

## Sephardic Beauty Queens<sup>i</sup>

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I would like to begin my talk with a photo of the 2013 winner of the Miss Israel beauty contest. When Yityish “Titi” Aynaw, the Ethiopian-born-21 year old was asked by the judges of the contest why she deserved the title, she quickly and shamelessly replied: “It was about time that a black woman wore the crown.”

I would like to think that this is what, in 1940, Esther Bahbouth, a beautiful Sephardi young woman, and the representative of the *Centro Sionista Sefaradí*, thought when she won the title of ‘*Reina Esther*’ in the Purim contest organized in Buenos Aires by the *Keren Kayemeth Leisrael* (KKL).<sup>ii</sup> “It was about time that a Sephardi woman wore this crown!”. I know for a fact that it was not only the candidate who was happy, but the whole Sephardic community; it was, indeed, the first time in the seven-year-history of these contests that the coveted crown had been awarded to a Sephardi.<sup>iii</sup> And in these early decades of the twentieth century, when Zionist activity among Sephardim was still being organized, the victory of Esther Bahbouth carried significant weight for this minority. The relationship between the *Centro Sionista Sefaradí* and the local *Federación Sionista Argentina* (made up of Ashkenazi Zionists) was conflictive, so a Sephardi young woman in the Zionist dais, clearly signaled to the Ashkenazim Sephardi commitment to the Zionist project.

But rather than continue to send only one candidate each year to the KKL Purim Ball to compete for the Queen Esther title, in 1944 Argentine Sephardim decided to organize their own Queen Esther beauty contest. At the *Gran Baile de la Colectividad*, as this event came to be called, the most beautiful representative chosen from a handful of Sephardic organizations was elected “*Miss Sefaradi*” and immediately crowned *Reina Ester*.<sup>iv</sup> Also sponsored by *Keren Kayemet Leisrael*, these events soon became a rallying point for all Sephardim, regardless of their origin; they participated eagerly and enthusiastically, reported the Balls in the press, tasked youth commissions with their management, and raised considerable funds for the Zionist project.

The decision to organize the “Sephardic” event marked the creation of a parallel Zionist Sephardic structure. In this new context, then, by choosing a beautiful Sephardic woman as the Queen of the community every year outside of the ‘main’ Keren Kayemeth structure, Sephardim were asserting their right to their own place in the Zionist movement both in Argentina and in Palestine/Israel. The Zionist movement, Sephardim believed, had been reluctant to recognize their participation in the nationalist project, and had played a deaf ear to their request for ‘separate’ Zionist institutions. By the time the Sephardim organized their first beauty contest in 1944, they had been ‘fighting’ for over twenty years with the *Federación Sionista Argentina* over control of their agenda and contributions.<sup>v</sup>

The establishment of the “*Miss Sefaradi*” beauty contest, moreover, signaled the creation of a new Sephardic-Argentine identity that ultimately helped shape the construction of a modern Argentine Jewish identity. This new identity was ‘Argentine’ for two reasons: on the one hand, Sephardim had been able, in Argentina, to overcome their various cultural differences and shape an inclusive “Sephardic” identity. Sephardic groups from diverse areas such as Morocco and the Ottoman Empire (Arab-speaking Aleppo and Damascus as well as Ladino speakers from present

day Turkey and surrounding areas) had initially maintained their individual identities by organizing their own immigrant associations (mutual aid societies, *Talmudei Torah*, schools, temples, butchers, cemeteries, etc.) and settling in distinct Buenos Aires neighborhoods, rarely crossing paths. Zionism *and* Argentina provided a common ground from where to fashion this unified identity, and the election of one *Miss Sefaradí* was the culmination of that process.<sup>vi</sup> The second “Argentine” aspect of this new identity had to do with the beauty contests themselves. Although the beauty contest mirrored Queen Esther contests held by other Jewish communities around the world, this Jewish practice should also be read within a visibly “Argentine” context that was itself in flux. Beauty contests in Argentina, and in particular during the early Peronist years (1946-1955), had increasingly placed the female body on the stage, and the Peronist regime used it as an element of their cultural project to create consensus and support. Of course the *Miss Sefaradí* contest was not ‘Peronist,’ but within the context of the popularization of beauty contests, in the utilization of ‘Argentine’ music bands, and dance salons, Sephardim were participating, as well, in **Argentine** performances that allowed them to assert their ‘national’ belonging.

