

## For Ourselves, Our Neighbours, Our Homelands Religion in Folklorama's Israel Pavilion

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Résumé de l'article

Le Folklorama de Winnipeg est le plus important et le plus ancien festival multiculturel au monde. Les communautés ethniques locales présentent la culture de la population de leur pays (et celle de la communauté d'immigrés) avec des kiosques culturels, des aliments et habituellement un spectacle ethnique. Le fait que les membres de ces groupes doivent décider de la façon dont ils se représentent eux-mêmes fait de ce festival une excellente opportunité pour comprendre les façons dont le festival est utilisé par les groupes pour interagir avec la société canadienne dans son ensemble. Bien que les dirigeants du festival, lorsqu'ils attribuent les pavillons, avertissent les organisateurs d'éviter les questions religieuses ou politiques provocatrices, dans la foulée des efforts déployés pour dépeindre des cultures particulières, les traditions religieuses ethniques sont souvent présentées quand même. Dans cet article, l'auteur se penche particulièrement sur la place des religions et la présentation qui en est faite (principalement l'Islam et le judaïsme) dans le pavillon d'Israël. Cette analyse montre que les présentations de la religion dans ce pavillon servent surtout certains des objectifs spécifiques et généraux de la communauté, comme la réduction de l'ignorance locale et de l'antisémitisme, la préservation de l'identité juive et la promotion du sentiment pro-Israël.

# FOR OURSELVES, OUR NEIGHBOURS, OUR HOMELANDS

## Religion in Folklorama's Israel Pavilion<sup>1</sup>

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Each summer in Winnipeg, Manitoba, over forty local ethnic groups participate in Folklorama, a two-week festival that its coordinators describe as the “largest and longest running multicultural celebration in the world.”<sup>2</sup> At Folklorama, ethnic communities represent themselves in “pavilions” that feature cultural displays, ethnic foods, and a typically lively 40-minute performance of folk music and dancing. These pavilions are located in various public and private spaces throughout the city: church basements, ethnic community centres, public schools and curling clubs, to mention only a few of the venues (cf. Willems-Braun 1994: 78-81).

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1. I would like to thank Faydra Shapiro of Wilfrid Laurier University for her insightful critique of an earlier draft of this article. I would also like to express my appreciation to the members of the Jewish community who agreed to be interviewed for this project. All identifying features of these individuals have been changed.
  2. See [www.folklorama.ca](http://www.folklorama.ca), the official website of the Winnipeg Folk Arts Council. The website reports that the “American Bus Association recognized Folklorama as an internationally known superevent in 1999;” and “Folklorama was recognized as the best cultural event in 1999 by the Canadian event industry.” Waterman (1998:60) argues that festivals indicate as much about the cities in which they are situated as they do about the particular cultural element (music, art, ethnicity, etc.) they are celebrating. The publicity surrounding Folklorama might represent a means of defending the often sullied reputation of Winnipeg in Canadian public discourse. While the city may be one of the coldest places in North America, the city does host “the largest and longest running multicultural celebration in the world,” and therefore deserves to be considered a world class city in this respect. See Greenhill's comments (1999a:5-6) on the stereotypically inauspicious place of Winnipeg in Canadian popular and scholarly discourses.

Few would dispute the claim that in many of the community groups that organize Folklorama's pavilions, traditional religious assumptions, values, and forms of social organization are intimately connected to ethnic identity.<sup>3</sup> As such, one would expect religion in some conventional form (including, for example, references to traditional narratives, architecture, music, iconography, or religiously grounded social structures or values) to play a significant role in pavilions.<sup>4</sup> However, in many pavilions, one has to look very carefully to detect religious signs and symbols. This may be because, according to pavilion organizers, the Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg (the governing body of the festival) does not allow pavilions to accentuate the political or religious dimensions of the cultures they are representing (cf. Thoroski 1997: 106). Displays of religious difference in Folklorama pavilions are also delicately presented because the people who oversee the festival are no doubt aware that many in the general public believe religion is by definition a problem (religion and politics being the two topics well-mannered Canadians know not to bring up at social gatherings). As such, Folk Arts Council officials are fairly careful about the way they portray the festival to potential researchers.

In 1999, I contacted the Folk Arts Council to discuss a larger research project on the place of religion in the festival (the current article is part of this study). The senior staff person with whom I spoke very politely but firmly informed me that I would not find much if any evidence of religion in any of the pavilions and that my time might more wisely be spent considering the festival as an attempt to foster ethnic tolerance and understanding. Even after I listed four or five instances of pavilion displays or shows in which religion is featured prominently, the employee continued to advise me that my search would be futile. This staff member was correct that pavilion displays and entertainment focus mainly on expressions of difference based on ethnicity, food, music, geography, architecture and language. However, a thorough analysis of Folklorama pavilions reveals that communities do sometimes feature

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3. These connections are by no means mere reflections of the roles religion played in the real or imagined (Anderson 1983) "old country." On the contrary, when groups or individuals resettle in North America (or anywhere else for that matter), they must to some extent re-create their religious tradition by combining religious resources from their former, other, or imagined homeland with cultural resources they find in North America. On this general trend, see Coward and Ratanakul (1999); McLellan (1999); Metcalf (1996); Richardson (1985).
  4. In this article, the term "religion" refers to the cultural and social expressions of institutionalized historical traditions, and not to individual spiritual experiences.

religious themes, dances, songs, and artifacts when they are trying to express to visitors — and, as I argue, to themselves — what it means to be Serbian, Italian, Chinese, West Indian, etc., in contemporary Canada.

