

## The Museological Side of the Conflict: Israeli Exhibition of Terror and the Palestinian Museum of Prisoners

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### Abstract

This essay deals with a section of somewhat unfamiliar terrain within the battlefield of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: museum sites. The focus is on two museological case studies, the Palestinian Museum of Prisoners in Abu Dis and the Israeli Captured Material Display (also known as the Exhibition of Terror) in Ramat Hasharon. Through an analysis of the artistic, educational and political characteristics of both sites, one can observe the complex internal and external power relations of museums located within an ongoing conflict zone. The essay will showcase the role these institutions play in a tenacious struggle for representation amidst efforts to gain the hearts and minds of the world's public opinion while simultaneously battling for national and communal memory. It will show that museums both serve as and perpetuate model behavior and perceptions of a political consciousness and its enemy and, in doing so, help shape political discourse. It also suggests that the study of Israeli and Palestinian museological sites can make a significant contribution to the understanding of Israeli and Palestinian collective fears, phobias, political perceptions, and desires.

Key words: Israel, Palestine, Terror, Prisoners, Museums, Exhibitions

### Introduction and Background Information<sup>1</sup>

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a battle over territory alone. Since the rise of the Zionist movement in Palestine at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through the Palestinian *Nakba*, the creation of Israel, and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the battle between the two national movements has incited manifold conflicts beyond the obvious territorial one. Fights over labor, language, material compensations, moral responsibility, security, international awareness, and many other arenas, have been chief concerns since the conflict's beginning. But it is the clash over the dominant narrative – the use and research of history, as well as crucial symbolic values – which attracts such a decisive part of the ongoing debate within each society.

Several pre-eminent scholars, including Edward Said (1979), have analyzed the narrative struggle that lies in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing on the usage of memory, heritage, and the creation of historical and contemporary knowledge. In 2006, for example, in memory of Said and his contributions to the debate, Makdisi and Silverstein (2006) edited a book titled *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, which highlights struggles over narrative as filtered through cultural practices, commemoration ceremonies, and other ceremonial acts undertaken at a time when history is overshadowed by a legacy of violence.

Meron Benvenisti (1996, 1997, 2002), one of the most prominent Israeli scholars who wrote on the struggle over narratives, extensively examined the use of landscape, both physical and social, as a way to preserve historical and political pasts. The importance of memory, and its use and place in Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli narrative, was analyzed by Susan Slymovics (1998) by looking how Palestinians remember the origins of the village *Ein Houd* in relation (and in contrast) to the Jewish residents of the village in the same area, which they called *Ein Hod*. The work of Whitelam (1998) and Zerubavel (1995) also bears great importance for this debate, especially regarding the place of collective memory and the use of history in the creation of Israeli national tradition. Nadia Abu al-Haj (2002) added to these discussions through a sophisticated reading and analysis of the *archeological* angle of the struggle over the narrative, emphasizing how this field of territorial expertise has helped

Israeli-Jewish society establish new historical knowledge that supports and validates the Zionist project within Israeli-Jewish society.

The research discussed in this essay attempts to add a contemporary angle to the current debate by juxtaposing two museum-type displays and looking at their ways of interpreting the past for a political present. Before delving into the Israeli-Palestinian examples, though, a brief discussion of the role museums play as arenas of conflicts and formulation of knowledge is necessary. Museums have long been seen as 'contact zones' (Clifford 1997: 188-219) or as 'forums' (Cameron 1971: 11-24) that do not simply operate as imperialist exercises, but rather, as spaces that simultaneously encourage interactions between cultures and acknowledge their differences. They are dynamic enterprises, rather than static (Tsing 2005: xi). Here we consider these museum spaces more as active 'conflict zones,' than that of 'contact,' and we examine the social and political import of their artifacts in perpetuating these conflicts (Miller 2005; Mauss 1925; Henare, Holbraad, Wastell 2007). Within these two museum sites, as we show, the same objects are utilized for different, and often conflicting, edifying purposes that themselves alter with contemporary political shifts.