But the story of the ‘separate but equal’ or ‘parallel’ beauty contests does not end in separation. This presentation will end with the 1971 contest. In that year, Miriam Noemi Jafif, the Sephardic Queen Esther, elected at the Sephardic Community event on March 18<sup>th</sup>, was crowned the Argentine Jewish Community Queen Esther in April.<sup>vii</sup> The now called “*Purim Ball Central*” organized by the KKL since the 1930s, elected, just like they had done in 1940, the Sephardic representative as the beauty queen. By the early 1970s, then, the two Zionist parallel balls had come together. Argentine Jews finally came around a single Queen Esther (called “Miss Colectividad”), a young woman who, again, could be the Sephardic representative. Unlike

Esther Babhout in 1940, or “Titi” Aynaw today, Miriam Noemi Jafif did not have the need to say “it was high time a Sephardi was elected Queen.”

This presentation will trace the history and development of these beauty contests, but will use them as a window onto the process of creation of the Argentine Jewish community. The Argentine Jewish community in the 1940s was much different than that of the 1970s, when a first or even second generation of Argentines was redefining the boundaries of their ethnic identity in conversation with their national identification. The Zionist context was different as well; the reality of the State of Israel, and the role assigned to youth in its construction and support shaped developments in the diaspora. But in both instances, in the 1940s as well as in the 1970s, women, beautiful women, were at the center of these identity constructions and political negotiations. It was an Argentine Jewish young woman (always, and sometimes, a Sephardi) who came to embody and reflect these changes. Ultimately, the “Miss Sefaradí” beauty contest reflected how Sephardim, by becoming Argentine, came to symbolize a new Sephardi identity that could parade its commitment to the Zionist project; and in the last development of the contest, we can see how Sephardim had found a way of remaining a separate ethnic group *and* able to represent the whole Argentine Jewish community at the same time.

Before there was a “*Miss Sefaradí*,” there was Purim and a “Queen Esther”. Because of its vague religious overtones and its connection with freedom, Purim, together with Hannukah, was a festivity that easily allowed for a secular appropriation. These two celebrations became central in the socialist Zionist construction of a secular Jewish culture: while secular in their re-invention, they were clearly visibly steeped in Jewish tradition.<sup>viii</sup> Starting in 1920, Tel Aviv, the first ‘secular’ Jewish city, celebrated Purim in grand style with a two-to-three day event. Invited

artists helped decorate buildings, cars, and open spaces of the city; people danced in the streets at night, children attended their own activities during the day, and men and women participated in several costume balls. The culmination of these events was a parade with floats through the main streets of Tel Aviv. Also, beginning in 1926, the “Carnival” hosted a Queen Esther competition.<sup>ix</sup> Created and organized by Baruch Agadati, an artist and dancer who believed that the contest lent itself perfectly for merging Jewish traditions and modern and European culture, the contest became immensely popular.

Of course Purim had been celebrated elsewhere prior to the creation of the Purim Balls in Tel Aviv. In Argentina, the beauty queen contest did not begin until 1933, but the KKL had been using Purim as a fund raising opportunity some years before that.

For Sephardim, however, the option of donating to the National Jewish Fund was not as simple as it may sound. In 1925, Sephardic leaders in the Middle East and in Europe had founded the World Union of Sephardic Jews (WUSJ) in order to make sure that their position as a minority within the Zionist movement did not translate into concrete measures against Sephardim.<sup>x</sup> They claimed that although nearly one third of the Jews living in Palestine were Sephardim, these Jews were not receiving sufficient attention upon their arrival, or adequate information prior to leaving their countries of origin. They therefore began a campaign to boycott the work of the *Keren Hayesod* and sent representatives to countries with large Sephardic congregations to try to raise money *among Sephardim for Sephardim*.<sup>xi</sup>

The reservations Sephardim had about the leadership of the Zionist movement, and what their role in it was, provoked some responses at the local and international levels. The *Federación Sionista Argentina* (FSA) had requested early on that the World Zionist Organization (WZO) send a delegate of Sephardic origin to work among the Sephardim living in Argentina.<sup>xii</sup>

It was believed that a Sephardic Jew would be able to convince other Sephardim that Zionism would indeed benefit them and their communities in Palestine.<sup>xiii</sup> The WZO finally sent Ariel Bensi3n in 1926,<sup>xiv</sup> and he arrived in Argentina in the midst of the controversy begun by the World Union of Sephardic Jews (WUSJ)<sup>xv</sup> in which Sephardim had been told not to contribute to the *Keren Hayesod*.

