Dialogue as Ethical Conduct: The Folk Festival That Was Not

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The present paper will expound the tale of a group of people who were motivated by an almost utopian belief in dialogue and co-operation as a way to promote peace in a war-ridden part of the world, Palestine-Israel. This is the narrative on an experiment in which a specific topography of historical memory was attempted, memory of a past that proved to be the memory of an unattained, and in my worst nightmares, maybe an unattainable future. But being a tale of a failure, and a metonymy of a still grander failure, it still witnesses to the untiring hope of some human beings to create together, to live together and even to study folklore together.[1]

I shall here attempt to describe and analyse the collective engagement with the problematic of representing my home city, Jerusalem, in which I took part during the years 1992–3. The context of the attempt was a fieldwork project on the folklore and folklife of Jerusalemites, contracted by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, with the intention of including Jerusalem as an theme on the Mall of the American capital in the summer of 1993, as part and parcel of the annual American Folklife Festival initiated and carried out by the Institution. The festival begins every year at the end of June and culminates after two weeks approximately in the United States Independence Day festivities of 4 July. The two other themes planned for the festival of 1993 were the Cajun culture of the south of the United States, and North American social dancing. Both other projects were thus, from a United States perspective, national; we represented the international, so to say.

Naturally the project has to be viewed in the context of the political realities of the period, prior to the recognition of the national and political rights of the Palestinians by Israel. I shall elaborate on this theme further on, but it is necessary to mention here that the possibility for the Palestinians to fully express their cultural, political, economic and human rights in Jerusalem has been questioned and denied by most Israeli governments since 1967. The Israelis, on the other hand, have traumatic memories from the period between 1948 and 1967, when the city was partitioned and they were denied access to the Western Wall, the Jewish

[1] The first version of this paper was read at the XII World Congress of Jewish Studies in the summer of 1997. A preliminary English version was presented at the International Center of Advanced Studies at New York University, in November 1997, and a longer version at the École des Hautes Études des Sciences Sociales in February 1998. A Hebrew version was published under the title “Representation and Dialogue in Folklore Research: The Poetics and Politics of an Unperformed Festival”, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* XIX–XX (1997–8), 459–73. The present version was enriched by the discussions at the workshop on Folklore and Ethics convened by Lauri Honko in Turku.

Quarter of the Old City and the cemetery on the Mount of Olives. The “Jerusalem Question” is generally admitted to constitute one of the most difficult issues of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. “Two capitals for Two States” has thus served as a slogan for the radical peace movements on both sides, whereas the fundamentalist-nationalist powers on both sides claim sole sovereignty for themselves for the whole city. Then again “United Jerusalem” under Israeli sovereignty has become an almost self evident state for most mainstream Israeli politicians and citizens. These consequential circumstances, as well as the internationally

shared tradition regarding the historical, religious and cultural status of Jerusalem, proved to be fatal for the project which I want to discuss and analyze.

"Let's bring Jerusalem to the American Folklife Festival"

"Everyone has a city called Jerusalem" is a line in an Israeli popular song in Hebrew. The sentiment expressed by that sentence is borne out by millions of people of the three monotheistic faiths. That already, without mentioning any further complexities, presents an almost insurmountable difficulty facing any project designed to create representations of Jerusalem.[2]

This is true especially if the representational mode in question involves visual and concrete elements of representation, which by necessity fix general perceptions in specific, more clear-cut images. When a specific exhibition is planned the difficulty emanates from at least two main sources: the great number of images and fantasies of the city accumulated in the minds of those whose task it is to produce the representation – and the multitude of such images which the authors of the project assume the expected audiences to have.

I shall remove some suspense from this presentation by mentioning now (what has been hinted in the article's title) that Jerusalem was not included as a theme at the American Folklife Festival in the summer of 1993. The official reason given for that absence to the participants of the fieldwork teams and their directors was the lack of budget. A less explicit but not less powerful motive for the cancellation may have been another production which materialised in the same year at another location in Washington, DC: the signing of the agreement between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin on 13 September 1993 on the lawn of the White House towards peace and partition of the land west of the River Jordan between Palestinians and Israelis, that has become known as the Oslo agreement.

