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Community on the Margins: The Social Consolidation of the HaTikvah Neighborhood in the Late Mandate Period and during Early Israeli Statehood

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Abstract: The definition and analysis of disadvantaged neighborhoods have been rethought in recent years, with the goal of trying to surpass the monolithic identification of all marginal neighborhoods and move towards an analysis of the social, urban, and national circumstances that create marginal neighborhoods in a particular country under specific historical circumstances. This paper offers a micro-historical case study that allows us to examine the social consolidation and civic engagement of a marginal urban community residing in the HaTikvah neighborhood, next to the city of Tel Aviv, during the period between the mid-1930s and the early 1950s. It argues that the residents' identifications and actions stemmed from an intersectional marginality that was composed of their low socio-economic status, their ethnic origin as Oriental Jews, the geographic location of the neighborhood, and its lack of municipal status. Taking into consideration the circumstances of British Mandatory rule and the processes of the consolidation of the Jewish national society in Palestine as a European society, this paper unveils the struggles of the community vis à vis various institutions for the purposes of recognition, the improvement of living conditions, and, subsequently, the preservation of the fabric of life in the neighborhood.



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1. Introduction

In recent years, scholars have attempted to analyze urban marginal residential areas, adopting a nuanced and non-monolithic perspective on them and their inhabitants, while criticizing the categories used to describe them and their residential environment and positioning these categories in broader historical contexts. Mayne pointed out that, in the postcolonial era, the discussion of slums shifted from the Global North to the Global South [1]. However, as Loïc Wacquant has shown, urban marginality in the Global North has not ceased to exist, and instead is taking on new forms and is being described in changing terms [2–4]. In his continuing intellectual efforts to reconceptualize the sociological discourse about the urban poor, Wacquant unpacked and contextualized the terms that seek to describe these living environments, such as ‘ghetto’ [3], and their residents, such as the ‘underclass’ [4], while advocating for an approach that considers the “diachronic sequence of historical transformation” [3] (p. 9). In 2013, following the work of Wacquant, Pierre Bourdieu, and others, a collected volume of historical cases was published; it sought to overcome “exotification” and “to look at heterogeneities and individuality instead of alleged unambiguousness” of the impoverished urban dwellers, and to perceive them as “actively engaged people who shape the precarious social conditions around them themselves in a process of purposeful adoption” [5].

This study will focus on the Jewish neighborhood of HaTikvah (meaning “the hope” in Hebrew), which was founded in the mid-1930s during the British Mandate on Palestine; shortly after its establishment, and for many years thereafter, it was a symbol of urban

marginality, poverty, and Jewish Oriental/Mizrahi sub-culture. This article seeks to reconstruct the formation of the local neighborhood community based on historical analysis, using archival materials and contemporary newspaper reporting. My core argument is that the struggles of the local community of HaTikvah should be understood in light of the intersectionality [6] of its marginality on the municipal, geographical, ethnic, and socio-economic levels, which together form a “cluster of disadvantage”, in the words of Wolff and De Shalit [7].

Bernstein argued that, during the Mandate period, the urban margins of the city of Tel Aviv did not exist independently, but were rather engaged in a dialogue with the center. The urban margins and center mark and define each other, and an examination of the margins can teach us about the city as a whole [8]. Jacobson and Naor noted that the neighborhoods on the seamline between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, such as Kerem Hatemanim, Neve Shalom, and Manshiyya, were characterized by “double marginality”, as their residents lived on the geographic, social, and cultural margins of the city and the Yishuv (the Jewish community of Palestine) [9] (p. 134). HaTikvah resembled these neighborhoods in terms of its ethnic composition and the social-economic status of the residents. However, Bernstein, Jacobson, and Naor, as well as Goren [10] and Razi [11], tend to identify social and cultural marginality with the western seamline between Tel Aviv and Jaffa, located near the sea, while the more isolated and less populated eastern bank of the Musrara Wadi (Aylon Creek), where HaTikvah is located, is often disregarded.

Moreover, in the existing research literature that addresses the social-spatial history of Tel Aviv, we witness a tendency to separate the discussion of the margins of Tel Aviv during the Mandate period from that after the establishment of the State of Israel [12,13]. I will argue that, in the case of HaTikvah, marginalization also prevailed after the neighborhood officially became part of the city of Tel Aviv, following the establishment of the State of Israel. In doing so, I will suggest that research about the marginality of local neighborhood communities requires us to look beyond the boundaries of interpretation created by the paradigm known as “methodological nationalism” [14], criticizing the subordination of the analytical framework to the time frame of the existence of the nation-state. Instead, we should move toward what Hunter, and later Cnaan, Milofsky, and Hunter, defined as the “ecological dimension” of community, referring to space and time as embedded in an understanding of local communities [15,16]. Moreover, since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been an ongoing debate among sociologists about the nature of urban communities. While the early research dealt with the dissolution and loss of communities, contemporary research offers a more nuanced approach, discussing degrees of communyness [15,17].

An examination of the HaTikvah neighborhood from an anthropological perspective was previously proposed by Leibner [18] and Shamur [19], who both pointed out the effects of the marginality of the neighborhood on the agency of residents and their notion of citizenship. The historical analysis presented here may offer another angle from which to investigate the local community. This article offers a micro-historical case study that dives into the circumstances in which a disadvantaged urban community formed and operated, arguing that a multi-layered marginality played a key role in the residents’ actions vis à vis the authorities and, thus, in shaping this particular community.