From when museums were created as Western enterprises, they were meant to maintain a particular 'world picture' (Heidegger 1977) and to solidify the Empire; the nationalistic aspect of educating the public through exhibitions, although seemingly archaic, cannot be overlooked. Yet as publics are increasingly fractured, and travel more accessible, museums are no longer central purveyors of current truths or even central stations for objects that bear political enterprises (Scheper-Hughes 1993: 480-504). Photography and newspapers offer instant access to the world of today and create ever-ready images of current threats to the state, or strategic political triumphs, as it may be. As countries swell in population, and digital images have become common parlance for events, photographs are now often placed in museums as 'proof' of political stances as regularly as the traditional *things* that made up the heart of early museum collections. Photographs, as implied in Rebecca L. Stein's *Itineraries in Conflict: Israelis, Palestinians and the Political Lives of Tourism* (2008), are what Israeli (and Palestinian) tourists now collect. If we consider the experience of museum-going as a tourist event – visiting a strange land with the expectation that it can be filtered (and consumed) through pre-existing conceptions – then it is easy to view Stein's 'national intelligibility' as a key factor in the formation and confirmation of particular political psyches in the museum spaces we discuss below. The perpetuation of Israel and Palestine as nation-states – even more so than other countries – requires an ongoing commitment to the symbols, myths, and rituals of their creations and museums are able to serve as physical manifestations of these origin stories (Mayer 2005: 5).

For proof of the role museums and museum objects have within political matters, one need look no further than Egypt and Zahi Hawass, the secretary-general of that country's Supreme Council of Antiquities. His recent demand for Germany to return a bust of Nefertiti to Egypt came immediately on the heels of the failure of Egypt's culture minister, Farouk Hosny, to win the election for a new director of UNESCO. Museums, as we know, are both architecturally and intellectually, the creation of individuals, and often, of nation-states. To suggest they are somehow above politics is simply to perpetuate a myth of an intangible omniscient other, thereby obviating blame for those in power (Mitchell 1991: 77-96). Still, many citizens, particularly those whose histories are not accurately portrayed in museums, see the institutions as further emblems of their powerlessness within the state. As Greenberg explains regarding a Bedouin man's perspective of a Bedouin museum within Israel, 'The representation of his community by this museum is both irreconcilable with his reality and ultimately, a *fait accompli*' (1997:14). It is not hard to extrapolate from Greenberg's work that many Palestinians similarly have no expectation that they will ever be portrayed as anything other than the enemy in Israeli Museums where Israelis are cast simultaneously as the 'victim' of life-threatening attacks and as the perseverant Zionist victors.

The two museological sites that we study in this article were built in Israel and in Palestine during the same time period, and were both established as a reaction to the Israeli-Palestinian ongoing conflict. Both sites were (and are) intimately linked to the political conflict, but choose different foci to highlight, tweaking their messages as the political climates in each place changes, and re-affirming and re-negotiating what events they portray to most accurately

defend their politics. The Palestinian museum, the Abu Jihad Center, has focused on the issue of the nearly 7,000 Palestinian prisoners currently held in Israeli prisons and detention centers, and also, more generally, on the history of the Palestinian Prisoners' Movement. It examines the suffering of the Palestinian prisoners, the political implications of their capture, their role as 'resistors,' and the violations of their rights at the hands of the Israeli authorities. In this way, the Palestinian curators have attempted to re-appropriate the traditional idea of the 'museum' and to utilize it as a localized form of public expression held in contrast to Israeli claims and narrative (Ames 1992: 13).<sup>2</sup> The Israeli exhibition space, meanwhile, has focused on the Israeli understanding of 'terrorism' – and uses its museological space, and many documents, movies, and exhibits, to justify Israeli actions and to depict them as defensive in nature. Israelis are portrayed as acting against a Palestinian offensive armed struggle instigated to hurt the Israeli people (hence the self-perpetuated perception of themselves as victims).



