

Living Jerusalem: Cultures and Communities in Contention

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Once, I was sitting on the steps by the gate of David's Tower. I had placed my two baskets at my side. A group of tourists was standing around their guide and I became their focal point.

"You see that man with the baskets? Just to the right of his head there's an arch from the Roman period—just to the right of his head."

"But he's moving! He's moving!" I said to myself.

Redemption will only come when their guide tells them:

"You see that arch from the Roman Period? It's not important! But next to it sits a man who's brought fruit and vegetables for his family."

Israeli Poet and Jerusalemite, Yehuda Amichai¹

Amichai reminds us that redemption, which to my way of thinking is the coming of humane values and situated understandings, will center on the paying of attention to the everyday acts of ordinary people – those who shop in Jerusalem's markets, take food home to their families, and pause to catch their breaths against a Roman Pillar along the way. Ethnographers both tell other people's stories and acquire memories of their own. Their retellings and acquisitions might conflict with their subjects' tellings and memories. To participate in this kind of redemption in disputed territory like Jerusalem, the ethnographic enterprise must become a collecting and juxtaposing of these narratives and counter-narratives in order to contextualize their contested chronologies and claims.

The Jerusalem Project sharpens Amichai's problematic, challenging us as ethnographers, as humans, to consider what happens when we refocus our gaze on the man resting beneath the

¹ Amichai, Yehuda, "Tourists", *Poems of Jerusalem: A Bilingual Edition*. Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1987, pp 176-177.

Roman Arch with his family's groceries. What follows, as a three-part response to Amichai's challenge, is a necessary logic of ethnography in disputed territories:

- First, ethnography must state the problem of counter-representation and undertake the collaborative construction of opposed frameworks of time, care, and value.
- Second, ethnography must articulate the development and use of these conflicting frameworks in its cultural context. In the case of the Jerusalem Project this context is itself conflictual.
- Third, ethnography must acknowledge the limits of the kind of cultural dialogue¹ its processes and products entail. The Jerusalem Project, for instance involves not only Israeli and Palestinian partners enmeshed in an ongoing relationship as occupier and occupied, but an American partner whose role complicates the already existing asymmetry and ambiguity.

Counter-representations and Counter Authenticities

The idea for the Jerusalem Project began in the Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution and was reshaped and operationalized by some twenty Palestinian and Israeli researchers with dozens of culture bearers in Jerusalem. Our goal was ethnography of

¹ Moreson and Emerson note that "To understand dialogue (in the first sense), it is necessary to recognize that dialogue is possible only among people, not among abstract elements of language. There can be no dialogue between sentences. An utterance requires both a speaker and a listener (or a writer and a reader), who as we have seen, have joint proprietorship of it. In other words, a constituent, necessary feature of every utterance is its "addressivity", its 'quality of turning to someone... without it [addressivity] the utterance does not and cannot exist" Gary Saul Morson & Carol Emerson, 1990, Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of Prosaics, Stanford UP, Stanford. pp 131

contemporary cultural traditions in Jerusalem that fully acknowledged the context of conflict in which these traditions are being created and enacted. Although there is a vast literature on cultural traditions and practices associated with Jerusalem's earlier historical periods, there is a lack of attention to traditions practiced in Jerusalem today. This results in part from the fact that the dominant, contesting socio-political and religious discourses in Jerusalem strategically privilege earlier eras.

Because Jerusalem is a disputed city, our ethnography developed counter representations and displayed the contested chronologies that undergird the ideologies of contending national, ethnic, and religious communities. It also documented some commonalities which are often either overstressed by the optimistic or avoided by the parties holding out for higher stakes. And not surprisingly, the project's focus sometimes was threatened by romanticization, orientalizing, a longing for a past or a future (anything but today), the intense pull of ancient stone—that Roman Arch again— that plays loudly even among those Israeli, Palestinian and U.S. partners willing to commit to polyvocal perspectives. But the project also was an unusual opportunity for ethnographers and subjects to reflect on their respective crafts and create a dialogic aesthetic whole from their contrasting parts.

From Native American Cultures Program to Jerusalem: History of the Project

Under the auspices of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, this ethnographic project was originally conceived as the basis of a program on Jerusalem for the

1993 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. The Smithsonian Folklife Festival, initiated in 1967, is described as:

A free outdoor, living cultural exhibition that draws over 1 million participants to the National Mall in Washington DC. This two week summer Festival is a research-based presentation of contemporary living cultures featuring musicians, artists, performers, craftspeople, workers, cooks, storytellers, and others who demonstrate their skills, knowledge and aesthetics that embody the creative vitality of community-based traditions. Festival programs typically include international, regional/state, occupational, and thematic processes.³

In July 1991, then Jerusalem City Council member, Ornan Yekutieli, in Washington as part of the United States International Visitors Program, chanced upon the *Land in Native American Cultures* program⁴ at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Yekutieli, a member of the left-wing Meretz party, was impressed particularly with how land was seen, used, and respected by the different Native cultures and he marveled at how, within the context of the Festival, contentious Indian groups had succeeded in marking off their territories on the National Mall in Washington DC, and how they were represented to each other and to the public. At a time when the Intifada was still a daily reality in Jerusalem and the “PLO” was not a sanctioned acronym in the mainstream Israeli lexicon. Yekutieli held an impromptu meeting with the Director of the

³ The Smithsonian Folklife Festival was formally the Festival of American Folklife. *The Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, Mission Statement. 1996. See also, Richard Kurin, “The Festival on the Mall”, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View From the Smithsonian*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, pp. 109-140.

