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The intricacies of Being Israeli *and* Yemenite.
An Ethnographic Study of Yemenite “Ethnic” Dance Companies in
Israel

Abstract

Focusing on the work of Yemenite “ethnic” dance companies in Israel, this article aims to understand how issues such as a shift in collective representations come to be invested into dance practices. In other words, it discusses how artistic creation and identity reconfigurations happen to associate in a dance form, and how an ethnographic study of dance practices and their contexts of performance may be a valuable way of accessing the dynamics of self-positioning of a group within the surrounding society. Linking together “classical” ethnography, analysis of dance products, and socio-political contextualisation, the present analysis shows that the articulation of two apparently contradictory ways of building these companies’ repertoire allows Yemenite dancers, choreographers, and also internal audience, to assume in one single dance form a sense of “being Yemenite” whilst not giving up the national dimension of their Israeli identity.

Keywords

Asymmetric ethnicity; Artistic creation; Cultural representation; Dance Company; Dance; Politics; Ethnography

From the 1960s onwards, many dance companies known as “ethnic companies” (*lehakot etniot*)ⁱ started to develop in Israel, each of which offering a staged representation of the dance repertoires of one part of the Israeli society (Jews of Yemenite, Moroccan, Indian origin and so on, but also non-Jewish groups such as Moslem or Christian Arabs, Druzes, etc). Through an ethnography of these companies’ work, and more specifically companies of Jews originating from Yemenⁱⁱ, this study aims to identify and analyse reasons of, and issues arising from, this transfer of dance practicesⁱⁱⁱ from an intra-community context to the stage.

The development of these companies takes place in a context of claims for cultural recognition by different communities facing a unified Israeli culture which was created in the first decades of the 20th century. Therefore this work aims to link together “classical” ethnography, analysis of dance products presented to the audience, and socio-political contextualisation, in order to understand how issues such as a shift in collective representations come to be invested into dance practices,

both at the Israeli Nation's level and at that of the different communities composing this society. In other words, how do artistic creation and identity claims happen to associate in a dance form?

Postulating that dance practices must not be looked at as the simple expression of a situation, but as powerful means to act in dynamic processes of identification, this article argues that ethnography of artistic practices should include both a close look at the creation processes and a contextualisation of these particular processes within the socio-political context. Therefore, after a brief presentation of the companies' general organisation, I will first analyse the form itself of artistic products performed for an audience. What are the dimensions in which choreographers and dancers feel comfortable to innovate, or on the contrary, what are the elements for which they do not accept any transformations? What do they borrow from external representations, what do they reject from them, and so on? I will then set out the Israeli socio-political background of such companies. This investigation of embroiled political issues will in turn shed light on the analysis of the dance, unveiling the intertwining of artistic work, construction of self-representation, and influence of an external (nationalist) glance^{iv}.

Organization of the Yemenite “Ethnic” dance companies and their audiences: a mixture of internal and external inputs.

Dancers

Yemenite “ethnic” dance companies generally consist of a group of about twenty persons whose ages range from 30 to 70 years old. Apart from very few exceptions, they all are of Yemenite origin, mostly of the second generation (i.e. born in Israel from Yemen-born parents), or immigrated to Israel at a very early age. Most of the time their families come from the same area in Yemen^v, and live in the same village or the same neighbourhood in Israel. As we will see later on, this common regional origin within Yemen strongly affects the content of the programme displayed.

Leaders

Two types of direction can be found among such companies. In many cases, the manager is one of the group members, and more than often he has played an important role in the foundation of the company. In such cases, he usually also assumes the task of artistic director or at least of “artistic convenor”, that is to say he has the last say on collective creations, decides on the set list of each performance, leads the rehearsals and so on. Otherwise, someone paid by the institution to which the company is related takes administrative leadership. Every company is indeed, at least to some extent, related to an institution: they may simply receive regular funding from the Education and Culture Ministry^{vi}, or depend on a local community^{vii}. Generally coming from a non-Yemenite background, and not trained in artistic matters, such an administrator will then work in close relation with an artistic director who is either permanently attached to the company, or occasionally works with the dancers.