From what we know today it becomes clear that the unequivocal visual representation of Jerusalem as the city of two national cultures, which was supposed to become the result of the festival production, was hardly compatible with the "creative ambiguity" which was the stylistic hallmark of the sensational diplomatic achievement of the Oslo text. At least, there must have been a number of influential individuals who thought that the two were incompatible. The conceptual clash between "Jerusalem", the item visually and officially exhibited

2 The descriptive and historical material about this subject is vast. With reference to Jewish culture, see for example Sabar (1993); see also Luz (2004).

in the open air for millions of visitors, and the city itself that constituted the hot potato of the Oslo accords, the problem whose solution was postponed to an undefined (eschatological?) future, was no doubt one of the reasons for the cancellation of the event at that specific point in time.

But here I have anticipated the then still future developments too fast. Let us return to the preparatory stages of the non-existing festival item itself and to the intellectual, political and socio-cultural premises of the project. The intellectual, discursive and performative domain in which the above mentioned events took place is what is usually termed "applied folklore". The relationship between applied folklore and the study of folklore has been much debated by the practitioners of both, who sometimes may be the same people, and the dichotomy itself has been rightly deconstructed (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988). For the present discussion it is however important to point out that the context of applied folklore tends to highlight the socio-political aspects of the material and renders those aspects especially visible.

Unlike the American items of the festival, the "international" ones require fieldwork carried out by local, i.e. non-United States, teams as well as co-ordinating scholars who are familiar with the local scene.[3] The social, political and cultural scene of Jerusalem – one city populated by two nationalities and three religions, each shaping a continuous historical as well as metaphysical narrative in which it and only it is positioned as the legitimate subject with title to ownership of the city – required a team representing all the above mentioned groups working in a spirit that could balance the dominant conflicting demands for exclusive subjectivity and ownership with recognition of the subjectivity of the other. The nature of the material that was studied in the project provided a fruitful ground for pluralism and tolerance since it calls for the sharing of the most intimate knowledge of the inner soul of one's own culture in its least presumptuous articulations in folk culture. Folklore has a strong potential to voice the anti-hierarchical and multicultural registers of cultures. It tends to resist canonisation and institutionalisation, and time and again it challenges the adamant efforts made by rulers – the less tolerant the ruler the firmer the effort – to harness it to various ideological causes.

For our present purpose it is necessary to describe the participants in the project in terms of their national as well as institutional identities. The initiator of the project, the Smithsonian Institution, was embodied in a number of individuals and administrative functions and levels: a leading executive of the institution, the director of the festival and its producer. All these visited Jerusalem in order to advise the leadership of the local research teams and to be advised by them. Two designers of the festival also visited the city in order to receive impressions about the physical and visual nature of the "item".

The Palestinian research team, which operated in parallel and in co-operation with the Israeli team, worked under the leadership of Suad El-Amiri, then professor of architecture at Bir-Zeit University, founder and then director of the

[3] During Folklore Festivals celebrated in other years, India, Indonesia and Japan were among the ones which did materialise.

Riwaq Institute for Palestinian vernacular architecture and arts. In addition to her professional credentials Prof. El-Amiri was also a central figure in Palestinian cultural life as well as politics. As a member of the Palestinian delegation to the official bilateral negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel, which took place in Washington (parallel to the secret Oslo negotiations), she spent several months in the United States' capital approximately in the same period as our project was under gestation. When the Palestinian National Authority was established she served a short term as director general of the Palestinian ministry of culture.