⁴ Olivia Cadaval, “Knowledge and Power: Land in Native American Cultures”, *1991 Festival of American Folklife Program Book*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991, pp. 76-80.

Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Richard Kurin, and unfolded the compelling reasons for attempting the impossible – presenting the peoples of Jerusalem at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

Yekutieli's proposal was daunting. The Folklife Festival is committed to the research and representation of and by local communities whose members are invited to present their living traditions. A Jerusalem festival program would require public acknowledgement of the political, cultural, and religious controversies that characterize the city and underlie the traditional practitioners who create there. The socio-political context could not be glossed over in representing the city on the National Mall since folklore ethnography foregrounds the folk themselves who, in the context of speaking for themselves, often voice the contentious truths of daily life, rather than official policies and idealized misrepresentations of reality.

In the fall of 1991, the Smithsonian Center for Folklife hired me to determine whether a Jerusalem Festival program was feasible. We quickly reached agreement on a fundamental methodological premise—the establishment of two parallel, cooperative, and self-determined research teams, one Palestinian and one Israeli, whose leadership would, in conjunction with Center staff, design a research process and festival program consistent with Center mission and values. This structure acknowledges the asymmetrical national struggle that frames Jerusalem. Folkloristically, this approach allowed for insider researchers to identify, interview, and document cultural practitioners within local communities all too familiar with having their traditions exploited and misappropriated by outsider agendas.

Clifford and Marcus observe, “Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique

ways.”⁵ The Smithsonian’s outsider voice might, at best, challenge the potential for restricted accounts without disempowering the insider understandings, struggles, and intersections that lie at the heart of the project. Our project was, at one level, ethnography of ethnography. Mutual observation, not only of the cultural traditions under study, but also of each other, would enliven and deepen analytic perspective. At the same time, the Smithsonian presence in the triangulation created an inevitable power imbalance by virtue of its stature as a quasi-governmental U.S. institution and its role as producer of the Festival. Moreover, since our goal was a high-visibility presentation on the National Mall in Washington amidst one million attendees, we had even more to contend with than the already daunting task of sharing power between Israeli, Palestinian, and US colleagues. Official scrutiny and sanction from all sides was also an important factor.

The feasibility of the project hinged first on whether we could design a framework that satisfied the official Israeli unified-Jerusalem position, Palestinian aspirations for autonomy and nationhood, and Smithsonian concerns over backlash by congressional and private funders if the Institution’s cultural mission were to be perceived as somehow influenced by Arab political interests.⁶ In other words, we had to recognize at the outset the existence of contentious national claims to the city while centering our efforts on the cultural traditions being practiced in its disputed spaces. To summarize the questions that framed our meetings with government officials: 1. Would Israeli officials allow—or at least not forbid—a project whose operating

⁵ James Clifford and George E. Marcus (ed), “Introduction: Partial Truths”, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp.9.

⁶ A Smithsonian Associates/New Israel Fund lecture series planned to commemorate Israel’s 50th anniversary by “examining its accomplishments, failures, and future challenges,” and featuring both Israeli and Palestinian speakers, was hastily cancelled in January, 1998 due to congressional and media pressure, see Phyllis Bennis, “Smithsonian Abandons its Mandate Once Again” *Baltimore Sun*, Baltimore, 1/14/98.

context was the establishment of two self-determined, parallel, and distinct research teams, one Palestinian and one Israeli, functioning under Smithsonian auspices? 2. Would Palestinian officials allow—or at least not forbid—a project requiring acknowledgement and even cooperation with the Israeli Jerusalem city council? 3. Would Smithsonian, congressional, and State Department officials allow—or at least not forbid—such a potentially volatile festival program on our sacred ground?

A detailed accounting of the negotiation processes that ensued is outside the scope of this paper. What is interesting to note is that in initiating the project and identifying and contracting with local research directors and teams, while simultaneously contacting appropriate state officials, we inadvertently made a successful tactical move. In reality, this simultaneity was a function of our tight deadline rather than savvy political maneuvering. We had less than six months in which to complete our ethnography and festival design, and implement a program that would feature one hundred Israeli and Palestinian traditional practitioners in Washington. By the time we met with government officials, our discussions were based not on abstract propositions but on a work feverishly and passionately in progress.