*Photo No. 1 Model of the Dome of the Rock, made by a Palestinian prisoner in one of the Israeli jails. Exhibited in Abu Jihad Museum, Abu Dis. Photo taken from the official website.*

The two museums, which arguably deal with different concerns, may therefore be seen as counterparts. Although entirely separate entities, the two have used similar, and, at times even complementary, methods and objects in order to convey their political messages. We attempt to show here that through an analysis of the two museological sites, one can learn not only about Israeli or Palestinian political perceptions of their immediate 'Other,' but also about the social and political considerations and characteristics of dominant internal political movements in each place, and their ongoing creation and re-negotiation. These museum spaces operate therefore not so much as spaces for re-negotiation themselves, but as vantage points into particular political attitudes that use the discourse of politics without attempting to problematize the national conflicts (Witz 2006: 107-134). The spaces serve to perpetuate prior perceptions

in part by taking advantage of the 'museum effect' (Alpers 1991; Bouquet 2001). In this way, the museums can seem more similar to the highly political World Fairs than more current exhibitions that try to break down potential myopic viewpoints of peoples and places (Ames 1992; Karp and Levine 1991). As Martin Heidegger states on his own, and as reconfigured by Timothy Mitchell (1977; 1991), the World Fairs and Exhibitions played a critical role in helping to define both the idea of a museum and that of a nation state. These expositions determined what products of a nation were worthy of exhibiting, and, in doing so, justified the existence of nations. Within these theories is the implicit suggestion that not only do museums display the most 'valuable' objects of a nation, but also, the inverse: a country without museums is one that has no (thing) of particular authentic, scientific or historically accurate value. In the case of these two museums, there is not necessarily the pretense that they represent the 'state,' so much as that they serve to promote a particular (and powerful) political vantage point that allows for a defined enemy.

Both museums use specific national and political perspectives and experiences to depict what are very often the same events. The two museological sites use the elision and sometimes the outright suppression of facts, as well as particular emphases within their displays and text to leave visitors with specific political impressions. That museums have an ideological bent is hardly unusual, but rarely are there two opposing ideologies displayed in two equivalent-sized and funded institutions in such close proximity to one another. Beyond their geographic proximity, their twinned emphasis on (relatively) current events means that many of the visitors to these exhibits are able to frame the exhibition's ideologies using their own recollections of the events and to bolster their ongoing political conversations with others using 'facts' from the museums.



*Photo No. 2 The Martyrs' Wall, Abu Jihad Museum, Abu Dis. Photo taken by Yonatan Mendel.*

### Abu Jihad vs. Exhibition of Terror: Introduction of the two case-studies

The Abu-Jihad Center for the Prisoner Movement is a museum attached to Al-Quds University in the Abu Dis Campus, just east of Jerusalem. It was established in 1999 in Ramallah and moved to its permanent location in 2007. It was built following a generous contribution from the Kuwaiti Government and the Arab Fund in Kuwait, and it maintains strong relations with the Palestinian leadership – chiefly that of Fatah.

The Center is dedicated to the Palestinian prisoners' struggle for freedom, and according to its website, aims 'to highlight the role of the Prisoner Movement in Palestinian life.'<sup>3</sup> It focuses on quantitative and 'absolute' data about the Palestinian prisoners, using specifics such as the exact numbers of prisoners, the schematics of main imprisonment centers, and the distinct types of interrogation and torture used by Israelis to bolster its arguments. The Center also contains a large exhibition of items created by the prisoners during their incarceration: Some of the most elaborate ones are models of the Dome of the Rock (see photo no. 1), a vase made out of pistachio shells, and many replicas of ships, which, as will be discussed below, represent freedom, as well as return. Another part of the museum displays photographs that portray the life of the Palestinian prisoners from the moment of their arrest, through their detentions, and up to their long jail sentences. One of the walls in the museum is titled *Martyrs of the Palestinian Prisoners Movement 1967-2007*, on which there are 220 pictures and names of Palestinian prisoners. These personages are meant to be viewed, as the title notes, as 'martyrs' who died in Israeli prisons (see photo no. 2). The museum includes also an archive, a library and a computerized research center.