In the discussion that follows, I will depict the layers of marginality that characterized the HaTikvah and its residents and address the civic engagement the residents took part in during the 1940s and early 1950s, recovered from the documentation of the British Mandate and Israeli governments, the Tel Aviv municipality, the Zionist labor movement, and contemporary Hebrew newspapers. Section 2 of this article surveys the formation of the neighborhood and, following Wacquant, points out its marginality on the social, urban, and national levels. Sections 3 and 4 examine the struggles of the residents to create a representative body and improve their living conditions (mainly regarding the struggle for a decent water supply) during the British Mandate period. Section 5 focuses on the period after the establishment of the State of Israel and the formal annexation of the neighborhood

into Tel Aviv. It presents the ongoing marginality of the neighborhood during this period and points to the escalation of the conflict between the residents and the municipality over the attempts to demolish homes in the neighborhood. Section 6 concludes this article and argues that the consolidation and resilience of the local community and the creation of its unique local identity should be understood in light of its multi-layered marginality.

2. The Emergence of a Neighborhood and the Dimensions of Its Marginality

Tel Aviv was Palestine's first modern Jewish city and was nicknamed "the first Hebrew city". It was founded in 1909 as a neighborhood (Ahuzat Bait) of Jaffa; it became a township in 1921 and an independent municipality in 1934. From its outset, the leadership of Tel Aviv aspired to make it a modern, European, bourgeois city, inspired by the garden city movement [20–23]. During the 1920s and 1930s, following the significant increase in the immigration of Jews from Europe to Palestine, the city became the largest demographic, financial, and cultural urban center of the Yishuv [24].

The HaTikvah neighborhood emerged in the mid-1930s, when private entrepreneurs (the 'HaMoshav' company) signed a nine-year lease for 37 dunams of land with the large and affluent Arab Abu-Khadhra family, residing in Jaffa. After the lessee went bankrupt, a series of trials over the legal status of the land took place [25–27]. Parts of the land were legally defined as collectively owned (Musha), by a community (village) or family, making it impossible to divide it into plots to be registered under the names of private owners [28,29]¹. The entrepreneurs who were behind the construction of HaTikvah and those who came to live in it surely assumed that the rapidly growing city would provide a place for earning a living and receiving services. However, the neighborhood was located outside the boundaries of Tel Aviv, on two blocks: one that appeared in government records as the area under the Arab village of Salameh, and one under the Arab village of Yazur [30]².

Wacquant points out that three interrelated dimensions formed disadvantaged territories in the United States and France between 1910 and 1980: social class, the city, and the state [3] (p. 9). In what follows, I will depict the manifestation of these dimensions in HaTikvah.

A key feature of the neighborhood's marginality was the social class of the residents combined with ethnic and economic marginality. While the Jewish society in Palestine, and Tel Aviv in particular, was becoming predominantly European/Ashkenazi during the Mandate period due to increased Jewish migration from Europe, most of the HaTikvah residents were Oriental Jews, as was the case in other neighborhoods on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. During the Mandate period, the usage of the term Oriental Jews included three categories: the Sephardim, which included descendants of the victims of the Spanish expulsion and Ladino speakers, and those from the Balkans; Jews originating mostly from Arab and Islamic countries that spoke Arabic, Aramaic, and Persian; and Yemenite Jews [9] (p. 11). In Hebrew, the terms 'Sephardim' and 'Beni Edot HaMizrah' were used, and in later years, after the establishment of the State of Israel, the term 'Mizrahim' began to be used to identify these ethnic groups.

In early 1937, the reporter Miriam Goronchik noted that, out of the 800 families residing in the neighborhood, 40 were Ashkenazi; she mentioned that good relations prevailed between the various communities (Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Yemenite, etc.) [31]. On 22 May 1945, the neighborhood's Talmud Torah representatives noted the following population composition: 60% Yemenites, 35% Sephardim, and 5% Ashkenazi. The Sephardim included Egyptians, Bukharians, and Syrians [32]. According to a government communiqué of September of that year, 45% of the neighborhood residents were Sephardic, 45% Yemenite, and 10% Ashkenazi [33]. Although we do not have sources attesting to where the neighborhood's first residents came from, it can be assumed that some of them moved from neighborhoods near the sea, on the seamline between Tel Aviv and Jaffa. Goronchik noted that one of the residents she spoke to, who was of Yemenite descent, had previously lived with his family in Gaza [31]. The concentration of Oriental Jews in the urban frontier characterized additional urban areas; Oriental Jews resided in neighborhoods on the border

between Tel Aviv and Jaffa (as well as in distinct areas in Haifa and Jerusalem). Often, it was Oriental Jews who lived in areas that became disadvantaged neighborhoods during the Mandate period [34].

An interconnected social aspect of the ethnic identity of the residents was their socio-economic status. Nearly all of the residents of the neighborhood were of the very lower working classes, who made their living through impermanent jobs in Tel Aviv as street cleaners (some were employed at the municipal cleaning department), housekeepers, and peddlers. The neighborhood was built in a grid-like structure, and it can be assumed that this design developed at the stage of dividing the area for residential construction [35]. The plots were small; about two-thirds were less than 200 square meters in size, and one-story two-room stone houses were built on most of them. In 1949, the residential density of the neighborhood was 5.2 houses and an average of 12.3 rooms per dunam. Most streets were narrow alleys about four meters wide; in the entire neighborhood, only three streets were more than ten meters wide [36]. The high housing density and almost complete lack of public areas caused the neighborhood to resemble a slum or favela.