As far as the places of religion are concerned, one of the most fascinating Folklorama pavilions is the Israel Pavilion, organized by the city's Jewish community. Although most of the pavilion's organizers and volunteers are not from Israel, most have either visited the country (some for extended periods) or have family and friends there; in any case, organizers suggested that those involved in the pavilion feel a deep sense of attachment to the state as their official (other) homeland. In this article, I focus on aspects of the way the local Jewish community represents itself (and perhaps secondarily, Israel) through its depiction of Israeli culture. More specifically, I argue that the presence of Judaism in the Israel Pavilion not only enables its Jewish organizers to pursue several specific community goals, but can also remind scholarly observers of the relevance of religion in contemporary ethnic groups. A definitive determination of how the majority of the members of the broader Winnipeg Jewish community perceive the place of religion in the pavilion is well beyond the scope of this study. My concerns are both more limited and more general. I describe the pavilion's various depictions of the religions associated with Israel, and speculate on the ways such depictions might function in Winnipeg's Jewish and non-Jewish communities. As well, I outline some of the broader implications of this analysis for an understanding of ethnicity in Canada.

My interpretations of this phenomenon are based on three forms of evidence: approximately 25 visits to the pavilion over the past 20 years; remarkably consistent in-depth interviews in 1999 with pivotal pavilion organizers (some of whom have been involved with the festival since the early 1970's); and the scholarly literature on the place of religion, ethnicity, and festivals in contemporary North America. My current understanding of Folklorama is indebted to the scholarly attention it has received in the past several years (Thoroski 1997; Greenhill 1999b; Thoroski and Greenhill this volume).<sup>5</sup> Previous Folklorama studies and research on other festivals (e.g.,

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5. I have been involved in Folklorama since I was a child: initially, as a volunteer at the Cari-Cana (Caribbean-Canadian) Pavilion where my father was a pavilion organizer for several years; then, as a staff member of the Folk Arts Council of Winnipeg for one summer in the 1980s; and during and after these periods, as a frequent visitor to many of the pavilions. The Israel Pavilion has been a favourite of mine since the early 1980s when I spent one summer as a "gofer" for the Chai Folk Ensemble, the pavilion's dance troupe, on its tour of Nova Scotia.

Ashkenazi 1987; Davila 1997; Cohen 1982; Cruikshank 1997; Shukla 1997; Willems-Braun 1994) are quite helpful for situating these events within meaningful, albeit polysemic (Ashkenazi 1987: 52; Shukla 1997), local and global contexts. With some exceptions, most of these studies are concerned with the ways festivals reflect and reinforce shifting definitions of place, identity, and power in contemporary western societies. While these commentators thickly interpret various components of a wide variety of festivals, they neglect or pay little attention to the places of religion in most of these events.

In order to contextualize the present research, some introductory comments are in order. According to the 1991 Canadian census (the most recent census in which questions were asked about religious identity), Winnipeg's Jewish community numbers approximately 15,000 people out of a total city population of just under 640,000. Winnipeg therefore has the third largest Jewish population in Canada, after Montreal and Toronto. The city's Jewish community has a history of involvement in progressive labour politics and *yiddishkeit*, the culture which grew out of the Yiddish language and cultural practices of Ashkenazi (or Eastern European) Jewry (cf. Arnold 1981; Brodbar-Nemzer et al., 1993; Gutkin 1980; Manitoba Culture, Heritage, and Recreation 1989). Approximately 60% of Winnipeg's Jews are affiliated in some — though often loose — way with Conservative Judaism, the Jewish denomination or tradition which seeks to be a middle ground between the strict observance embraced in Orthodox Judaism and the liberal style of Reform Judaism (Brodbar-Nemzer et al., 1993: 51). The Orthodox and Reform communities (7% and 11% respectively) are not as well represented in Winnipeg as they are in other major cities (Brodbar-Nemzer et al 1993: 51, 44; cf. Gutkin 1980: 125; cf. Chiel 1961).

The Israel Pavilion has been involved in Folklorama since the inception of the festival in 1970. For most of its history, the pavilion was located in the Young Men's Hebrew Association building in downtown Winnipeg. However, after a successful fund raising drive, in 1997 the community built the spacious and architecturally impressive Asper Jewish Community Campus in Tuxedo, the city's most affluent neighbourhood. The move from downtown (on the fringes of the largely working class north end of the city) to the more prosperous south of Winnipeg reflects the economic prosperity of the community in general. "The Campus" is now the hub of the Jewish community: it houses a variety of Jewish social service agencies, a kosher delicatessen, the largest Jewish private school in the city, the offices of the Jewish Community Council, the Jewish Museum of Western Canada, and one of the finest athletic facilities in Winnipeg.