Meetings and phone conversations were held with Ambassador Itamar Rabinovitch, Congressman Sid Yates, Smithsonian Secretary Bob Adams, Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek and his unofficial Palestinian equivalent, Faisal Hussein, as well as numerous State Department and Israeli Foreign Ministry officials. The outcome was, if not approval, a tacit nod of the head accompanied by comments such as, “This is very interesting.” Ultimately it was Smithsonian Secretary Adams’ private meetings with Israeli Ambassador Itamar Rabinovitch that resulted in the project moving forward. Rabinovitch, it turned out, was not only a savvy diplomat and scholar on Syria, but quite knowledgeable about American folk music as well. His first request to

Secretary Adams was for a copy of a Greenbrier Boys recording. We are unsure whether he realized just how savvy his request was, for Ralph Rinzler, the founder of the Center for Folklife and an Assistant Secretary under Bob Adams was also a virtuoso mandolin player and an original member of that bluegrass band.⁷

Armed with the Smithsonian's approval of a self-determined yet cooperative framework that allowed for Israeli–Palestinian engagement, and in the process of accumulating the necessary tacit nods from appropriate U.S., Palestinian, and Israeli officials, my first task in Jerusalem was to identify local research directors willing to build and coordinate parallel fieldwork teams. It is no accident that the right men for the job were women. Jerusalem and Ramallah are home to Israeli and Palestinian women's organizations that have succeeded over many long years of struggle to find common ground for cooperation. While men dominate the official political channels, it is women's groups working back channels who have built the grassroots infrastructure that supports dialogue as well as efforts to address and act on shared issues such as health, education, an end to Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and prisoner rights.

The two internationally distinguished research directors, Israeli folklorist Dr. Galit Hasan-Rokem and Dr. Suad Amiry, a Palestinian scholar of vernacular architecture who later became Deputy Minister of Culture for the Palestinian authority, were veterans of the women's peace movement. Hasan-Rokem and El Amiry's established research teams were based at Hebrew University and Bir Zeit University, respectively. There was a shared sense that this was an unprecedented opportunity to document and present the traditional lifeways of a city whose

⁷ This section benefited from a discussion with James Early, who served as Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian during the inception of the Jerusalem Project. Early traveled to Jerusalem as a Smithsonian representative at an early stage in the research process.

image was all too often reduced to media sound bytes about deep-seated conflicts among its population. The research process occurred during the negotiation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace plan and Suad Amiry served simultaneously as research director of our project and a Palestinian negotiator in Washington.⁸ It was an interesting time in which ethnographic and folklore scholarship, it was felt, might help move ongoing Israeli-Palestinian dialogue efforts forward.

Research Parameters: Binding Jerusalem's Space, Time, and Stuff

Since the Festival program would grow from the ethnography of contemporary practices in the city, we needed first to establish parameters that could guide and limit the research process itself. The first step was to find an acceptable – if not ideal – location from which to operate the project. It was in the process of relocating to Jerusalem and trying to set up our first meetings that I discovered the dearth of neutral grounds, neighborhoods, or institutions in which to base the project. Ironically, a five star hotel, The American Colony, located on the edge of East Jerusalem, became headquarters and home for this grassroots folklore project. Although it is located in East Jerusalem, Israelis were willing to drive to the American Colony; hotel guards provided insurance against car torching.

In the garden courtyard the research directors, along with Israeli and Palestinian advisors and Smithsonian staff, conceived their research design. Rather than impose a synthetic, top heavy frame on the fieldwork, conflicting facts would be allowed to unfold on the ground. We chose a cross-weaving of genres, themes, and communities, understanding that these

⁸ See the interview with Suad Amiry in *Middle East Report* 23, no. 3 (May-June 1993): pp. 21-22. Also, Amiry's introductory article "Researching East Jerusalem" in (forthcoming) book on the Jerusalem project, edited by Amy Horowitz, Suad Amiry, and Galit Hasan Rokem, is tentatively titled *Living Jerusalem*.

interpenetrating categories would overlap. Our scope included holiday and season cycle celebrations, ethnic and religious groups, neighborhood sites and homes. Thus a Muslim wedding celebration might yield a henna ceremony⁹ while a Jewish wedding might feature a *ketubah* calligrapher.¹⁰ Foodways, rituals involving candles, seasonal games, and songs associated with Ramadan, Shabbat or Easter could ultimately help a Festival attendee understand holiday celebrations as well as how Jerusalemites cook, play, and sing. Holy Fire candle makers could refocus the spectacle of this celebration on the people whose hard work behind the scenes makes this intense explosion of light and heat possible.¹¹ Various ethnic groups throughout the city could share their healing practices, stories, jokes, and lullabies. Representation of magnetic sites such as the Dome of the Rock, the Holy Sepulcher and the Kotel would highlight the craftspeople that maintain these monuments. Daily neighborhood rhythms, homes, streets, synagogues, mosques, churches, coffeehouses, markets, corner bakeries, and courtyards would center the research effort. In an effort to privilege the “practices of everyday life,”¹² we aimed to name and situate individual creators in their communal contexts.