The Israeli counterpart to the Abu-Jihad Center was established in 2001 and is officially named the Captured Material Display in The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. The Center is a white complex located in the suburbs of Ramat Hasharon, just north of Tel Aviv. It is attached to the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center (IICC), an NGO dedicated to the memory of fallen members of the Israeli Intelligence Community. It maintains ties to the Ministry of Defense and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The director and deputy director of the Israeli Center are both civilians with military backgrounds, and the Center itself is run by military intelligence soldiers. Beyond its existence as a museological site, the Center also operates a large security and intelligence-oriented library and a computerized information center.

According to the Israeli Center's official website, the museum space 'focuses on issues concerning intelligence and *terrorism*... It reports on various topics such as the Palestinian Authority and its policies regarding *terrorism* and *terrorist* organizations, Palestinian *terrorist* organizations and their activity during the lull in the fighting, anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli incitement and hate propaganda, *terrorism*-sponsoring countries - especially Syria and Iran - as well as Hezbollah, the global financing of *terrorism*, links between Palestinian-Middle Eastern *terrorism* and global Jihad, suicide-bombing *terrorism* and its source in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the involvement of women and children in Palestinian *terrorism*' (emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> If the Palestinians are portrayed as martyrs in their museum, here, Israelis are portrayed quite clearly as a people threatened by terrorism; they are defenders, rather than perpetrators.

Since 2003, the Center has hosted an exhibition of Palestinian documents and materials, including weapons and political posters that were captured through IDF operations. These items, according to the Center's website, are meant 'to help the public understand the features of Palestinian terrorism, its dimensions and its ideological, cultural and practical aspects.'<sup>5</sup> Again, we see an overabundance of a specific type of information related to terrorism, meant to clearly define visitor perception of ongoing events.

What follows is a further discussion of these two museological sites as political and ideological counterparts. We look at the physical locations of the two institutions, the roots and aims of the structures as museums, the exhibits they present, their political and social context, and their existence as reflections of societal perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## 1. The Battle over the World's Hearts and Minds

As participants, and, indeed, initiators of state hegemonic and political discourses, the politics of these museums are not incidental to our discussion. It is worth noting as well that many of the political discourses taking place within these museums are also reflected in other local institutions. Meron Benvenisti (1996: 4) has shown how the Israeli Tower of David Museum in the Old City in Jerusalem is a straightforward example of a Zionist-oriented museum, which erases Palestinian history. It bears the slogan 'The Tower of David Museum – Where Jerusalem Begins,' despite its location in a citadel that is actually an Ottoman mosque crowned by a cylindrical minaret. This museum exists in stark contrast to the Islam Museum, located on top of the Temple Mount in the same city.

This paper, therefore, does not intend to merely illustrate the political slant museums have, but also, to show the implicit and unmistakable connection between contemporary political justifications and museology. When looking in particular at the Israeli concept of 'terrorism' and the Palestinian concern for the estimated 7,000 Palestinian prisoners jailed in Israel, the two museums showcase internal political – and even security-oriented – needs. In this, one of their significant shared characteristics is their flexibility. They are able to regularly add exhibits to their displays according to the ongoing political events and changes on the ground, and, arguably, according to fights over *representation* of these events.

These museums relate to and inform ongoing political events and conflict rather than merely offering new interpretations of past events (as many other museums do). The Israeli museum may expand its exhibition following the next escalation of tensions between Israel and Palestine; the Palestinian museum continues to update its information for visitors regarding the number of prisoners and detainees held in Israeli prisons shifts. Both museums thus deal with ongoing, unresolved, immediate political realities. This makes them, if not wholly unique, then particularly noteworthy. Similarly politically charged museums, such as the Beijing War of Resistance Museum in China (Mitter 2000), The October Panorama in Cairo, Egypt (Meital 2003: 163-165), the Museum of War and Martyrdom in Khorramshahr, Iran (Audoin-Rouzeau 2000: 494), or the South African District Six Museum (Witz 2010) correspond to and shape the remembrance of finalized, closed, and fundamentally past events.<sup>6</sup>

The museological act that is studied in this essay is not a reflection of the past, or a political attempt to shape it according to the national discourse, but rather a description of a 'continuous past,' and so it very much corresponds with a changing political present. Here, the museological act should be seen as part of an attempt by Israeli and Palestinian politicians and persons in power to inform and 'educate' their local population's political consciousness, as well as the international community's public opinion.

