

*I received 1000,000 tulip bulbs,
and I'm planting them equally
on the two sides of the city.
Teddy Kollek (Mayor of
Jerusalem, 1965-1993)*

*This [new peddlers and farmers
market at Bab al-Amud] is a
very important effort because
these peddlers were sitting
across Sultan Sulayman Street
and near the Damascus Gate,
and it was very inconvenient for
everyone. Now its very
convenient for shoppers and
vendors and it opens up the
entire Sultan Sulayman and
Salah ad-Din Streets for the free
movement of people on the
sidewalk and for cars in the
streets. Ehud Olmert (Mayor of
Jerusalem, 1993-present)*

martina rieber

***The Beautification of
al-Quds?***

At the beginning of 1998 the municipality of Jerusalem distributed a brochure in Arabic to residents of East Jerusalem, titled *Development and Building in East Jerusalem*, detailing the municipality's infrastructural investment in the eastern parts of the city: 130 million Israeli Shekels worth of road work, a kindergarten in Isawiyya, a new school for girls in Al-Thuri, a peddler's market at Bab al-Amud and so forth. The public relations campaign is the product of two

related desires: (a) to thwart the mounting criticisms in the fall and winter of 1997 that the municipality is setting excessively high tax rates for the east while providing little or no municipal services and (b) to exhibit the municipality's policy of "reinforc [ing its] sovereignty" over the area by meticulously describing every meter of asphalt laid in East Jerusalem in 1997.

The post-1967 discourse of Jerusalem as a "united city" was designed and dominated by the twenty-eight-year long reign of the Kollek municipal administration. With the launching of a successful Likud challenge in 1993, the nature of the relationship between the two parts became the subject of public re-examination. Upon victory, Ehud Olmert gave an interview in which he outlined his agenda for East Jerusalem: expanding Jewish residential areas, and improving municipal services in the city's Palestinian neighborhoods. Commenting upon the "dirty roads" in the eastern half of the city, the new mayor promised to increase its share of the municipal budget, and to provide equal access to health care, education, garbage collection and road construction.²⁶ However, the

priority given to the dissolution of the Shu'fat refugee camp, the only refugee camp located within the municipal boundaries, encodes the interpretative framework that the current municipality seeks to valorize. Home to more than 8,000 people, the camp has been a source of frustration for both the Kollek and Olmert municipal administrations. The existence of Shu'fat refugee camp inescapably implicates the Israeli municipal administration in a complex set of relations of domination. The desire to re-position these relations by way of a minority discourse - replace the refugee camp with a public housing project - by the "liberal" and "rightist" successive municipal administrations has remained unsuccessful.

In contradistinction to the concrete reality represented by the Shu'fat refugee camp, other aspects of Palestinian presence have been more permeable to the transformation into minority discourse. While actively dis-crediting most forms of community-generated expression throughout 1997, the municipality has variously sought to articulate - and thus contain - expressions of Palestinian identity, for instance by hosting and orchestrating an Arab Culture Week in an East Jerusalem hotel or supporting an exhibition of

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²⁶ *al-Quds*, November 11, 1993.

Palestinian material culture in West Jerusalem.

A closer look at one of these events is instructive. In fall 1997, Ehud Olmert opened an exhibit titled *Palestinian Costumes: Embroidery in a Rainbow of Colors* at the L.A.Mayer Museum for Islamic Art. The owner of the collection, Manuel Kleidmann, expressed “the sincere belief that this gesture is a just one to promote peace and drive people toward mutual respect.” The exhibition traced the diversity of dress making traditions in Palestinian villages between 1850-1950. This art form, the catalogue informs, was animated by two different historical impulses:

The monotheist nomadic origins of this traditional art, its unique abstract pattern and sense of composition, as well as its Syrian, Greek, Byzantine and African influences, are essential to reveal the mythologies that impregnated this region. [...] But it is also an intimate art of the eastern Mediterranean, that reflects sincere love of the land and for the life of the people.”

While drawing on the syncretic elements of “Mediterranean culture,” the exhibition does not preclude a sensitivity to the local conditions in which these clothing items were

produced. It locates the designs within standard notions of Palestinian geographical and cultural diversity (i.e. urban/rural/bedouin; north/south/central), drawing a picture of a rich and colorful cultural past, but one that celebrates “Arab” village life outside its Palestinian context.

The problem here lies with ways in which this exhibition negotiates the terrain of history and memory. The collection enables (though this not by any means need be exclusive) an aestetized and ethnographized reading of Palestinian geography and material history. The celebration of a history in which “the patterns and decorative motifs [...] were exclusively the language [Arab women] used to express themselves and their aspirations” does not raise too many troubling questions. It provides a comfortable space from which the municipality can partake in and construct a minority discourse.

The print catalogue gives perfunctory recognition of the origins of the collection – “daily researches in villages and refugee camps” – yet refuses to engage with the travel of these material artifacts. Unlike other “native art” circuits in which minority discourse is secured, there is an anxiety that permeates the *Palestinian Costumes* exhibition. In addition to the questions that cannot be addressed (e.g. what kinds of

dialogues are possibly enabled in an exhibition of Palestinian material culture purchased in Palestinian refugee camps and exhibited in the halls of an exclusive Jewish West Jerusalem museum?), the historical enframing of the exhibit within the catalogue suggests a *reigning in* of the “potential” questions that the dresses could raise. The catalogue provides a popular two-paragraph rendering of a few thousand years of history in a section titled, *Palestine as Defined in Geographical and Historical Terms*. Completely out of place and unconnected to anything else, its main function seems to be to remind the reader that “the name “Palestine” was used in an effort by the Roman authorities to wipe out all memory of independent Judea.”

