of Palestine whether through sending the queens on free trips to visit the land as the organisers of North America chose to do or by including aesthetic elements of what they imagined as Palestinian culture, whether through song, dance, or adornment, in the style of Australian Zionists. Like in Poland and in Palestine, the pageants I discussed in this section also dealt with, albeit in a more clandestine fashion, the same questions of Jewish femininity and its

[399] As it was described in the press in 'JNF Purim', *The Australian Jewish News (Melbourne)*, 13 February 1942, 8; 'Jewish National Fund', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 26 February 1942, 8; 'Jewish National Fund', *The Australian Jewish News (Melbourne)*, 6 February 1942, 5; 'J.N.F. Cancels Purim Ball', *The Australian Jewish Herald*, 5 February 1942, 2.

role in Zionism and in new Jewish or Hebrew aesthetics. While these North-American and Australian Jews certainly were products of social contexts that differed from those of Europe, the question of Jewish femininity traversed oceans and took on new interpretations in new lands. Most concretely, perhaps, was that these organisations all raised funds to materially support the colonisation of Palestine and recruited the bodies of women to do so. In this sense, the critics of the pageants in Palestine and in Poland did not succeed in their goal of ridding Jewry, or perhaps just Zionists, of their penchant for pageantry.

Further, that Zionist Jews living in Canada, the United States, and Australia all implemented Queen Esther pageants within their home countries is not without significance. As settlers in their own contexts, perhaps the orchestrators of the pageants looked to the Zionist project in Palestine as, on the one hand, subconsciously a familiar, settler society but on the other hand, a nation that was built for them, that would be their own. In emulating the culture of Tel Aviv, the pageant organisers cemented that Tel Aviv had become a point of cultural reference for the urban Jews of North American and Australian cities. Tel Aviv's bourgeois Zionism that emulated the Western convention of pageantry while reinforcing the uniquely Jewish nature of its beauty contestants was compatible with the middle-class Zionists of the Anglo-settler world, who on the one hand sought to strengthen their uniquely Jewish identity and on the other hand desired to fit in within their local and national milieus. Despite the cessation of the pageants in Poland and Palestine in 1929, the negotiation of Jewish peoplehood, femininity, and nationalism took root elsewhere, binding together the transnational blocks that together build the foundation of Jewish history.

Conclusion

In 1926, Ha-Arets published that "the most beautiful and typical *Jewess*" will be chosen at Agadati's gala.[400] Henceforth, other publications referred to Queen Esther as "the most beautiful and typical *Hebrew woman*," motioning to their readers that a new national and racial identity has shaped the Jews of the Yishuv.[401] In 1929 Poland however, Miss Judaea was always Jewish, often 'Semitic,' and rarely Hebrew. In the Queen Esther pageants of the 'New World' between 1928 and 1977, the beauty queens were proudly Jewish, though their Jewishness was grounded in Palestine and veneration of the land. On the one hand, the lack of consensus on how to name Zionist beauty reflects the incoherence of the process of manufacturing a new Jewish or Hebrew identity across borders. On the other, the fact that different groups of Jewish Zionists around the world were invested in the curation and construction of new, Jewish feminine bodies that were tied to *the* land reveals that the version of urban Zionism that had developed in the interwar period made space for contradictions in favour of Jewish unity.

My thesis, in its focus on Zionist beauty pageants in 1929 Warsaw and 1926-1929 Tel Aviv, as well as in its consideration of the pageants amongst the Zionists of New York, Montreal, Los Angeles, Melbourne and Sydney between the years 1928 and 1977, draws upon Banet-Weiser's theorisation of the beauty pageant to argue that pageantry publicly reconciled perceived social difference. Not only did the pageants provide a means of reconciling the disparate and contradictory discourses regarding how to *talk* about Jewish 'race' and 'nation,' but as I demonstrated in my second chapter, they also allowed for Zionists to address their anxieties regarding incoherent racial and national identities. Gender too, as my first chapter argues, was

[400] 'Neshef Bḥirot [The Election Ball]', *Ha-Arets*, 22 January 1926, 4.
[401] 'Neshef Bḥirot [The Election Ball]', *Do'ar Ha-Yom*, 27 January 1926, 3.