During Folklorama, a portion of the Jewish Community Campus is home to the "Israel Pavilion — Shalom Square," one of the most popular pavilions in the festival. The pavilion is closed on Friday night for *shabbat* (sabbath), and does not open until 9PM on Saturday night (an irregularity explained in the official Folklorama program). Several organizers commented that this practice is somewhat peculiar because the vast majority of the city's Jews either do not observe *shabbat* at all, or do not observe it strictly. However, organizers noted that out of respect for the more observant minority, the pavilion is closed on *shabbat*.<sup>6</sup>

The urbane sophistication of the Jewish Community Campus itself may be considered part of, or perhaps an informal introduction to, the pavilion's cultural display to the extent that the complex reflects the community's solidity, affluence and vigour. The campus buildings communicate, in no uncertain terms, that this community has arrived, and has arrived in style. After entering the campus and walking past a security desk, the Jewish Museum, the delicatessen, and the swimming pool, a visitor's first formal encounter with the pavilion comes in the form of its official cultural display. The nature of the exhibition changes every two years: some years it is very elaborate, and is housed in its own large room with photographs, displays, hand-outs, dramas, and music; other years, the display is relatively simple, and consists of perhaps 20 or 25 mounted posters. Sometimes the focus seems to be on worldwide Jewish life (including Israel); at other times the focus is more clearly on the State of Israel itself. In 1999, the display area was relatively small (perhaps 300 square feet) and was located in a wide hallway *en route* to the main auditorium. This display featured a series of mounted posters highlighting important dates in Jewish and Israeli history. The text and photos on these posters mainly described and celebrated the resilience of the Jewish people throughout history and against formidable odds.<sup>7</sup> A small area near the cultural display was devoted to local merchants selling a variety of Israeli and Jewish crafts.<sup>8</sup>

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6. The Campus itself does not close for *shabbat*. However, those who visit the Campus on this day are asked to observe certain restrictions. For example, members are asked to pre-pay any fees, since the exchange of money is not allowed on *shabbat*.
  7. Pavilion organizers recognize that it would be impossible to omit photos or depictions of war-related events, since most important dates in the history of Israel are related to military campaigns, and since the army is such a pervasive force in contemporary Israel.
  8. See Thoroski (1997:108) for a discussion of the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses evident in a crafts display at the Afro-Caribbean pavilion.

In 1997 and 1998, the cultural display was designed by a local interior designer and featured a series of eight “Jewish Holiday Tables,” small, round tables set elegantly in a manner appropriate to these events. Above each of the tables was a brief explanation that explained the historical and religious contexts of the holiday as well as the kinds of foods traditionally served. These explanations were also found in the form of an eight-page hand-out available at the end of the display. For example, the explanation for the Shavuot table read:

Shavuot: When: May or June, seven weeks after Passover; Why: Commemorates G-d’s<sup>9</sup> gift of the Torah, on mount Sinai, thereby continuing the process of the redemption which began with the Passover Exodus. They used the Torah as the divine guideline for living as a free people; How: Jews stay up all night studying a Jewish text of their choice; Food: any dairy food.

The 1998 display also featured a large collection of photographs and posters depicting life in Israel. Given that pavilion organizers estimate that approximately 80% of Israelis are “secular” (by which they normally mean non-orthodox or non-observant), it was interesting that quite a few of these photographs depicted men wearing the traditional Jewish headcovering, a *yarmulke* (or *kippah*).

While most pavilion organizers recognize that it is difficult to understand Israeli or Jewish life without understanding the Holocaust, for a variety of reasons these community leaders have avoided representing this great cataclysm. These individuals are more concerned with demonstrating, as one person expressed it,

the very enjoyable side of [Jewish life], because, when you come to Folklorama, you’re not coming to read a book, you’re not coming to spend hours and hours in a seminar, so we tried to showcase it by having the artifacts. We had a chart of ten [familiar Hebrew and Yiddish] words, with some funny anecdote attached to each one. So that was quite interesting, quite different. A lot of these different ideas are very, very serious concerns, like a wedding, is serious, but in Judaism, also very fun. And that was an interesting angle, to try to make it fun and yet hold onto the serious aspect.

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9. A pavilion organizer explained that many Orthodox Jews omit the vowel in this word as a sign of respect for the divine. Although this convention is debated in some Jewish circles, the writer of this Shavuot explanation evidently wanted to ensure that no one would be offended by seeing the full name of the divine in print.

Another participant commented that

People who come to Folklorama are looking for fun. Yeah, they want to learn, and I think they want to understand the [cultural and historical] backing, but they want to walk out happy, saying "Wow, I just had a fantastic time, and would you believe, I didn't know this about them or that about them," and I think our pavilion really fulfils them. And we take people from the start and aim for this — a while ago we had [a roving comedian with a loudspeaker] for people standing outside in the line-ups.

The emphasis on the fun or entertaining elements of culture is not in any way unique to this pavilion; nor is it unique to this festival (Piette 1992).<sup>10</sup> These emphases reflect what is by now a fairly well developed Folklorama style, promoted by the Folk Arts Council<sup>11</sup> and more informally, by a thirty-year tradition regarding appropriate and inappropriate representational conventions (cf. Mato 1998). Pavilion organizers clearly want visitors to absorb the excitement behind "Hava Netze B'Machol [Let's Go and Dance]"<sup>12</sup> and "Heveinu Shalom Aleichem [We bring Peace unto you]," the titles and lyrics of two songs/dances which almost always conclude shows at the pavilion. The upbeat messages and styles of these songs not only elicit the most enthusiastic responses from the audiences I have observed over the years, but may also be considered emblematic of both the pavilion's shows and, to some extent, Folklorama in general.<sup>13</sup>

After visitors move through the cultural displays, they enter a large gymnasium, usually purchase a sampling of kosher Israeli foods, take their seats and await the beginning of the show. All pavilion organizers agreed that most people are attracted to the pavilion for the roughly 40 minute show. The

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10. Anthropologist Pauline Greenhill uses the term "McMulticulturalism" (1999b:38; cf. Bissoondath 1994) to describe the depiction of cultures which often emerges when communities emphasize what they perceive to be the entertaining or neutral elements of their cultures.