Artistic direction

In terms of artistic direction, a first possibility lies in the permanent appointment of a choreographer to the company. He/she is mainly in charge of creating “new scenes” (that is to say, new stage-adapted presentations of traditional dances), directing rehearsals and deciding on the content and organisation of each show. Yemenite by origin, he or she is often trained as an Israeli Folk Dance performance

groups' choreographer. A second possibility is when no choreographer is appointed on a permanent basis. As mentioned before, this situation is more likely to happen when the company's leader belongs to the group of dancers. In such cases, stage-adaptation of a dance piece is the product of a collective collaboration by all the dancers and is finally approved by the manager. Moreover, when there is no permanent choreographer, outside choreographers (with similar backgrounds as the above mentioned) are invited from time to time to create a scene for the company's repertoire, or to give transversal advice on the entire repertoire. This may also happen when the leader belongs to the group. However, in such cases choreographic work generally points to the managing of time and space, or to some details about the gestures, but does not usually impinge upon the constitution of the dance pieces themselves; hence a manager explained to me: "*People who worked with us did not teach us how to dance, but how to do it on the stage*" (Zion Shlomi, "insider" manager of the Moshav Amka's company)^{viii}.

Similarly, as stated by dancers asked about the work of a choreographer who came to help them:

We did not want the choreographer to develop [create] things... We really wanted what belongs to us, exactly as they did it in Yemen. You see, we just wanted a few polishing. (Lea, dancer of Moshav Shaar Efraim's company)

Dalia [Avizemer] brought us a lot (...) She taught us 'how to dance', how this dance is the same as ours but 'how to enter or to leave the stage', how to manage time. (Sara, dancer of Moshav Bareket's company)

Audiences

Four types of audience may be distinguished, from the highest to the least « connoisseur ». First are those who once lived in Yemen. They are by and large aware of transformations occurring on the staged presentations; however, they usually enjoy the performance for it brings them pleasant memories. Second are their children or grandchildren who have never lived in Yemen and generally possess only a short knowledge of what was danced, played and sung there. For them, the performance then becomes a means of knowledge transmission about Yemen. Third, part of the audience is usually composed of Israelis who are not of Yemenite origin. Most of the time, their knowledge of Yemenite dance primarily derives from the truncated interpretation given by Israeli Folk Dance. Finally, Yemenite "ethnic" dance companies can perform in front of an international audience, either composed of tourists in Israel or by international festivals' audiences all around the world.

The elaboration of Yemenite "Ethnic" Dance Companies's Repertoires

The common denominator of all Yemenite "ethnic" dance companies is the shaping into a show of dance practices brought from Yemen, practices which were, until then, kept within family ceremonies or community circle, or even no longer practiced for several years. Let us have a closer look to the "final product" one can see performed on stage^{ix}.

On a first level, the shows are all organised on the same model, which is a succession of several "scenes". Each of these scenes being built up in one of those three different ways:

1. a dance piece is presented alone, without referring to its performing circumstance(s) in Yemen;
2. one or several dance pieces are integrated within a playlet representing the larger event during which they used to take place (wedding, henna ceremony, etc);
3. one or several dance motifs are used to make “danceable” an activity which was not so in Yemen (women’s daily work, teaching the Torah to young boys, etc).

The rest of this article will focus on the two last types of scenes which both (re)contextualise a dance practice. I call them “pedagogical dances” for they aim to give an account of life in Yemen.

On a second level, the examination of the making of those “scenes” shows several concomitant procedures. First, several elements or dimensions are usually maintained:

- Characteristic features of musical accompaniment are respected: only songs and percussion are performed, melodic instruments being traditionally banned among Jews in Yemen;
- Physical separation between men and women is kept such as it existed in Yemen: in the whole of daily, religious and festive life, the conjunction of religious and cultural injunctions led to the separation of men and women’s distinct territories;
- As a result, different repertoires developed in Yemen due to the fact that men and women’s dance and musical practices were not supposed to take place in the same venue. In the scenes offered today by Yemenite “ethnic” dance companies, differences between masculine and feminine repertoires are generally respected;
- Differences between regional repertoires are kept and emphasised: Yemenite Jews come from three main regions of which dance repertoires partially or totally differ. In turn, as mentioned earlier, each Yemenite “ethnic” dance company is most of the time referring to one specific place of origin by the selection of the dance pieces they decide to perform.