Bensi3n's campaign in Argentina on behalf of the WZO was successful, to a degree. He founded three new Sephardic Zionist societies (*Bene Kedem*) in Buenos Aires, Rosario and Mendoza, and brought these organizations within the folds of the World Zionist Organization.<sup>xvi</sup> Yet, although the Sephardim agreed to channel donations through the WZO and the National Jewish Fund, suspicions between the two groups at the local level continued to color the relationships into the following decade. But in 1933, the second *Centro Sionista Sefarad3* received a letter from the KKL inviting a member of the *Centro* to participate in the organizational meetings of a "Purim Ball."<sup>xvii</sup> Mr. Bahbuth, a member of the CCS explained to the rest of the steering committee that

"this party will be advertised by an extensive campaign carried out by 50 young ladies using 1500 phones, on the radio, and in the press. The Ball will take place in the *Coliseo* [Theater], and it will be the same as the one organized in Tel Aviv during the Carnival season. Each invited center will have to organize a ball in which they will select their "Beauty Queen," who will then participate in the "Beauty Contest" to be held during the Purim Ball."<sup>xviii</sup>

In an effort to ensure participation in an event that was being organized by a group with which the *Centro Sionista Sefarad3* had conflicting relations, the invitation made reference to the beauty contests and Purim Balls that had been held in Tel Aviv in the 1920s, legitimizing the event in the eyes of a particularly skeptical audience.<sup>xix</sup> From that year on, until 1944, the CSS participated regularly in the Argentine KKL Purim Ball, both by sending a representative each year and by selling tickets for the event.<sup>xx</sup>

But in 1944, as mentioned above, the Sephardim decided to organize their own “*Baile de la Colectividad*.”<sup>xxi</sup> “At the beginning of 1944 we began to realize,” claimed Salvador Camji, a member of the CSS, “the need to constitute, officially and definitively, on solid bases, a Sephardic Department of the KKL for Argentina.”<sup>xxii</sup> This “official” creation of a KKL Department within the CSS gave impetus to the need both to send significant donations to the KKL in Palestine and to raise enough money to support the newly-created local structure. The Sephardic participation in the KKL collections would now be more evident, as the creation of this Sephardic branch made it possible to wire sums independently rather than submit their collections to the (Ashkenazi led) KKL offices in Argentina for a single remittance. And the existence of a local structure with its own budget made it possible to organize a plan of action that included “spreading knowledge of the National Jewish Fund, its sacred objectives, the idea of the redemption of *Eretz Israel*” to their own.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The separate Sephardic Queen Esther Ball was, then, the manifestation of these organizational changes; and the success of the 1944 party was, almost, instantaneous. From five initial institutions that participated sending ‘representatives’ in 1944, there were eight in 1945; and although there were only four in 1946, there were nine in 1948.<sup>xxiv</sup> The money collected also augmented as the years went by, from a profit of \$3,666.95 in 1945, to \$5,976.20 in 1947. This amount becomes even more significant when we compare it to other sources of revenue for the Sephardic Branch of the KKL. In 1945, for example, donations made to the KKL through the use of the ‘collection tin boxes’ amounted to \$4, 167.85 for the *whole* year, and donations given during the Passover campaign were a mere \$102.

In its mechanics, the Sephardic ball would become almost an exact replica of the event organized by the KKL, with a much more visible presence of its youth. The organization of the

ball was in the hands of the Youth Department of the CSS, the Sephardic branch of the KKL and its Young Women's commission.<sup>xxv</sup> Each Sephardic center would organize beauty contests among its members, and then send their representatives who would compete for the title “*Miss Sefaradí*.” The judges in charge of the selection were prominent members of the community, representatives of the organizations that had sent candidates for the title, as well as well-known Sephardic and non-Sephardic Zionist leaders.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The *Baile*, although “Jewish,” Zionist, and “Sephardic” did not take place behind closed doors, as it were. With very few exceptions, the election of *Miss Sefaradí* during these first years took place in a Ballroom called “*Les Ambassadeurs*,” located in an upper middle class neighborhood of Buenos Aires.<sup>xxvii</sup> The event itself came to be associated with the salon, as if the contest's importance derived, in part, from the location itself.<sup>xxviii</sup> The orchestras hired to play were also famous Argentine bands, not “Jewish” groups contracted to provide ‘Jewish’ music. There usually was a Jazz band (it was the late 1940s and 1950s, after all), and a *Típica* band that played tango.<sup>xxix</sup>

