



# Cultural Diplomacy in Mandatory Haifa: The Role of Christian Communities in the Cultural Transformation of the City

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The concept of cultural diplomacy is far from uniform or unequivocal and holds multiple definitions and interpretations depend on the context under examination. In order to analyse the connections between Christian communities and European powers in Mandatory Haifa it would be useful to adapt some of the theoretical aspects of this concept.

The classic definition of cultural diplomacy “as a means of serving strategic interests of national governments while at the same time holding out the promise of moving beyond the national interest to support a greater good through mutual cultural exchanges”<sup>1</sup> is only partially suitable for the case of Haifa. It is safe to say that for the most part the attitudes of European powers towards local populations in the Middle East were characterised by a condescending and orientalist approach and that relationships were shaped by a deep inequality and exploitation of the colonial systems. The drive behind practices of European cultural involvement in the Middle East, and in Palestine in particular, was normally based on the promotion of foreign interests with no desire by the European parties for cultural exchange with

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<sup>1</sup>Ien Ang, Yudhishtir Raj Isar and Phillip Mar, “Cultural Diplomacy: Beyond the National Interest?” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21, no. 2 (2015): 366.

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the local Arab population. Under this context, the narrow definition of cultural diplomacy as a two-way exchange or a mutual understanding fails to describe the form of cultural relations between Europe and the Middle East. However, we should not entirely abandon this concept as over the years it has expanded considerably to finally contribute to the historical analysis of the case under scrutiny: the cultural relations between Christian communities and various European actors in Mandatory Haifa. The broad term of cultural diplomacy overlaps or is used interchangeably with associated notions such as “foreign cultural relations”, “international cultural relations”, “public diplomacy” and “soft power”.<sup>2</sup> The latter term, for example, refers to the “the ability to establish preferences of others through appeal and attraction associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions”<sup>3</sup> and can shed light on how European countries, particularly Britain and France, sought to advance their interests in the area through their country’s “cultural attractiveness”. In order to do so, they established, various institutions which spread their culture and language. Yet, they did not perceive these activities as a platform for cultural exchange between equal partners, but rather a one-way impact on the locals. Moreover, this process of gaining influence was not always direct and government-dominated, but encompassed diverse actors including the formal public sector (consulates, national cultural institutions, etc.) and the private sector (merchants, religious associations, missionaries, etc.). A more inclusive and flexible concept of cultural diplomacy allows a scrutiny of varied forms of European cultural intervention as well as the different ways in which European Powers enhanced their influence in Mandate Haifa.

### THE EUROPEAN PRESENCE IN HAIFA

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, and accelerating during the first half of the twentieth, Haifa attracted various missionary organisations, consular agents and foreign merchants. Settled in the city, these European powers represented the interests of their countries of origin and cultivated cultural networks with local communities, mainly affiliated with various Christian denominations. The advent of steamships in the second half of the nineteenth century boosted the importance of the port of Haifa and led to an increasing number of consular agents from Russia, Prussia, USA, Greece, Holland, Britain, France, Austria and Sardinia (later Italy), which improved the security of the Christian minority. In terms of its religious composition, by the mid-nineteenth century Haifa comprised a Muslim community which constituted 51% of the total population, Christians with 36% and Jews

<sup>2</sup>John Matthew Mitchell, *International Cultural Relations* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>Josef Nye, *Born to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1990), 32.

**Table 1** Haifa population

HAIFA POPULATION		MUSLIMS	CHRISTIANS	JEWS
<b>MID</b>	<b>19<sup>TH</sup></b>	51%	36%	13%
<b>CENTURY</b>				
<b>1922 CENSUS</b>		38%	36%	25%
<b>1931 CENSUS</b>		38,5%	26,2%	34,7%

with 13%. By 1922 the Muslim population had dropped to 38%; Christians remained at 36% and the number of Jews had risen to 25%. By 1939, a period in which Haifa underwent an extensive process of immigration and urbanisation, the Muslims constituted 38.5%, Christians dropped to 26.2% and Jews increased to 34.7%.<sup>4</sup> The Christian community of Haifa was varied and included various denominations, the most prominent among them the Greek Orthodox, Greek and Latin Catholics, Protestants, Maronites and Armenians. The Greek Orthodox was the largest and oldest religious minority in Haifa, followed by the Greek Catholics, together giving them numerical superiority over all other denominations (Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

While enjoying the protection provided by the European presence in the city, Haifa's Christians were also subject to the political and cultural influences of competing European interests, by way of educational missions, cultural clubs and the trading opportunities introduced by European consulates. Perhaps the most significant source of influence was the arrival of various missionary organisations in the city, which established a series of educational, religious and cultural institutions for the benefit of the local Christian communities. The spread of Western schools provided the local population with modern education which was viewed as an opening for cultural penetration.<sup>6</sup> The Catholic Mission, supported by France, was the most dominant. Through the patronage given to the Catholic communities, France sought to gain influence in the city,<sup>7</sup> for example, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, providing substantial funds to the Carmelite Mission for the founding of a spacious French-style convent on Mount Carmel, that

<sup>4</sup>May Seikaly, *Haifa: Transformation of a Palestinian Arab Society 1918–1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1955), 21, 49.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 30–31.

<sup>6</sup>Enaya Hamad Othman, *Negotiating Palestinian Womanhood: Encounters Between Palestinian Women and American Missionaries, 1880s–1940* (London: Lexington Books, 2016).

<sup>7</sup>Alex Carmel, *Ottoman Haifa: A History of Four Centuries Under Turkish Rule* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 97.

remained of the most impressive landmarks in Haifa up until the establishment of the Mandate. This institution promptly became a magnet for foreign European guests as well as for local Christian believers who were exposed there to the French language and culture.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the importance of religious institutions, education was the primary tool used by missionaries to gain influence in the area. Christian missionary education, predominantly French, was first introduced in Haifa by the Roman Catholics. Despite the very small number of Latins among the local population, this congregation had the largest number of schools and convents in the city. The Greek Catholics (Melkites) and the Maronites also established schools next to their churches, but the increasing number of European institutions run by Catholic orders which specialised in education were more attractive to all Christian groups, including the Greek Orthodox. Jamil al-Bahri, a Christian intellectual from the Melkite community in Haifa, noted in 1922 that “the task of every clergy who comes to Haifa is to open schools for its sons and daughters, and to teach them the principles of the French and Arab cultures as well as religious matters”.<sup>9</sup> More than 10 French-oriented schools operated in the city before the Mandate period, alongside other private Christians schools which taught in Greek, English and Arabic. On the eve of British rule about 80% of Haifa’s Catholics knew French while English was more prevalent among the Protestant community.<sup>10</sup> The English high school for girls, for instance, founded in 1919 by the Anglican Mission emphasised in its published brochures that it was a “Christian institution” with a “well educated and cultured Christian staff”. The headmistress stressed that the school would only succeed if the teachers and the majority of the pupils were Christians.<sup>11</sup> Towards the end of the Mandate period, 22 schools operated in the city, 4 were governmental and the rest private, divided into 12 Christian and 6 Muslim schools.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike the churches affiliated with Rome, the Orthodox Church in the East did not provide a unifying leadership with which the laity could identify with, nor did it supply its adherents with adequate material, social, educational or spiritual services. For this reason, European and American missionary activities won the majority of their converts from this Church and provided them with an attractive range of educational and cultural services. Thanks to the large budgets of missionary institutions, largely coming from

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>9</sup>*Al-Zabara*, 15 June 1922.