The dimensions of the city manifest in the geographic location and municipal status. Located near the Arab villages of Salame and Yazur, it was situated in the rural hinterland of Jaffa. However, unlike these villages, it was not designed as a rural settlement but as a satellite neighborhood, in which the residents depended on a city for their livelihoods and services. Its location, about 3.5 km from the port of Jaffa and 3 km from the Carmel Market in Tel Aviv, created a dependence on public transportation among residents or forced them to take long walks to acquire services in these cities. In addition, the valley of Wadi Musrara (Aylon Creek) was a topographic barrier that separated it from the neighboring cities of Tel Aviv and Jaffa. In the winter, the stream flowing through the Wadi often flooded its surroundings, causing the residents to become trapped in their homes and require rescue [37–40]. Until 1961, when a new bridge was inaugurated, the bridge crossing over the Wadi was narrow and had only one lane. At this time, HaTikvah was not formally under the municipality of Tel Aviv or of Jaffa. As in the case of some of the Jewish neighborhoods on the northern edge of Jaffa, partial municipal services were provided by the Tel Aviv municipality [10]. However, essentials such as water, waste treatment, and education were not systematically provided, as the next section will demonstrate.

When addressing the aspect of the state, one must consider the fact that, since 1920, Palestine had been a colonial state under the Mandate system. While the British governance in Palestine generated an urban planning system and adopted parts of the Ottoman local government system, financial investments in urban development were limited to those that served imperial needs [41]. In addition to the colonial authorities, the Zionist institutions established during the Mandate period, which are commonly referred to as “the state in the making”, should also be perceived as playing the role of the state in this case. In the following sections, I examine the organized activities of the residents, considering their marginality in the social, urban, and state dimensions.

3. Local Governance

Numerous records tell the story of how HaTikvah’s residents, whose neighborhood had no municipal affiliation, acted in various ways to establish a local representative and administrative body of their own. The local organization of residents striving to promote neighborhood goals while appealing to various authorities was not unique to the HaTikvah neighborhood; it characterized many of the Jewish neighborhoods in large cities during the Mandate period [42]. Neighborhood committees were local bodies that were highly active in the Jewish society of Palestine during the British Mandate but had no formal status in the local government system. In neighborhoods established in an organized manner, such as the Hadar HaCarmel neighborhood in Haifa, the legal status of the committee was anchored in its being subject to “An Ordinance to provide for the constitution and regulation of Co-operative Societies” [43]. In the case of HaTikvah, however, there is no evidence of a preexisting residents’ association being involved in forming this locality.

In the early 1940s, the residents attempted to elect a representative committee for official recognition by the Mandate authorities. They established an election commission and composed an electoral constitution (which they sent to the district officer), and then the neighborhood's men voted and elected the committee [44]³. In the election constitution that the residents composed, it was stated that the right to vote would be given to every property owner, man or woman, and their dependents over the age of 18. Eleven representatives were to be elected to the committee. All elected representatives had to be 25 years of age or older, Hebrew speakers, and residents of the neighborhood, and voting took place using a voter card [44].

In HaTikvah, following the residents' initial steps for establishing local elections, various groups approached the district officer simultaneously requesting to be endorsed as the residents' representatives. However, the district officer notified all residents who wrote to him that he could not confirm the existence of any elected committee because the government did not supervise such activities [45]. In response to the pressure for an elected local representative, the district officer decided to appoint a mukhtar who would be responsible for managing the neighborhood⁴. A mukhtar was an administrative status that the Mandate authorities adopted from the Ottoman local government system and adjusted to their governmental needs. The mukhtar oversaw the management of the internal affairs of a settlement (a village, neighborhood, or colony) and mediated between the authorities and the residents [46]. The decision to appoint a mukhtar for HaTikvah triggered an additional wave of requests from the residents [47]. The neighborhood committee recommended candidates and, in November 1941, the position of the mukhtar was entrusted to Yeshayahu Israel, an early resident of the neighborhood, who was of Yemeni descent [48]⁵. Alongside the mukhtar, the district officer accredited a committee that was responsible for managing public affairs to serve as an urban planning committee and rent tribunal. According to the surnames of the seven men elected to the committee, Sephardi, Yemenite, and Askenazi residents were all represented⁶. Most of the lists indicating the names of neighborhood committee members in the Yishuv during the Mandate period predominantly comprised men, and women's activity in the neighborhoods was directed toward other channels. At the same time, women were not completely absent from all committees⁷.

From the outset, the first mukhtar's appointment was beset with allegations of corruption, criminality, and violence. In October 1942, Israel and his brother were wounded during an assassination attempt following a dispute between the assassin's family and the mukhtar's family over a house the assassin's father had built. Israel's brother died of his wounds, the shooter's family fled the neighborhood for fear of retaliation, and tensions were high [49]. The deputy chairman of the neighborhood committee addressed the district officer and noted that "it has become a terrible situation that cannot be described. The whole neighborhood is in turmoil. Committee members and their families are afraid to walk through the streets", and asked the officer to condemn the act and impose order in the neighborhood [50]. The debate over the mukhtar's corruption exposed sectarian tensions between two groups of residents, the Sephardim and the Yemenis. The term Sephardim usually refers to Ladino-speaking Jews, descendants of Jews expelled from Spain and Jews from Mediterranean countries, while Yemenis are considered a separate ethnic category with a unique culture, which was also reflected in their separate public organization in the Yishuv. The two groups were, at times, perceived as belonging to the broader identity category of Oriental Jews [9] (p. 7).

An open letter serves as an early indication that the tension between the Sephardim and the Yemenis reached its peak in the summer of 1944. This letter held that a "public committee" from the neighborhood (elected by 150 of the "neighborhood's dignitaries") sought to draw public attention to the various official committees that exploited the neighborhood's problems for political ends. The "public committee" explained that the activities of these committees disturbed public order and that the only body authorized to speak on behalf of the neighborhood was the local committee approved by the authorities and the public [51].