I assume that I was initially invited to lead the Israeli research team on the basis of professional criteria. My work in that position would, however, have been quite impossible were it not for my experience in the peace movement, especially the feminist section of the peace movement, where we trained ourselves in joint tactics of non-violent struggle as part of the culture of dialogue which we had been developing between Palestinians and Israelis for some years.

The Israeli team worked in various forms of consultation with the Municipality of Jerusalem, then led by Mayor Teddy Kollek. Although the Palestinians did not yet have a parallel official institution, the senior delegation of the Smithsonian Institution met with both Palestinian and Israeli official representatives, including Mayor Kollek and the late Palestinian leader Feisal Husseini – who emerged as the Palestinian peer of the mayor.

Although the political leaderships on both sides never met on this issue, there was a deep and continuous interaction between the Palestinian and Israeli research directors, professor El-Amiri and myself, based on former relations of trust and appreciation acquired in the common Palestinian-Israeli struggle for peace. Fieldworkers from both sides rarely met, if at all.

Acknowledging the intricacy of the project the Smithsonian Institution appointed a special curator, ethno-musicologist Dr Amy Horowitz (later a producer of "Folkways" records at the same institution), who was not only expert in one of the fields especially privileged by the festival organisers but also professionally and socially well connected in both of the researched communities.

The research teams included, in addition, a co-ordinator on each side and specialists of specific sub-fields of folklore such as narrative, dance, song, arts and crafts, religious folklore, as well as expertise on specific ethnic, religious or local groups. About ten fieldworkers carried out the actual interviewing and documentation on the Israeli side and about the same number among the Palestinians; the interviewees counted a couple of hundred. The objective of the fieldwork was to locate the best makers and performers of traditional creative and expressive culture in the city. From those performers and makers we were to select the ones who would according to our assessment make the best contribution in the actual performance and exhibition slots of the festival.

The very need to launch a project of such dimensions discloses the fact that neither of the researched communities had recourse to a satisfactory collection or database of the materials from which the necessary knowledge could be retrieved, although there were partial archives for some of the relevant areas. As a by-product of the research, whose primary objective was the preparation of materials
for the festival, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington now houses the original videotapes, audio-tapes, photographs, slides – all catalogued – of both Palestinian and Israeli folklore in Jerusalem. Copies have separately been made for each group. The Israeli collection can be consulted at the Folklore Research Center at the Hebrew University, the Palestinian collection at the above mentioned Riwaq Institute in Ramallah-Elbireh.

The festival within the festival: the poetics of celebration

In the remaining part of the article I shall highlight the processes from the perspective best known to me, namely as seen through the work of the Israeli team. The search, review and documentation activities carried out by the team addressed the following fields: year-cycle holidays, life-cycle rituals, folk medicine, folk narratives, dance and song (both religious and secular), foodways, arts and crafts pottery, embroidery, paper cutting, etc. – and specific lore and customs of the various Jewish ethnic groups residing in the city (such as Yemenite, Sephardic, Ethiopian, Kurdish, Ashkenazic and Iranian Jews). We interviewed caretakers of some of the numerous sacred sites and sanctuaries, the visitors of the same, among them being the Western Wall (Ha-Kotel), King David's tomb, Yad va-Shem memorial of the Holocaust. We documented activities there and in some other culturally distinctive spaces such as the Midrehov (Ben Yehuda) mall, the Jewish quarter of the Old City, Mahane Yehuda produce and food market, Cafe Ta'amon (a midtown hangout for lefties and artists) and the Talitha Qumi rendezvous (the name stems from a New Testament narrative, Mark 5: 41). Cooking and foodways were sampled and recorded from orally transmitted recipes as well as actual meals.

Initially the declared foci of interest of the festival – music, arts and crafts, occupational folklore and foodways (see Kurin 1989; Cantwell 1991; Bauman, Swain and Carpenter 1992; Sommers 1996) – were sought out for documentation. On the other hand, throughout the fieldwork new knowledge communicated by our sources of information was integrated in the conceptual profile delineating the contours of Jewish folk culture in Jerusalem, thus enriching and diversifying – and sometimes unsettling – our initial conceptions.