<sup>10</sup>Seikaly, *Haifa*, 22.

<sup>11</sup>Ela Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow: Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010), 77.

<sup>12</sup>Johnny Mansour, “The Arabs in Haifa During the British Mandate Period, Social, Economic and Cultural Developments and Changes,” in *The Secret of Coexistence: Jews and Arabs in Haifa During the British Mandate in Palestine, 1920–1948*, eds. Dafna Sharfman and Eli Nahmias (North Charleston, SC: Book-Surge, 2007), 251–259.

France, Britain and the US, poor Christian students were also able to acquire an education and live in the boarding schools.

The settlement of German Templers, who established a European-style colony in the city in the second half of the nineteenth century, served as another source of influence on the local population. The Templers introduced new cultural activities such as libraries, music, drama and sports activities which were frequented by educated elites: Christian families for the most part.<sup>13</sup> In the last years of Ottoman rule, the Templers and the French competed for influence, but while the former held mainly economic influence, the latter continued to support a large network of schools and cultural institutions to preserve their cultural precedence.

The educational, professional and cultural advantages Christians had acquired since the nineteenth century led to the emergence of an educated generation who spoke a variety of foreign languages, which opened up more lucrative business, created and benefited from more employment opportunities. The Ottoman Tanzimat reforms in the nineteenth century extended this trend by enabling Christian minorities to organise and control their secular affairs and to promote social and cultural matters. With the transition to British rule, these changes proved highly beneficial as Christians easily integrated within the British administration as well as within the city's expanding private sector. Wealth began to be directly linked to education, with educated families acquiring key positions in the new cultural and economic institutions of the city. Furthermore, the replacement of Islamic rule with foreign Western government changed the criteria of elite affiliation and allowed previously disconnected members of the Christian minority to make their way into the elite ranks and to gain social prestige and local influence. Families from the Melkite community, for example, became especially dominant and successful in the city's public life. A growing middle class which included a large number of Christians was closely connected with the increasing trade with Europe and many of them continued to acquire socio-cultural privileges through the patronage of foreign agents.<sup>14</sup> All of these well-established assets laid the foundation for the key role Christians played in the cultural transformation of Haifa during the Mandate years.

### CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN HAIFA AND THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Haifa under British rule represented a unique case in Palestine in terms of the variety and scope of dramatic changes it experienced, including accelerated economic, social, spatial and demographic growth over a short period of time. From a small and neglected town in the nineteenth century, Haifa

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>14</sup>Seikaly, *Haifa*, 29.

became an economic, industrial and cultural capital in northern Palestine. This process was already under way during the last years of Ottoman rule, but it was enhanced dramatically during the Mandate. Haifa constituted a crucial element in British imperial plans as the British regime saw the city as a gateway to the Middle East and thus established there its biggest imperial projects as well as its administrative and military headquarters. These rapid developments reinforced the expansion of the city's economic infrastructure and encouraged its growth as a regional hub for employment which attracted thousands of Arab and Jewish immigrants. The city's population grew six-fold in those years: from 22,000 residents in 1918 to 130,000 by 1947. This growth significantly changed not only the city's size but also its ethnic composition which became more heterogeneous and cosmopolitan. The swift urban transformation modified the city's public spaces and created a new reality, more dynamic than ever before.

The urban development spurred processes of cultural change and the appearance of new lifestyles, which were evident in the emergence of new patterns of cultural production and consumption. Within a few years, Haifa experienced a tremendous expansion of leisure and recreational opportunities that became available to different social groups. Public forms and institutions of leisure thrived quickly throughout the city and changed the face of urban culture: cafés, bars, restaurants, nightclubs, hotels, cinemas, theatre troops, cultural clubs, sports teams, commercial beaches, playgrounds, urban parks, newspapers, public libraries, as well as new entertainment technologies such as the radio and gramophone. Recreation became an important economic enterprise and gradually grew into a significant factor in the city's economic setting. These changes reshaped the daily experiences and desires of individuals and shifted their perception regarding the role of leisure in their lives. Entrepreneurs and businessmen from different communities identified recreation as a promising source of profit and invested money in developing cultural activities and entertainment centres, utilising advanced technological improvements.

Despite being a numerical minority, the Christian community in Haifa had the financial and cultural privilege to invest substantially in leisure infrastructures and thus become a major factor in the development of cultural life in the city. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's framework of analysis, I argue that these assets served as *cultural capital* which Christians had accumulated due to their long-lasting educational and cultural ties with various European and missionary forces. The transition from Ottoman rule to the British Mandate enabled them to bring their *cultural capital* into play by contributing to the city's cultural developments. In other words, the significant role they assumed in the cultural arena was in fact a product of acquired social advantage, dependent on religious affiliation and cultural ties. However, it is important to clarify that their *cultural capital* did not stem directly from their religious identity as Christians per se, but rather was generated thanks to the cultural networks they fostered with Western powers based on shared religious

affiliation. As we shall see below, their involvement in cultural life promoted their social mobility in a society undergoing intensive national and cultural crystallisation processes. Examination of different cultural and leisure arenas sheds light on Christians' impact on the cultural transformation in the city.