The need to go beyond the traditional tools of ideological warfare and public relations (i.e. print and screen media, propaganda, press releases, and other ephemera) to shape public opinion was most acutely recognized by both Israelis and Palestinians during the last decade. The Israeli decision to re-establish the Ministry of Public Diplomacy, and its latest campaign titled '*Masbirim*' (lit. 'Explaining') is an evident attempt to deal with growing criticism from the international community of its political policies and occupation. Similarly, the latest Palestinian campaign to boycott goods from Israeli settlements was accompanied by intensive efforts to publicize it in English, not just in Arabic. Palestinian and Israeli demonstrators or activists often confront each other with cameras, trying to collect 'evidence' that can be later used in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian versions' battle in the international media. Hackers, both Palestinian and Israelis, use the internet as another arena for putting one's opinion on top of the other; the 'Israeli-Palestinian Conflict' page in Wikipedia has become a hub of heated conflict between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian editors who clash online about the definition of the term, and try to control the knowledge about it that is consumed by English-speakers.

It is in this light that one should read the creation of the two museological sites studied here: they were established immediately before and after the second Palestinian *Intifada*, which broke out in September 2000. During this period, the importance of public-opinion and a struggle to win the world's 'hearts and minds,' as demonstrated by Shamir and Shikaki

(2010), were clearly at the fore of political discourses. These two institutions were created with the intention of operating as active participants in each society's political struggle for being 'understood' and 'supported' by the international community. They were also created in order to maintain a united, nationalistic front within their distinct local communities, as will be analyzed hereafter.

## 2. Audience

According to the deputy director of the Abu-Jihad Center, Fahd Abu al-Haj, the primary audience of the museum is the local community.<sup>7</sup> He estimated that it has an average of 3,000 visitors every year. The vast majority of the visitors – more than eighty per cent – were Palestinians and only a minority of them was foreigners. The local visitors are mostly Palestinian students from high schools and universities, but also from other parts of society. They are coming for day visits to the museum, which usually include a lecture about the Palestinian prisoners and their struggle against Israeli occupation. Some of the local visitors are also researchers who make use of the library, archive and information center located within the museum complex.

The visits of foreigners are usually organized in advance, and are almost entirely made up of delegations of politicians, diplomats, representatives of different NGOs operating in the West Bank, and peace activists. These visitors are typically guided by the director of the Center. Hardly any of them are Jewish-Israelis. This is likely because they disagree (or expect to) with the Palestinian museum's perspective, but also because the entrance to Abu Dis, where the museum is located, is forbidden for citizens of Israel.

The knowledge that the Abu-Jihad museum receives not only directed visitors but mainly Palestinian ones is reflected in the museum's signage. All signs and posters have original Arabic texts followed by English translations. The museum website's first language, however, is English and only some portions of the online texts are translated into Arabic. This shift indicates the more local orientation of the physical museum, and the more international orientation of the museum's website, and also corresponds with the perception of the museum as operating in both international and local political discourses related to Palestine. The website is therefore utilized as a platform for improving public opinion of the Palestinian cause internationally, and the prisoners' issue particularly.