The candidates for the title, as well, were not meant to look ‘ethnic’ either. While in the Tel Aviv contests the crowned Queen wore their ‘Oriental’ clothing suits, for the procession,<sup>xxx</sup> and in Argentina “ethnic communities” beauty contests elected ‘ethnically’ dressed candidates,<sup>xxxi</sup> the “*Miss Sefaradí*” hopefuls in Buenos Aires did not have their ethnicity inscribed in their clothes or bodies. In fact, there was nothing that readily identified these women as *Sefaradíes* besides their belonging to a Sephardic institution: they looked like Hollywood actresses, with elaborate hair styles, and were clearly wearing make-up. The event, the organizers explained, had become a “*modern tradition*,” (emphasis mine) which would clearly have necessitated the erasure of a traditional past that ‘traditional’ clothing would have brought to the fore.<sup>xxxii</sup> Being

*Sefaradí* in Argentina meant being ‘modern’ and ‘classy,’ indistinguishable from other Argentines young ladies.

The only ‘ethnic’ marker was of an ideological nature, and it did not last for very long. In the program of the first *Baile*, the organizers of the event (the Youth Zionist Sephardic groups) had included, among the photographs of the candidates to the title, a picture of “la *jalutzá*”, the pioneer woman living in Palestine. The *jalutzá* looked young, fresh, happy and committed, but was not wearing elegant clothes, or had her hair fashionably styled, as the other candidates. Her symbolic presence on the program suggests that there was the hope that the elected *Miss Sefaradí* should embody the ideological commitments of the pioneer Zionist woman, ready to physically contribute to the construction of the future State. But that was her first and only appearance. The link between the *jalutzá* and *Miss Sefaradí* was lost (probably to the great discomfort of the ideologically committed Zionist youth), and the contest was presented as a way to celebrate ‘natural’ (and “Argentine”) beauty and not just ideal ‘internal’ qualities.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The intentional split made between these two images, of the non-ethnically marked Argentine born Sephardic woman and of the ideologically committed Jewish young woman in Palestine, reminds us, as well, that Zionism in Argentina was used not just to link the Diaspora to (the idea of) the Jewish State, but (in what may appear to be a contradiction but was not) to evidence belonging to the Argentine nation.

The *Reina Esther* and *Miss Sefaradí* were, of course, not the only Beauty titles awarded in Argentina. The 1930s, in particular, had seen the popularization of beauty contests. Many “*reinas plebeyas*” (*Reinas de la Primavera, de la Colectividad, de la Simpatía*, etc.) would reign in interior towns, having won their titles in festivals organized by local newspapers and businesses.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Local and regional governments, together with rural and industrial businessmen,

elected ‘their’ queens in order to promote the products and goods of their region.<sup>xxxv</sup> The female body was increasingly paraded and celebrated in public. One such publication to organize a beauty contest was the Argentine-Sephardi magazine *Israel*, which, in 1929, wanted to elect the “Most Beautiful Jewish [*Israelita*] Woman in the Argentine Republic.” To that end, the editors of *Israel* invited all “married or single women, regardless of their nationality, who live in Argentina,” to send in their photographs to the magazine.<sup>xxxvi</sup> After a selection done by the editors of the magazine, it was the readers who chose the winner of the contest. The name of the winner would be announced “at a social event held in her honor,” and her photograph distributed to other Argentine magazines.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Just like other ‘ethnic’ collectivities had elected their “beauty queen,” so would the Jewish community in Argentina. It was clear that the editors of the magazine did not wish to restrict participation to only Sephardim. Moreover, the winner was a young woman from Mendoza, stressing the idea that the contest was not only representing the city of Buenos Aires but all of Argentina.

Besides these local or ethnic beauty Queens, the “Miss Argentina” contest, although not yet in its modern form, had appeared in the late 1920s. Two beauty contests, organized by Argentine magazines, crowned their Queens as the most beautiful women in Argentina.<sup>xxxviii</sup> In 1932, Ana Rover, a Jewish young woman who, representing the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Once, was elected “Miss Capital Federal.” As such, she participated in the final election for the candidate that would represent Argentina in the “Miss Universe” contest to be held in Belgium. Although the Argentine press made no reference to her Jewishness, the possibility that a Jewish Argentine woman would indeed represent the whole country would not have been lost to Argentine Jews in general.<sup>xxxix</sup> Participating in Beauty Queen contests, even if only Jewish, was an opportunity to place Argentine Jewish beauty on a similar, if separate, stage.