A month later, an article described the dubious methods used by the mukhtar for granting building permits and collecting money from those who sought to build houses [52]. Next, the monthly general assembly of the Sephardic community decided to declare complete distrust in the mukhtar, demanding his dismissal and the implementation of democratic elections. The general assembly pleaded for recognition of the provisional committee it had chosen until elections were held. The members of the assembly appealed to the Tel Aviv Municipality, the Zionist Labor Federation (Histadrut), and the Sephardic Community Committee and requested that they assist the provisional committee [53]. Soon afterwards, the provisional committee published a stern report on the occurrences in the neighborhood. The report stated that the residents were defrauded by greedy people in the sale of plots. Among other things, it stated that the mukhtar was “a Yemenite with no elementary education, who has never been involved in public business, and all the more so in the matters of a settlement larger than the city of Netanya” [54] (p. 2). His tenure was harshly described as “days of corruption and public coercion that few have seen even in the most backward countries of the East” [54] (p. 4). He was accused of charging arbitrary amounts for building permits and introducing a “typical African” method of collecting taxes from those engaged in unregulated trade. According to the report, negligence or late payments led to acts of revenge against business owners, and “If it were not for the innocence of the poor residents who were exploited in a disgraceful way by the mukhtar and his gang, there would be no such long-lasting regime. However, the tyranny on the one hand, and the illiteracy and fear of poor residents on the other—is the root of evil” [54] (p. 4). The words chosen by the report’s authors not only convey harsh criticisms of the mukhtar’s actions but also attest to the Orientalist point of view of the Sephardi writers, who emphasized the Eastern/African nature of the Yemeni mukhtar’s actions.

The local struggle between the two groups reveals that each group sought to safeguard its interests, whilst the Sephardim exhibited a condescending attitude towards the Yemenis. The Sephardic criticism of its unjustified lack of political power was not only local at the time. Elections to the fourth Assembly of Representatives of the Yishuv, the body governing the Jewish community in Palestine, took place during the Summer of 1944. Representatives of the Sephardic community feared losing their power and political influence at the national level, and the Sephardi Association threatened to boycott the national elections, arguing that the electoral system led to the misrepresentation of the Sephardi community in national institutions [55,56].

In HaTikvah, the local conflict prompted the mukhtar’s resignation; he was later accused by the court of accepting bribes [51,57–61]. Around the time of his resignation, the residents again became engaged in inducing the appointment of a new mukhtar⁸. Letters and petitions were once more sent to the district officer [62–68]. Some of them protested the rumors about the decision to appoint Izhak Izon as mukhtar, arguing he caused disputes among the residents, entered Palestine illegally, and was unfamiliar with the customs of the country [66,67]. The latter claim indicates that Izon was an Ashkenazi immigrant. Other residents stated that mukhtars are superfluous and that they would be satisfied with the appointment of a local council [68]. Ultimately, a committee comprising residents was appointed to manage the neighborhood; in October 1945, Avraham Nissim Elkayam and Shimon Malakhi, representing the Sephardim and the Yemenites, respectively, were officially appointed as mukhtars [69].

The residents’ numerous appeals to the government, asking it to intervene and control the neighborhood’s governance, originated from their desire to establish a formal local government where one was not to be found; this attests to the high levels of community involvement among the residents. The residents asserted their right to be formally acknowledged by the authorities and used democratic means, such as the electoral constitution and assemblies, to make decisions concerning themselves, even though their opinions were not always considered. While the discussions about the representatives expose the high degree of local engagement, they also reveal that ethnicity played a key role in the internal organization of the inhabitants, as well as in the internal tensions between neighborhood

groups, based on ethnic origin, and the patronization of Sephardim over Yemenites. In the process of the development of the political structure of the Yishuv under the Mandate rule, according to Naor, the Oriental leadership lost the representative status it had in previous years and its contact with the colonial powers [70]. According to Herzog, the Sephardim and Yemenites were differently situated in relation to this emerging political system in the Yishuv. While the Yemeni political organization was the fruit of political entrepreneurship that reflected the aspiration for social mobility and political integration, the Sephardi organization was one of political organizers who were losing the positions of power they had held in the previous political structure in the late Ottoman period and who were looking for a way to integrate into the new system that was being created during the Mandate period [56]. One explanation for the power struggle in HaTikvah is that, as both groups became marginal in relation to the European hegemony of the Yishuv, each tried to maintain and maximize the positions of power it could achieve, including local ones.

4. Community Protest

In addition to their efforts to elect representatives for their neighborhood, the residents took various civil measures as a community to increase the involvement of the Tel Aviv municipality and the government in neighborhood affairs. Throughout the 1940s, the residents used civic means, such as appealing to the authorities, demonstrating, and writing petitions, to change the situation caused by the lack of organized municipal activity in the neighborhood. The residents refused to accept the severe neglect of their neighborhood and asked the municipality and the British Government to take care of cleaning, sewage services, and education [71–75].

I will demonstrate this here by focusing on the issue of water supply. In the climate of Palestine, water is a limited resource in all spheres of life: agriculture, industry, and urban and domestic consumption. The supply of drinking water was one of the most difficult problems in the HaTikvah neighborhood. In 1941, the residents began to revolt against the existing water supply arrangements, which took the form of two water companies: one that had operated since the neighborhood was established and was owned by Standard Bank, and another that was owned by the Shimshon Company, which had been operating since 1940⁹.

The residents protested that the water was held in private hands; however, their protest had no legal basis because, under British colonial legislation, water did not constitute public property [76]. This legal tangle resulted in the appearance of “water lords”, who sold water at inflated prices. Mukhtar Yeshayahu Israel and his family also played a part in the local water plants and in preserving the monopoly of the water companies; thus, the struggle for water was also one of the arenas of the struggle against his rule [77]. In May 1941, the residents of the neighborhood sent a petition against Standard Bank to the district officer, begging the government to interfere in the water supply arrangements, “What sins and crimes have we committed? . . . In the winter we drown in the floodwater, and in the summer, we die of thirst and lack of water,” they wrote [78].