In Jerusalem boundaries were, of course, a central problematic. Even scholarly attention to generic boundaries is controversial. Traditional genres are constantly innovating, morphing into new configurations of folk, popular, and classical forms. Thus, contemporary research must encompass political graffiti and peddling. Neighborhood and city football teams, scout groups, and youth movements are central to both Israeli and Palestinian communities and highlight youth culture. The Palestinian theatre El Hakawate (storyteller) draws from traditional stories to create

⁹ Na'mati Al-Imam, interviewed by Reem Abu Kishk, Jerusalem, Oct. 17, 1992.

¹⁰ Luba Bar Menachem, interviewed by Nirit Roessler, Jerusalem, Oct. 28, 1992.

¹¹ Elias Manneh, interviewed by Vera Tamari, Jerusalem, Oct. 14, 1992.

¹² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*: Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

plays such as *The 1,001 Nights of a Stone Thrower* performed at playgrounds in refugee camps.¹³ Palestinian musicians who perform at a Muslim wedding render classical Arabic music by Egyptian composer Muhammad Abdul Wahab in a vernacular form.¹⁴ The hora, an Israeli folkdance recomposed from Middle Eastern indigenous roots and used by Israeli state culture, takes on another meaning when performed at a community wedding by Kurdish Jews whose parents carried similar dance traditions from Zazaki.¹⁵

The issue of temporal boundaries was no easier. How should we define “contemporary culture?” Is “today” a time frame of twenty, fifty, or one hundred years? Temporality becomes politically charged in view of demographic changes. Jewish and Palestinian migration in the last century and the 1967 War had profound impact on local cultural traditions. Changes in music, crafts, and dance have been observed in the last decade, since the Palestinian intifada and the mass immigrations of Ethiopian and Russian Jews.¹⁶ Where could we draw the line between “living” traditions, revivals, and cross-revivals (e.g. European-Israeli *darbukka* and Palestinian conga players)? What should be said of recently disappeared traditions, such as Coptic tattooing or Sufi performances during Ramadan?¹⁷

The most heavily charged boundary issue was, however, the spatial dimension. In Jerusalem, mapping the city’s limits is more than a struggle between rural and urban domains and the tendency to privilege the more colorful and “authentic” traditions of neighboring villages

¹³ Dov Shinar, “The Theater and Visual Arts as Communications Networks”, *Palestinian Voices: Communication and Nation Building in the West Bank*: Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987, pp. 132-150.

Susan Slyomovics, “To Put One’s Fingers in the Bleeding Wound”: Palestinian Theatre under Israeli Censorship,” *The Drama Review*, (Summer, 1991), pp. 18-38.

Francois Abu Salem interviewed by Hussein Barghouty, Jerusalem, Nov. 8, 1992.

¹⁴ Ghidian Al-Qeimari interviewed by Kamilya Jubran, Jerusalem, Oct. 8, 1992.

¹⁵ Sheva Ahayot Dance Group interviewed by Ittai Rosenbuam, Jerusalem, Jan. 24, 1993.

¹⁶ Gete Mulu interviewed by Hagar Salamon. Jerusalem. Dec. 15, 1992.

¹⁷ George Jacob Razzouk interviewed by Mayyada Jarallah. Jerusalem. Oct. 27, 1992.

and towns. In cultural terms, tightly defined spatial boundaries disrupt the natural interpenetration between city and village traditions so central to Palestinian life. Are Beit Sahour and Hizmah neighborhoods of Jerusalem or do they retain their distinct identities as villages? If the latter is correct, then the *rababa* and *yarghoul* traditions that accompany *zajal* storytelling are beyond the bounds of an ethnographic study of Jerusalem. Hebron carpets and Yemenite jewelry from the Negev are sold in Jerusalem's marketplaces and can be seen as cultural mediators between village and city. Richly embroidered, colorful Palestinian dresses are native to the neighboring villages but not to Jerusalem, where Palestinian clothing follows urban, cosmopolitan styles. Nevertheless, village women wearing their traditional handmade dresses, work, shop, and visit relatives in Jerusalem. Yet, an inclusive spatial definition of Jerusalem was politically charged in light of Israeli policies aimed at expanding the boundaries of Jerusalem to include new Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

The boundary between Jerusalem and surrounding suburban and rural regions was problematic yet essential from the outset. Would a visit to Rachel's tomb, on the road connecting Jerusalem and Bethlehem, be considered a Jerusalem pilgrimage? What about musicians who performs weekly in Jerusalem but live near Tel Aviv or Hebron? What about the Jewish quarter of the old City which is in East Jerusalem, and Arab neighborhoods of Beit Tsafafa and Abu Tor, which are located in West Jerusalem? Also illuminating are the Ethiopian, Malachite, and Muscovite churches, which occupy territory in both East and West Jerusalem, transgressing Israeli/Palestinian boundaries but belonging to neither.

The intention of our research design was cultural juxtaposition and fragmentation, which, we believed, would grow into a multi-vocal mapping of living traditions in contemporary Jerusalem. Such a premise would leave synthesizing to the Smithsonian festival-goers and create

both problems and opportunities in the research process. In a contested city, to give up categorical control to the process of discovery is itself a contentious act. It was argued, for example, that Palestinian strikes are spontaneous outbursts of local culture and should be allowed to emerge in the Washington Festival performance context.

