“Holiday of Holidays”
Festival in Haifa: between Hope and Reality

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Introduction: Haifa as a Mixed City

All localities in Israel are divided into three groups according to their ethnic composition: Jewish, Arab and mixed. According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), eight urban localities are defined as mixed. These towns “with a large majority of Jews, but with a considerable minority of Arabs” are: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv-Yafo, Haifa, Akko, Ramla, Lod, Ma’alot-Torshiha and Nazerat Illit (CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2010, 2011, 29). Life in these cities is a subject of heated academic and public discussions. Academics who study planning and development strategies, distribution of housing, public space and resources believe that on the one hand, Arab neighborhoods are treated as ‘internal frontiers’ into which Jewish presence keeps expanding thus turning mixed cities into urban ethnocracies, where citizenship is unequal, and resources and services are allocated on the basis of ethnicity rather than residency (Yiftachel, and Yacobi 2003, 680, 690). On the other hand, the mixed city context may be favorable for forming perceptions of coexistence (Falah et al. 2000, 792). Among the mixed urban localities, Haifa, the third largest city of Israel, has gained the reputation of a model of tolerance among mixed localities. This might be partially explained by the history of Haifa, where Jews and Arabs lived under the same municipality prior to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (Yacobi 2009, 1). In the empirical study conducted by Falah et al., the ranking for positive perceptions of coexistence is highest in Haifa for Arab respondents and second highest for Jewish respondents (2000, 787). At the same time, the international conference From Mixed to Shared: The Haifa Alternative organized by the NGO New Israel Fund reported results of a study based on the discussions with 165 residents in 22 focus groups which indicated that “the majority of the town’s residents live in a sort of cultural indifference devoid of neither desire to interact with members of other populations nor outright hostility” (New Israel Fund 2010). In addition, like in other Israeli towns, the interethnic relations in Haifa visibly deteriorated in the period of the 2nd Intifada also known as Intifada Al Aqsa (2000-2005), when there were several terrorist attacks in Haifa buses and restaurants and clashes between Arab demonstrators and policemen. Animosities that soared in that period were hardly alleviated by the fact that among the victims of the terrorists were not only Jewish but also Arab and Druze residents of Haifa.

The total population of the Haifa district which includes the city’s suburbs is 880,000. The Arab sector makes 213,600, the rest being “Jews and others” (CBS, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2009, 2010, 106). Like other mixed cities, Haifa is still ethnically divided into the so called...
“Arab” and “Jewish” neighborhoods. The former are located in the low-prestige areas of the city. In fact, Jews also live there, although not by choice but due to financial constraints. Rich neighborhoods are primarily occupied by Jews, although socially upward mobile Arab families have corners in them as well. One Arab neighborhood in the old part of the city stayed empty for 50 years after the War of Independence which took place in 1948 after the State of Israel had been proclaimed. According to Israeli law, abandoned houses cannot be transferred to other owners for a period of 50 years. Since Palestinian refugees are not allowed to return to Israel, the real estate was appropriated by the city and today this district is in the process of renovation. Most of the restored buildings house offices and shops.

On a daily basis interaction between Jews and Arabs occurs in the work place, for example in hospitals where both Jews and Arabs can be found among the staff and patients, in shopping centers and malls, in pharmacies and post-offices, and at the universities and colleges (see Blumen & Tzafrir 2011). One can add that at the universities, there are many more Arabs among the students than among the professors, engineers, librarians, and secretaries. Notably, although there are four mixed bilingual schools in Israel, none of them is in Haifa (Mor-Sommerfeld et al. 2007, 11). Yet some Arab and Druze parents send their children who intend to go to the university to Jewish high schools in order to facilitate their further studies, because instruction at Israeli universities is in Hebrew. In addition, both Arab and Jewish children, including Russian-speaking immigrants, study together at the Rubin Conservatory located in one of the Arab neighborhoods of the city. Despite a long history of living under the same jurisdiction and abundance of contact zones, Jews and Arabs in Haifa continue being apart maintaining social networks and engaging in leisure activities primarily within their own ethno-cultural groups.