11. The Folk Arts Council employs "Inspectors" who visit each of the pavilions to ensure that there is a degree of standardization with respect to food and beverage prices, show length and other details. These employees are also responsible for ensuring that the pavilions' display content is not offensive (cf. Willems-Braun 1994:79).

12. One participant translated this title as "Let's Go Out in a Celebration of Folklore."

13. Primeggia and Varacalli describe a song in the Giglio festival in New York: "Besides becoming an auditory symbol of the event, ultimately it has come to stand for the community itself" (1996:430). This interpretation also describes the songs which traditionally conclude shows at the Israel Pavilion.



show features the Chai Folk Ensemble (a local and internationally-travelled group of folk dancers), a ten person band, a charismatic host, and a group of approximately five singers. The fast-paced performances are technically, musically, and aesthetically polished and exciting, which might explain why the show has always had the reputation of being one of the best in the festival.

The songs that accompany the dances are mostly sung in Hebrew, so it is unlikely that the non-Jewish members of the audience, or those Jews without a formal Jewish education, would be able to distinguish between the religiously- and non-religiously-based songs. Nevertheless, according to a former choreographer, Chai's repertoire normally combines approximately 75% lively traditional ("secular") Israeli folk dances with roughly 25% more explicitly religious dances. The latter include a dance based on the ancient "shema" prayer (which most Jews would recognize), and another featuring stylized depictions of prayer, clothing and lifeways representative of ultra-orthodox Eastern European Jews.

The preceding description should give readers some sense of what they would see in the Israel Pavilion. Now I want to consider three ways religion may function in this pavilion for its Jewish organizers and the larger Jewish and non-Jewish communities. An analysis of these three roles elucidates not only the ways religion functions in this pavilion, but also and not coincidentally, three of the major issues facing the Jewish community.

## **Identity-Formation**

One of the most general functions of religion (in this case, Judaism) in the pavilion is to contribute to a "discursive field" in which the negotiation of Jewish identity takes place (Davila 1997: 92; Davidman 1991) against the backdrop of an implicitly (or at least historically) Christian culture.<sup>14</sup> Although Jews in Canada have widely varying degrees of commitment to Judaism as a formal religious tradition (Brodbar-Nemzer 1993), the tradition remains an important component of what Pierre Bourdieu would describe as the "symbolic capital" of Jewish people (Bourdieu 1990).<sup>15</sup> Some (Gans 1979; 1994) have argued that symbolic affiliation and its related symbolic ethnicity (in this case,

14. On the general process of religious negotiation in secular settings, see Bramadat (2000).

15. As I suggested earlier, Winnipeg's Jewish community is mainly associated, albeit often diffusely, with the Conservative, or middle-ground denominational tradition. Although this characterization is necessarily impressionistic, in an attempt to describe many of

one could say symbolic religio-ethnicity) are diluted versions of some more authentic, unmediated, or disappearing form. Such critical observations are still sometimes made by academics and members of the general public who continue to accept the now much-criticized secularization hypothesis.<sup>16</sup> However, while most public institutions in Canada have become thoroughly (at least formally) non-religious (Bramadat 2000; Sweet 1997), sociologists continue to report a generally stable (albeit evolving) level of personal religiosity throughout the continent (cf. Bibby 1993; Stark 1999: 254). Consequently, the fluid, post-traditional, post-modern, or symbolic form of religion (or religio-ethnicity) which appears to be emerging in North America and perhaps in the Jewish community, may not necessarily presage the eventual disappearance of religion *per se* or Judaism specifically; rather, it may indicate a new horizon on which the traditional offerings of the Jewish tradition can assume a transformed significance for individuals and communities.<sup>17</sup>

For example, several of the people I interviewed indicated that for many Jews, regardless of their degree of observance, some implicit or explicit reference to Judaism must be included in personal and community events in order for these events to be properly Jewish, even properly culturally Jewish. In other words, for some, even an oblique reference to Judaism in the form of the pavilion's music and dances (approximately 25% of which include religious themes), displays (including photos of religious people and places), food (which is kosher, although the large majority of the city's Jews do not keep kosher), or the location of the pavilion (at the *Jewish* Community Campus) may bestow an aura of Jewish authenticity on the Israel Pavilion and its Jewish participants.<sup>18</sup> Such references — even subtextual allusions — to Judaism may seem peculiar

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his Conservative Jewish peers, one participant said, "We identify with the religion more than practice it." According to several pavilion organizers, only about 5-10% of the Winnipeg Jewish community keeps kosher and considers *halakhah* (Jewish law) thoroughly binding. This estimate corresponds to the sociological overview provided by Brodbar-Nemzer et al. (1993:51), who note that roughly 7% of the city's Jewish community are Orthodox Jews.