negotiated through the pageants. Interwar urban Zionists used the form of the pageant to carve out not only a new mode of Jewish femininity, but of Jewish masculinity as well, allowing city Jews to configure a gender identity that was not primarily predicated upon labour of the land but rather upon Western bourgeois values and heterosexual desire. Using the contemporaneous archival Zionist press, my thesis has thus investigated the roles of gender, race, and nation in constructing Jewish peoplehood. As relatively new city-dwellers, the urban Zionists whom I discussed in this thesis tried to carve out their own version of urban, bourgeois culture that could at once compete with great cities like Rome, Paris, and London while also maintaining a uniquely 'Jewish' character. How that 'Jewish' character *looked*, however, was yet to be defined.

Taking inspiration from Foucauldian ideas about the body, I have argued that the body served as a site of national production, as well as a site on and through which questions about Zionism could be *flesh*ed out and the new Jewish (or Hebrew) *look* could be curated. I have traced how Zionists of the twentieth century grappled with pressing questions of gender, race, and nation, turning to women's bodies to find answers and harmonise contradictions within the Jewish national movement. By selecting and upholding Jewish beauty queens, these urban Zionist men, and to an extent women, crafted fora through which passionate and invested voices joined together to establish an aesthetic representation of a dispersed people, promoting (trans)national unity through the visual representation of a coherent Jewish narrative. Miss Judaea and the multiple Queen Esthers, though not ubiquitously accepted by all Jews, indicated that urban Zionism celebrated, rather than ignored, normative femininity. In the interwar period, pageantry was perhaps one of the only ways in which young women could visually participate in Zionist imagining precisely *because* of their femininity, not in spite of it.

My first chapter, in its analysis of the historical European-Jewish confrontation with gender and race, particularly the anti-Jewish myth of male Jewish effeminacy, addressed why creating a model of ideal Jewish femininity was so problematic. I argued that the pageants necessitated a conscious or even sub-conscious negotiation with racial antisemitism that included within it specific gendered elements, through which Zionist Jews proved that they could and would *be* men and women, and that their manhood and womanhood was intrinsically tied to their Jewishness.

The second chapter of this thesis argued that the beauty of pageants of Tel Aviv and Warsaw also provided a space in which Zionists could find a way to crown Jewish beauty that could enshrine and represent Ashkenaz, Sepharad, Teiman, and Judaea alike. Through mass spectacle that was consumed locally and through the spread of photographic images that were shared with global Jewry through the Jewish press, Zionist popular culture presented a solution to Jewish disunity. I argued that in Warsaw's 1929 Miss Judaea, the relatively ethnically homogenous Polish-Jewish society searched for a queen that would visually represent a largely imaginary Judaic 'East,' relying upon fantasy of the exotic 'Orient' to guide their aesthetic project, while also asserting that its Zionist women were 'modern' in attitude and as such, 'Western.' In Tel Aviv, where the orchestrators of the pageants contented with the visual reality of a landscape that contained Jews from all corners of the world, I posit that their choices of beauty queens reflected the existing phenotypical diversity of the Jewish women who lived in Palestine, presenting an assortment of models of ideal Hebrew beauty. This presentation of varied models of beauty was also a mode of publicly confronting the supposed aesthetic ambiguity of Jewish people to perform national unity and togetherness, whether ethnically or otherwise. This civic ritual perhaps did not necessarily

succeed in its goal of erasing, or rather smoothing over, *and* celebrating Jewish difference, whether that be of ethnicity, class, religiosity, or political belief. That it attempted to do so, however, is significant and indicative of the contradictions inherent to crafting any coherent national narrative and identity, albeit one of a people scattered across the earth for thousands of years.