Attempts to bring Haifa communities closer to each other are made by Beit Hagefen—the Arab-Jewish Center founded in 1963 (information about Beit Hagefen’s activities can be found on its website (http://www.beit-hagefen.com/En_Web/En_%20Home_Index.htm, accessed 9/01/2012). Its current head, Asaf Ronen, says that from 2003 to 2010 the center was in crisis and only now is trying to reinvigorate residents’ interest in its initiatives (Korin 2012). One of the most successful among them is the December festival known as Holiday of Holidays. It was launched in 1993 as a joint venture of the Municipality of Haifa and Beit Hagefen. The name and the time of the festival was chosen because the holidays of the three main religions represented in Haifa—Christmas, Hanukkah and Ramadan happened to be almost at the same time in that year. Moslems use the lunar calendar, and since then neither Ramadan nor any other Moslem holiday has fallen on December, yet in the consciousness of the residents the festival is still associated with the three religions, although the events of the festival are intercultural. An intercultural festival was successful and from year to year it is getting more popular attracting Israelis from all over the country as well as foreign tourists. Today it is generously covered in the
media, including electronic sources. The festival has its own web page which posts the schedule of events, announcements and photographs (http://www.haifahag.co.il/, accessed 10/12/2011). It is covered on the site of the Haifa Municipality (http://www.haifa.muni.il/Haifa/Pages/NewsItem.aspx?OneId=306, last accessed 20/01/2012) and on the homepage of Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (http://www.altawasul.com/MFAAR/israel+beyond+politics/society+co-existence+and+peace/Holiday-of-Holidays-Festival-celebrated-in-Haifa-13122011.htm, last accessed on 20/01/2012). Note that on the municipal site the page is given in Hebrew, Arabic and English, and the Ministry adds the Russian page. In 2011 we also found that the festival was advertised on the web pages of travel agencies in Russia and Ukraine (see e.g., http://tours-service.ru/news/9161 and http://www.rv.org.ua/blog/prazdnik-prazdnikov-v-haife/, last accessed 20/01/2012). The articles on the official Israeli sites underscore the inter-confessional nature of the holiday, contributing to peaceful coexistence of ethno-religious groups. Sites for tourists, on the other hand, emphasize a playful and happy atmosphere and the entertaining nature of the events.

This essay is based on participant observation and monitoring of websites. We have attended events of Holiday of Holidays since the year it was launched, first coming as curious members of the audience, and in the last two years talking to participants, watching behavior and reactions of children and adults, collecting advertising leaflets, making notes in our ethnographic diaries. In January 2012 we interviewed the head of Beit Hagefen, Asaf Ronen. We read and analyzed internet materials devoted to the festival on institutional and non-institutional sites, such as discussion forums and blogs in English, Hebrew and Russian. Unfortunately, we were unable to cover sites in Arabic, although we spoke about the festival with our Arabic-speaking colleagues and students. Moreover, we conducted a short online interview with Roseland Daem, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature of the University of Haifa, specializing in folklore, and a lecturer at the Academic Arab College of Education.

The Holiday of Holidays in Haifa is an attempt to promote Haifa’s image of a tolerant multicultural city by creating a unifying festival. At the same time, for years Haifa has struggled to shed its image of a provincial city, which has little to offer to young and ambitious people. A widely used method of revitalization of a city’s image, developing its economy and place identity, and capitalizing on cultural resources is conducting festivals (Cheng-Yi and Woan-Chiau 2009, 1317-1322). This trend is a distinctive feature of post-industrial societies, where urban landscapes “become less tied to production and more concerned with organization of consumption” (Zukin 1991, 57).