Second, formal changes happen in terms of space: facing the audience is instituted; the dancers' configurations (circles, lines, pairs, etc) and displacements in space begin to diversify (diagonals, backwards, etc). Changes in terms of time organisation also occur: dance pieces are shortened, the number of identical repetitions of the same motif are extremely reduced, etc. However, changes very seldom affect the internal structure of the dance pieces, i.e. the different motifs each piece is composed of are neither separated nor suppressed. This situation is expressed by one of the “insider” managers when questioned on the issue of evolution since the creation of the company at the beginning of the 1970s:

No, there have been no changes in the origins of our work. Maybe we became more “professional” in the way we are doing it, we are more confident in ourselves when we are on stage, that’s all. I think that when we start to lose basic elements, it will be the end of the group, the end of the founding idea. (Z. Shlomi)

To Change or Not To Change: The Dance “Product” As An Embodiment Of Israeli Issues

This analysis makes clear that the processes of adapting dance pieces to the stage are stretched between two contradictory extremes: on one hand, the will to “*do things just as we did them at home [in Yemen]*”, which implies “not to change anything”; on the other hand, the idea that it is necessary to acknowledge the presence of an audience and to attempt to please it, thus introducing some changes:

In order to make it understandable for the audience, it has to be a show. It is not exactly like a private party at somebody’s house. (Z. Shlomi)

[To please the audience, one has to] change a little bit, to do some variations, some choreographies. You have to change: all the dancers come together and then they spread out, so the stage seems fuller, the audience has more to look at. In Yemen there was no choreography... (...) It is impossible for any choreographer – me as well when I work with the company – to keep things static. (...) The choreography must be modern: a line, couples, a circle which becomes a line, lines crossing each other and then mixing together, and so on. Because the eye becomes tired from always looking at the same things (...) Tradition is here, it is embodied within the songs, the dance, but the choreography must change because it is not... In Yemen there was no choreography, they used to dance freely, spontaneously. Here in Israel you must show the audience what is going on. Therefore you must occupy the entire stage, change the [spatial] forms, the structures, so that it will be interesting, not boring. Those are the elementary rules. (Saadia Amishai, former choreographer and ‘insider’ manager of Hadera’s Company)

This dialogical tension is certainly not specific to those Yemenite “ethnic” dance companies in Israel. However, in the light of the historico-political context that undermines those companies’ development, it encodes here particular issues, acting as a counterbalance to the homogenising process of the new immigrants’ different cultural practices which occurred in the 1940s and 1950s with the creation of a new “Israeli culture”. Therefore, it is now necessary to contextualise the development of those “Ethnic” Dance Companies in their relation to the creation of the so-called Israeli Folk Dance.

The creation of an “Israeli Folk Dance” as a nationalist tool

Israeli Folk Dance^x was literally created in the 1940s as a tool for the cultural – and largely political – construction of a “new” Israeli culture. This process, which began at the end of the 19th century and went on during the main part of the 20th century, derived from the Zionist ideological will to shape every Jew arriving in Palestine according to the character of the “New Hebrew”^{xi}. More concretely, it aimed at “absorbing”^{xii} the new-comers as fast as possible in the creation of an Israeli society by having them adopt a single culture; the same for all. Viewed from this perspective, this new culture had a double purpose: to banish the past lived in diaspora, and to convey this new life-experience of building a Nation-State (Israel proclaims its independence in May 1948). In summary, this new form of dance could be described as an ideologically planned synthesis of the different repertoires of Jewish and non-Jewish communities present at the time in Palestine/Israel. Dance

pieces of these different communities were dismantled and only a few elements were then singled out to become the basic elements of this Israeli Folk Dance (kinetic or musical motifs; dancers' configuration, and so on). So, by carefully breaking the links between those elements and their geographical and cultural origin, the creators of the Israeli Folk Dance answered the double aim of Zionism which was the main ideological paradigm at the time: on one hand they erased every link with the life led in diaspora; on the other they attempted to extract some kind of "supra-judaism" from these different dance elements, from which they built up a new form of dance which would directly contribute to the looked-for cultural and physical unification embodied by the character of the "New Hebrew". However, despite this attempt to create something completely new, the general frame of this new form of dance remained strongly influenced by the European cultural patterns which were those of the first creators, almost all of them being European immigrants from the beginning of the 20th century^{xiii}. Among the selected elements, one in particular comes from the rich repertoires of Jews from Yemen, which became both a basic component of Israeli Folk Dance and, being named the "Yemenite step" by the creators of Israeli Folk Dance, the stereotype of *the* Yemenite dance.