That these urban Zionists emulated a practice that was so emblematic of Western modern culture reflected the wish to be perceived as a nation *of* the West, ideologically, politically, and in some cases, aesthetically. This also points toward the fact that Zionism was, not unlike many other nationalist movements, an ideology that promoted assimilation to the conventions of Western modern nationalism through paradoxically abandoning the geographic West for an orientation toward the East. The beauty pageants were a means of seeking legitimation in the eyes of the West, mirroring nationalist institutions in which female beauty was enshrined by the bodies of women representatives. However, Agadati, Appenszlak, and their colleagues chose embodiments of beauty that were unabashedly 'Jewish' and 'Eastern,' despite not having a clear aesthetic interpretation of how 'Jewish' and 'Eastern' looked. In North America and Australia, the Zionist bodies that organised their respective local beauty pageants were unabashedly Jewish in nature and reinforced connection to *the* land, yet they were even more ambiguous about manifestations of physical, visibly Jewish beauty. The pageants in all their geographical contexts indicated that these Zionists wanted to fit in as Western and stand out as Jews and used these pageants to negotiate that very contradiction. Further, these pageants confronted the contradiction of native/Palestinian and dispersion, which as I have illustrated in this chapter, was only one among many.

My thesis, incorporating methods from history as well as theories and concepts from Gender Studies and Nationalism Studies, has uniquely considered these different Zionist pageants as interconnected and intertwined. My understanding of Jewish *trans*national identity as a real, historical, processual phenomenon that has undergone (and still undergoes) construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction may inform other scholars of Jewish Studies to draw connections between different geographical contexts, looking beyond the local or national in their analysis of the Jewish past.

Beyond demonstrating the interconnectivity of these historical beauty competitions and of Jewry in general, I also considered that urban Jewish Zionists, especially those of the interwar period, were tasked not only with forming a national character, but also a settler-colonial – or rather, a settler-national – identity. The settler-national identity that was being negotiated in the interwar period, as I argued in my second chapter, had to synthesise two disparate narratives. The first narrative constructed *all* Jews as native to Palestine, framing Zionism as a homecoming movement in which Jews returned to their ancient land. Using the bodies of Jewish women as well as ideas about Sephardi, Semitic, Yemeni, and 'Oriental' aesthetics, the urban, almost entirely Ashkenazi Zionists of this thesis attempted to fabricate a native aesthetic that was not necessarily Palestinian-Arab, but Jewish, Judaic, and *of* Palestine, or Erets Israel, a racial orientation toward the 'East.' The second narrative positioned Zionism as a Westernising, 'modernising' movement. It modelled its ethos of territoriality, which anthropologist Patrick Wolfe termed as "settler-colonialism's specific, irreducible element,"[402] in reference to existing colonial projects, appealing to Ottoman and British imperial powers to accomplish their goals. The second narrative also created a space

[402] Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387–409, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240, 388.

in which Jewish men, and to a lesser extent women, could be like citizens of "every other *civilised* nation," to borrow Herzl's words, Judaising Palestinian land and competing with Palestinian people to create a state in which those citizens could settle in a society of their own, setting the stage for building the apparatus of the state.[403] Thus, I argue that scholars who treat interwar, Zionist history, especially that which deals with gender, must consider how the convoluted settler-nationalism and colonialism of the Zionist movement indelibly shaped Jewish women, men, and their bodies. While the Miss Judaea and Queen Esther pageants reinforced Zionist nationalism, they also bolstered Zionist settler-nationalism and colonialism by using women as symbols of a national synthesis of 'East' and 'West,' 'native' and 'modern.'

Through my study of the Miss Judaea and Queen Esther pageants, I have been able to identify that a variety of elements, including gender, race, and nation intersected to imagine a settler-nationalist and feminine body that attempted to harmonise – as opposed to unify – the paradoxical elements of Zionist ideology. Despite a lapse of almost a century, Zionism is nowhere closer to resolving these contradictions of West and East, of diaspora and of 'homeland,' of male and of female, of rural and urban, and of religious and secular. These divergent elements of Zionism have not necessarily been harmonised, and Jewish Zionists, Israeli or otherwise, still reckon with the multivocal polyphony that reverberates to this very day. My thesis, which reckons with the still-unanswered existential questions of Zionism, thus allows us to better understand the mechanics of Zionist identity production of the past and present, opening new avenues of study for the future.

[403] Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 157.

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