The residents claimed that the water company demanded payments according to the number of rooms in their homes, but not all the payers received water, while the company’s representatives claimed that the residents refused to pay for the water [79]. In the summer of 1944, the struggle for water intensified, and the residents established a committee on water affairs, which demanded the intervention of the district officer in solving the problem. The women of the neighborhood and their children came to demonstrate in front of the Tel Aviv municipality building, demanding that the municipality take responsibility for the management of the local water companies [77]. That summer, a tour was held in the neighborhood that presented the plight of the residents to municipal representatives, members of the Tel Aviv Workers’ Council, and journalists [77].

The press closely monitored the water affair in HaTikvah. The Al HaMishmar newspaper, which repeatedly published articles against the rule of the mukhtar, devoted a series of articles to the issue. These reports—which included the headlines “The cry of a neighbor-

hood" and "Chicago in miniature, water, and blood"—portrayed the situation as a product of corruption and the lack of the rule of law in the neighborhood [52,80,81]. The struggle of the Water Affairs Committee caused the municipality to promise to supply them, but this promise was not fulfilled, and the local water companies even began to lay new pipes there in an attempt to maintain their monopoly [81]. The HaMashkif newspaper described the confrontation as a struggle between "fans of the 'Shimshon' Company" and "opponents of the company who demand water exclusively from the Tel Aviv municipality" [82]. The opponents, the newspaper reported, attacked the workers who had come to deal with the company's pipes, and the incident developed into a fight [83]. HaZofe guessed that the reason why the Tel Aviv municipality did not supply water to the neighborhood was that the water companies demanded that it buy the pipes and equipment in their possession, which delayed the signing of the agreement between them [84]. The local community used the repertoire of civil struggle, which included filing out petitions, holding demonstrations, establishing committees, and sometimes even using actual violence, to claim its right to a water supply. As in the case of the election of the mukhtar, the issue of water also exposed internal tensions within the neighborhood community. However, as in the case of a signed appeal relating to the issue of education, the struggle over water was not molded around clear ethnic identifications [85].

Other behaviors among the residents revealed the strong internal solidarity within the local community and, perhaps, their alienation from the national Zionist society. For example, during the early stages of the 1948 war, after economic cooperation between Jews and Arabs in the Tel Aviv and Jaffa area increased during the Second World War [86], the residents continued to trade animals for slaughter with Arab merchants, despite the Zionist national institutions' attempts to ban this trade [87]. Later on in the war, locals attacked inspectors who came to stop trading on the black market [88–90].

5. Becoming Part of the City?

From the mid-1940s onwards, the Mandate authorities and the Tel Aviv and Jaffa municipalities discussed the neighborhood's municipal status [91,92]. In 1944, the Mandate authorities decided to include the neighborhood in the town planning area under the Jaffa municipality. This decision was made against the background of the discussion about annexing the Jewish neighborhoods in northern Jaffa into Tel Aviv. The residents of these neighborhoods' request to join Tel Aviv arose in the mid-1930s during the 'Arab Revolt', and, from the mid-1940s onwards, this became a prominent urban issue. The Mandate authorities did not support adjoining the neighborhoods to Tel Aviv, knowing the Arabs would interpret such a step as supporting the Jewish takeover of Jaffa; they determined that the two municipalities should reach an agreement [10]. HaTikvah's residents, who rebelled against its annexation into Jaffa, feared that it would terminate the little support they were receiving from the Tel Aviv municipality. A year later, the possibility of the neighborhood being recognized as a local council or a rural council within the Jaffa municipality was discussed, but the proposal was never implemented; the same solution was presented in the case of the Jewish neighborhoods in Jaffa, as well as in the neighborhoods of Hadar HaCarmel and Kiryat Haim in Haifa [93]. The solution of a local council that was under municipal supervision was perceived as a compromise that allowed the neighborhood more independence without transferring land and authority from one municipality to another.

The mayor of Tel Aviv, Israel Rokah, claimed that the government was preventing HaTikvah's annexation into his city for political reasons; he was quoted as saying that what was happening in the HaTikvah neighborhood was "[...] a disgrace to the British regime. They are building there without permits and overcrowding while prohibiting the Tel Aviv municipality from gaining a foothold in the neighborhood, 'this is anti-Jewish politics.'" [94]. While he publicly criticized the Mandate government for preventing the Tel Aviv municipality from gaining a foothold in the neighborhood, it is unclear to what extent he made concrete efforts to promote its annexation into the city, and to what extent the municipality was interested in formally taking responsibility for this impoverished neighborhood¹⁰.

The end of the British Mandate and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 reintroduced the question of the annexation of the neighborhood into Tel Aviv, along with the hopes of the residents for substantial improvements in their living conditions. While the Israeli Ministry of the Interior appointed a border committee to examine the possibility of annexing HaTikvah into the city, the neighborhood residents turned to the Tel Aviv municipality and the Israeli government and requested that they deal with the issue. On 3 September 1948, Gad Abbo, who was a member of the neighborhood committee, a former secretary of the local security committee, and one of the activists belonging to the Zionist Labor Federation in the neighborhood, asked the Minister of the Interior, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, that the neighborhood be annexed into the city. In addition to the issue of the water supply, Abbo mentioned the absence of municipal cleaning services and informed the Minister that the neighborhood committee could not monitor its income and expenses. "Is it possible, in the State of Israel, too, to leave a densely populated neighborhood in such negligence? Additionally, what about the thousands of children playing with mud, due to the lack of a small public garden?", he concluded [95].