Hebrew is hardly found in the museum, or on the website. The only exception to this is a single sign in the museum that is translated to seven different languages, including Hebrew. It states, 'I will kiss the ground of my cell... as it is part of my homeland' (see photo no. 3). This text bears immense political, as well as emotional, importance as it is a popular slogan for the yearning of the Palestinian people for the historical Palestine (pre-1948) on which the State of Israel has been founded. The way the cell - as a negative, intimidating, and horrifying place – becomes a source of positive encouragement and passion as it is 'part of the homeland,' is a powerful twist on its more traditional meaning and it demonstrates the Palestinian determination and devotion for Palestine and again reiterates the theme of them as imprisoned martyrs.

The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center's audience is nearly the mirror image of that of the Abu Jihad Center. Most of the in-person visitors to the museum are locals from the Israeli-Jewish society, either students or soldiers, but also Jewish tourists who arrive to Israel from abroad through various educational programs. According to the director of the Center, approximately 300 people visit the exhibition each month, which places the number of the annual visitors at approximately 3,600. All display explanations inside the exhibition are given in Hebrew and in English. There is no explanation about the exhibits that is written in Arabic.

A small staff of Israeli-Jewish experts writes information bulletins on political topics for the Center. The bulletins are issued in Hebrew and English, but many of them are also translated by the Center into French, German, Russian, and Arabic.<sup>8</sup> Apart from the bulletins, the Center also operates a website called [www.terrorism-info.org.il](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il), which can be accessed in Hebrew, English, French, Russian, Arabic, and Persian. The focus on the term 'terrorism,'



*Photo No. 3 An eight-language exhibition wall in the Abu Jihad Museum, Abu Dis.  
Photo taken by Yonatan Mendel.*

in the name of the Center, its website, and the many references to this word in the Center's official goals, is purposive. As we see it, there is a strong rhetorical element to this repetition, which is supposed to create both fear and certainty among the visitors – physical or online – of the existence and prominence of 'terrorism' within the Palestinian society, strategy and politics. This perception corresponds with prevailing political views among Israeli-Jewish society and establishment.<sup>9</sup>

According to the Center's official figures, the website receives more than 100,000 online visitors a month from all over the world, although their audience is mainly from the United States, Europe and Israel. It also states that 'among the subscribers are senior policy-makers, leading media personalities, members of academic institutions and institutes specializing in global terrorism.'<sup>10</sup>

As with the Palestinian museum, therefore, the Israeli exhibition hall and the Center of Terrorism and Intelligence are closely linked to ongoing political dialogues, and they are only a small part of their organization's attempts to spread and legitimize various political messages, an effort which is mostly achieved by the Center's website and newsletter. Both institutions as physical entities therefore mostly preach to the converted, reaching mainly those who already agree with them; they both try to influence the world's hearts and minds through English-language websites and newsletters.

### 3. Architecture

Despite the effectiveness of the internet at dispersing the political messages of these institutions, the museum's power as a building should not be overlooked. It is almost pat at this point to reference the Foucauldian exhibitionary complex to explain how museums in particular manipulate the way bodies move through their space, becoming exhibited symbols themselves through their very presence (c.f. Bennett, et al., 1995.) Yet it would be mistake to





Photo No. 4 A map of Palestine, handmade by a Palestinian prisoner, exhibited in the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. Photo taken by Yonatan Mendel.

dismiss this type of inscription as well; the Abu Jihad Museum and the Israeli exhibition hall utilize their physical spaces to very specific political purposes that are categorically designed to embody the emotional sentiments they wish to instill upon visitors.

The Abu Jihad Museum was built to make a political statement and to raise awareness of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, and its architectural design is meant to evoke the life of Palestinian prisoners as victims, but also, as martyrs. On the ground floor, for example, black prison bars separate one section of the museum from the next. The staircase climbing from the first floor to the second begins with four used and scarred stones, whereas the rest are new and polished. According to the director, 'the first four symbolize the prisons... and those that come after them symbolize what is yet to come – peace and the release of the prisoners'.<sup>11</sup>

The museum makes clear that 'the life in prison' situation also represents the Palestinians who live under the Israeli occupation.