During the Mandate period, Haifa grew as a hub for newspaper publishers (though it remained smaller than Jaffa and Jerusalem).<sup>15</sup> In October 1919, right after Palestine was secured by British forces, Ottoman censorship was abolished and the press received a strongboost with the emergence of new newspapers and those who were closed during the First World War resumed their publications. The latter were the newspapers *Al-Karmil* (1908), *Filastin* (published in Jaffa) (1911) and *Al-Nafir* (1913) whose editors were Christians of the Greek Orthodox community. They were the pioneers of the Palestinian press who, after the 1908 revolution, used the educational advantage they had gained to give voice to political sentiments that prevailed during those years. Within a short time after the inception of the Mandate, additional newspapers and magazines began to be published in Haifa regularly, the most prominent of which were: *Al-Zabrah* (1921), *Al-Yarmuk* (1924), *Al-Bushra* (1934), *Al-Samir* (1939), *Al-Ittihad* (1944), *Al-Rabita* (1944), *Mihmaz* (1946).<sup>16</sup> The fierce competition with high-level newspapers imported from neighbouring countries encouraged editors to introduce innovations and improvements in the structure and content of their published products. For instance, editors hired local intellectuals to contribute with articles and regular columns.<sup>17</sup> The upgraded press provided Haifa's public with a diverse range of services, from news reporting to literary and cultural articles, advertisements for consumer goods and details about public events. In addition, it reported on leisure activities, sports competitions, concerts, film screenings and radio broadcasts. The literacy rate grew considerably thanks to the establishment of a governmental education system, whose foundations were laid by the Ottomans as part of the Tanzimat, and later further expanded by the British, as well as due to Christian and Muslim initiatives to open private schools. This process also created a growing readership among the Haifa expanding population. Newspapers quickly became a popular and accessible leisure product used both in private and public spheres. Cafes, for example, became places where the literate read aloud, with one person's reading skills providing new knowledge to an entire group, so that

<sup>15</sup>Jamil al-Bahri, *History of Haifa* (Haifa: The National Library of Haifa, 1922), 29–34 (in Arabic).

<sup>16</sup>Israel State Archive (ISA), RG 2, M-366/32, "Licensed Periodicals (Palestine)," 1945; Mustafa Kabha, *The Press in the Eye of the Storm: The Palestinian Press Shapes Public Opinion 1929–1939* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi & The Open University of Israel 2004), 20; Ami Ayalon, *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900–1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 64–65; H. Al-Bawwab, *Encyclopedia of Carmel Haifa* (Amman: Self-Publishing, 2009), 273 (in Arabic).

<sup>17</sup>Kabha, *The Press*.

those who remained semi- or illiterate could stay on top of events and participate in the discussions that accompanied the reading.<sup>18</sup> Cafe owners, who sought to increase their customer circle, subscribed to several newspapers to attract more clients.<sup>19</sup> Reading newspapers represented a great novelty which gradually became a common cultural practice that has spread from a limited circle of educated elites to other groups in Arab society. The intensification of the national struggle, through the 1920s, enhanced this trend as people were thirsty for up-to-date information, which accelerated the emergence of newspapers as an everyday consumer product. Up until the 1930s newspaper editors, many of whom were Christians who had acquired their education in Western or missionary institutions as mentioned earlier, gave extensive coverage to political issues though they did not deviate in their writing from Mandate policies. The riots of 1929 and political developments thereafter triggered a change as more newspapers, both Christian- and Muslim-owned, entered the arena, devoting an increasing number of articles to questions of national identity and opposition to Zionism. Editors began using their newspapers as a tool for consolidating Palestinian national awareness while criticising the British government.<sup>20</sup> This trend was reinforced during the Arab Revolt in the second half of the 1930s, which led to the suspension of many publications by the authorities. The press, in Palestine in general and in Haifa in particular, had an important role in shaping public discourse in those years, while Christians played a substantial role in this process.

Theatre was another domain that expanded dramatically during the Mandate years, becoming an important component of the leisure and cultural life of the Arab-Palestinian community in Haifa. A modest theatrical scene started in the city in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when students of missionary schools began to occasionally stage some plays. In 1892, for example, the Franciscan school performed “The Story of Cleopatra” in Arabic, and in 1902 the Frères School staged two plays, one in Arabic and the other in French.<sup>21</sup> These sporadic activities were increased after the 1908 Ottoman revolution, which allowed for greater freedom of expression for people throughout the Ottoman Empire. During this period, missionary and private Christian schools performed plays twice a year, at Christmas and the end of the year, staging shows which were open for all school students and their families.<sup>22</sup> Two Ottoman clerics, Rafik al-Tamimi and Muhammad Bahajat, who were sent in 1915 to write a report for the governor of *Wilayat* Beirut based on a tour of Palestinian towns and villages, noted that in Haifa

<sup>18</sup> Ayalon, *Reading Palestine*, 142–152; Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity, the Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Ayalon, *Reading Palestine*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Kabha, *The Press*.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Bawwab, *Encyclopedia*, 293.

<sup>22</sup> Hala Nassar, “Palestinian Theatre: Between Origins and Visions” (PhD diss., Free University of Berlin, 2001), 16–17.

there were six Christian associations, one Muslim society, two women's associations and one Christian theatre group.<sup>23</sup> During the Mandate period Christian, Muslim and state-run schools allocated resources for theatre performances which now took place not only in school halls but also in communal clubs or on the larger stages of the city's new cinemas.<sup>24</sup> Madj Khoury, a Palestinian interviewee from Haifa, told me joyfully about a play in which she participated as a child in the mid-1940s at the Sisters of Nazareth School, shedding light on the continuing cultural involvement of missionary figures:

One day the nun came and asks me, "Are you interested in playing Santa Maria in the Christmas show?" I said to her: "Yes, but I do not look like Santa Maria." "Santa Maria was from the East and she was like you, if you want, come." I said to her: "Yes I do", so eventually I went and acted. The nuns, they were in charge of everything, they wrote the script, taught us how to act, prepared the set and costumes, everything.<sup>25</sup>

Najib Nassar (Greek Orthodox), owner and editor of *Al-Karmil* newspaper, was a staunch supporter of theatre plays, which he saw as an essential means of establishing national identity among students, who were in his eyes the future generation of the nascent Palestinian state. He often published articles about upcoming shows, encouraging Haifa's Arabs to go and watch them. He also added reviews on the plays he watched and commented on their content, quality of acting, decor and costume.<sup>26</sup> The reviews in *Al-Karmil* as well as in other local newspapers indicate that these plays incorporated national content and linked figures and tales from Arab popular folklore to current political issues.

The growing middle class and the increasing number of educated people in these years gave a further boost to the theatre which spread beyond the domain of schools to become an attractive cultural activity for young people. A rising number of independent drama groups were established, as the new commercial entertainment venues in the city allowed them to perform on their stages because they attracted large crowds.<sup>27</sup> The most prominent figure in Haifa's theatre was undoubtedly the Christian actor and director Iskandar Ayyub Badran. He was one of the leaders of theatrical activity in the

<sup>23</sup>Yad Yaari Archive (YYA), Yosef Vashitz Collection, (5) 26.35-95 'The Educated Class in Haifa'. Mahmoud Zaid noted in his article in the Palestinian Encyclopedia that in pre-Mandatory Haifa there were 15 cultural associations which were mostly Christian "due to the influence of foreign churches and consuls in the city which represented the interests of their countries in Europe". Mahmoud Zayed, "Unions and Associations," *The Palestinian Encyclopedia Vol. 3* (Damascus: The Palestinian Encyclopedia Institute, 1984), 182.