Claiming an "ethnic" cultural recognition: the development of "ethnic" dance companies

A few decades later (1960s-1970s), there was a trend of protest rises against the socio-economic gap which remained between Jews coming from Africa and Asia and those coming from Europe and America - even several decades after their arrival. When Jews from Asia and Africa finally understood that the roots of this unequal socio-economic relation were buried in a cultural depreciation of their own practices, their claims for better education, lodging or salary were strengthened by a claim for cultural recognition. It was at that time, and within this socio-political frame, that the "ethnic" dance companies developed. Whilst bits and pieces of musical and dance repertoires specific to this or that community were instrumentalised in Israeli Folk Dance in order to build a single Israeli culture, those repertoires were now reinvested and exhibited as such by the members of the community themselves^{xiv} so as to oppose the "cultural roadroller" of the first decades.

Hence dance was again called upon, but this time to restore their legitimacy and specificity to the cultural patrimonies of the different communities^{xv}. Other socio-political factors added up to these protests^{xvi} and the ideology until then prevailing (which advocated a singular Israeli identity) finally started to erode gradually. It gave place to a pluricultural image of the Israeli society, the richness of which precisely lay in its diversity. In turn, this shift affected the Israeli politics of culture. Policy makers were fast to perceive that the existence of such dance companies could help emphasise the socio-political turning-point; to recognise these companies by allocating them some founding and organising festivals was to recognise the cultural specificity of their members, and so to assert the cultural pluralism of the State of Israel. However, the use of the adjective "ethnic" until today is a good indication that equality has not been achieved... The terminology in use is a means of keeping a symbolical difference between "ethnic" dance companies and "Israeli" dance companies (cf. above, note 1).

Reconfiguring Identities and Boundaries through Dance

Within this socio-political context, the tension analysed above between the two predominant building processes of “ethnic” dance companies’ staged-dances becomes clearer. The articulation of these apparently contradictory dimensions allows Yemenite dancers, choreographers, but also internal audience, to assume in one single dance form a sense of “being Yemenite” whilst not giving up the national dimension of their Israeli identity. Thus, through dancing (and/or looking at other persons dancing), Israelis of Yemenite origin are able to negotiate both a way to distinguish themselves from the image of a single Israeli identity, and to fully participate in the reformulation of a plural Israeli identity in which they hope to acquire an identical hierarchical status to that of the other members of the Israeli society. If we come back now to the construction of the scenes under study, this tension between “not changing anything” and “transforming elements to please the audience” plays a central role in the interaction between members of the Yemenite community and the Israeli society around them.

At one extreme is the will of “*doing things just as we did them at home [in Yemen]*”. By insisting on the diversity of dance patrimonies coming from Yemen, the artistic work of staging helps in re-building a heterogeneous Yemenite identity of which most of the non-Yemenite Israeli are particularly unaware. Unlike the unifying image built up by the Israeli Folk Dance suggests, there is no such thing as a Yemenite dance, but a dozen or so different repertoires depending on the actors (men/women), the areas within Yemen, the circumstances, etc. Furthermore, this claim for a Yemenite cultural specificity is set out with the exact same tools which were used to deny it; against the de-structuring of the dance pieces carried out by the creators of Israeli Folk Dance, the work of staging does not only feature the entire dance pieces, but also the circumstances of execution as a whole (wedding, etc) and that with a maximum of ethnographic accuracy (musical setting, clothes, differentiation of areas, of genders, etc).