Questions about the relationship between ethnic and national identity and its location, or in other words "the location of culture" (Bhabha 1994), were constantly raised. In order to illuminate aspects of memory encoded in space and objects as it was formed in the project, I would like to concentrate on one theme of folklife in which those terms become especially relevant: the celebration of the Feast of the Tabernacles – Sukkot – in Jerusalem.

Holidays were a natural part of the research agenda of the preparations for the festival, and Sukkot with its rich visual manifestations was an obvious favourite among holidays, second only maybe to the carnival of Purim. The Feast of the Tabernacles is one of three holidays of the Jewish calendar which were celebrated with pilgrimage to Jerusalem during periods when the Temples of Salomon and Herod existed in the city. The traditional etymology of the name of the holiday derives it from a place where the Israelites halted during their wanderings in the desert (Numbers 33: 6).[4] The holiday serves to commemorate the wandering in the desert embodied in the commandment to erect tabernacles (Leviticus 23: 42), temporary constructions, covered only with roofs made of branches or reeds.[5]

Note that Sukkot thematises the concept of the Folklife Festival itself: both are links in the year cycle; moreover, both involve the erecting, and later the dismantling, of temporary structures, so that the duration of the event parallels exactly the life span of the construction. During Sukkot and the Folklife Festival the temporary structures are designated semiotically complex symbolical roles by which they are made to refer to identity as historically constructed. As mentioned above, Sukkot refers both to the ephemeral and nomadic aspect of existence by commemorating the tabernacles or huts which were the abodes of the Israelites during their wanderings in the desert, and paradoxically also the most idealised periods of stable nationhood in the past, those associated with the Temples (I and II) in Jerusalem, being one of the three annual feasts of pilgrimage to the city.

Likewise music, arts and crafts and also foodways dominate the scenes of both Sukkot and the Folklife Festival. Although these components are partly archetypal of any celebration, there are enough signs to single out these two – the Folklife Festival and Sukkot – for a specific comparison, the main ones being the concrete occupation with designing the locus and construction of temporary buildings. Those two signs also enter a complex dynamics of interpretation *vis-à-vis* the status of Jerusalem as locus of "eternity" and the claim of a continuous relationship between the city and Jewish national identity. The selections made in the concrete means of representation in each case, i.e. the festival and Sukkot respectively, may be considered as specific models of constructing a geography of historical memory as motivated by culture and ideology.

The documentation regarding Sukkot produced in the research includes a videotape of two markets where four kinds of symbolical plants employed in the synagogue ritual of the holiday (myrtle, willow, palm and citron) are purchased before the holiday itself (the markets of Mahane Yehuda and Mea Shearim); audio recordings of informants, some of whom are owners of Sukkot that have been visually documented while others have been interviewed about the building of the *sukka* and its decoration; a videotape of the annual reception of the Mayor at the Citadel ("David's Tower").

When the field notes were analysed the conflicting meanings of Sukkot, i.e. ephemerality and eternality, emerged as semiotically intersecting. Many informants highlighted in their discourses the special characteristics of the Jerusalem tabernacles (one *sukka* many *sukkot*) as local phenomena. On the other hand some of the contradictions are more generally Israeli and stem from the clash between the historical nomadic ideal reflected in the customs of the holiday

4 The initial mention of the name in the Bible occurs after the brothers Esau and Jacob part ways, and Jacob builds a hut (Hebrew *sukka*) and names the place after it. After that he builds an altar in Shalem, the name of the Jebusite city which David turned into his capital, Jerusalem (Genesis 33: 17–20).

5 The term *Sukka* is employed by several prophets as a poetic name for Jerusalem, e.g. Isaiah 1: 8; Amos 9: 11.

and the ideological weight of stability and settling down associated with the Zionist ideology of Jewish repatriation.