<sup>24</sup>See for example: *Al-Karmil*, 2 April, 1921; *ibid.*, 1 July 1921; *ibid.*, 19 December 1921; *ibid.*, 2 June 1924; *ibid.*, 15 September 1924; *ibid.*, 6 July 1932.

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Madj Khoury, Haifa, 16 December 2014.

<sup>26</sup>See for example: *Al-Karmil*, 15 September 1925.

<sup>27</sup>*Al-Karmil*, 29 June 1921; 1 July 1921; 28 June 1924; *Al-Nafir*, 29 July 1926.

city and was involved in the establishment of several actors' groups during the 1930s. At the beginning of the decade he founded *Al-Karmil*, which was the most professional theatre troupe in Palestine up until the end of the British Mandate.<sup>28</sup> *Al-Karmil* maintained close ties with famous theatre actors from Egypt and Syria, and sometimes its players performed in Yosef Wahabi's plays which were staged in different cities in Palestine.<sup>29</sup> In 1944, for example, Wahabi directed the play "The Desert" in Haifa in collaboration with *Al-Karmil*.<sup>30</sup> During the 1930s Badran also founded the Actors and Education Club with the aim of "educating the younger generation through theatrical performances". In addition, he served as a professional consultant to the Haifa Theatre Club, which was open to "every young man or woman over the age of twenty, who loves art and Acting".<sup>31</sup>

The theatre scene saw the growing involvement of local intellectuals who began to write plays and facilitated groups of actors. Jamil al-Bahri, a famous Melkite writer, wrote original plays which were published in his two Haifa literary magazines, *Al-Zahara* and *Al-Zahur*. Mastering different languages thanks to his missionary education, he translated classic Western plays into Arabic, adapting them to Arab culture.<sup>32</sup> Many of his novels inspired local groups who staged them as plays for the general public of Haifa. A particularly popular novel was "the Killer of His Brother", which was staged not only in Haifa but also in many other cities in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.<sup>33</sup> In addition to promoting the theatre, Najib Nassar himself also wrote several plays. In 1922 he founded the Arab Economic Revival Society which encouraged acting by donating money to groups of actors in the city.<sup>34</sup> The mid-1940s saw the mushrooming of more theatre groups, mainly composed of educated young people who recognised theatre's cultural power as a platform for promoting social and political goals.<sup>35</sup>

The great popularity of theatre plays made them a convenient arena for the dissemination of national ideology. Like plays presented in schools, those performed by professional actors were based on texts and figures from Arabic literature, poetry and history. These plays related values attributed to Arab tradition such as courage, nobility, loyalty and patriotism to the Palestinian

<sup>28</sup>Haganah Archives (HA), 105/310, 'Al-Karmil troupe,' 1946; *Al-Difa*, 9 October 1945; Al-Bawwab, *Encyclopedia*, 298.

<sup>29</sup>Mansour, "The Arabs," 287.

<sup>30</sup>HA, 10\309, 'The Desert Play', 1944.

<sup>31</sup>*Filastin*, 10 April 1930; ISA, RG 2, M-61/51, 'The Theater Club of Haifa', 1930.

<sup>32</sup>Abdul Rahman Yaghi, *The History of Modern Palestinian Literature: From the Renaissance to the Nakba* (Ramallah: Publications of Palestinian Culture, 2001) (in Arabic).

<sup>33</sup>Mansour, "The Arabs," 284–285.

<sup>34</sup>Nasri al-Jūzy, *History of the Palestinian Theater 1918–1948* (Cyprus: Nicosia, 1991), 23–33 (in Arabic).

<sup>35</sup>Other theater groups founded in the city during those years were: The National Players and Music Association, The Art Forum and The Art Foundation Club. ISA, RG 25, M-61\31, 1947.

nation.<sup>36</sup> The content of the plays sought to create an affinity for past traditions and to link national topical issues with glorious cultural history. The Palestinian political struggle and attempts to strengthen the national identity served as a driving force in the revival of the theatre during the Mandate period, especially in Haifa, where theatrical activity was advanced more than any other city in Palestine.

The close connections between Haifa and neighbouring countries greatly influenced the development of theatre in the city. During the Ottoman period and even after the inception of the British and French Mandates which created new colonial borders, Palestine continued to be an integral part of the cultural and social system of the Middle East. Within the shared Arab cultural space, Cairo and Beirut served as leading cultural centres which inspired the entire region. Beginning in the Nahda period and increasingly in the first half of the twentieth century, Cairo and Beirut led intensive cultural activity in a variety of fields and constituted a dynamic focal point for theatre activities that became a role model to the Middle East as a whole. Haifa was not detached from these occurrences and derived cultural ideas, patterns and products from its neighbours. Its geographical proximity to Beirut, along with the improvement in means of transportation, deepened the contacts between the cities and strengthened theatre collaborations, as in many other areas. During the 1920s and expanding in the decades that followed, Arab theatre groups, especially from Egypt, came regularly to perform in Haifa.<sup>37</sup> The city's Arabs were familiar with these troupes and followed their activities through radio programmes and cultural magazines that were imported to the city.<sup>38</sup> Newspapers reported that the local audience filled the city's halls at their performances. In May 1929, for example, *Al-Karmil* reported that "Yosef Wahabi and George Abiad, who performed three nights in a row on the stage of Bustan al-Inshirah theatre, attracted a crowd of nearly two thousand people".<sup>39</sup> These performances left their audiences with an appreciation for the theatre and encouraged them to attend the shows of local groups. This active and ongoing interaction served as a source of inspiration and incentive for the flourishing of local theatre activities in Haifa.

Examination of various associations and clubs which operated in the city illuminates how the old ties between local Christians and European agents

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Karmil*, 2 April 1924; 18 June 1924; *Filastin*, 5 April 1944; *Al-Difa*, 28 November 1946; The National Library (TNL) Israel, Ephemera Collection.

<sup>37</sup> To mention only a few examples: On October 1925 the Egyptian play "Miserable Tears" was staged at the Colosseum Hall in Haifa, *Al-Karmil*, 17 October 1925; The famous Egyptian theater troupe 'Ramsis' starring Youssef Wahbi and Amina Rizk staged often their plays in Haifa during the 1920s. For instance, "Poor's Children", "The Confession Throne", "Rasputin", "Alma", "The Trio", and more, *Filastin*, 23 June 1925; *ibid.*, 30 April 1929. For more examples see *Al-Karmil*, 8 May 1929; *Al-Nafir*, 31 January 1926; *Al-Difa*, 10 October 1945.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Samia Shehadeh, Haifa, 16 December 2014.