Certain histories and memories, then, that are permeable to a broader notion of minority discourse can find a voice within current municipal politics. Yet, those that cannot possibly be contained within what in effect are imperializing dynamics, such as attempts to celebrate diverse Palestinian organizational histories at Hakawati theatre, the municipality dis-articulates as “authentic” memory or history and relegates to the “inauthentic” realm of nation-making.

making roads, building markets

Six images accompany the municipalities rendering of *Development and Building in East Jerusalem*. The front cover features sidewalk repair at the southern entrance to the Old City, with the wall dominating the composition. The back cover features a snapshot of Zahra Street, a shopping area in East Jerusalem. A new red and grey bricked sidewalk, shot through a fish eye lens, give the street a dreamy, Mediterranean feel. Yet, this image of modern urban improvement conceals the contentious processes that went into the renovation.

The area from Zahra and the adjoining Salah ad-Din Street to Bab al-Amud is the only remaining “urban center” in East Jerusalem. Situated right outside the Old City it is lined with shops and restaurants catering to the local community. It is also the site of organized urban protest – for peace, children’s rights, against occupation.

In March 1996 the area became the site of the first Israeli police station in East Jerusalem outside the Old City. One year later the municipality began tearing up the sidewalks on Salah ad-Din and Zahra Streets. The object was to replace the large, handcut colorful grained flagstones with a pallid, machine-cut pavement. At issue for Palestinian Jerusalemites was the authoritative displacement of

their historical sense of the city with that of the Israeli municipality's. The old stones had been laid by the Jordanian municipality in 1954, but their shape and texture resembles older urban architectural traditions going back to Salah ad-Din and earlier. The community later learned that the municipality's renovation was part of a larger project, titled the Salah ad-Din Project, to construct an urban infrastructure that mirrors that of downtown West Jerusalem. It is this struggle over place and space that the municipality's brochure re-represents as part and parcel of a dominant modernist aesthetics of "clean streets."

The larger Bab al-Amud area has been invested with heavy symbolism following the "re-unification" of Jerusalem. In the words of the Israeli architect and director of the Harvard Jerusalem Studio, Moshe Safdie:

The Damascus Gate triangle [is] a key to the future of Jerusalem. In this area lay the opportunity to determine the nature of the connection between the Old City and the new, between the Arab and the Israeli business districts, and to influence the character and the

*experience of the entrance to Jerusalem from the north.*²⁷

The Bab al-Amud area was one of the central sites for the Harvard Jerusalem Studio, an urban planning and design seminar in Jerusalem between 1980-1984. According to Safdie, the urban planners wrestled with the attempt to rethink the icons of modernity, to design for a society that represents not only the iconography of multiple religious traditions, but also diverse cultures, and "divergent views of sovereignty."

In *The Harvard Jerusalem Studio: Urban Designs for the Holy City*, Safdie details the kinds of obstacles and pre-set ideologies that constrained and formed the various projects. Perhaps the most far-reaching was the presumption that the iconography of the Old City could only be preserved through spatial separation. In the 1920s the colonial powers had drawn up a plan to demolish the structures attached to the outer walls of the Old City. By 1970 the Israeli municipality had succeeded in isolating the Old City as a unit and transforming the urban space outside the walls into a park. In effect what was left for the Harvard seminar urban planners was to develop designs for the park and the

²⁷ Moshe Safdie, *The Harvard Jerusalem Studio: Urban Designs for the Holy City*. (Cambridge: MIT, 1986), p. 141.

surrounding areas. Yet, what is interesting in Safdie's text written over a decade ago is an articulated unease concerning the "pre-scripted" nature and assumptions upon which the urban planners built their designs.

Were not many of the proposals trying to tidy up places which, in the context of the Middle East, want to and should remain spontaneously messy? What is wrong, in the informal markets, with the makeshift structures and spontaneous servicing that have marked much of the life of the Old City for centuries?"²⁸

In 1997 the Olmert municipality implemented some of the designs produced in the Harvard Jerusalem Studio. In the late fall a farmers and peddlers market was opened in the Bab al-Amud area of Jerusalem. Demarcated with signs in Hebrew, Arabic and English, these covered markets along the city wall were heralded as part of the municipality's successful urban renovation of the eastern parts of the city. The glimpses of unease expressed a decade ago now were replaced with a celebratory note regarding the ease of modern municipal design.

The itinerant vendors around Bab al-Amud are part of a very particular Palestinian experience of urban

Jerusalem. Peasant women and petty-commodity vendors from West Bank villages to the north and south of the city have a long history of selling their goods in the Bab al-Amud area particularly on Fridays, the main market day. These women have been the target of a vicious campaign by the municipality for years. With the Olmert administration, harassment of the vendors and confiscation of their produce became stated municipal policy. On November 28, 1996, for instance, municipal workers and border guards violently attempted to remove the women vendors, leaving an elderly woman from a refugee camp hospitalized.

Confrontations between street peddlers and municipal administrations mar late twentieth century urban history in most places. Although it may be argued that the roofs covering the new peddlers market will ease working conditions in the rain, and that the mere existence of the markets on some level represents the municipality's failure to get rid of itinerant vendors altogether, the fact remains that within the very specific context of the city of Jerusalem these urban conflicts take on a different level of complexity. "Beautification" here equals the formal and symbolic attack on a people's experience of their city.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 184.