In a letter to the editor published in *Al HaMishmar* a few weeks earlier, Abbo criticized the activists in the Tel Aviv City Council, particularly the workers' faction, for ignoring the suffering of the neighborhood's residents [96]. At the end of September, the 'Committee for the Annexation of the HaTikvah and Ezra Neighborhoods' wrote on behalf of the neighborhood's residents to Interior Minister Gruenbaum, requesting that he amend its status immediately and that issues requiring urgent treatment would not be overlooked until the border committee had decided on the status of the neighborhood. The appeal was accompanied by a leaflet distributed among the residents of the neighborhood, and it ended with the words, "Our demand from the Government of Israel and the Minister of Interior is: Do not treat us as stepchildren, we are equal to every citizen of the homeland with rights and obligations, and this is what we are prepared for" [97]. This leaflet makes it clear that the residents sought to become part of the city not only for the technical necessities of municipal administration but also because its authors believed it was a just step in promoting equality.

However, the residents' opinions regarding how to solve the problem of the neighborhood, which had now become part of the new state, were not uniform. Disagreements arose regarding its annexation into Tel Aviv. Some would have preferred for the neighborhood to be declared an independent local council. This controversy was reflected in the struggle between two bodies that claimed to represent the residents. A body that defined itself as the "neighborhood committee" promoted the neighborhood's annexation into Tel Aviv, while another body, which called itself the "Public Committee for the Neighborhoods of HaTikvah and Ezra", argued that the neighborhood should be declared a local council [98]. At first, this committee supported the annexation of the neighborhood into the city, but, as revealed in a letter addressed to the Minister of Interior, its members later decided that the annexation contradicted the wishes of the residents and came to support the declaration of a local council¹¹.

On 28 December 1948, the neighborhood was officially annexed into Tel Aviv [99,100]. In that year, the number of residents was about 18,000, and the building density was very high: 78% of the land was used for buildings, 20% for streets, and 2% for public needs [101,102]. Despite the residents' hopes, the annexation of the neighborhood into the city did not significantly improve the plight of the residents, and most of the problems they suffered from during the Mandate period were sustained. Moreover, the arrival of new immigrants, most of them Oriental Jews, in the neighborhood shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel led to a rapid growth in the number of residents and amplified the load on the already limited infrastructure and services. In July 1949, a little more than six months after the annexation, the municipal inspector, Haim Alperin, wrote a disturbing report exposing the difficult living conditions in the neighborhood. The garbage was removed three times a week, and the streets remained dirty since the neighborhood had not been thoroughly cleaned since the 1948 war. The engines of the water stations did not meet the

needs of the residents. Only half of the houses were connected to electricity, and there was no lighting on the streets. The construction of a building that would serve as a municipal clinic had not been completed. The low frequency of buses often led to passengers fighting in the stations. The only road that passed through the neighborhood was too narrow and lacked sidewalks, and the local social bureau could not handle the volume of demands. In the summary of his report, Alperin stated that the HaTikva neighborhood was “a special problem that requires a radical solution” [103] (pp. 5, 6).

This was not the first time such a claim had been made. The structure of the neighborhood was inconsistent with the attempts made by the Mandate authorities, Zionist leaders, and the Tel Aviv municipality to eliminate slums and replace them with modern dwellings [104]. As early as the mid-1940s, the Tel Aviv municipality had argued that the solution to the neighborhood’s problems would be to demolish and rebuild it [105]. The annexation enabled it to act in fulfilling its vision. After the occupation of Jaffa and its surrounding villages, the Tel Aviv municipality was interested in conducting mass demolitions [106]; however, in practice, demolitions and evacuations were limited and slowly executed. In July 1949, the Tel Aviv Municipal Council passed a resolution prohibiting construction in areas near Wadi Musrara and limiting the percentage of construction on privately owned plots, as well as the heights of the buildings. It was also determined that the residents of the neighborhood would submit plans to the municipality individually and pledge to stop illegal construction [107]. In practice, house demolitions were much slower than construction in the neighborhood, and attempts to eradicate illegal construction failed. According to city engineer Moshe Amiaz, between 1949 and 1953, the number of buildings in the neighborhood increased by 700 [104]¹². In 1953, the number of residents reached 25,000 [108]. An article from May 1951 described the state of construction in the neighborhood since the establishment of the State of Israel:

The Tel Aviv Municipality has apparently completely given up any planning in the construction of the HaTikvah neighborhood. Repeatedly, houses and shops pop up on every corner and empty lots, ‘streets’ and alleys disappear overnight and are replaced by one-or two-room houses, and the air becomes compressed to the point of suffocation. [109]

Similar to ‘slum’ residents in other countries (in the United States, for example), the residents resented the one-sided acts of eviction, demolition, and reconstruction [110,111]. Demolitions did not contribute to the establishment of trusting relationships between the municipal authorities and the residents, and they intensified existing feelings of indignation and deprivation. As early as March 1949, the municipality demolished a series of houses and rooms in the neighborhood. The demolitions, carried out without a trial or verdict, created resentment among the residents [112]. In February 1950, a leaflet signed by Tel Aviv’s mayor, Israel Rokah, was published, calling on the residents not to listen to the instigators against the municipality [113]. The flyer indicated that the mayor was concerned that the anger and bitterness of the residents of the neighborhood would lead to an uprising against the municipality. However, the mayor’s calls did not achieve their aim. In October 1951, the residents of a part of the neighborhood called Ezra went on a demonstration march against the demolition of 200 shacks [114]. Several months later, the residents of the shacks expected the municipality to meet with them [115].