<sup>39</sup> *Al-Karmil*, 5 August 1929.

shaped the cultural sphere in Mandatory Haifa. Different clubs offered their members a whole array of leisure activities which constituted a central ingredient of Haifa's Arab leisure life. Already before the Mandate, Christians were central to establishing the majority of these organisations. Although at their inception the activities of these associations were fairly modest, they served as a model for the establishment of associations later in the Mandate period. Official documents show that 54 associations and cultural clubs were registered in the Haifa district, 45 of which operated in the city itself and the majority were Christian based.<sup>40</sup> These organisations functioned as an alternative to the expanding commercial leisure industry in the city, though their activity was not isolated from the new scene. Commercial sites occasionally hosted events that were organised by the communal clubs. These clubs offered a range of leisure and cultural activities, such as social gatherings, sports activities, lectures, theatre, poetry readings, dances parties, enrichment classes and libraries.

Of all clubs and associations operating in the city, those founded on sectarian basis were the most dominant. Different religious denominations created frameworks for social activities that would strengthen the denominational identity of their members. For Christians, Churches played an important role in the leisure life of their communities by establishing cultural clubs that competed with the new for-profit leisure venues and were opened to their followers. Madj Khoury recalled in relation to this:

We had a club that belonged to the church. There was also a club for Latins, Catholics, Maronites, Muslims, all the communities in the city. We used to go there as children, women would gather there, order coffee and cake. It was like a cafe, they did handicrafts or participated in other circles. My parents used to go to parties, lectures by poets and writers which were organised by this club. That's how we would spend time in our community. The rich used to go to fancy restaurants and the common people would spend time with the community at the church club.<sup>41</sup>

Each church had a religious leadership that handled religious aspects such as ceremonies, holidays, weddings and funerals. In addition, each year a council composed of representatives of the community was elected in order to cultivate the community's cultural life through its clubs.<sup>42</sup> However, the clergy was closely involved in the arrangement of social and cultural activities so the line between religious and cultural activity was sometimes blurred. In the Latin club, for instance, the priest himself functioned as a spiritual leader and a social educator who coordinated secular entertaining activities and was

<sup>40</sup>ISA, RG 25, Associations; HA, 8/5, 'Arab Associations', 1944.

<sup>41</sup>Interview with Madj Khoury.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with Salman Natour, Haifa, 2 September 2015.

a member of the club's committee.<sup>43</sup> Many of these churches were run by missionaries whose senior hierarchy was comprised of Greeks, French, English and Italians which preserved their long-lasting foreign influence on the city's Christians.

The Orthodox Club was among the most prominent Christian organisation in Haifa. The club was established in 1937 and declared in its initial regulations that it aimed "to promote social, cultural and sports activities among members of the Orthodox community in Haifa" and that "participation is open only to Orthodox followers".<sup>44</sup> The club offered theatre, wrestling, weightlifting, table tennis and soccer classes; it organised dances for families as well as charity events to raise donations for the community's poor. Likewise, the club hosted famous singers and artists from the Arab world as well as intellectuals who gave weekly lectures on a variety of current issues.<sup>45</sup> Another central club was the Catholic Club, founded in the early 1920s. The leader of the Catholic community, Bishop Hajjar, raised money throughout the Mandate years from political and social organisations in Europe, which was allocated not only to the erection of new churches, but also to the establishment of schools and cultural institutions.<sup>46</sup> From its outset, the Catholic Club offered its members leisure, sports and theatre activities.<sup>47</sup> *Al-Zabara* magazine, for example, reported on 15 July 1922, that "a cultural party was held at the school of the Greek Catholic Church for members of the community in the presence of senior clerics. The party included among other things reading of poetry and prose in French and Arabic".<sup>48</sup> In the early 1940s the club sought to expand its ranks by including all members of the denomination. By the mid-1940s, the club had already numbered several hundred members.<sup>49</sup>

The vigorous activity of Christian associations in the city, especially of the Christian Association founded in the early 1920s, catalysed the establishment of similar clubs by groups of young Muslims. Among them were the Association of Muslim Youth, the Muslim Brotherhood, the [Association of] Adherence, Muslim Virtues Association, Ahmadiyya Association, Syrian Union Club, al-Rama Young Men's Club, Kafr Kanna Young Men's Club and

<sup>43</sup> *Filastin*, 5 May 1942; *ibid.*, 17 March 1946; *Al-Karmil*, 14 June 1924.

<sup>44</sup> Haifa City Archives (HCA), 8515 'The Orthodox Club', 1940–1943.

<sup>45</sup> HA, 8/6 a, 'A Party in the Orthodox Club'; Hanna Naqara, *Memoirs of a Palestinian Lawyer* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2011), 94–97 (in Arabic); *Filastin*, 7 January 1945.

<sup>46</sup> Yosef Vashitz, "Social Changes in Haifa's Arab Society Under the British Mandate" (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1993), 134 (in Hebrew).

<sup>47</sup> *Al-Karmil*, 2 June 1924.

<sup>48</sup> *Al-Zahara*, 15 July 1922.

<sup>49</sup> HA, 8/3 a, 'The Catholic Club', 13 November 1942.

more.<sup>50</sup> The Association of Muslim Youth was the largest and most central organisation and its main goal was the “promotion of Islamic education and values among the Muslim population through cultural activities”.<sup>51</sup> In a very short period of time, this association became a significant factor in the life of the Muslim community in Haifa. It organised parties and receptions, national conferences and religious celebrations as well as sports, theatre and weekly lectures of Islamic and national nature.<sup>52</sup> These activities were attended by a wide range of social groups: the elite was interested in receptions of high-ranking public figures, educators showed interest in its weekly lectures, ordinary people went to popular celebrations, uneducated found interest and usefulness in evening classes and youth participated in sports events.<sup>53</sup>

Official documents and oral interviews indicate that activities offered by the denominational clubs in the city enjoyed a high rate of public attendance and that various social groups, especially the popular classes, could access new forms of urban leisure thanks to these organisations. Furthermore, it seems that people chose to spend much of their free time in these places alongside members of their own religious or denominational community. These multiple institutions reflected on one hand the heterogeneous composition of Arab society in Haifa and on the other its preference to spend spare time with people from the same social group. In the context of the Christian community, this natural tendency to be with people of the same group, combined with the domination of cultural life by the churches and their Western supporters, further preserved European influence over local Christian. This predilection mirrored the existing sectarian demarcation lines which expressed the tense historical relationship between Christian and Muslim communities in the city.<sup>54</sup> Mahmoud Yazbak argues that Haifa’s associations and clubs worked solely for the benefit of their members and that their sectarian loyalty overcame any other allegiances.<sup>55</sup> Archbishop Hajjar and some wealthy

<sup>50</sup> *Al-Yarmuk*, 10 September 1925; HA, 105\159, “Muslim Brothers’ celebrations”, 1946; *Al-Bushra*, 1 January 1936.