Portions of the fieldwork inquiry addressed the interaction between the traditions of the feast and the urban environment. The results included the documentation of advertising “Eternal Sukka” (usually an aluminium construction) on one hand and advertising the above mentioned emblematic plants of the festival alongside the season’s sales of shoes and clothing. The concept of an eternal *sukka* notably constitutes yet another stark contradiction of the original idea of erecting temporary buildings.

However, none of our informants introduced any of the messianic associations connected to the holiday in ancient sources, such as the one provided by the prophet “I shall raise the fallen tabernacle of David” (Amos 9: 11), and nobody seemed to know about the ancient custom “to circle around the Mount of Olives on Hosha’na Rabba” (the last day of Sukkot; see Gliss 1994: 196),[6] which implies the messianic belief that the future resurrection will start on the Mount of Olives. But ultra-orthodox informants were careful to mention that repentance of the sins committed during the former year is possible as late as the last day of Sukkot.

The interviews tell us about the characteristics of a *sukka* built in Jerusalem: it is made of simple materials, usually white sheets of cloth (according to one informant the practical motivation of economy was augmented by a symbolical one, “purity”). *Sukkas* which were made of other materials, such as blue or black velvet, were described as uncharacteristic or stemming from the fact that the builder had moved in from another town. The characteristic, simple Jerusalem *sukka* thus embodies the claim to a continuous Jewish Jerusalemite identity.

The principle of austere simplicity was dialectically adjusted to other aesthetic principles, which have traditionally gained religious weight: *hiddur mitsva*, the beautification of the commandment, and *noy sukka* the beauty of the *sukka*. Standard decorative elements included portraits of the *ushpizin*, the patriarchs and other venerated biblical figures (given a mystical, kabbalistic meaning by one of the informants); symbols of the blessing of the land such as the seven species of produce (wheat, corn, olive, date-palm, pomegranate, fig and vine) and the four species typical of Sukkot mentioned above;[7] decorated verses from the Bible; and the most traditional decorations, paper chains and paper flowers, *reyzelekh* (small roses in Yiddish). Alongside these there were numerous modern national symbols such as the flag and the declaration of independence of the state of Israel, photographs of landscapes from all over the country, as well as flowers and animals. Thus there was a double exposition: the symbols of wandering and of the continuous traditions brought from the diaspora were exhibited alongside signs of national independence and appropriation of the land. A specific group identity was revealed through the use of *glatt-shakh*, ultra-kosher reeds, so to say, to create

6 They were also oblivious of the characteristic Jerusalem custom of women to bless the ritual palm leaves (*lulav*); blessing is otherwise restricted to male practice, as in the blessing of the other three symbolical plants (Gliss 1994: 194).

7 The contradiction between eternal and ephemeral also appears in the plastic copies of the above mentioned four and seven species of produce, which we did not document in our fieldwork, but which have since become very popular on the market.

the typical roof which has to be made of branches. Another informant stated emphatically that his father, on the contrary, likes to see something "live" in the *sukka* and therefore opts for green branches and "not mere planks as those in Mea Shearim" (the ultra-orthodox neighbourhood).

One *sukka* builder, Mr Weinberg from Mea Shearim (one of our "five-star" candidates for the Folklife Festival), and his *sukka* deserve special attention. The elaborate decorations of this *sukka* earn him every year a host of visitors, who have made the planning of a special visitors' schedule necessary. Weinberg's *sukka* thus effectively blends aspects of private and public space, contrary to the other *sukkas* (except of course the mayor's) which constitute an extension of private space to what usually is public sphere.[8] The blending of types of spaces is also expressed by the demand that the *sukka* has to have a bare roof so that the stars can be seen through the branches. This mixture of outdoors and indoors adds a cosmological axis to the *sukka* linking it with heaven. The extension of the private sphere into public space is likewise characteristic of the Folklife Festival.[9] Moreover, the tension between private and public is so much more emphasised when the artisans and performers "do their thing" from home at the festival than with even the most public versions of Sukkot.