In September 1952, the municipal engineer Moshe Amiaz, who had written a report in February 1948 that reviewed the state of the neighborhood in preparation for the annexation, submitted a plan for its rehabilitation. His plan included evacuating the residents to land reserves near HaTikvah, undertaking large-scale demolitions of the existing buildings, and expanding the streets and public areas [116]. From Amiaz’s point of view, “the residents of the neighborhood fought stubbornly and in an organized manner against the imposition of law and order. Inspectors and police forces who came to the neighborhood encountered organized resistance” [116]. From the perspective of the residents, they fought against the destruction of the existing fabric of life in the neighborhood and spoke out against the crude intervention of the Tel Aviv municipality. The demolitions intensified the feelings of

alienation of the residents from the city and, at the same time, reinforced the municipality's position, which ignored the local community and strove toward the eviction and destruction of the neighborhood. Nonetheless, the municipality was hesitant in carrying out large-scale demolition and rebuilding plans. Amiaz's 1952 plan was brought before the Town Planning Committee in October 1952, and the committee decided to halt construction in the neighborhood, prepare an urban building scheme for the neighborhood, and take measures to create a land reserve to which the residents would be evacuated [117]¹³. However, at the same meeting, it was also decided that the final decision regarding the neighborhood would be postponed [117].

Instances of neighborhood activism were repeated in later decades, as well as in recent years (see note 13 above). The annexation of the neighborhood into the city eliminated one dimension of the marginality of the neighborhood discussed here, since it officially entered the area under the responsibility of the Tel Aviv municipality. However, as is evident from the above analysis, this did not improve the living conditions of the local community, but rather led to a more direct confrontation with the municipal authorities. The mayor and city engineer saw annexation as an opportunity to redesign a neighborhood the residential style of which was incompatible with modern construction and had been developed outside the municipal planning and building supervision system. Meanwhile, the residents, some of them veterans of the neighborhood and some recent arrivals, experienced this action as the unjustified destruction of their place of residence. Should one, therefore, conclude that marginality at the municipal level was insignificant compared to the ethnic-social components? Not necessarily. Rather, I suggest, it was the early marginality on the municipal level that shaped the built space and the relationship between the municipality and the residents in a way that continued to be significant even after the change in the neighborhood's municipal status.

This is not the place for an in-depth analysis of the events in the neighborhood from the 1960s to the present, but it should be noted that, in the 1970s, the neighborhood made headlines and became one of the symbols of the struggle of a group of Oriental/Mizrahi Jews called the 'Israeli Black Panthers'. On 18 April 1973, six families from the HaTikvah neighborhood invaded a house intended for new immigrants in the city of Bat Yam, protesting the housing shortage and using the term Panthers in their signs [118]. During the demonstration that the Panthers held near the Tel Aviv municipality, they carried signs with the slogans "HaTikvah Neighborhood with the Panthers" and "HaTikvah Neighborhood is equal to North Tel Aviv". However, not all neighborhood residents welcomed the Black Panthers' activities. Six representatives of the Panthers were expelled from a demonstration in the neighborhood [18,119]. It can be assumed that not everyone wanted to identify themselves with the form of struggle represented by the Black Panthers, which was perceived as militant and associated with leftist political perspectives. It is also possible that this is further evidence of the unique communal character of the neighborhood, with some of the residents of which seeing themselves as being identified with the local community and not necessarily with the ethnic struggle at the national level. In 1978, partly because it was a symbol of a distressed neighborhood, the neighborhood was one of the first to be included in the Israeli flagship urban renewal project called "Project Renewal" [120]. The neighborhood rehabilitation plan did not substantially change the neighborhood's impoverished status, leaving residents feeling alienated from the initiative [121,122]. In 2011, during the social protests in Israel over the cost of housing, a protest encampment was set up in the neighborhood. Unlike the encampment in central Tel Aviv, the initiators of the HaTikvah encampment, mainly Oriental/Mizrahim Jews with a prominent presence of single mothers, demanded public housing and social rights [18]. According to municipal data from 2021, the neighborhood was ranked in the intra-urban index as being in socioeconomic cluster number 1 (the lowest) and its population density was 10.4 per dunam [123].

6. Conclusions

Recently, Wacquant suggested the need “to connect analytically the sociopolitical production of neighborhoods of relegation and of enclaves of privilege; and, when these are distant spatially and phenomenologically [...] to trace how this disconnection is (re)produced” [124]. Reconstructing the history of community formation in the HaTikvah neighborhood from the 1940s to the mid-1950s, while analyzing the various aspects of its marginality, is a case study of the production and reproduction of such disconnection.

In the case of HaTikvah, this disconnection was based on the lack of an official urban status, the geography that separated the neighborhood from the city, the ethnicity of Oriental Jews, and the low socio-economic status of the residents, which played a role in shaping the lives of the residents and the way they operated.

Here, I examined the formation of the local community in light of these dimensions of marginality, focusing on the residents’ appeals for official representation and protests to improve living conditions, as well as discussing the question of the official status of the neighborhood in the city.

Wacquant emphasizes that a comparative examination of marginal neighborhoods in the United States and France reveals the differences between the historical circumstances in which they were created and functioned in relation to race, economic and social policy, and urban structure. HaTikvah offers us a better understanding of the formation and function of a marginal Jewish community formed under the circumstances of British Colonial–Mandatory rule in Palestine, amid the process of the consolidation of a Jewish national society.