With the spatial, temporal, thematic, and generic categories of our research plan loosely identified, the two parallel Israeli and Palestinian teams began documenting the arts, work skills, tales, memories, and cultural ideals of traditional cultural practitioners in Jerusalem—craftspeople, cooks, storytellers, musicians, healers, artisans, and religious specialists. The researchers participated in holiday celebrations and watched local sporting events. They recorded the sounds and stories of peddlers and merchants in the outdoor marketplaces and cantors and sheiks in storefront synagogues and neighborhood mosques. They gathered recipes and lullabies. They followed bus lines, demonstration lines, punch lines, and headlines.

The researchers charted a delicate path. Their task was to produce a body of research that could be translated into a representation accessible to a mass public in Washington without trivializing or Disney-fying Jerusalem.¹⁸ The complexly layered cultural expressions they found testified to the fact that despite the accumulation of myth and the tensions of political conflict, on an ethnographic level, Jerusalem is not very unlike any heterogeneous urban environment in which people create an artistic dialogue between traditional and contemporary repertoires. Unlikely combinations of aesthetics and cultural ideas are brought together by “modern” technologies like cassette recorders, faxes, and microwave ovens. The result is folklore in motion, traditional Hebrew prayers vocalized in top forty-style Greek and Turkish melodies,

¹⁸ Richard Kurin, “Disney Acquires Smithsonian!” Washington, Smithsonian Ripley Center, Nov. 8, 1996. (Unpublished paper)

which Persian Jerusalemite cantor Ezra Barnea learned from a recording of Yemenite Israeli singer Avihu Medina.¹⁹ Cassette tapes of famous Quranic recitations, which are amplified from local minarets, now often replace live calls to prayer, and Armenian folk poetry recounting their national massacre now features western rock beats and synthesized string sections. The result is culture contact: French croissants have been localized and can be found on sale on Salahadin Street laced with the herb za'atar; Eastern European gefilte fish showed up next to Middle Eastern kubeh dumplings at a Kurdish Jewish bar mitzvah. As ethnomusicologist Adelaide Schramm suggests, cultural identity is often a repertoire of shifting centers of gravity that ebb and flow according to contextual need.²⁰

In Jerusalem, culture is not only a reflector and activator of human landscape. In this disputed context, simple cultural acts may seek to occupy, even capture, geographical and political territory. Jerusalem is a city of laundry flapping in the street and a quick glance at the items waving from an individual laundry line can mark a Palestinian, secular or ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood. To take this one step further, by organizing laundry in a red, green, black, and white pattern, one achieves the visual patterns of a Palestinian flag, which, although banned during the course of our research effort, could be seen hanging to dry from many balconies. The same effect was achieved by the colors of a kite or by simulating national flags by ordering a Pistachio, licorice, strawberry and vanilla ice cream, or blueberry and vanilla at the American Colony.²¹

A similar principle of transgressing and occupying prohibited territory can be observed in musical traditions. Like laundry, the soundscape often demarcates the ethnic demographics of a

¹⁹ Cantor Barnea interviewed by Amy Horowitz, Jerusalem. December 8, 1993.

²⁰ Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Ethnic Music, the Urban Area and Ethnomusicology," *Sociologist* 29.1, 1979, pp. 1-.21.

Jerusalem neighborhood. Yemenite and Kurdish vocal mellisma reflect the Middle Eastern Jewish market of Mahaneh Yehuda and the surrounding neighborhood of Nachlaot while Russian folksongs and symphonic compositions are more likely to be heard in Rehavia and the German Colony. Yet in recent years, Middle Eastern tunes that were excluded from the official Israeli airwaves have infiltrated not only these national channels but also the realms of Israeli folk dance. ²²In the Christian Palestinian context, traditional Palm Sunday liturgy is infused with lyrics about the intifada sung in Arabic rather than Greek, ²³and among Muslims new compositions written by a Muslim journalist Muhammad Abu Jareer, who works for Israeli television, are sung by local sheiks as they cross the Allenby Bridge on their way to Mecca. Some of the poems collected are infused with a call for peace and understanding between Palestinians and Israelis. ²⁴

Conflicting myths and internal cleavages within Israeli and Palestinian communities subvert any attempt to create a notion of internal unity. For example, tensions between the dozens of Israeli ethnic groups loosely divided between Middle Eastern and European communities exist, as do conflicts between Christian and Muslim Palestinian communities. These ethnographic realities or “narratives of blasphemy” contradict the official discourse aimed at presenting a unified front. We hoped that the unfolding ethnography, in the form of over one hundred audio and videotaped interviews, photographs, and field notes, might provide a cultural snapshot of community-based traditions in Jerusalem, a record of ordinary life in extraordinary times in a city of tremendous historical and contemporary significance. Moreover, this ethnography would need to be translated into a living Festival program in Washington DC.

²¹ Faisal Hussein and Ornan Yekutieli ordered these color combinations, signaling their national flags, at a meeting regarding the Jerusalem Project held at the American Colony.

²² See Ruth Freed’s interviews of Israeli music traditions in Jerusalem.