The Weinberg *sukka* is decorated with emblems of the twelve tribes of Israel hammered in copper, emblems representing each month of the Hebrew calendar, a glass box for each *ushpiz* (mythical guest at the *sukka*), butterflies and birds (which both have a special significance related to the feast according to the proprietor). When asked about his prospective participation in the festival in Washington, Mr Weinberg was unequivocal in stating that he would absolutely not transport any of his regular decorations, but he was ready to prepare new decorations especially for the Folklife Festival. He was then offered the opportunity to make decorations on site and to sell them in the context of the event. Some other informants, especially women, suggested that they could communicate with the visitors at the festival by teaching them the art of paper-cuts and other paper decorations such as multi-coloured chains and New Year cards.

The city within the city: the politics of (mis)representation

My purpose in presenting all this material about Sukkot in Jerusalem was not primarily to provide a mass of ethnographic information, but rather to analyse it in order to understand the intellectual and creative operation that was needed to transform that ethnography, and others like it, into the exhibition and performative event of the item "Jerusalem" at the Folklife Festival. In other words: how were we to represent Sukkot, to represent the Sukkot of Jerusalem, to represent Jerusalem?

Let us return to the initial grouping of the participants in the research preparing the materials for the festival. The folklorists among us, irrespective of

8 Additional cases of semi-public or public *sukkas* are those erected in synagogues and hotels.

9 Bauman, Swain and Carpenter (1992: 27–38) deal with complex examples of framing with reference to the same issue.

nationality or gender, entered the research guided by our professional conceptualisation of folklore and folk culture as collective, artistic and performed in small groups. Those small groups are usually of a continuous character, such as family or neighbourhood. Folklore, according to the folklorists, embodies a dynamic interaction between tradition and innovation, and it is usually transmitted orally and in non-canonised, uninstitutionalised modes. Consequently we tended to decline the inclusion in our representation of Jerusalem's folk cultures those forms of traditional expressive culture which had been co-opted by established and elite cultural institutions, such as actors functioning as story-tellers. The municipal administrators on the other hand were worried about the trivial and "lowly" image of the city that the selection of our informants was bound to create. After some discussions we all agreed to exclude a healer who cured jaundice by attaching a pigeon's anus to the navel of the patient as a representative of the folk culture of Jerusalem.[10] On the other hand the suggestion of the deputy director of the culture department of the municipality of sending a small chamber-music orchestra – to represent "his Jerusalem" at the festival – was absolutely unthinkable to us folklorists.

The interface between the local Israeli folklorists and the representatives of the Smithsonian Institution, most of whom were professional folklorists, was occasionally no less complicated than our relations with the municipal administrators. The folk-dance groups – a very popular Israeli pastime – were rejected as possible items for the festival by the more theoretically oriented of the Smithsonian folklorists (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 71). They labelled it "revivalism" which in their terminology stands in stark contrast to "folklife". I find it especially intriguing in this context that the metaphorical language used in both cases to make a value judgement refers to life. It is, I think, a sign of the vital importance of the issue itself. The Israeli team tended to view the decision as based on a lack of understanding of the role of "invented traditions" in the actual folklife of the country (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983).[11]

It is possible to analyse the difference between the approach of the municipal cultural administrators and the folklorists through the pair of concepts on which Stephen Greenblatt (1990) has based his analysis of exhibiting culture, whether art or ethnography: *wonder* and *resonance*. Whereas the officials from the municipality seemed to strive for the distanced and admiring effect of wonder, the folklorists' objective seemed to lean towards the creating of a more emphatic and familiarising effect of resonance. The same opposition may also be interpreted as the preference for the culturally specific and unique by the former (although chamber music is not exactly unique) and the culturally comparable and universal by the latter.