The Festival and Its Chronotope
The term “Chronotope” (literally “time-space) was introduced into literary studies by Mikhail Bakhtin for the analysis of novels. He defined it as “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin 1981,
Although initially understood as a formally constitutive category of literature, this concept was later extended to the study of culture and folklore. Specifically, Bakhtin discussed at length the Chronotope of the carnival in the feudal society, and some of his insights seem to be relevant to the festivities of our age. According to Bakhtin, as opposed to the official feast, carnival in Middle Ages, “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions” (Bakhtin 1984, 10).

Although there is a marked difference between feudal and post-industrial societies, hierarchies, norms and prohibitions have not disappeared from the way our contemporaries celebrate holidays. We still witness ethnic and religious divisions: festivals of one group leave members of other groups indifferent at best, but sometimes trigger alienation and hostility. The rejection of national holidays by Arab citizens of Israel seems to be strongest on the Independence Day (cf. almost identical conflict in the perception of the Victory day among Estonian and Russian denizens of Kohtla-Järve in Jago 2011, 27).

The spatio-temporal framework of the Holiday of Holidays festival has clear-cut borders. The official opening takes place on the afternoon of the first Saturday in December, which already demonstrates the secular nature of the festival, because due to the conventions of Judaism, public events in Israel are limited from Friday evening to the Saturday evening, the time of Sabbath. The rest of the program encompasses Thursday nights, Fridays and Saturdays until the 31st of December. Most shows, concerts and happenings of the festival take place in the two adjacent neighborhoods: Wadi Nisnas and the German Colony which are populated primarily by Christian and Muslim Arabs. The district known as the German Colony had been established in 1868 by German Templers, whose descendents were expelled at the beginning of World War II by the British for pro-Nazi sympathies. In post-war years the area gradually deteriorated, but in the 1990s its main street, Ben-Gurion Avenue, located at the bottom of the Bahai gardens that stretch from the top to the bottom of Mount Carmel was renovated. Numerous restaurants opened there and turned it into one of the favorite locations of nightlife entertainment. The European-style architecture of the Templers and the Bahai shrine visible from any point of the street make the street attractive and exotic by its “otherness”. This area is easy to reach for those who come from other towns because it is situated close to a train station and the port.

The second main location of the festival, Wadi Nisnas, is visually separated from the adjacent streets and has just a few narrow entries. The impression of separateness and autonomy is reinforced by the absence of public transport and scarcity of cars there. With its narrow streets Wadi Nisnas seems to be an inappropriate location for mass festive happenings; on the other hand, the combination of shabbiness, disorderliness and often naïve but moving decorations makes it picturesque. Many houses look dilapidated needing repairs badly, but this seems to be beyond the means of low-income owners (cf. with the situation of the Moorish historical district of Albaicin
in Granada discussed in Shaw et al. 2004, 1986). Despite its pitiful state, *Wadi Nisnas* was chosen by Arab and Jewish artists for displaying their works. The streets and houses of the district are decorated with numerous sculptures, frescos, ceramic bass reliefs, and metal installations which turned it into an open-air museum. On the pavement of the streets one can see painted foot prints indicating the route of “Coexistence Walks” – guided tours organized by *Beit Hagefen*. Besides its art, *Wadi Nisnas* attracts secular Jews who like to visit it on Friday afternoon and Saturday, when shops in the Jewish quarters are closed.

During festival events these two neighborhoods become exclusively pedestrian and are separated from the rest of the city by railings with guarded entrances. Used to check-ups at the entrance to any public building, members of the audience patiently queue at the gates, opening their bags for inspection which should boost the perception of personal safety (cf. with the importance of ‘gateways’ in Shaw et al. 2004, 1991). Festive atmosphere presupposes the feeling of trust. As Giddens indicates, “Risk and trust intertwine, trust normally serving to reduce or minimize the dangers to which particular types of activity are subject” (Giddens 1990, 35). At the same time, the clearly marked border between alleged risk and safety may be viewed from a different angle:

Although security is vitally important during mass public events, a whole neighborhood is blocked. If residents leave it in order to do their shopping in a nearby store or have to do some chores outside their district, when they come back home, they have to pass through security control, and their bags are checked. It is also humiliating for youngsters to be checked by security at the entrance to their own house (from an interview with Roseland Daeem).