<sup>51</sup> ISA, RG 25, 61\141, “A Letter from the Deputy Chairman of the Young Muslim Association to the District Governor,” 1940.

<sup>52</sup> ISA, RG 25, 61\141, “Invitation to Celebrate the Muslim Year at the Muslim Youth Association,” May 1930; Prophet’s Birthday Celebrations, *Filastin*, 21 July 1932; *ibid.*, 6 July 1933; *Ibid.*, 19 April 1940.

<sup>53</sup> ISA, RG 25, 61\141, “Lectures on Behalf of the Muslim Youth Association,” 1935; *Filastin*, 31 December 1932; *ibid.*, 16 January 1932; *ibid.*, 19 July 1933.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the historical roots of the tensions between various religious groups in Haifa, see Vashitz, “Social Changes,” 144–146; Mahmoud Yazbak, *Haifa in the Nineteenth Century, History of the City and Society* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 1998), 163–165 (in Hebrew); Mahmoud Yazbak, “Immigrants, Elites and Popular Organizations Among the Arab Society of Haifa from the British Conquest to 1939,” in *Economy and Society in Mandatory Palestine, 1918–1948*, eds. A. Bareli and N. Karlinsky (Sede Boqer: The Ben-Gurion Research Center, 2003) (in Hebrew); Seikaly, *Haifa*, 36–38.

<sup>55</sup> Yazbak, “Immigrants, Elites and Popular Organizations,” 373.

Christian merchants in the city, for example, openly forbade their community's members from participating in any political or cultural activity initiated by Muslims.<sup>56</sup> Similar phenomena prevailed in the Muslim community as well, where cultural activities took place in separate groups based on political or sectarian identification. The leaders of different Muslim subgroups sought to emphasise the predominance of their community over others as reflected in separatist recreational activities.

The escalating national struggle from the mid-1930s onward urged the denominational clubs to engage in national-political activity and deepened the need to unite the ranks. Thus, occasional attempts were made to collaborate and merge different clubs within the Christian and Muslim communities as well as attempts to unite Christian and Muslim clubs. However, disputes and power struggles that were common in leadership circles prevented these initiatives from being implemented.<sup>57</sup> The denominational clubs were well aware of the necessity to consolidate national awareness, therefore they embraced cultural activities with a strong national character. Nonetheless, this was not enough to transcend the divisions among the various communities in the city. While the clubs increasingly conducted political-national activities, these took place within each club separately. At the individual level, there were people who crossed their community lines and spent leisure time in other clubs, but this trend was not strong enough to undermine the cultural separation which was led by the various denomination leaders. The denominational clubs were, more than anything, oriented internally to their own communities. Nevertheless, the extensive cultural-national activity that took place in the Christian clubs turned the Christian minority in the city into a crucial actor as well as an equal to its Muslim counterpart at the forefront of the national-Palestinian struggle.

Alongside the denominational clubs, other cultural groups were established by European organisations in the city and functioned as an additional source of influence over local communities. One of the most prominent was the British Council, which was founded "to spread the English language throughout the British Empire, to develop close cultural relations with local populations and to fight the rise of Fascism".<sup>58</sup> Initial attempts to establish branches in Palestine began in 1936 and rose towards the end of the decade. The first branch was established in Haifa in 1940 as the council's committee believed that "Haifa is the best place to start, since there is no branch of the YMCA and the city will probably remain under direct British control due

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 386.

<sup>57</sup>HA, 105\159, "The Unification of All Arab Societies in Haifa," 1946; Hashomer Hazair Archive (HHA), Israel, The Aaron Cohen Collection, 8.10-95 (1), 'Clubs Unification,' 1 February 1946.

<sup>58</sup>TNA, BW, 1, British Council: Registered Files, General Series, 1936-1994.

to the oil pipeline and port facilities”.<sup>59</sup> Apart from the British administration, the target audience for the Council was mainly the affluent classes of the Arab and Jewish communities, who were considered to share the same cultural needs with the British community: “If we want to provide a social and cultural club for the Jewish and Arab communities, both of which have a large number of educated and affluent people, it is absolutely necessary to establish a first-class institution”.<sup>60</sup> The club offered activities for groups of men, women and children in music and sports as well as English classes, exhibitions, lectures and libraries. The 1943 club report shows that 20 young Arabs attended an English course, 16 Arab women participated in the club’s activities alongside several dozen Arab men. From the names appearing in the club’s records, we learn that a large part of the Arab members were Christians.<sup>61</sup>

A glance into the field of sports in Haifa sheds further light on the intensive involvement of the Christian community in the city’s cultural life. Sport, in its modern and organised form of leisure was practised in Palestine already at the end of the Ottoman period, when middle-class young men began to engage in physical activity as part of a new idea that modern and healthy individuals should partake in sports activities on a regular basis. This perception was influenced by Western ideas that seeped into the urban centres in the Middle East.<sup>62</sup> The first Arab football team in Palestine was established at St George’s Missionary School in Jerusalem in 1908; a year later, it defeated the American University of Beirut team, then considered one of the best in the region. In 1912, local Arab youths formed the National Football Team, which competed with missionary groups.<sup>63</sup> A large-scale institutionalisation of football in Palestine began after the British occupation, as one of the means through which the colonial government Eurocentrically believed it should modernise the local inhabitants.

The government schools emphasised physical education, trained sports teachers and purchased equipment and books on the subject.<sup>64</sup> They incorporated football games as part of the curriculum, which boosted the distribution of the game across the country. The British also set up an organisational framework for football games called the Sport Club and, in search of rivals to compete against them, invited local Jews and Arabs to participate in the games.<sup>65</sup> The key innovation during these years was that previously informal

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. In subsequent years, branches were also established in Jaffa, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Nablus, and Nazareth.

<sup>60</sup>TNA, BW, 47/2, British Institute Haifa, 1940–1945.

<sup>61</sup>TNA, BW, 47/2, Annual Report Haifa Institute, 1943.

<sup>62</sup>Murat Yildiz, “Institutions and Discourses of Sports in the Modern Middle East,” *Cairo Papers* 34, no. 2 (2016): 13.