16. For a full discussion of the current state of the secularization debate, see the Fall 1999 issue of *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*.
17. For a critique of the Gansian thematization of symbolic ethnicity, and also for a discussion of the enduring salience of Judaism in contemporary American Jewish identity-formation, see Winter (1996) and Kivisto and Nefzger (1993).
18. See Thoroski and Greenhill (this volume) for a discussion of the ways Folklorama presents its visitors with depictions of cultural authenticity (cf. Cruikshank 1997:59).

to observers who know that the religious people and practices represented in parts of the cultural display and some dances sometimes reflect the community's history rather than its actual practices. However, although such themes represent the religious histories rather than the religious lives of many of the city's Jews, the inclusion of religious themes underlines the profound symbolic role references to religious artifacts, characters, and events can play in identity formation. Perhaps this form of affiliation with Judaism and Jewishness through the medium of these pavilion themes points to a powerful mode of personal identification available to those who want to rearticulate or affirm elements of Jewish culture within the context of the broader North American culture.

Recently, scholars have thematized this form of identification in terms of the "politics of difference," (Willmsen and McAllister 1996), or what Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1994) calls the "politics of recognition," the process by which individuals and groups define their identities in open dialogue (or sometimes, in argument) with the larger culture (Gamson 1997: 181). As a site for the expression of the politics of difference, each August, the campus becomes detached from its usual moorings and is bilocated, part way between Winnipeg and Israel (cf. Greenhill forthcoming: 39; Turner 1969: 94; Willems-Braun 1994: 81). In this way, an ordinary (albeit impressive) building is made during (and by) Folklorama into a liminal zone, a transnational workshop for the construction and expression of individual and community identities. I would argue that this inherently liminal experience of transnationalism serves both to undermine any simplistic affiliation with mainstream Canadian society, and thereby, to underline Jewish (and Israeli, although this is a secondary concern) distinctiveness. This seems likely to mitigate against assimilation, the process some Jewish thinkers believe has replaced anti-semitism as the main threat to North American Jewish life (Abella 1997: 88). In other words, being involved in this pavilion may be one way in which the organizers, and other Winnipeg Jews, can publicly demonstrate that despite intra-communal distinctions (Ashkenazi/Sephardic, north end/south end, affluent/middle class, Ultra-Orthodox/Orthodox/Conservative/Reform, religious/cultural Jews, etc.), many of the city's Jews share an abiding commitment to remaining (again, diversely) Jewish in a predominately Christian milieu (cf. Gamson 1997: 192).

One participant said that in Winnipeg, "You're very conscious of the fact that you're Jewish. When you're in Israel, you don't even think about it." At the Israel Pavilion, the various implicit and explicit references to Judaism as

either the official religion, or at least an integral part, of Jewish (and Israeli) life, may help to transform the imaginary Winnipeg-Israel space of the pavilion into a place in which Jews “don’t even think about” being Jewish. In other words, the involvement of Judaism in the “collective effervescence” (Durkheim 1973: 181) produced in the pavilion may temporarily normalize Jewishness and bind the community and pavilion together in a way that watching secular Israeli folk dances and eating falafels would not. Perhaps in conjunction with their participation in other elements of the city’s Jewish life, this momentary reprieve from otherness may clarify the differences between Jews and non-Jews during the rest of the year.

### **Local Public Relations**

One former Israel Pavilion coordinator suggested that Folklorama is partly responsible for the generally harmonious religious and ethnic climate of Winnipeg, insofar as the festival allows Winnipeggers to meet people from traditions with which they might otherwise be unfamiliar and perhaps initially uncomfortable. One pavilion organizer, who has been involved with the pavilion and the Folk Arts Council for over two decades, commented that “We happen to be fortunate [in Winnipeg]. Because of Folklorama, this community is more at peace with itself than other communities in North America. For the most part, people know what other people are about and aren’t afraid of them.” Thoroski and Greenhill write:

Many, both within and outside the organizational structures of the festival, regard [Folklorama] as an emblem of the friendship and co-operation between and among Manitoba’s cultural communities. For the immigrants of the 1960s and 1970s, the festival is a marker of how far they have come in building their identities as Canadian citizens and members of distinct cultural groups (this volume).<sup>19</sup>

Although many believe that in its 31 years, Folklorama has decreased ethnic tensions in Winnipeg, there is also a consensus that there is a continuing need to pursue this objective. Most of the people I interviewed spoke at length about the extent to which the Israel Pavilion represents an excellent opportunity

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19. Although most of Winnipeg’s Jews are descended from an earlier wave of immigrants (Manitoba Culture, Heritage, and Recreation 1989), the broad cultural and public policy shifts (Kelley and Trebilcock 1998) which occurred at the end of the 1960s also improved the lives of more established minorities.

to combat both malicious anti-semitism and benign ignorance by informing non-Jews about the main elements of Jewish life. One pavilion organizer commented: "I often tell people that education or knowledge and prejudice are diametrically opposed. I really think you can't hate Jewish people if you know a little about them. If you understand why that guy on the street is wearing a beanie, then you don't get mad at him when he wears it into the Legion." Another organizer said: "As a rule... we don't make money [at Folklorama]. And my argument is that you can't buy for the \$3000 or \$5000 or \$1000 the positive images of Israel and Jewish people, because I look at both."