At the other extreme is the will to “*acknowledge the presence of an audience and to attempt to please it*”. For those who create staged-dances, the point here is to understand the aesthetic codes and expectations of the audience they wish to touch and, at least to a certain extent, to conform to those expectations. Thus the artistic work takes place at two levels. On one hand, changes affect the formal dimension, such as the multiplication of the dancers' patterns in the space or the shortening of each sequence, in order “*not to bore the audience*”, as stated by most choreographers:

On stage you have to do something similar to theatre, to give the audience the possibility of understanding what's happening. Because what's the point of keeping it static, of showing something for a long time, of stretching a piece for ever, especially when it is a simple one. People will not understand what's going on. You need to have somebody who is explaining what's happening, then maybe they will understand... But if you create something very rhythmic, with a choreography changing all the time, the eye enjoys, the heart enjoys, and that's what you should do! (S. Amishai)

I thought that it was very important to give them [the ethnic dance companies] a separated stage, with a different attitude towards what's going on on the stage, a different attitude towards time, so that one does not get bored, and so on. If you know how to stage it, and if you know what you are coming to see, you can accept it and appreciate it. So you must find

the best way to expose them [the ethnic dancers], and not to have them compete with the boisterous Israeli Folk Dance! (Reena Sharet, external non-Yemenite choreographer)

Moreover, the aesthetical dimension of dance materials is reprocessed, aiming to transform an action into a show and not to simply demonstrate this action as it could be done in a museum display, for instance. A delicate balance is therefore needed; if the result is found too “artistic” by the audience of Yemenite origin, it will no longer be looked at as “really” representative of the Yemenite Jews^{xvii}, but on the other hand, if it is not enough so, the show is liable to be uninteresting for the non-Yemenite audience, the transmission of information or the translation of one culture towards another being then not achieved, whilst this is precisely one of the aims of this kind of performance^{xviii}.

Towards an Israeli-Yemenite compromise

On a second level, a more abstract process takes place in the elaboration of staged-dances, which underlines the important role played by both internal and external representations in self-image construction. One particularly striking example illustrates this argument: in almost every company's programme, one can find a scene featuring a two partners' dance. This dance piece originates from a male repertoire of the South-Centre region of Yemen. However, even though all companies do not come from this region, or are not always provided with enough male dancers and must then dress up women in men, almost every company attempts to have such a scene in its program. What is at stake here is that it is from this specific masculine dance in pairs that Israeli Folk Dance has selected what is now viewed in Israel as representative of *the* Yemenite dance. So by performing this dance piece in front of an audience, a Yemenite “ethnic” dance company is incorporating an image of the Yemenite Jews largely built outside the community and carried around by Israeli Folk Dance. Such performance becomes an effective mirror-play which sends back to a non-Yemenite audience what they expected when coming to see the show, since for them *that* is the Yemenite dance – *and only that*^{xix}.

The show offered by these companies therefore becomes the place of negotiation and elaboration of an identity which may be called “Israeli-Yemenite” in so far as it is largely influenced by life spent in Israel for *circa* fifty years. On one hand, the external unifying glance which rests on the Yemenite Jews contributed to the building of an image that they, in turn, made their own before sending it back again to everyone through dancing. On the other hand, such “show-case” aims at the breaking-down of a unifying image of the Yemenite Jews made up by the Israeli Folk Dance. However, the will to “*do things just as we did them at home*” tends to crystallise a situation which is no longer that which the actors are living daily. By referring to a so-called “authenticity”, this attempt to keep alive something which no longer exists as such since several decades ago brings together community practice, artistic work, museification and elaboration of an “imagined” Yemen (Anderson, 1983). And in fact, the “imagined” dimension of the Yemen shown here is even higher, in the sense that Israeli citizens are not allowed by Yemen to enter the country anymore. It is then impossible for choreographers or dancers to “refresh their memory” from time to time, as is the case of many cultural actors in a migrating situation. Therefore, everything rests on the memories of migrants who came into Israel no later than the beginning of the 1950s...

Conclusion

Bringing to light the role played by dance in the processes of reconfiguring identities in Israel, this article intended to demonstrate how an ethnographic study of dance practices and their contexts of performance may be a valuable way of accessing the dynamics of self-positioning of a group within the surrounding society. The analysis of the staged-dances shows the reconstruction of a self-image as the articulation of internal choices, with the recuperation and reinterpretation of an already existing image externally built within a specific nationalist context. This type of micro-analysis which combines analysis of the artistic product and ethnological analysis of the context of performance in a broad sense (i.e. ethnography of the conditions of production and larger contextualisation) could therefore conceal heuristic means for the understanding of dialectic processes of both differentiation and assimilation of a given group within the context of migration and/or minority, thus offering an empirical echo to Barth's ground-breaking analysis of interethnic relationships (1969). Indeed, one of the processes analysed here seems to be particularly tied to the migration context: to mobilise objects and/or action sequences (here dancing) in order to retain some dimensions of life before migration by keeping them unchanged (and to a large extent mummified), while simultaneously altering the relation to time and space in order to fit with the codes of the group with which they wish to exchange (and within which they have to "fit" to some extent). Although this is the case for several cultural forms, it seems that both polymorphous and polysemous nature of dance – and more largely still, of dance events – allows it more particularly to simultaneously combine several levels and several aspects of identification.