Examining marginal neighborhoods in both the United States and France, Wacquant argues that marginalization is an inseparable part of cities in advanced societies (hence, he uses the term “advanced marginality”), and it is not an expression of the city’s surplus or of phenomena that belong to the past [4] (pp. 232, 233). Similarly, HaTikvah was an integral part of the establishment of Tel Aviv as a modern urban Jewish space in Palestine and, later, in Israel. However, while Wacquant presents spatial alienation and the dismantling of space as some of the features of “advanced marginality”, focusing on the residents’ actions in HaTikvah, we can observe a strong sense of identification and spatial belonging, similar to that experienced by residents of the ‘black ghetto’ prior to the 1960s [4] (pp. 241–244). The marginalization of the neighborhood and the residents’ shared struggles united them and led them to act as a community to confront the various governmental and municipal authorities. The various signed appeals and letters sent to the authorities reflected a high level of internal communal solidarity, resilience, and cooperation between residents of different origins. At the same time, ethnic identification, as it appears in the case of the residents’ engagement in the management of the neighborhood, led to internal tensions between the different ethnic communities within the neighborhood. This tension may be understood in the context of a broader struggle of Oriental Jews to gain recognition at the Zionist national level.

While the municipal status of the neighborhood was a key element in molding this local community, the establishment of the State of Israel and the annexation of the neighborhood to Tel Aviv, along with a considerable increase in the resident population, did not lead to an improvement in the infrastructure. On the contrary, this situation led to a more severe confrontation between the municipality, which sought to evacuate and demolish the neighborhood, and the residents. Their feelings of deprivation and discrimination intensified, alienating the neighborhood community from the city.

The purpose of this article was not to provide an explanation for the neighborhood’s ongoing marginalization; however, future research may attempt to provide an explanation for why, while many neighborhoods in South Tel Aviv and Jaffa have undergone intense gentrification processes in recent years, the HaTikvah neighborhood remains distressed and has even undergone the opposite process. Many African refugees and asylum seekers who moved to the neighborhood exacerbated this distress, and the veteran residents who

could afford to do so left the neighborhood. It is now home to the most vulnerable senior and stateless population in Tel Aviv [30].

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Notes

- ¹ *Musha*, which means “sharing” in Arabic, is one of the seven legal subcategories of land the Ottoman authorities defined in the Land Reform of 1858, and it continued to exist during the Mandate period. ‘Mosha land’ is land that is owned by a community (village) or family, and which has been used for joint cultivation.
- ² The blocks on which the neighborhood was built are 6135, 6136, and 6043.
- ³ The election commission included eight men whose family names indicate different ethnic origins, for example, Tsadok, Poshkit (of Pustik), Mizrahi, and Natan.
- ⁴ A letter from the officer of the Tel Aviv Colonial District to the HaTikvah and Ezra Neighborhoods Committee clarified that ‘despite all the efforts of this ministry to establish some order in your neighborhood and to operate the committee, to my great dismay, all the efforts of this ministry in the above directions have been in vain, and no benefit and order has come out of all the meeting between district officers and the residents of the neighborhoods.’ 2 December 1941, Israel State Archive [Thereafter: ISA], M 1783/34.
- ⁵ Despite the similar names, this mukhtar was not the same person as Israel Yeshayahu, who was active in the Yemenite community in Tel Aviv and the Zionist Labor Federation in the 1930s and 1940s, and later served as a member of the Israeli Knesset for the Mapai party.
- ⁶ The committee members were Haim Zadok, Moshe Yerachi, Yaakov Barmatz, Shalom Yaphet, Yitzhak Izon, Avraham Sat, and Shlomo Reuven. The Hatikvah Neighborhood Committee to The District Officer, 29 December 1941, ISA, M-1783/34.
- ⁷ For example, Mrs Leah Yosef was a committee member in the Rehavia neighborhood of Jerusalem in the early 1940s. A memo to neighborhood members, which included the report of the annual meeting held on 19 May 1942, reported that Mrs Leah Yosef had been elected as a committee member. Jerusalem municipal archive, 4933/7 (1946). Yosef’s name was also included in the list of members of Rehavia’s neighborhood committee elected in June 1944. “Jerusalem—Towards the Sewage of the Rehavia Neighborhood”, HaMashkif, 8 June 1944, p. 4.
- ⁸ Resignation was officially accepted in June 1945. Acting district commissioner Lydda District to District Commissioner Settlement, Tel Aviv. 22 June 1945, ISA, M 1783/34.
- ⁹ In February 1941, a resident of the neighborhood asked the colonial officer to settle the issue of water in the neighborhood. He noted that the water in the neighborhood did not flow between 6:00 P.M. and the morning. On Friday, a fire broke out in one of the barracks, and no water was found to extinguish it; miraculously, it was extinguished with rags and sacks. ISA, M-1783/34.
- ¹⁰ In a letter written by Rokah to the district commissioner on 20 September 1944, he complained about the lack of planning and the unlicensed construction in the neighborhood, and the government preventing the annexation of the neighborhood. TAMA, 04-2209A.
- ¹¹ The appeal noted that, prior to the establishment of the state, the neighborhood was in the process of being declared a local council. The Public Committee claimed that the members of the Neighborhood Committee, most of them cleaning workers in the municipality, were working towards an annexation to Tel Aviv, yet payments of the municipality tax would be too heavy for the residents. ‘The Public Committee for the Neighborhoods of HaTikva and Ezra’ to the Minister of the Interior. 5 September 1948. TAMA, C-3964/17.
- ¹² According to Amiaz, the city engineer, the number of buildings reached 2200, of which 2070 were residential, 1644 were one-story buildings, 520 were two-story buildings, and 36 were three-story buildings; a further 450 buildings were dilapidated. The number of buildings increased by 700 within five years. Moshe Amiaz to Mayor Mordechai Namir, HaTikvah neighborhood and the surrounding area, 22 June 1960, p. 2, TAMA 04-2216A.

- ¹³ This reserve was meant to be created by purchasing the lands of the nearby, formerly Arab village of Salame, managed by the ‘Development Authority’.

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