Religion in the Israel Pavilion plays an important role in combating anti-semitism and ignorance in two ways. First, I mentioned above that underlining the (even symbolic) relevance of Judaism in the community helps Jews both to define themselves for themselves and, necessarily, to define their differences from surrounding others. In addition, however, this religiously-related discursive process of self-definition may be a means of establishing, in their own and the broader community, that their community is categorically different than other ethnic groups seeking power and respect in the politics of difference.

It is true that most democratic societies are becoming increasingly sensitive to the ethical, ethnic, political, economic, and religious claims of individuals and minorities (cf. Taylor 1994). However, there may be limits to this openness. Perhaps — to extend the theme of the politics of difference — there is also an economy of difference. Perhaps a given society can only support a finite "quantity" or degree of difference from the putative mainstream with respect to values, languages, norms, and appearance. Groups can be understood as competing for this difference, or at least for its rewards (in the currency of government largesse, improved immigration and settlement policies, or, more broadly, public recognition). The regulation of this economy of difference is clearly at work in the context of Folklorama, in which ethnocultural communities that wish to organize a pavilion must submit formal applications to the Folk Arts Council and are then accepted or rejected by a committee. One participant told me that this committee once declined a pavilion proposal from the city's small ultra-orthodox Jewish community because the pavilion was deemed to be too explicitly religious. As well, a small scandal arose in 1992 over the committee's reaction of legal injunctions against the city's lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gendered arts community's alternative, parodic "Multi-culti-queer" pavilion (Greenhill forthcoming). There have also been

minor controversies within Folklorama over the proliferation of pavilions that some participants consider to be insufficiently unique. For example, some pavilion organizers are critical of the fact that the festival has permitted several Caribbean pavilions to operate simultaneously (Thoroski and Greenhill this volume).

Although the Israel Pavilion is in no danger of being excluded from the festival, because Jews (even, until recently, Israelis) do not share one language, phenotype, or country of origin, their place in Folklorama's economy of difference is more ambiguous than that of other ethnic communities involved in the festival. I would argue that the presence of Judaism in the pavilion might help to promote the public perception that Jews are both ethnically and religiously distinctive. The healthy place of the city's Jewish community (and the Israel Pavilion) within this economy of difference is safeguarded by the fact that the pavilion (its shows, displays, location, restricted hours of operation) evidences that collective and individual Jewish identities are often intimately associated with their ancient religious origins. By subtly reminding non-Jews that many of the roots of both Winnipeg's and Israel's "mainly secular" and "this-worldly"<sup>20</sup> Jews are entwined in the deep soil of Judaism, the pavilion may strengthen their claim to cultural and ethnic uniqueness. While no one I interviewed expressed anxiety about improving their place in the economy of difference, I would suggest that this may be one of the underlying, perhaps even subconscious, motivations behind — and as importantly, one of the obvious consequences of — the occasional foregrounding of religion.

The second way in which the form of Judaism represented in the pavilion serves as a part of a local public relations effort is that it (often implicitly) emphasizes the ways in which Judaism shares a great deal in common with Christianity. This second strategy is obviously in tension with, though not in opposition to, the first one.

Several people I interviewed said that when they conducted pavilion tours or designed cultural displays, they wanted visitors to realize that Jewishness is not altogether exotic. In fact, one participant described a particular cultural display which featured a holiday scene by noting that

We had a Sukkah there, where you have branches in one hand and you do blessings. [We did this] just to show that the way [Christian Canadians]

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20. Two pavilion organizers described their community this way.

have the Christmas and Easter holidays, we have joyous holidays, too, and these holidays are based around fun things that occur in history, not just war and destruction of temples. And that was in the forefront of our minds, that we are just like [Christian Canadians], and we have our holidays just like [them] — not the same holidays, but the same reasons.

Echoing this sentiment, another participant commented that “[Folklorama] is a way to teach people that Jewish people or Israeli people are good, normal people, like everyone else.”

When Judaism is foregrounded explicitly (in displays or, sometimes, in the commentary provided by official pavilion tour guides), it is often portrayed as originating in the sacred stories of Abraham and his progeny, representing a form of biblical monotheism, and celebrating family, food and seasonal celebrations. In this way, predominately (albeit perhaps nominally) Christian visitors to the pavilion can map their own experiences (of learning about Abrahamic mythology, reading the Bible, and engaging in feasts and festivals) onto the representation of Judaism they are witnessing. This is likely to diminish the foreignness of the tradition.

Pauline Greenhill confirms that Folklorama pavilions often downplay cultural difference in favour of an affirmation of commonality. She writes: “Folklorama is structured in such a way as to ensure that contrasts within and between groups are masked by a common presentation of... music/dance, food/drink, and the display and sale of crafts” (forthcoming). As one Israel Pavilion organizer put it, “I think Folklorama shows that while we’re all different, we’re all the same. We all like good food, we all like to get together, we all like to be entertained. And the window dressing is different, but underneath we’re all the same. We all have something to offer.” It is ironic that religion, one of the primary markers of difference, can also be used in the effort to underline commonality (cf. Thoroski 1997: 109).<sup>21</sup>

On the one hand, Judaism helps to communicate to Folklorama visitors that Jews are not just any ethnic group, but an ethnic group with a sacred

21. Such a strategy is not, however, without its perceived dangers. I asked one pavilion organizer if this approach, combined with the Folk Arts Council’s rules about show length and content, tended to detract from their depiction of the uniqueness of Jewish culture. He responded, “Yes, I agree with you: Folklorama can be a little flat and one-dimensional in some ways.... but I don’t know how else to do it in an hour and still maintain something the public will accept. If a hundred people walk through our pavilion and five people learn something that will help them, that’s why we’re doing it.”

origin. This strategy affirms their uniqueness, may diminish anti-semitism and ignorance, and positions the community favourably in the economy of difference. On the other hand, the practice of underlining the similarities between Judaism and Christianity helps non-Jews to see Judaism as non-threatening and, in the most literal sense, familiar. This second and more ambiguous strategy emphasizes similarity and thus positions the community as a more readily acceptable example of difference.