But it is not until the first Peronist government that these beauty queens contests acquire wide spread interest. The regime utilized female beauty as a means to garner popular support. The discursive link between “Argentina” and “worker,” which legitimized as citizens a group of people that had, until that point, been left out of the political arena, became embodied in the “*Reina del Trabajo*” (Queen of Labor) title.<sup>xl</sup> Around May 1<sup>st</sup> (a socialist festivity appropriated by Peronism), Buenos Aires would host ‘provincial’ Labor Queens who came to the city to compete for the prized title of *Reina del Trabajo*, who was crowned by none other than Evita Perón. This contest was held in visible public spaces; it became part of official propaganda and was, decades later, televised in the State owned channel. And although the 1955 coup interrupted the practice, the election of the “*Reina del Trabajo*” was re-established in the 1970s, with the return of Peronism to power.

It is impossible to imagine that the Argentine Jewish community was not aware of all these very public beauty contests and events. And while it is true that the election of “Queen Esther” was deeply embedded in Jewish practices and culture, the Argentine context clearly provided new layers of meaning to this ‘Jewish’ event.

*The Baile de la Colectividad* continued, into the 1960s and 1970s, to be a significant event for the Sephardic community. Although there were many new youth organizations, the ball continued to be organized by the *Directorio Sefaradí del Keren Kayemeth*, which reorganized its youth group in 1970, with the help of those organizations that sent candidates to the title.<sup>xli</sup> The mechanism of the election did not change with the years. Each participating association held their own contests to elect their candidate, and sent a member to act as a judge. Participants were asked to walk on stage to show themselves to those in attendance: Queen Esther, Miss Sefaradí, Miss Simpatía (Miss Congeniality), and Miss KKL Sefaradí were then

elected. The “most beautiful” were crowned Queen Esther and her princesses, while Miss KKL Sefaradí was awarded to the representative of the (participating) Sephardic organization that had raised more money.<sup>xlii</sup> The Reina Esther was, according to one announcement, “the symbol of the beautiful and intelligent woman.”<sup>xliii</sup> The prizes were symbolic, and they included sometimes a (fake) crown, flowers, or, in some cases, jewelry.<sup>xliv</sup> Although it seems that during the 1960s the *Baile* was held in Sephardic and non-Sephardic Jewish venues, it moved out again into ‘public’ places in the 1970s.<sup>xlv</sup> “*Rugantino*” and the still famous “*Les Ambassadeurs*” were some of the famous *boites* (a 1970s term for a disco) where the contest was held in the 1970s.

As stated in the introduction, in the early 1970s, the Sephardic ‘Queen’ and Misses got invited to participate in the general KKL “*Baile de Purim*,” which crowned a *Reina Esther de la Colectividad*.<sup>xlvi</sup> It becomes clear from the description of these contests that not only were now “Sephardim” included as candidates, but a larger number of representatives (and their organizations) from the interior provinces. From a purely Ashkenazic event, this 1970 “*Baile de Purim*” came to truly represent a much more diverse Argentine Jewish community, one that, also, was mostly held in public spaces (*River Plate*, *Club Comunicaciones*) and, because of larger budgets, boasted the presence of very famous ‘youth’ singers, rock stars, and *animadores* (hosts): Sui Generis, Valeria Lynch, Trocha Angosta, Leonard Simmons, Guillermo Brizuela Mendez, and Silvio Soldán. Tango was no longer heard, and Israeli dances and “Jewish” singers made their appearance too.

Sephardic visibility in these ‘general’ Jewish events was always highlighted, whether specifically (by Sephardic press) or generally (by the general Jewish publications). In 1973 we read, for example, that of the nineteen participants, nine were Sephardim, which suggests that not only the Sephardic Queen Esther and Miss Sefaradí were entered as candidates, but other Jewish

communities (like sports clubs, for example) were electing Jewish young women of Sephardic origin as their candidates.<sup>xlvi</sup>