The interconnection of risk and trust is particularly meaningful for Israeli society for years tormented by military conflicts and terrorist attacks. According to the study conducted by Jabareen, the area of the German Colony is perceived by both Arab and Jewish Israelis as a safer place than other parts of Haifa. This is explained by lively economic and social activities attracting members of both sectors, and by the belief (unfortunately, mistaken) that Arab quarters and Arab-owned businesses are unlikely to be targeted by suicide bombers (Jabareen 2009, 97-98). Our own participant observation of both the German Colony and *Wadi Nissnas* based on multiple visits to these neighborhoods on week days, weekends and during holidays is ambivalent. Although we share with Jabareen’s subjects the feeling of trust and safety, we know that many Jewish residents of Haifa avoid Arab neighborhoods. Moreover, on the occasions we guided guests from other Israeli towns and from abroad through the area, we were often confronted with their fear and suspicion. Sometimes it requires quite a bit of an effort to convince visitors to “set foot on the Arab territory” (cf. reluctance of international tourists to visit predominantly Moslem neighborhoods in London after 09.11.2001 in Shaw et al. 2004, 1992). In the last years when the events of the festival have become more diverse, the Holiday of Holidays has not been confined to the two neighborhoods described here. In December admission fee...
to Haifa museums is reduced from 30 to 5 shekels, and in the Jewish neighborhood of Bat-Galim artists open doors of their private apartments and studios for free visits. Thus, the Holiday of Holidays festival offers both “high” and popular culture. In the literature about festivals, researchers observe that the audiences that choose high culture events tend to ignore popular culture and vice versa. Specifically, high culture events with low ethnic minority participation are more attractive to older audiences (Richards, and Wilson 2004, 1932, 1940, 1942). We also observe that during the Holiday of Holidays ethnic groups mix primarily in restaurants and open-air happenings.

The two main locations of the festival are decorated with garlands lit in the evenings, posters in four languages (Arabic, English, Hebrew and Russian), multicolored balloons, Hanukkah candlesticks and imitative Christmas trees. The latter deserve a special description. Some are young cypress trees, others are plastic. In the last two years a 10-meter plastic tree assembled of 5,000 mineral water bottles is mounted on one of the roundabouts of the German Colony. Designed by Hadas Itzcovich, who specializes in ecologically-friendly installations, this semi-transparent blue structure looks slightly weird in the daytime, but closely resembles a fir tree at
night when it is decorated with blinking lights. When it was first installed in December 2010, it immediately became a curiosity and attracted numerous residents to gaze at it and photograph it. In 2011 one of the Christmas trees in the German Holiday had to be removed because it had been placed in front of a synagogue, which was perceived as an offensive gesture by the religious Jews. While walking through the area during December festivities we looked for decorations associated with Islam, but the only one we found was a crescent crowning one part of the metal installation permanently attached to the building of Beit Hagefen. It presents stylized Christian, Jewish and Moslem temples, each with a respective symbol, and embodies the unity of the three groups of the Haifa residents. When we asked Asaf Ronen about the lack of Moslem symbols in the festival decorations, he explained that they would be out of place in the absence of a Moslem holiday at the time, so on his initiative, in 2011 posters advertising the festival did not mention the names of the three holidays. He added that although there were no complaints about it on the part of the Moslem community, it was worth considering how to present Moslem symbols during future festivals. Importantly, 5% of the festival’s budget had been spent for Ramadan festivities that took place in August 2012.

Objectively speaking, we have to admit that these are not three holidays. Decorations reflected December holidays: Hanukkah and Christmas. Holiday of Holidays is a trademark that emerged under specific circumstances but they have changed. The dynamics of the festival remain the same: celebration of coexistence in Haifa. The Holiday of Holidays is the trademark of coexistence in Haifa (from an interview with Asaf Ronen).