### **Zionism<sup>22</sup>**

Another function of Judaism in the Israel pavilion is that it may serve to improve the image of zionism among Winnipeg's non-Jewish majority. Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and especially since the Intifada, the popular uprising of the Palestinians between 1987 and 1994, zionism has come under attack from a variety of quarters. Many people and organizations (including, for a period, the United Nations<sup>23</sup>) have equated zionism with racism, and many zionists believe that the media has often been unfairly critical of Israel on this issue. One organizer remarked that

In the Intifada, every night on TV you'd see pictures of Israeli soldiers shooting at Arab children. The fact that these children were knowingly taking rocks and trying to kill Israelis with them is never mentioned. So, Israelis and Jews were being painted in a very negative light, and the pavilion was an wonderful opportunity to demonstrate what we were — our culture, our traditions, a little bit of our religion, and that we weren't all carrying M-16s and shooting people. Because that's what the portrayal was.

Given that 45% of Winnipeg's Jews consider themselves zionists (Brodbar-Nemzer et al., 1993: 51), it seems reasonable that pavilion organizers would be interested in presenting Israel, especially its Jewish citizenry, in the

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22. Zionism is a complex social, political, and religious movement that emerged formally in nineteenth century Europe in response to growing anti-semitism. There are a variety of forms of zionism, ranging from progressive labour zionism, to religious zionism, to secular zionism, to mention only a few. There are also many anti-zionist ultra-orthodox Jews, in Israel and the diaspora, who feel that Israel can only rightly exist as a formal state when God intervenes dramatically in history. Although there is considerable disagreement among these many factions, in general, zionists affirm that the State of Israel ought to be considered the rightful home of Jews.
  23. In 1975, the United Nations Security Council declared, in Resolution 3379, that zionism was the equivalent of racism and racial discrimination. This declaration was quietly repealed in 1991 by Resolution 4686.



best possible manner. However, a dogmatic defense of zionism or even a description of the Arab-Israeli conflict would be patently contrary to the intended (fun) spirit of Folklorama. One pavilion organizer who has also worked with the Council, explained that

There's no problem describing the political situation, as in "We have a Labour government," but making any kind of judgment is the problem. It's a positive festival, and I can't see it remaining positive if our pavilion had a discussion about the future of Jerusalem. Unless I sit down with people for 20 hours or whatever, to explain the situation, misunderstandings will happen.

I would argue that the pavilion gives organizers, and the community in general, an opportunity to quietly resist, or at least to problematize, the rather facile image of Israel as the bully of the Middle East. This endeavour obviously has local resonance as well, and several pavilion organizers linked public opinion about local and Israeli Jewish populations. One person said:

When you have the Intifada, with the kid throwing the stone and the soldier shooting the kid, well, when people see how wonderful the community is in Winnipeg, that means not all Jews or Israelis are bad. Peoples' images of Jews is either the people who were killed in the Holocaust and who complain about it all the time, or people who oppress the Palestinians without understanding that it's been going both ways for three thousand years or more.

Another organizer remarked that

In order to get past a lot of the hardships in any country, you have to show the good in it. And I think that... Israel can fight the Israeli wars. Yeah, I have friends from Canada who have joined the army, but I think what I'm doing is equally important. Let them fight the wars. Let me fight with words. I think those of us who are not actually physically fighting in the war — we're fighting the propaganda, which is equally a challenge, if not more, than a war. So that's why I'll glorify it.... I'll talk about the good points of Israel and fight the propaganda. And I think that's what the Israel pavilion does. The cultural aspect, the religious aspect — we want to showcase who we are as a people, and the history of Judaism, and the history of Israel, and we want to do it in a good light, because I'm not here at Folklorama to showcase the bloodshed. Let them do that over there.

The promotion of zionism in the pavilion is effected through both the celebration of Judaism and the paucity of verbal and graphic references to the Islamic and Christian populations in Israel (cf. Cohen 1982: 23). Implicit or explicit references to Judaism in a pavilion dedicated to depicting contemporary

Israeli culture may remind visitors that the current conflict is in part the latest expression of biblical enmities and tribal (not to mention sibling) rivalries that have “been going both ways for three thousand years or more;” in other words, roughly since the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan. This reminder may challenge criticisms of zionism in that it may at least allow or at most encourage non-Jews to conceive of the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians as more than simply contemporary political or ethnic strife.

By largely excluding Islam (and Christianity, although that is less problematic) from its cultural displays, the pavilion promotes a certain picture of Israel (a *de jure* Jewish, but *de facto* multi-religious state) as an essentially Jewish state. The dearth of references to Islam in the pavilion has normative power in the sense that it is difficult to sympathize with a people who are rendered invisible (or even opaque). This portrait of Israel, painted as it is with few Islamic hues, may subtly influence the way non-Jews interpret Palestinian/Muslim claims to the land.