The *Bailes* organized by the KKL, in their Sephardic and non-Sephardic versions, can be read as many things: beauty contests, expressions of Zionist zeal, and social occasions, among others; and indeed they were that. But I suggest that we can read them as something more. At the beginning, in the 1940s, with the creation of the Sephardic beauty contest the Sephardim were able to both make their participation in the Zionist cause visible, and begin to shape a new Sephardic identity, not based on their past cities/countries of origin but on their shared Argentine present, which included their participation in the Zionist movement as Argentines.<sup>xlvi</sup> Camji, in his speech at the *Primera Convención Regional Sefardí del Keren Kayemeth*, explained that “[t]his important party of the *colectividad*, which has already become a beautiful tradition to be repeated annually among the Sephardic youth institutions of Buenos Aires...is a clear manifestation of the wish of all our youth to work together for the *colectividad* and for the Jewish people, either morally, materially, culturally or practically.”<sup>xlix</sup> This *colectividad* was, they understood, not only one Sephardic group, but a new collective that was being shaped in this new country. “Those who make decisions today about the organization of this party, will decide tomorrow about matters of interest shared by all its members....[Y]oung people who are growing up in a free country like Argentina share this new will that unites the institutions that organize this ball.”<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the 1970s, with the steady growth of youth movements and increased participation of young people in radical politics, the Sephardic and indeed the non-Sephardic *Bailes de Purim* take a whole new meaning. It is clear that with the many available options for

the participation of *gente joven* in the Zionist movement, most of which advocated for *aliah*, these *Bailes* (and in particular, the Sephardi one) provided a 'safe' option, one that allowed both for the expression of 'ethnic' AND 'national' identity. "*Miss Sefaradí*" signaled not only the Sephardic right to their distinct presence within a project that threatened them with invisibility, but she came to embody a new Sephardic identity, one which stressed commonality from within, born from their participation in the Zionist movement, and in the 1970s, with their inclusion back into the 'mainstream' *Baile de Purim*, their being part of the Argentine Jewish community. *Miss Sefaradí*, a young Argentine-born Sephardic Jew, became the symbol of a new group identity, predicated on both difference (celebrated and defended) and commonality, which in this case translated as well into a commitment to help and save all those Sephardim arriving and living in Palestine.<sup>li</sup> This new young Sephardic woman, beautiful, healthy and Argentine, was both the product and the origin of a new generation of Sephardic Jews that had found in Zionism a platform from where to defend their visibility as a group, in Israel as well as in Argentina.

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<sup>i</sup> A longer version of this paper appeared in Adriana Brodsky, "Electing 'Miss Sefaradí,' and 'Queen Esther': Sephardim, Zionism, and Ethnic and National Identities in Argentina, 1933-1971," in *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone*, ed. Raanan Rein and Adriana Brodsky (Brill, 2012).

<sup>ii</sup> National Jewish Fund, which, together with the Keren Hayesod, became important fundraising institutions to speed up the process of the creation of the Jewish State. In particular, the KKL bought land in then Palestine for settling purposes. See Berkowitz, M. (1993). Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, in particular chapter 7.

<sup>iii</sup> La Luz, Año 10 No. 7, 5 Abril 1940, p. 166; CSS, Minute Books, March 31, 1940. They also proudly announced that the money collected by the representatives of the CSS for the magazine of the event, and the number of tickets sold for the party.

<sup>iv</sup> The mechanics of the contest changed with time. Although in the first years "Miss Sefaradí" was automatically crowned "Reina Esther," we later find that these two titles were awarded to two different young ladies. Given the language used in press reports, Queen Ester was the most coveted.

<sup>v</sup> One of the most contentious issues was language. The FSA printed materials, and carried their meetings in Yiddish, making it impossible for Sephardim to understand. A percentage of all collections made by Sephardim and handed over to the FSA for remittance to the World Zionist Organization was subtracted by the FSA in order to support its local structure (propaganda, meetings, etc.) Sephardim complained bitterly about the fact that their money was being used to print material they could not understand, and pay for meetings they could not attend. The language discrepancy continued well into the 1960s. See, for example, Centro Sionista Sefaradí, Minute Books, April 11, 1936; and ADAMA (newspaper of the Directorio Sefaradi del Keren Kayemet Leisrael), A. 3 No. 38, Octubre de 1961, p.1.

<sup>vi</sup> Representatives from Sephardic organizations that belonged to all Sephardic groups were entered for the final contest. See Gran Baile de la Colectividad (Programs for the years, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947 and 1948). More on this below.

<sup>vii</sup> Not only were the participants young ladies from Ashkenazic and Sephardic backgrounds, but also they were from a variety of locations in Argentina, not just from Buenos Aires. See *Mundo Israelita*, April 17, 1976.