Finally, the larger question of representation of a culture in the frame of a show and/or a museum arises from this study. In fact, several authors have already drawn attention to the fact that an analysis of "national" or "folklorised" dance-shows could shed light on the way conceivers of such shows look at specific populations and desire to represent them in order to fit their political agenda^{xx}. Other authors have tackled this particular issue from the point of view of exhibitions' curators^{xxi}. The present study offers an original angle, since here, staging processes are mainly conducted by members of the culture that one wishes to represent. Nevertheless, Israelis of Yemenite origins are also, to some extent, influenced by outside interventions ranging from Israeli Folk Dance-trained choreographers coming to help them to suggestions from official organisations of festivals in Israel and abroad.

Endnotes

- i The expression "ethnic companies" (*lehakot etniot*) is the terminology officially in use in Israel. I use it here because it is suitable to the described phenomenon, in that sense that each dance company is specialising in the presentation of one particular cultural patrimony. But the term "ethnic" itself is questionable insofar as, in Israel, it is not used in reference to all the groups of the population: it is mainly used for Jews who came from Asia and Africa (often called, although not properly, Sefarad) and also sometimes for Arabs and Druzes. But no one would qualify Jews coming from Europe and America as "ethnic". Moreover, this distinction is reinforced by the fact that performances offered by these companies are more than often called "folklore", whilst what Israeli dance companies present will be called "dance" (*mahol*)...This

terminological asymmetry reflects an inequality in cultural recognition on which I will later reflect on at length. So inasmuch as these companies have an existence of their own, I keep this expression, but in order not to adopt its ideological implications, I shall put the word “ethnic” within brackets.

- ii Two main waves of immigration came from Yemen to Israel: the first at the end of the 19th century (approx. 10,000 persons), the second between 1949 and 1951 when about 50,000 people were directly transferred by plane from Aden to Israel. Since Israeli statistical categories count as “Israelis” the third generation of “Yemenite” immigrants, it is difficult to give an accurate number of Israelis from Yemenite origin living today in Israel. Nevertheless, in 2005, approximately 143,000 Israelis were either born in Yemen (33,200) or born from a father born in Yemen (110,300) (Source: *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2005, table 2.23).
- iii The expressions “dance practices” and “dance piece” are coined in analogy to “musical practices “ and “musical piece”.
- iv The study of these dance companies was undertaken in two principal directions from 1999 to 2005. On one hand, ethnographic fieldwork took place within three companies of which the members come from different areas of Yemen. Informal and formal interviews, as well as detailed observations were conducted during rehearsals, performances, and daily life of dancers, managers and choreographers. Moreover, I attended as many performances as possible given by the different companies still active today in Israel. On the other hand, formal and informal interviews were also conducted with individuals involved, in a way or another, in these companies' development whilst not belonging to one of them, nor necessarily being of Yemenite origin. I would like to thank in particular the companies and their leaders from Moshav Amka, Moshav Bareket, Kiriat Ekron, Moshav Shaar Efraim, Hadera and Kiriat Ono. In this article, I kept the names of choreographers and managers, but changed the names of the dancers when they were not talking on their own name but as a member of the group.
- v Three regions of Jewish settlement in Yemen are generally distinguished: South-Center (around the capital city of Sana'a), North (in the area of Heydan) and Eastern-South (around the city of Haban).
- vi Ministry organisation regarding culture changed several times in Israel between 1949 and today. At the creation of the State, culture and education were joined in the same ministry. Sport was added to it in the mid-1970s, then suppressed, then added again, and so on. Today, culture, sport and science depend of the same Minister, whilst education is on its own.
- vii By “local community” I mainly refer to Regional Councils or municipalities. Moreover, they are generally affiliated to an association which serves as intermediary between the company and potential organisers of performances in Israel or abroad, in particular the CIOFF (Traditional Arts and Folklore Festivals International Council), an international cultural NGO in formal consulting relations with UNESCO, and one of its local partners in Israel, the Maataf (Center for the Encouragement of Cultural Exchange and Folklore).
- viii Most of the quotes used in this article are extracts of discussions held in Hebrew but translated in English for the sake of this publication (Zion Shlomi's and Reena Sharett's interviews were held in English).
- ix For an example of such performances, see the website of the Yemenite dance company from moshav Amka: www.israel-folklore.com (folder “Gallery”).
- x “*Rikudei Am*” in Hebrew. Literally meaning “dances of the people”, it is usually translated either by “popular dance” or “folk dance”. In this article, I use the