The nearly exclusive emphasis on Judaism in the Israel Pavilion is not, however, an uncontested issue, even within the pavilion community. Almost all of the people I interviewed mentioned a particular episode in the pavilion’s history in the late-1980s when a respected member of the pavilion community suggested to the governing committee that the pavilion should reflect the fact that Israel is a multi-religious country. This participant suggested including three-dimensional models of a synagogue, a mosque, a cathedral, and a Bahai temple in the cultural display area. He also proposed that they might invite members of the local Muslim Students Association to explain the Islamic elements of the display.<sup>24</sup> According to several organizers, this proposal was rejected for a variety of reasons, including the committee’s concerns about security (the pavilion has received bomb threats in the past), and competing understandings of the fundamental nature of Israel and the purpose of the pavilion.

I want to note emphatically that *none* of the Israel Pavilion organizers with whom I spoke understands him- or herself as promoting the notion that Islam and Palestinians have no place in Israel; nor is this the aim of the pavilion.

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24. At present, there is no pavilion that represents any predominately Islamic culture. For example, members of the Somali and Pakistani communities have chosen to be involved in the African and Indian Pavilion communities respectively. It is difficult to speculate why such a pavilion has not yet emerged among any of the city’s Muslim communities.

Because of the obvious good intentions on the part of the pavilion organizers, the pavilion has never had to defend to the Folk Arts Council either the privileged place of Judaism, or the absence of Islam, in the pavilion.<sup>25</sup> Both the Council and the Israel Pavilion organizers go to great lengths to avoid belittling any ethnic or religious group. While the pavilion leaders with whom I spoke quite sincerely seek to ensure that the pavilion's displays and shows are not critical of Islamic or Palestinian claims, by placing so much emphasis on Judaism in the Israel Pavilion, such criticisms may appear, at least to some visitors, to be implicit or subtextual.

## Conclusions

In a variety of implicit and explicit ways, the Israel Pavilion reminds visitors and Jewish community members of the role of Judaism in the lives of Winnipeg's and Israel's Jews. In truth, it would be impossible to provide an adequate rendering of Jewish or Israeli life without mentioning Judaism. The fact that many of the city's and Israel's Jews eschew some of the formal and *halakhic* features of Judaism may make the inclusion of Judaism in the pavilion seem anachronistic to some observers. However, the role of Judaism in the pavilion may reflect not only the historical fact that Jewish and Israeli cultures do have vital religious roots. It may also, more significantly, demonstrate the continuing importance — daily, *halakhic*, and imperative for some; periodic, symbolic, and negotiable for others — of Judaism in this community.

Although pavilions clearly try (and are required by the Council to try) to avoid expressions of religion that are either prescriptive or aggressively ideological, most groups do incorporate elements of the religious traditions associated with their cultures. It should be clear that the picture of religions presented in the Israel Pavilion is highly selective; this is true of the depiction of religions in other pavilions. As I have suggested, the forms of religion evident in this pavilion (and others) facilitate certain specific community aims. For example, the formation of Jewish identity (and thus the resistance to assimilation), the reduction of anti-semitism and ignorance, and the promotion

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25. This suggests that visitors to the pavilion, some of whom presumably would be sympathetic to the Islamic and Palestinian communities in Israel and the Occupied Territories, have not found the depiction (or lack thereof) of Islam or Palestinians to be insulting (or at least worthy of a complaint). This is important, since other Folklorama pavilions have been asked by the Folk Arts Council to modify elements of their displays to make them less politically provocative.

of pro-Israel sentiment, are the simultaneously local and transnational goals that shape the way religion is depicted in the Israel Pavilion.

Given the shifts Canadians have witnessed in the past 30 years away from restrictive and euro-centric immigration policies, we should expect religions in Canada to be the sites of increasingly cosmopolitan and complex combinations of local and global religious themes. However, these combinations will likely be shaped by existing Canadian standards. In Folklorama, for example, while pavilions express the relative alterity of their cultures (including their religion), clear expressions of religious difference are delicately articulated to avoid any provocation and offence. The standard of non-offence at work in Folklorama grows out of two sources: a form of Canadian multiculturalism which espouses pluralism, deference, liberalism, and the affirmation of cultural diversity, and a festival ethos which emphasizes fun and cultural education. None of the three functions of Judaism in the pavilion transgresses these values. Although the use of Judaism to express, if not necessarily to promote, a generalized form of zionism seems to bend the rule against the politicization of the festival, these pro-zionist motifs may be entirely or at least partly unintentional, and are certainly presented in the larger context of a welcoming, edifying, and vibrant pavilion.

The present research on the place of religion in this Folklorama pavilion suggests that far from being a dusty relic of an old, imagined, or other country, religion can be a fairly flexible symbolic resource for the definition and dynamism of ethnic communities in contemporary North America. Religion continues to be one of the main vehicles employed by both individuals and groups to express their corporate and individual identities in the context of the Canadian economy of difference. Investigating the ways particular ethnic communities employ religion in festivals such as Folklorama helps us to appreciate the way ethnic communities determine the kinds of substantive citizenship they wish to maintain in our increasingly multicultural societies.

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