<sup>viii</sup> Spiegel, Nina S. "Jewish Cultural Celebrations and Competitions in Mandatory Palestine, 1920-1947: Body, Beauty, and the Search for Authenticity." Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001, Chapter 1 "The Beauty Competitions for Queen Esther, 1926-1929;" and Hizky Shoham, "'A huge national assemblage': Tel Aviv as a pilgrimage site in Purim celebrations (1920-1935)," *The Journal of Israeli History* 28, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>ix</sup> Nina S. Spiegel, "Jewish Cultural Celebrations and Competitions in Mandatory Palestine, 1920-1947: Body, Beauty, and the Search for Authenticity" (Stanford, 2001).; and Shoham, "'A huge national assemblage': Tel Aviv as a pilgrimage site in Purim celebrations (1920-1935)."

<sup>x</sup> "Con Sabetay J. Djaen, enviado de la Confederación Universal Sefaradí," *Semanario Hebreo*, Buenos Aires, April 30, 1927, cover page. The WUSJ was also called "Confederation of Sephardic Jews."

<sup>xi</sup> Confederation Universelle des Juifs Sepharadim, Propagande, 2ème Année No. 17. Comité Exécutif, Jerusalem, le 31 Aout 1927. Jerusalem City Archives, Box 14, File 129.

<sup>xii</sup> Mirelman, "Early Zionist Activities," p. 195. See also, "Atracción de los Sefardies al Movimiento Nacional Judío," *Mundo Israelita*, October 2, 1926, cover page.

<sup>xiii</sup> The rhetoric used by Ashkenazim always assumed that Sephardim did not want to donate money, or that they were not interested in Zionism.

<sup>xiv</sup> The local (Ashkenazic) press announced the arrival of the delegate of the Zionist Executive Committee with fervor. *Mundo Israelita*, A. IV, No. 172, September 18, 1926.

<sup>xv</sup> The World Union of Sephardic Jews "has denounced the World Zionist Organization to the Council of the League of Nations Union as not doing anything for the Sefardim. Just like our enemies, the Arab agitators and the Agudath Israel. Now, something must be done to show the world what they are." Letter written by Ida Bensión to Fanny Wachs, Nov. 4, 1927. Ida Bensión wrote two more letters to Mrs. Wachs regarding the work of Djaen and his connection to the WUSJ.

<sup>xvi</sup> For a more detailed description of Bensión's visit to Argentina, see Adriana Mariel Brodsky, "The Contours of Identity: Sephardic Jews and the Construction of Jewish Communities in Argentina, 1880 to the present" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 2004).; chapter 3.

<sup>xvii</sup> CSS, Minute Books, February 7, 1933. I believe that the exhaustive description of what they party entailed might suggest that this was the first Queen Esther ball.

<sup>xviii</sup> See above.

<sup>xix</sup> See Spiegel, "Jewish Cultural Celebrations,"; Bat-Sheva Margalit Stern, "Who's the Fairest of Them All? Women, Womanhood, and Ethnicity in Zionist Eretz Israel," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 11(2006).

<sup>xx</sup> *Mundo Israelita*, February 4, 1933, p. 2. It is unclear at what point the KKL became the organization in charge of this event (and not the NJF).

<sup>xxi</sup> It is interesting to note that in Tel Aviv, the Yemenite community began organized its own beauty queen contest the year after its candidate won the title in the 'general' Agadati contest. Although the general Queen Esther contest ended in 1929, the Yemenites continued with theirs, as well as Bukharan Jews' contest. For a description of the Yemenite contest, see Stern, "Who's the Fairest of Them All? Women, Womanhood, and Ethnicity in Zionist Eretz Israel." and Spiegel, "Jewish Cultural Celebrations."

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<sup>xxii</sup> Salvador Camji, "Informe del Departamento del KKL a la Primera Convención Regional Sefaradí del KKL., en la Argentina." *Israel*, November 1945, p. 13-16.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Camji, "Informe del Departamento," p. 14.

<sup>xxiv</sup> See *Programas* for all these years.

<sup>xxv</sup> In 1944, the CSS Youth department was in charge of the organization. For the 1945, the KKL and the Youth Department of the CSS organized it. For 1946, the KKL Sephardi Directory together with the Youth commissions of the CSS were in charge. See *Gran Baile de la Colectividad*, años 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947 and 1948.