One of the more hyperbolic suggestions which originated in one of the municipal museums of the city was the idea of transporting an enormous stone block from "The Gate of Hulda", which had earlier been exhibited in Toledo, to

[10] The fact itself is not uninteresting and the man was widely documented and interviewed in a local newspaper.

[11] Briggs (1993) has rightly criticised the discarding of "invented traditions" as any more false than all other traditions that are also constructed.

the Washington Mall. The idea signalled a design of folk culture which would contract the diachronic aspect of the archaeological past into the concept of present folklife. The status of archaeology in shaping national identity in Israel does indeed call for such contraction (cf. Zerubavel 1995; El-Haj 2001). The representatives of the Smithsonian Institution found it

necessary to decline the offer due to the high costs of the transportation. The same line of argument was to reappear in the final decision not to produce the whole of Jerusalem.
The opposition of wonder and resonance may be formulated in yet another theoretical context. Whereas folklife is understood to be an inherent part of the practice of everyday life (de Certeau 1984; see also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 216), Jerusalem on the other hand is experienced on many levels as uplifted from the sphere of quotidian life. The cultural tradition of heavenly Jerusalem (Aptowitzer 1931: 137–53, 257–87), which does not seem to impress the municipality when it comes to the care of everyday hygiene and cleanliness of the city, serves as a serious barrier to conflating the image of the holy city with the creativity of ordinary people.
The negotiations between the Palestinian and the Israeli research teams moved in complex circles touching questions of belonging, identity, lawful claim, inherited ownership, continuity, uniqueness of sentiments – of each of the national entities represented. One has to keep in mind that whereas mutual recognition was not yet achieved on the political level, the project itself could not exist unless based on such an assumption. It therefore presented on one hand a subversive view *vis-à-vis* prevailing ideology, but in retrospect it may be seen as one of the many minor arenas on which the mutual recognition was being crafted at the time. The most sensitive question, Jerusalem – which is still pending between Israelis and Palestinians – had to be solved, at least on the level of representation.
One of the more sensitive issues of the political symbolism of representation in this case was naturally the very design of the "geography of identity" through which the ethnographic material was to be exhibited, in other words, how to divide the actual area assigned to this project. Even the question of whether it was finally one project or two projects was left hovering by naming the enterprise Yerushalayim–Alquds–Jerusalem (I hope I am not violating the actual order; if I remember well, chronology determined the above mentioned order). But whereas texts, even of internationally binding agreements, may be helped (or are they in the long run?) by "creative ambiguity", the division of an area allows for no such intricate operations. This also seems to be true of the openness of interpretation with regard to verbal texts, in contrast to more restrictions put on the freedom of interpretation of visual representations. The question of the demarcation, not to say borderline, between the two parts of the exhibition naturally created a symbolical (and real) crisis. Some of the Israeli representatives of the municipality of "United Jerusalem" found even the question offensive, but finally understood that on the practical level it had to be solved. That was one of those moments when one hoped that the implications of the question of representation would echo on the level of political decisions. One of the more amusing solutions that at least for one moment was able to release a sigh of relief from all participants in the discussion was to substitute the straight line of demarcation with a zigzag line. It

was clear that on the level of representation a straight line signified more of a "border" than the irregular design that may have been reminiscent of "natural" rather than "political" borders (which tend to be straighter lines on actual maps). Another suggestion that gained consensus on all sides was to reproduce in "reality" (that is, in the representation on the Mall) the actual map of Jerusalem neighbourhoods as they are distributed between different identities.
Another interactive pattern in the research process through which political facts resonated was the status of the American colleagues, the creators and hosts of the American Folklife Festival, in relationship to the "locals". The status of the United States in the culture of the world in general and especially in the eastern part of the Mediterranean was reproduced in the

power and influence relations in the research. The imbalances became stronger the closer our discussions came to actual questions of production, whereas in general theoretical or material-centred discussions the local scholars often emerged as the specialists. The Israelis and the Palestinians were equally interested in the representation of "our" culture. Some of the discussions on the common semiotics of stuffed vegetables, or the eternally trivial question "whose is the falafel?" returned again and again. The Americans on the other hand were concerned with integrating "us" in an event named "American Folklife Festival", uncannily reminiscent of the *Pax Americana*, in whose embrace our peoples strove to land, literally in peace.