To Capture Jerusalem in Washington: From Ethnography to Production Realities

As we anticipated the necessities of site maps and technical production, the challenges intensified. How could we present the cultural traditions of living Jerusalem against the backdrop of such a symbol-laden city? How could we challenge the mythologies of Jerusalem without creating new ones in our representation? How could we bring the tastes and tones, the light and stone of Jerusalem into Washington's humid summer air and flat, grassy fields, surrounded by the Washington Monument, the U.S. Capital and other federal buildings? Presentation spaces and photo blow-ups could help set the environment; coffeehouses and courtyards, neighborhoods and gardens, suqs and shuks, flapping laundry draped across streets and sacred panoramas. We could only hint at touch and sight, ironwork and textile, balconies and windows, at the magnetic pull of ancient monuments.

As we began to grapple with contextualization, the reality of our limited budget created a Palestinian–Israeli alignment aimed at confronting the Smithsonian's increasing reduction of the project scope. Fundraising efforts taking place back in Washington were not going well and as with any Festival program, this meant a severe pruning back of initial intentions, a shift whose scale began to feel – in the Jerusalem light – like a misrepresentation of the research efforts and the city itself. Although the Festival philosophy is one that privileges and foregrounds the human performer over the physical landscape, Jerusalem could not be reduced to a few white tents and a couple of photo blow-ups. To illustrate this point, both Israeli and Palestinian research directors demonstrated their intended scale. To describe the size of photo blow ups necessary to represent

²³ Ibrahim Katan interviewed by Kamilya Jubran. Beit Jala, Dec. 12, 1992.

the Dome of the Rock, Kotel, and the Holy Sepulcher, the Palestinian research director, Suad Amiry, an architect, began pacing off an area – one roughly equal to almost the entire lobby of the American Colony.²⁵

Because of the increasing probability that political concerns about the project (articulated as a discourse of funding shortages) would jeopardize our project or at least greatly diminish its scale, we searched even more intensely for a means of motivating people to step out of the Washington atmosphere without attempting an “authentic representation” of place. Details gleaned from research data became symbolic and emotional indicators of place rather than place itself. Similarly, examples of religious rituals and ceremonies would suggest, rather than enact, the ceremonies themselves. Hebrew and Arabic would be represented on signs and in musical performances. We might hint at congested Jerusalem markets and alleys, since we could not replicate the crowded conditions.

Designing the Jerusalem Program Site: Proximities and Delineations

Outdistancing all concerns was how to translate our research into a Festival site design that would physically represent Jerusalem on the National Mall. We would have to deal with physical space, proximities, and delineations for communities that imagine Jerusalem quite differently. We had to design a site that simultaneously portrayed enough of a connection between East and West Jerusalem to represent the Israeli vision and enough distance and autonomy to represent the Palestinian image. The National Mall’s rectangular grassy plots are separated by wide pedestrian walkways which could create more distance between the East and

²⁴ Muhammad Abu Jareer interviewed by Albert Aghzarian and Amy Horowitz, Oct. 25, 1992.

West Jerusalem presentations than actually exists in some parts of Jerusalem itself. The symbolic outlines of joint and autonomous spaces and the question of shared spaces and transitional crossings required a creative blueprint.²⁶

The process of transforming our ethnographic research into a Festival site design required the involvement of Israeli municipal officials for whom the prospect of a fifty-fifty sharing of Jerusalem with their Palestinian adversaries on the National Mall in Washington was tantamount to metaphoric territorial concessions. At the same time, Palestinian officials had to swallow a non-autonomous proximity with their Israeli occupiers. There would be no way to construct a wall like that erected on the historic Ted Koppel Nightline segment, for unlike television viewers, Festival goers would not remain seated, they would flow between Palestinian and Israeli segments of a living, improvisational presentation.

We finally devised a “creative ambiguity”,²⁷ and with this compromise partitioned the Israeli and Palestinian presentations using a row of triangular photo panels. This gave the sense of separate spaces while allowing for the public to easily move through the two segments of the program. The photo installation allowed us to mount a kind of shifting, cultural kaleidoscope that would transport a festivalgoer from East to West Jerusalem. In theory, this device seemed to satisfy the contradictory needs for demarcation and spatial flow.

²⁵ The American Colony lobby is a grand parlor

²⁶ During the course of our research plans construction on Highway 1 were initiated. This road created a division between East and West Jerusalem far greater than the delineation we were planning for the National Mall.