The main events are the opening of the festival taking place in Wadi Nissnas, a happening in the German Colony at the end of December and a Hanukkah procession in the old city center, Hadar. All the three are advertised as “happenings for the whole family”. Indeed, the variety of entertainment can satisfy people of different ages, tastes and financial means. The Hanukkah procession is organized by the municipality, a Hadar community center and the Chabad-Lubavitch Center of the Russian-speaking Jews of Haifa and suburbs. The procession is headed by a large truck brightly lit with torches and dubbed in the press the “Habbad tank” (Igoshina 2011). Participants of the procession also carry torches. Although a fire brigade and an ambulance accompanied the procession, some of the Internet users commenting festivities in 2011 expressed anxiety about the danger of fire (http://haifa.israelinfo.ru/comments?id=7825#rules, last accessed on 02/02/2012). At the same time all admitted that the atmosphere was festive thanks to the abundance of light, Hanukkah songs, fireworks and torch juggling. Notably in 2011, the two big happenings in Hadar and in the German Colony were held on the same day. So it was possible for the festival goers to attend both, and in their reports about the festival some bloggers mentioned attending both events.

During the festival events the streets of Wadi Nissnas are overcrowded. They are lined with stalls where crafts, toys, Christmas decorations and religious
books in different languages as well as various foods are offered to the customers. Importantly, shop owners of Wadi Nisnas do not necessarily profit from the festival:

Festival goers coming to the Wadi mostly buy food or toys for children. On the other hand, stores selling clothes, shoes, building materials, and so on do not attract visitors; just the opposite, the entrances to their stores are blocked by the stalls, and so traders from all over the country, not the local people try to make a buck. The local jeweler simply closes his shop for this period (from an interview with Roseland Daem).

Children are drawn to body-art stalls and to young people on stilts dressed as angels, fairy-queens and various characters of Christmas tales. Street theater groups, some of them with Jewish-Arabic casts, perform one after another using the roof of a low building on a small square as a stage. On the balcony across, young men disguised as females dance provocatively exchanging jokes with the audience filling the square. Notably, guards can be seen on other balconies making sure that no provocation would disturb the festivities.

One of the main events of the big happening in the German Colony is a parade of Santa Clauses. This made
Santa-style red caps with blinking light popular. Made in China, they can be found in numerous shops selling Christmas-tree decorations and paraphernalia in Wadi Nisnas, and many children and young people both Christian and Jewish wear them during festival events. Notably, some caps have one of the following inscriptions in Russian: Люблю Снегурочку, Ищу Снегурочку (I love Snow Maiden, I am looking for Snow Maiden, I want Snow Maiden). Snegurochka, Snow Maiden, is the granddaughter of Ded Moroz, Grandfather Frost - the Russian counterpart of Santa Claus. Unlike Santa, Ded Moroz and Snegurochka have a folk rather than a religious background. They are inseparable from childhood memories of those who grew up in the former Soviet Union and who make a large part of the Russian-speaking community in Israel (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2007, 275-280). Noteworthy, when we interviewed Asaf Ronen, he asked what was missing for us in the festival. Without a minute of hesitations we both mentioned Snegurochka and were promised to see her at the next year festivities. It is worth mentioning that Snegurochka dolls have been on sale in Russian and Arab-owned shops for years. This year we also saw the typical blue-white-and silver Snegurochka dress in one of the Arab-owned shop.

Music is an important component of the festival. First to be mentioned is liturgics concerts in churches which are also situated in the area of festivities and nearby. The rest of the music program of the festival consists of open-air performances by professional and amateur musicians. Several stages are installed in the German Colony on the day of the big happening. One can hear classic music performed by chamber ensembles, Latin-American dance music played by guitarists, marches by the local scout brass band, Arabic music performed on darbuka (goblet drum, an Arabic percussion instrument.) and Israeli pop. Sometimes these various tunes overlap, but the cacophony does not disturb listeners wandering from stage to stage. Noteworthy, the person responsible for the music is Professor Amos Lanir, a retired chemist of one of the Haifa hospitals involved in the festival organization along with other...
volunteers.