The possibility of including in the American Folklife Festival not only Jerusalem, but India, Indonesia, the Czech Republic and other countries as well (not all in the same year), seemed to have a double connotation. On one hand it revealed a process of searching for "roots" in a country which stresses the positive value of its being an immigrants' society (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 177–200). The participation of Americans whose origins are in the exhibited countries certainly reinforced that impression. On the other hand there was also a clear awareness shared by all the participants that the situation mirrored the hegemonic status, political but also cultural, of the United States in the world. The hegemonic status, and the fact that the representation was to take place on American turf (literally, again) addressing an American audience (notwithstanding the immense variation, ethnic and other, within it) demanded processes of "cultural translation" (Asad 1986), which from the point of view of the "local" researchers were not infrequently felt as distortions.

Representation operates by metonymy, synecdoche and metaphor. In the case dealt with here the spatial representation of historical memory seems to evolve in the specific figure which has been defined by some French narratologists (borrowing André Gide's use of the term) as *mise en abyme* (Dällenbach 1977; Ron 1987). This figure, literally "set on the abyss", is described as constituting a smaller version of the whole work of art or literature embedded in the whole. The exact degree of the likeness between the whole and its minimised version has been subject to debate, which we need not recall here. I would like to suggest that the attempt to represent one (two?) capital(s), Jerusalem, at the heart of another, Washington, constitutes a complex case of *mise en abyme*. The theoretical insights concerning the narratological figure may thus contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanism of representation of a city within a city. It may
be of value to recall that both cities claim the role of centre of the world.[12] The main theorist of the figure, Lucien Dällenbach, has formulated the impact of the figure as follows: "The *mise-en-abyme* emerges suddenly as the very opposite of the dominant interpretation [of the text] and as such it serves as a powerful means of introducing contradiction into the heart of the reading process" (Dällenbach 1977).

We may not have to accept Dällenbach's premise for every case of *mise en abyme* in order to recognise its applicability to the present argument. The project in which Jewish and Arabic folk culture and folk life in Jerusalem were studied in a dialogical attitude in order to accomplish their representation in Washington illuminated the complex urban situation, as I have tried to show, by multiple and dialectical interpretations of each position within that situation. These multiple interpretations certainly served to contradict and subvert some of the dominant interpretations of the period with regard to the position of Palestinians and Israelis in the city. The research may thus be evaluated as a minor part of the public peace process which for a while paralleled the political peace process – yet another *mise en abyme* (Saunders 1985). Perhaps the internal contradiction, with its creative and restorative potentials, presented itself as a threat to the political and economical powers which were

supposed to sustain its concrete materialisation. The model of sharing Jerusalem, in the heart of Washington – thus projecting the possibility of that sharing to the *mise en abyme* itself[13] – was again postponed.

The years since then have not brought many positive developments, and in order to believe that the deferment is not to an eschatological future undeterred hope is necessary. A physical barrier between parts of the city is erected, a wall produced by fear, suspicion and violence. One group's belief that without the wall the others will inflict terror on them wreaks chaos on the lives of those who cannot reach their schools, hospitals, relatives, sacred sites. A phantom image of the divided city of the past reconstructs the city as its own nightmare, *mise en abyme*, set in an abyss.

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12 The concept is developed from an American perspective with specific reference to Jerusalem, by Stephen Greenblatt (1991).

13 A rabbinic *Midrash* describes the erection of the Temple of Solomon on an abyss! Palestinian Talmud, tractate Sanhedrin ch. 10, paragraph 2; Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Sukka* f. 53a-b, and other parallels

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