²⁷ Ambiguity was a survival mechanism in designing a physical site. See discussion in Amy Horowitz, “To Capture Jerusalem: Ethnography on Disputed Ground” 1994 Unpublished Introductory Essay in (forthcoming) book on the Jerusalem project, edited by Amy Horowitz, Salim Tamari, and Galit Hasan Rokem, is tentatively titled *Living Jerusalem*. Also Galit Hasan Rokem, “Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue and the (Co?)Production of Culture: “Our Jerusalem” and Dialogue as Ethical Conduct: The Folk Festival That Was Not in

Shared Jerusalem: Ethnographic Intersections

Despite the national polarities that required this site design to establish simultaneous proximity and distance, the research itself was unearthing even more intriguing boundary crossings by members of the research teams and the participants being interviewed. Israeli and Palestinian researchers working on similar genres began to contact one another and share data that related to "the other side." While gathering research on Christian liturgy, one Palestinian researcher heard an Israeli television broadcast of Syrian Jewish music and discovered that Syrian Jewish and Christian liturgies share melodic territory. Elderly Arab and Jewish neighbors from pre-Israeli Palestinian quarters of the old-city contemplated coming to Washington to share their stories of life under Ottoman and British rule. Even Mayor Teddy Kollek and Faisal Huseinni agreed to share stories they learned from their grandparents at the Festival.

Generic, linguistic, and environmental intersections appeared as we studied the fieldwork reports. Palestinian and Israeli kitchens feature similar stuffed and preserved dishes made with squash, cabbage or olives. When conducting interviews with older Jewish women in the West Jerusalem neighborhood of Katamon Vav, the preferred language is Arabic. Fieldwork reports included mutual descriptions of the tension in conserving limited water supplies. Maintaining the fragile demarcation between nature and culture by fighting back the desert sands that infringe upon the courtyards and inner living spaces creates shared cleaning rituals. The market cries at the now transformed Damascus Gate and Mahene Yehuda share resonance that crosses national lines.

Terms of Engagement

As a program outline emerged, some terms that in Washington seemed to be the uncharged jargon of ethnographers were found to have loaded connotations in the context of Jerusalem. While we easily agreed on a name for the program, “Jerusalem, Yerushalyim, Al Quds,” the problem was how to depict this trinity of names graphically without evoking hierarchy and the political connotations that ordering these three words might signify. Language use was often a landmine that brought irony and comic relief. Eyebrows were raised when a Smithsonian staff member referred to our local Palestinian research partners as collaborators—a term with life or death consequences in Jerusalem's politically charged environment. When we spoke about representing traditional "occupations," the immediate question was, “Okay, can we bring the soldiers?”

Previously acceptable, otherwise-neutral Smithsonian design strategies were also found to have unexpected overtones. For example, the Smithsonian used cost-effective white tents as presentation spaces. Yet for both Palestinians and Israelis such tents register recent experiences as refugees and survivors and were antithetical to the stone edifices that characterize urban Jerusalem. With typical wit, one Palestinian researcher remarked:, "This project is a conspiracy to resettle Palestinian refugees on the National Mall.” At which point an Israeli researcher responded:, “We'll make an agreement with you! We'll all go settle on the Mall in Washington together, Israelis and Palestinians and give the land back to nature." Later, an Israeli official broke a tense moment by musically paraphrasing an American folk anthem to illustrate his discomfort with the amount of the territory being allotted for the Palestinian presentation. His rendition of Woody Guthrie's song went something like this:

“This land is my land, their land is my land.”

De-signing a Festival Program that Didn't Happen

Despite the relentless external factors that formed the backdrop for this project—stalled peace talks, Hamas deportation, and reciprocal outbreaks of violence—the project continued. The Festival program began taking place in our minds, but we were less certain that it would take place in Washington. Despite the ongoing challenges and the tenuous status of our project given the Washington fundraising crisis, massive hurdles had been overcome in less than one year. And Jerusalemites were ready -- craftspeople, musicians, cooks, storytellers and others had agreed to participate in the interview process and consider participation in a Festival program couched in vague and distant terms. Mayor Teddy Kollek and Faisal Hussein had both agreed to not only serve as functionaries but as festival storytellers. We had a program name that in its simplicity reflected the complexity of the city: Jerusalem, Yerushalyim, Al-Quds. From nearly two hundred interviews, we had identified over one hundred Jerusalemites who could share their skills and wisdom with Festival-goers. Notwithstanding fears that Jerusalem is too-much-at-stake to be represented, we had planned what we believed would be a thoughtful and provocative presentation.

But now the major obstacle loomed even larger. Tensions concerning the political stakes were couched in familiar economic terms. “Fundraising efforts in Washington had failed.” The complex political underpinnings that drive Middle East fundraising efforts buckled at the same time that a severe American economic recession and radical budget cuts to the Smithsonian decreased other potential sources. In addition, other political developments may have

contributed to the postponement. The National Holocaust Museum was set to open its doors in June at around the same time that the Festival program would have taken place. Also, unbeknownst to us, the summer of 1993 would feature a CNN soundbyte on the White House lawn, the historic handshake between Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat. One might speculate that these high visibility events may have in some way contributed to the erasure of a Festival program on Jerusalem to be held simultaneously in very close proximity.²⁸