<sup>63</sup>Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 231.

<sup>64</sup>*Al-Dida*, 1 January 1939.

<sup>65</sup>Tamir Sorek, *Arab Soccer in a Jewish State* (Jerusalem: Magness, 2006), 25.

games such as football became standardised and institutionalised and were organised by various bodies. From the 1920s onwards there was a significant increase in awareness of and presence of sports in Palestine, as elsewhere in the Middle East, in the form of facilities, organisations and competitions. Physical training began to be associated with a national culture that promoted values of discipline, order, strength, masculinity, and most of all, modernity.<sup>66</sup> Already in the mid-1920s, *Filastin* reported that “the sports movement has spread rapidly all over the country”.<sup>67</sup>

In Haifa, these trends were further reinforced due to the substantial presence of various European agents. Thus, for example, the English High School for Girls that was funded by the Anglican Mission regularly held sporting events for its students, both Muslim and Christian, in the presence of their parents. Girls’ sports were not common among the governmental and private Muslim schools since it was seen as a contradiction to the values of woman’s modesty. However, in this Missionary school sports was an integral part of the curriculum, where the students demonstrated their abilities in gymnastics and other physical activities.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, a variety of new sports fields, clubs and teams appeared at that time and drew participants from all walks of Palestinian society. A wide range of sports such as basketball, volleyball, table tennis, gymnastics, weightlifting, and especially soccer and boxing became highly popular among young people. However, a careful look at this vibrant arena reveals a complex picture regarding inter-communal divisions. Much like the city’s cultural clubs, many sport teams were founded on religious denominational basis, largely thanks to the support and resources they received from their communities. Christian sport teams generally enjoyed financial resources that were allocated to them by the missions, which in some cases allowed for the purchase of lands that were transformed into sport fields. Benefiting from Italian professional support, the *Salizyan* (Salesian) basketball team, for instance, was considered the best and most qualified team in the city and played against Jewish professional teams such as Maccabi and Hapoel. This team was open only to young Christians who were nurtured by the Italian mission and its players were trained by the best coaches, especially invited from Italy.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Geryes Jamil, who was the chairman of the “Christian Brotherhood”, described its football team that was the pride of his association:

We had our club, the ‘Christian Brotherhood’ in Wadi Nisnas on Haddad Street. This club was closed in 1948 ... we had a very high-level football team with coaches and costumes. It was a professional team and we played in

<sup>66</sup>Yildiz, “Institutions and Discourses,” 14–16.

<sup>67</sup>*Filastin*, 17 December 1927.

<sup>68</sup>*Al-Difa*, 5 June 1939; see also: *ibid.*, 13 June 1939; *ibid.*, 20 April 1938.

<sup>69</sup>Abd Kanafani Al-Latif, *15 al-Burj Street – Haifa* (Beirut: Baysān, 1996), 105–115 (in Arabic).

Jerusalem, in Tel Aviv and all over the country. Even articles in the newspapers were published about us.<sup>70</sup>

The sectarian element was particularly prominent in encounters and competitions held between different teams within Arab society in the city, with each group standing out and taking pride in its denominational affiliation. However, the expansion of national awareness, mainly from the mid-1930 onward, encouraged the establishment of sports clubs that emphasised national element in their identity. Teams such as the Arab Youth Club consisted of Christian and Muslim players and collaborated with the sectarian clubs, using each other's facilities for training and games. For example, in September 1943, a football tournament was held between Cairo and Haifa teams (the latter was composed of players from the Islamic Club, the Orthodox Club and the Armenian Club) on the field of the Islamic Club in Haifa.<sup>71</sup> In the summer of 1945, the Arab Youth Club won the national finals and was awarded the title of Palestinian champion in football.<sup>72</sup> Interestingly enough when such clubs played against Jewish or Arab teams from neighbouring countries, the sectarian identity gave way to the national- Palestinian one. Hence, despite the sectarian nature of Haifa's cultural and sports clubs, from the mid-1930s they increasingly operated in the spirit of nationalism using the popularity of sports as a vital tool in consolidating national sentiments.

Alongside the vivacious sports scene, another new form of leisure gained popularity in Mandatory Haifa. During those years, a number of commercial beaches were established and promptly turn into amusement centres that offered various services to Haifa's public. These beaches functioned as popular recreation sites and were mostly owned by Christian private entrepreneurs who made the seashore a legitimate leisure venue. The most popular beach in the city was Khayat Beach, with its high standards of amenities. Its owner, Aziz Khayat (a Melkite), was among the richest in the city who maintained substantial trade relations with Europe. A resident of the city, Abd al-Latif Kanafani, described the beach in his memoirs:

*Al-Aziziyya* was the favourite destination of travellers due to its high level, unmatched anywhere in the country. The food and drinks, which were of the highest quality, were served by a Nubian waiter wearing a fez and a garment that was so white it sparkled. He wore a red clock around his waist, like the palace servants that filled the Egyptian films. The original jazz orchestra played dance melodies hour after hour in a cheerful, gay atmosphere and the

<sup>70</sup>Interview with Geryes Jamil, Haifa, 2 September 2015.

<sup>71</sup>Central Zionist Archive (CZA) S25\6693, Sports activities with sports associations from neighboring countries, 1943.

<sup>72</sup>TNL, Ephemera Collection.

Mediterranean water always shining in the sunlight days and the moonlight night.<sup>73</sup>

This place had a great influence on the city's cultural scene and despite being relatively distant from the city centre, it regularly attracted large numbers of people. The attendees were among different sectors and classes, both Jews and Arabs, who were provided with services at various costs to suit different economic statuses. In the summer of 1931, a reporter from the daily newspaper *Doar Hayom* described the great popularity of the place: "Thousands of Haifa's residents and other cities flock to Khayat beach to escape the heat of the last few days. On last Saturday and Sunday an effort was made by the city's taxi drivers to bring back at once the many masses who spent their time on the beach".<sup>74</sup> The beaches, like other commercial leisure sites in the city, were a space where people from different religious, sectarian and national groups socialised and spent time alongside each other. Unlike sports games which were competitive in nature and allowed ordinary people to participate in the process of formulating the national culture, the beach was characterised by an open, positive, relaxed and informal atmosphere, where people came to forget everyday worries and be entertained. The choice to go there was due to personal taste and style and was not necessarily related to political sentiments.