denomination used in English by the actors of this form of dance themselves: "Israeli Folk Dance".

- xi Also called "New Man", this figure is supposed to embody and to personify both physically and culturally the construction of a new Jewish homeland and to depart from the stereotypical figure of the diasporic Jew. Among others, M. Nordau developed widely this idea, which he associated with the notion of "musclar judaism" (Eisen 1998). On the "New Hebrew", see Zerubavel 1994, 1995, 1998 and Berkowitz 1993.
- xii The words « absorption of immigration » (*klitat ha-alya*) and "fusion of the exiled" (*mizoug ha-galuyot*) in use from the day after the creation of the State of Israel (1948) to name one of the principal politic of the new government, are significant of this endeavour to deny and rub away the different diasporic cultures to give way to the new Israeli culture.
- xiii In particular Gurit Kadman (born in 1897 in Germany who emigrated in 1920 to Palestine), Rivka Sturman (born in 1905 in Poland, raised in Germany, and emigrating in 1929), and Sara Levi Tanai (born in 1911 in Jerusalem to Yemenite parents, but raised by Europeans). On another dimension of this cultural construction, the music, see Hirshberg 1997.
- xiv Although most of the creations of companies are initiated by "insiders" of the community, they were also greatly encouraged by outsiders, mostly academics and actors of Israeli Folk Dance desirous to "rescue" dance and musical practices "in danger of disappearing". The "Project for the promotion of ethnic communities' dances" (*Maf'al le tipouach rikoudei ha edot*) is thus set up at the beginning of the 1970s within the *histadrout*, in collaboration with the Ministry for Education and Culture and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The project was directed by Gurit Kadman, one of the first creators of the Israeli Folk Dance.
- xv Few companies existed before that period, but were usually not created by members of the community itself but by actors directly participating to the creation of a new Israeli Folk Dance. Their aim was therefore more to secure some kind of "stock of material potentially useful in the creation of Israeli Folk Dance" than to present existing dance practices for their own sake.
- xvi First of all, the consequences of the Six Days War (1967) and the Kippur War (internal disagreements about the annexation of the occupied territories, religious renewal, etc.), then the arrival of the Right in the government, for the first time in the history of this state (1977).
- xvii Such is the case in particular of the company called *Inbal Dance Theater* created in 1949 by Sara Levi Tanai (informal conversations with Yemenite and non-Yemenite audience; See also Roginski 2006:181). I did not mention this company in this article because from the beginning, the aim and the work of this company were quite distinct from the dance companies analysed here: although its choreographer Sara Levi-Tanai drew much of her inspiration in the dance practices of Jews from Yemen, she regularly stated, and fought for the dance scene and the audience to recognise, that she was attempting to create a new vocabulary of dance and not to present the dance of Yemenite Jews. On this particular issue, see the very comprehensive article of Roginski (2006).
- xviii Referring to a related, though different, context, the museum exhibits, D. Chevalier suggested that these notions of "transmission" and "translation" of a culture to another one are key concepts of the work of museography (*coll.*, 2002:111).
- xix I present this particular situation at length elsewhere: see Gibert, forthcoming.

- xx See in particular Shay 2002 and Nahachewsky 2003.
- xxi For instance, reflections arising from the creation in progress of the “Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée” in Marseille, France (*coll.* 2002: 105); research on Folklife festivals at the Smithsonian Institution or elsewhere (Karp and Lavine 1991); or more lately the work of de l’Estoile (2007).

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