The local Palestinian and Israeli teams accomplished their research mission and transformed the data into a blueprint for a living presentation. It was the U.S. partner who ultimately pulled the plug on actualizing the event. The Smithsonian Center staff's disappointment was minor in light of the impact on the Israeli and Palestinian research team members and potential Festival participants who had taken profound personal and professional risks to accomplish their work. A sense of abandonment directed at the Smithsonian accompanied the sense of accomplishment shared by Israeli and Palestinian researchers. They had managed to take Yehuda Amichai's words to heart and to foreground the human beings who shop and cook and create art and stories amid the mythic landscape of Jerusalem—the candle maker preparing for Holy Fire rather than the church officials, the plaster/stained glass artisan working on Al Aqsa rather than the glory of the Mosque itself,²⁹ the Yemenite Rabbi and his wife, who pray at a small neighborhood synagogue, rather than the Kotel³⁰—they had captured a

²⁸ Galit Hasan Rokem, "Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue and the (Co?)Production of Culture: "Our Jerusalem" and the Poetics and Politics of (Mis)Representation. (Unpublished Paper delivered at the International Center of Advanced Studies at NYU, Nov. 1997). A published Hebrew version: Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Representation and Dialogue in Folklore Research: The Poetics and Politics of an Unperformed Festival." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 19-20 (1997-1998):459-73. Of course an argument can also be made to the opposite effect that is that the events temporal and spatial proximity might have been seen in a positive light.

²⁹ Bashir Al-Mwaswas interviewed by Vera Tamari. Jerusalem, Nov. 8, 1992.

³⁰ Braha Capakh interviewed by Ruth Freed (check this), Jerusalem, Apr. 1, 1993.

city, filled, as Yehuda Amichai had said, with people hurrying home with their bags of groceries in hand.

As Jerusalem's status continues to play out in the Middle East Peace process, we cannot predict if and when we will succeed in presenting our ethnographic findings in Washington. Nevertheless, the engaged dialogue and research between the Israeli and Palestinian researchers and artists and Smithsonian staff generated a substantial collection of documentary materials. The Jerusalem Folklife Project Collection, housed at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, is comprised of print, audio and videocassettes, and photographic media. Copies of selected holdings have been deposited with Riwaq (an institution founded by Suad Amiry devoted to the preservation of traditional Palestinian architecture) in Ramallah and with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Among the materials is over forty hours of broadcast-quality video footage from which a thirty minute demonstration tape entitled *Jerusalem: Gates to the City*, directed by Dani Waschmann and Francois Abu Salem, has been produced and is currently being distributed.³¹ Israeli, Palestinian, and Smithsonian researchers continue work on a number of projects including a feature length documentary, a collection of essays by Israeli and Palestinian scholars, a virtual Jerusalem festival.

Collaboration has recently expanded to include the Ohio State University's Mershon Center for International Security Studies, Melton Center for Jewish Studies and Center for Folklore Studies. In 2001, I was appointed as a researcher in residence at the Mershon Center to generalize the model developed by the Jerusalem Project into a method for studying geographical locations that encompass cultures with conflicting values and national aspirations.

³¹ Galit Hasan Rokem correctly notes that this demo video is only tenuously related to the fieldwork data. Although senior members of the Israeli and Palestinian research teams served as research directors for the video, the Palestinian and Israeli video directors created the ultimate artistic statement in two parallel segments.

Contemporary maps are riddled with these complex boundary zones—Northern Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, Indonesia, the Indian subcontinent, Rwanda, Guatemala, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. These disputed cultural territories can be extended metaphorically to study the equally complex but not necessarily geographically-bounded arenas of race, gender, and sexual identity. The project will explore how life experiences shared by culture-bearing groups can give rise to meaningful human relationships and inform effective state and civil society policies.

Extending the Jerusalem Project model, scholars and artists from conflicted communities will plan and carry out ethnographic research on their contemporary cultural practices free of the temporal, spatial, conceptual, and technical limitations that confronted the Jerusalem researchers who hastily gathered data as a basis for a Festival program at the Smithsonian Institution. Without the pressures of a high profile Festival, the local leadership representing parallel and self-determined research teams will identify the parameters of the traditions to be included in their study, as well as in its scholarly and public products.

Under the auspices of the Ohio State University ethnography in disputed territories can be theorized. Is our ethnography reshaped when parallel insider/adversarial teams conduct the processes and analyze the products? How is the data affected by a methodology that calls for simultaneous self-determination and cooperation between adversaries engaged in the data collection itself? How does the presence of a US institutional partner alter the ethnography?

At this stage, five operational steps in ethnography of disputed territory can be summarized:

1. Focus communities in conflict on the rich contemporary traditions and cross-cultural bridges that have survived despite war, emigration, political turmoil, poverty, disease, and racism.
2. Sensitize communities to the ethics and aesthetics of their adversary's contemporary traditions through cross-cultural projects.
3. Create bodies of knowledge, information, and data that can be archived for use by and between adversarial communities.
4. Identify and establish a functional network of local practitioners to foster dialogue, understanding, and skill-sharing between adversarial groups.
5. Employ modern technology to accelerate the collection, analysis, and dissemination of knowledge designed to promote cross-cultural understanding.

The Jerusalem Project, and by extension the study of cultures in disputed territories, is concerned with the cultural practices of everyday life among the residents of contending communities, and the broader policies and actions they engender. It is true that society's problems are deeply rooted in tradition. It is also true that solutions to these problems can grow from the same place.