Another popular beach in the city was owned by the Buthaji family (Protestant) which served mostly the Arab middle class as well as some foreigners.<sup>75</sup> This family also owned the T.S Boothaji & Sons Company and a chain of department stores selling novel leisure products such as records, gramophones, radios and more.<sup>76</sup> Charles Buthaji, one of the family members, owned the Windsor Hotel in the city and acted as the head of the Association of Arab Hotel, Restaurants and Cafes Owners in Haifa in the early 1940s. In this capacity, he worked to cultivate the cultural life of the city and protected the interests of its business owners. Khayat and Buthaji are just an example of how prominent Christian families with long-standing economic and cultural connections with Europe functioned as important cultural entrepreneurs who contributed substantially to the city's cultural transformation.

The examination of several cultural arenas in Haifa indicates that even though the Christian community was a minority, it served as a significant protagonist in the cultural change which unfolded in the city during the Mandate period. In the light of strengthening Palestinian nationalism, one should ask

<sup>73</sup>Kanafani, *15 al-Burj Street*, 36; For a further description of the lively activity on the beach, see *Filastin*, 20 May 1932.

<sup>74</sup>*Doar Hayom*, 31 July 1931.

<sup>75</sup>Al-Bawwab, *Encyclopedia*, 81.

<sup>76</sup>Andrea Stanton, *This Is Jerusalem Calling, State Radio in Mandate Palestine* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2013), 48–54.

how these actions affected their identity and status within Palestinian society. In order to answer this question, we now look at the wide politicisation processes unfolded at the time.

### CULTURE AS A TOOL FOR CONSOLIDATING PALESTINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Palestinian nationalism rose during the Mandate years to become a dominant category in the collective identity. The need to confront the Zionist threat accelerated political and national activities, which in turn contributed to a cultural revival.<sup>77</sup> Under this process, leisure sites served as a crucial space for forming a Palestinian culture and invigorating the identity of the national community. Leisure emerged as an effective arena for distributing national ideas, converted as they were into catchy and accessible cultural products for ordinary people. Activities such as sports competitions, cultural clubs, scouts, theatre shows and newspaper publishing became important avenues in the nation-building process. The Christian community in Haifa functioned as a decisive actor in these processes by taking active steps to develop and foster a distinct Palestinian culture. The realm of theatre, for example, became a convenient arena for the dissemination of the national ideology, while also being dominated by the Christian communities. This trend, as we saw, was prominent in plays staged both by schools and by independent troupes of young actors. Some of the plays were based on translations of classical plays such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* or Molière's *The Misérables*, while the most popular were based on themes from Arabic literature, poetry and history. These plays linked values attributed to Arab tradition such as courage, nobility and loyalty with patriotism and the Palestinian nation.<sup>78</sup> The intensification of national consciousness reinforced the popularity of these plays and gave the audience the feeling that their participation as spectators supported this cultural activity and thus contributed to the national effort in the competition against Zionism. A report in *Filastin* from 1944 illustrated this:

The theatre society of the Gaza College staged the play 'For You Oh Motherland'. This play critically examines the social and economic situation of Palestine. All the events in the play revolve around the sale of lands. The two gentlemen wrote the play in 1934 and it seems as if they wrote it today. The hall was flooded with attendees, attesting to the high importance the residents attribute to this matter.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup>Maayan Hilel, "Cultural Transformation in Palestinian-Arab Society, 1918–1948: Haifa as a Case-Study" (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2018).

<sup>78</sup>See for Example: *Al-Karmil*, 2 April 1924; *ibid.*, 18 June 1924; *ibid.*, 2 April 1924; *Filastin*, 5 April 1944; *Al-Difa*, 28 November 1946; TNL, Ephemera Collection.

<sup>79</sup>HA, 105/309, 'For You Ya Motherland,' 1944.

Similarly, sports games became a vital channel for strengthening national feelings, due to their ability to function as a unifying force. The participation of young people in sports contests allowed them to express their affiliation not only to a particular fan group, but also to the Palestinian national community as a whole. The sense of belonging that sports games provided paved the way for this form of entertainment to the hearts of many young people. Local newspapers contributed to this trend by giving extensive coverage to the games and by providing vivid descriptions of what was happening on the fields.<sup>80</sup> The politicisation of leisure was also evident in the cultural clubs of the various city's denominations, which since the mid-1930s increasingly incorporated cultural activities of a national character. The national struggle sharpened the need for unification between the different communities and occasionally led to attempts to merge various clubs within Arab society. As such, for example, the lawyer Hanna Nakra, head of the Orthodox club, changed the rules of the club (which was the largest and most popular one in the city) to define it as a national rather than a denominational club. He therefore invited onto the board important figures from the Muslim community in the city, such as Rashid al-Haj Ibrahim, Abd al-Rahman al-Khadra and 'Abd al-Karim al-Karmi.<sup>81</sup> These are only a few of many examples of the ways in which culture was appropriated as a crucial tool in the national struggle. Against this background, the intensive and long-standing engagement of Christians with cultural development strengthened their national identity and functioned as a channel for their mobilisation within Palestinian society.

## CONCLUSIONS

Using the more inclusive concept of "soft power" allowed us to interpret missionary and other European activities in Haifa as forms of cultural diplomacy. In seeking to gain influence in the region, these forces supported and fostered local Christian communities as early as the nineteenth century. As a result these communities were able to acquire a substantial *cultural capital* in the form of social and cultural advantages that qualified them to contribute significantly to the cultural developments unfolded in the city during the British Mandate. Through "soft" intervention, then, European presence indirectly influenced local processes in the sense that it served as a powerful platform for local Christians to play a key role in the cultural transformation which was vital to the national struggle. The rapidly changing political circumstances deepened the need for a cultural revival as a tool for consolidating a Palestinian national identity. The nation-building process required the formulation of national culture and this intersected with the ability of Christian communities to translate their long-established *cultural capital*

<sup>80</sup> *Filastin*, 17 August 1947; *ibid.*, 8 August 1947; *ibid.*, 20 June 1947.

<sup>81</sup> Naqara, *Memoirs*, 94–97.

into investments in the city's cultural life, which boosted their mobility in the Palestinian national system. As Noah Haiduc-Dale shows, during the Mandate period, Christians tried to determine their own space in society. They sought to navigate nationalism and communalism as two modes of identifications as the shifting political balance reshaped their options.<sup>82</sup> Building on this, I argue that by cultivating cultural activities that took place mainly within the framework of their denominations, Haifa's Christians placed themselves as an integral and legitimate part of the Palestinian national movement, thereby reinforcing their Arab-Palestinian identity. Paradoxically, what enabled them to do so was their long-term association with European organisations. In other words, their extensive cultural activity, which drew inspiration from European sources, served as a springboard to the heart of Palestinian nationalism meant to fight Zionism: another European export.

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<sup>82</sup>Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine Communalism and Nationalism, 1917–1948* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 3–4.

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