During the festival one of the buildings of Beit Hagefen accommodates a fair of antiquities. As usual for such places, most people come to have a look at curious and exotic things without intentions of buying, but those who wish can acquire objects ranging from cheap trinkets to expensive collectors’ items. Like everything else during the festival, the fair is multicultural displaying Passover dishes and crosses, Stars of David and rosaries, antique European dolls and carved oriental boxes and pieces of furniture. In 2011 we visited the fair several times and did not hear Arabic spoken nor did we see visitors wearing traditional Druze and Moslem attire. This made a contrast with open-air events where Moslems and the Druze were both acoustically and visually represented.

As mentioned earlier, the Holiday of Holidays attracts craftsmen and caterers offering products for people with different means. Hand-made chocolate, colored glassware and candlesticks, ethnic dresses, jewelry and various other goods are examined, touched, tasted or tried on. One can eat in gourmet restaurants located in the German colony, but most relish Hanukkah sufganiot (doughnuts), Druze pita, Middle-Eastern falafel with humus and tehina, or Chinese ravioli sold on the streets and served on plastic plates. Advertisers also take advantage of the amicable atmosphere of the festival, and young girls wearing stylized Santa dresses and Santa-caps distribute fliers of cell phone companies, galleries and restaurants. Although we did not find any reports about the economic impact of Holiday of Holidays, the festivalization of consumption seems to be an additional factor attracting audiences.

Druze pita baked on a street of Wadi Nisnas are tasty to eat and fun to watch.

Participation and Self-Exclusion

According to various scholarly publications, one of the most important criteria of festivals’ success is growing participation of local residents and outsiders, although all admit that hard data on the numbers is difficult to obtain (see e.g., Quinn 2005, 932; Lin, and Hsing 2009, 1321). The article devoted to Holiday of Holidays which is posted on the site of Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs cites the following numbers: approximately 200,000 visitors across Israel and abroad, with over 40% of festival goers being out-of-towners (http://www.altawasul.com/MFAAR/israel+beyond+politics/society+co-existence+and+peace/Holiday-of-Holidays-Festival-celebrated-in-Haifa-13122011).
As mentioned earlier, festivals attract diverse audiences and some groups are more noticeable than others. Like in other societies, in Israel members of different groups are identified by the elements of clothes such as skull caps, wigs and head dresses of religious Jews, black dresses and white scarves of Druze women, *sherwal* and *tarboush* of Druze men, and Hijabs of Moslem women. In addition, members of different groups may be recognized by symbols worn on the neck, such as the cross and the star-of-David pendants. In a divided society like Israel, people are used to taking notice of such distinguishing artifacts in order to identify members of one’s own group and “others”. At the same time, there are secular individuals in all ethnic groups who do not wear any of these identification signs. Then it is the language they speak or their accent in Hebrew that serves as an identifier (Cf., description of the language as the marker of group belonging in Janev 2011, 15). Against this background we could see very few religious Jews at the popular culture events in Arab quarters. The prevailing languages spoken by festival goers were Arabic, Hebrew and Russian. One could also see and hear multilingual Asian tourists and guest workers. Judging from the abundance of Russian speakers and the detailed coverage of the festival events on Israeli Russian-language web sites, it attracts members of this group, which is numerically almost as large as the group of Arab citizens of Israel, and makes up approximately one sixth of the total population. For secular Russian speakers, whether they are Jews or non-Jews, this festival is associated not only with Hanukkah but also with New Year celebrations, much loved in their country of origin. While on the whole the attitude to New Year celebrations by Jews is negative in Israeli society and is often critically discussed in the media, the attachment to it by Russian Jews is gradually making government institutions and individuals more tolerant of it:

This year the Haifa Division of the Ministry of Absorption will take an active part in the festival. We closely identify with the holiday of Hanukkah because we have been celebrating the New Year since childhood. And this festival will enable our compatriots to make a holiday for the entire family: to meet clowns, famous “Russian” artists, and the Klezmer ensemble “Kalinka”, (Yulia Shtraim, Deputy Mayor of Haifa, [http://ru.local.co.il/EventPage.asp?nav=4.50.7.6.28678](http://ru.local.co.il/EventPage.asp?nav=4.50.7.6.28678), last accessed 31/01/2012)

This statement is interesting in the way a government official is mixing up two traditions. While it is ideologically “correct” to celebrate the Jewish Hanukkah, Shtraim inadvertently admits that it is the New Year that the
“Russians” are attached to. Another amusing detail pointing to the hybridity of Russian-speaking Israelis is the name of the ensemble mentioned by Shtraim. Founded by immigrants in the early 1990s, it is a frequent participant in Haifa public events. Although today the musicians position themselves as performers of traditional Klezmer music of the shtetl, they have preserved the name “Kalinka” – the title of a famous Russian folk song.

Clearly, members of the public show their attitude to the festival by either attending its events or avoiding them. In addition, popular attitudes to it can be traced in web talk-backs. Holiday of the Holidays festival triggers narratives evaluating inter-ethnic relations as part of the urban culture. According to our observations, the discussion about the festival was livelier in Russian than in Hebrew. The attitudes of the commentators range from extremely positive to negative and angry, and it is the latter that prevail on the Hebrew sites we found. The contrast in the assessment of the festival can be summarized as dichotomies of “our own” vs. “their” holiday, interesting vs. a waste of time and public money. The nicknames of the commentators are sometimes first names, but others are ethnonyms or phrases expressing political statements.10

Hebrew comments:

Among other wonderful things, they built a skating rink in the Azrieli mall, for the crazy guys, to tempt those who have never tried it before. As far as I know, the price is 39 shekels. It was cool (Sharon, 20/12/2011).

I wish there were holidays of all the religions all year round. I wish we could learn to live together. (And then the Messiah will come, 21/12/2011)

It’s of no interest. Neither the place nor the event. It’s a waste of land-tax money. (Yehuda Israeli, 01/12/2011)

Where is the synagogue? Where is Hanukkah? Why don’t we celebrate Hanukkah in Haifa? (Erosion of national identity, 01/12/2011)

Haifa Arabs who demonstrate against the state and support our enemies? (Browser, 02/12/2011)

Russian comments:

не понимаю-какое отношение имеет сильвестр к евреям- русским-русским евреям- арабам.и с какой статьи весь израиль его празднуют. что это праздник и что он означает. если его празднуют католическая европа- какое отношение это имееткизраилю.илиарабы-католики.
Festival in Haifa

The organizers of the Holiday of Holidays festival make their best to make the festival all inclusive. The reaction of the residents differs: some embrace the possibility to have fun, whatever motives are behind it; others militantly reject the very idea of combining holidays of the three religions, still others remain completely indifferent and are not even aware of the festivities.\footnote{11}

Conclusions

In Israeli context, the Holiday of Holidays is a unique attempt to bring Arabs and Jews together in terms of the scope of the events and the involvement of both governmental institutions and NGOs. It is not accidental that the festival emerged in Haifa boasting peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups. The celebration of “unity in diversity”—the catch phrase used in scholarly discussions of multicultural urban festivals and in the official discourse of festival organizers serves to boost the political image of Israel as a whole, and Haifa in particular. The festival also contributes to the upgrading of the city image. During the Holiday of Holidays it is no longer perceived as a “sleepy” provincial city that is only good for work, but turns into a boisterous and vivacious center of recreation.\footnote{12} Notably, one of the singers addressed his audience in the German colony in exhilaration: “Look around! This is no longer Haifa, it’s Champs-Élisées”. Even though the comparison of the German Colony with the celebrated Parisian avenue is preposterous, it reflected the pride of some residents in their city. Yet for those who prefer the city space to be predominantly Jewish this was hardly a compliment.
According to our observations and informal discussions with residents of Haifa belonging to different ethnic groups, political agenda of the festival does not really concern those who attend its events. People come to enjoy the festive atmosphere of the carnival. Among those who avoid the festival, however, the rejection or skepticism towards the political agenda of the festival is more pronounced.