<sup>xxvi</sup> In 1945, Dr. Mibashan, the representative of the KH, was one of the jurors; In 1947, Mr. José Hoffman, from the Agrarian Fund of the Zionist Organization, participated in the selection; and in 1948, Mr. Cialik, from the KKL Capital Federal, was present. The other jurors belonged to the Sephardic community. It is very difficult to assess what criteria was used by the judges in their selections. It is also almost impossible to claim whether the selection of a particular candidate carried 'political' overtones.

<sup>xxvii</sup> The venue changed in the 1960s. Evidence suggests that in the 1960s, it moved into Jewish Community centers, to move out again in the late 1960s.

<sup>xxviii</sup> In interviews with members of Sephardic Zionist groups who were active in the 1960s and 1970s, when I inquired about the Beauty Queen contest, their first reaction always was "Ah, the event at the "Ambassadeurs...". Interviews with Pepe Menasche, and others. August 2008.

<sup>xxix</sup> See *Programas*.

<sup>xxx</sup> The clothes represented a woman's origin, as well. See

<sup>xxxi</sup> See, as well, the description of the 'ethnic' beauty contests in Berisso, Argentina. Mirta Zaida Lobato, ed. *Cuando las mujeres reinaban: Belleza, virtud y poder en la Argentina del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005).; p.182.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Siu highlights the symbolic value of the types of clothes candidates wore in the election of the Queen of the Chinese Colony in Central America. Lok Siu, "Queen of the Chinese Colony: Gender, Nation, and Belonging in Diaspora," *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2005). P. 525.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Lobato makes this argument in Lobato, *Cuando las mujeres reinaban: Belleza, virtud y poder en la Argentina del siglo XX*.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> See *ibid.*, and Andrés Bisso, "Monarquías republicanas en tiempos de democracia fraudulenta. Representaciones lúdicas de la soberanía en las elecciones de reinas y misses del interior bonaerense," in *3ras Jornadas sobre la política en Buenos Aires en el siglo XX* (La Plata 2008).

<sup>xxxv</sup> Lobato, *Cuando las mujeres reinaban: Belleza, virtud y poder en la Argentina del siglo XX*.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> "Gran concurso de belleza Femenina de Israel," *Israel*, May 17-24, 1929, p. 6.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> I was not able to find any evidence of these events.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Cecilia Tossounian, "Embodying the Nation. Beauty Culture and Miss Argentina in the Global Context " (2009).

<sup>xxxix</sup> Ana Rover did not win the contest. See *ibid.*; Sandra Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). p. 68-69.

<sup>xl</sup> Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). [VER PAGINA]

<sup>xli</sup> ADAMA, June 1970, p. 2.

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<sup>xlii</sup> Although I have not been able to talk to a ‘judge,’ participants in the Contest agreed that ‘beauty’ was what judges ranked. Matilde Abraham personal communication, September 2009. Chuchi Cwyner and Keila Gaut de Niborski recall a different practice, however. Chuchi stated that the candidate that had brought more people to the event (number of tickets sold) was elected; Keila, on the other hand, described that each candidate stood on the stage and the one that received the loudest applause was crowned. These two events, however, were not “Sephardic,” but organized by local KKL branches (in La Plata, and in Tucuman). Chuchi Cwyner and Keila Gaut de Nibroski, personal communication, September 2009

<sup>xliii</sup> “Un Purim Diferente,” ADAMA, March 1971, p. 3.

<sup>xliv</sup> Chuchi Cwyner remembers a ‘torah’ pendant; Keila Gaut was given a gold (or silver) necklace; and Matilde Abraham remembers a crown. Personal communication.

<sup>xlv</sup> In 1960, it was held in Macabi, a Jewish social and sports club; in 1962, in the Chalom Congregation (Sephardic), and in 1964, in Alianza, the Moroccan social and sports club. Thanks to Matilde Abraham for information regarding the Contest in 1960.

<sup>xlvi</sup> ADAMA, May 1971, P. 3

<sup>xlvii</sup> ADAMA, May 1973, p. 2.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Brodsky, "The Contours of Identity: Sephardic Jews and the Construction of Jewish Communities in Argentina, 1880 to the present."

<sup>xlix</sup> Camji, “Informe del Departamento,” p. 14.

<sup>1</sup> “El Baile de la Colectividad,” *Programa del Gran Baile de la Colectividad*, 1945, n/a.

<sup>li</sup> Although the list of participating organizations in the election of Miss Sefaradí did not include ALL of the Sephardic organizations in Argentina (there was only one Sephardic organization from the interior that participated in the Balls of which we have information), most of the organizations with a strong youth department were represented.