In the last two years the scope of the festival and its popularity among Israelis and international tourists has clearly increased, which makes the organizers think of how to expand its territory to the rest of the city. Indeed, the events of high culture take place in a variety of districts where concert halls and museums are located. But is it possible today to place Hanukkah candlesticks side by side with Christmas trees not only on the streets of mixed districts, but also in the Jewish ones?

According to Bakhtin, the carnival and similar marketplace festivals are “the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance” (Bakhtin 1984, 9). Although the long-term benefits of the festival in terms of politics and economy remain unresearched, the presence of numerous children exhilarated by the cultural mix gives hope.

Notes
1 The research reported here is a joint project. The authors alternate priority of authorship in their publications.
2 Although not specified by the authors of this document, the Arab population, apparently, includes not only Christians and Muslims but also the Druze. We can also infer that “Jews and others” primarily refers to non-Jewish members of mixed families perceived as members of the Jewish sector.
3 In 2005 the Jewish-Arab Center at the University of Haifa began implementing the program “Into the Future - Towards Bilingual Education in Israel” sponsored by the ZEIT foundation (Mor-Sommerfeld et al. 2007, 16).
4 One of the reasons why Holiday of Holidays has been advertised on the sites of Russian and Ukrainian travel agencies is that Israel is one of the few countries which citizens of Russia and Ukraine can visit without a visa. Moreover, many of potential tourists have friends and family among Russian-speaking Israelis, which makes visits easier and more attractive.
5 Paradoxically, the image of the city has improved thanks to the 2nd Lebanon war, when the city suffered from heavy shelling. The government allocated money to renovate the city’s infrastructure and build roads. Among the projects aimed at attracting the young was construction of a new campus in the area adjacent to the port. Buildings that stayed empty for years were renovated and the new ones constructed. The “Port Campus”, as the project was dubbed, provided universities and colleges with new buildings where teaching is conducted, and opened the doors of new dorms to out-of-town students. Moreover, it breathed new life into a previously rundown area. In the last several years the municipality has also undertaken various projects to develop tourism in the city which did not use its potential of a coastal town with sandy beaches and picturesque terrace streets on the green slopes of Mount Carmel.
6 A good example of hierarchical and sectoral approach to festivals of different ethnic and religious groups in Israel is the university system. There are no classes during Jewish holidays, while on the days of Christian, Moslem and Druze festivals classes are not cancelled. However, professors do not
penalize students for absences and avoid holding exams and tests on these days.

7 Wadi is Arabic for a dried-up river bed.

8 Chabad-Lubavitch is a branch of Hasidic Judaism.

9 Fear of fire may have been exacerbated by the fresh memories of a devastating forest fire in the suburbs of Haifa in December 2010.

10 Like her predecessor, Yulia Shtraim is an immigrant from the former Soviet Union and settled in Israel in the 1990s.

11 The style and spelling of the comments has not been edited.

12 From time to time the local media reports incidents of interethnic clashes and damage to property in mixed districts. Most of them are classified as petty crime, but on December 24, 2011, there was one that had clear political background. All four tires were punctured in a car parked in the German Colony because the owner put a scarf colored as a Palestinian flag and having the inscription in English “Palestine” on the windshield (Cf. Janev 2011, 9-10 about the incident with the Albanian flag). Note that this happened during Holiday of Holidays. The article reporting the incident on the portal Israel.info was headlined “Who punctured the tires of the car with Palestinian accessories?” (http://haifa.israelinfo.ru/news/7818, last accessed 03/02/2012).

13 In common parlance, each of the three biggest cities of Israel is assigned its own role: Jerusalem prays, Tel Aviv entertains itself and Haifa works.

Works cited