The architectural design of the building is meant to make visitors empathize with the general Palestinian life experience as constricted by the Israeli hegemonic state. The main entrance to the museum is made out of large cement blocks, a blatant symbol of the life of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who reside close to and behind the cement separation wall, put up by the Israeli government. The real Separation Wall, created by the State of Israel, can be seen from the museum, as it curves through the town of Abu Dis. The museum therefore, is imprisoned in real and designed walls, and is located in the West Bank, which is also an 'imprisoned' territory, kept under Israeli military occupation since 1967.

In the Israeli exhibition hall, the museum itself is used as an object for political purposes, or 'poetic transcendence,' showcasing the Israelis as constantly threatened by outside forces (Saunders 2001). To reach the second floor, visitors must go through a passageway titled 'The Tunnel of Terror,' which is a dark staircase that aims to transport the visitor from the outside 'civilized' world into the world of 'terror' and 'terrorism.' There is also a plan to place the remains of an Israeli bus, which was exploded in 2002 by Palestinians and killed eight Israelis, in front of the building. According to the Israeli Journal of Intelligence (2004: 6-7) this is supposed to 'illustrate for the visitor the Palestinian terror... and to serve as a *landscape sculpture* (lit. *Pesel Svivati*) which will correspond with the exhibition itself, where information about the lethal terror attack will be given.' Here, 'Palestinian' becomes an adjective, utilized to describe the act itself of terror in such a way that the Palestinian identity as a personified threat (or as a martyr) is disabused for the more abstract, yet comprehensive, threat of dark terror.

Apart from the 'Tunnel of Terror' and the suggested 'landscape sculpture,' there are no other significant architectural elements in the Israeli exhibition hall designed to manipulate the viewer experience in any manifest ways. It can be argued, however, that the actual density of exhibits in the two-space exhibition is fundamentally a political decision. One of the desired aims may be to overwhelm the visitor with such a huge number of maps, documents, movies, exhibits, explanations, which fill every corner in the exhibition halls. These items in their entirety represent the Israeli case as based on so many exhibits and 'facts,' that they imply infallibility and truth. As Barbara Saunders states while discussing the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, 'The role of a museum then is to display such artifacts and enact its performatives with sufficient efficacy for the nation to feel itself at home, to resonate imaginatively to exhibits and displays, to unite in sorrow, to identify with pride, and for neighbors and visitors to acknowledge authenticity' (2001: 18).

#### 4. The Role of the Director

Unsurprisingly, the directors of both centers are linked politically and emotionally to the themes of their museums. The director and founder of the Palestinian museum is Fahd Abu al-Haj, who was imprisoned in Israel in 1978 and released in 1985 as part of the Jibril Agreement.<sup>12</sup> According to Al-Haj, his experience in an Israeli prison has made him more fully appreciate freedom, and he therefore decided to dedicate his life to other prisoners still in Israeli jails. Al-Haj has said that the museum's commitment to peace comes in part from his experience in jail. According to him, 'the vast majority of the released Palestinian prisoners believe in a peace agreement. The prisoner has suffered and this makes him – more than the average person – inclined to look for peaceful solutions... so his children and people will not need to suffer as much as he did.' This vision, as portrayed in the Palestinian institution leaves room for a better, and peaceful, future, much more so than any text within the Israeli institution.

The Israeli Center's director is Dr. Reuven Erlich, a retired Colonel from the Israeli Military Intelligence who has special interest in and knowledge about 'terrorism.' Beyond his work at the Center, he also teaches a course titled 'Intelligence Studies' at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center, a private academic institute located north of Tel Aviv. According to the academic center's website, Erlich served for thirty years as a researcher in the Military Intelligence corps, and specialized in Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian affairs. Moreover, he served as the Israeli government's deputy coordinator for Lebanese affairs and was a member of the Israeli delegation to the bilateral peace talks with Lebanon.<sup>13</sup> Erlich has built his career in close contact with the Israeli establishment, and even more so with the Israeli security system.

It could be argued that there is the expectation that to bolster their arguments the individuals who run these centers are required to not only be experts in the field, but also, people whose personal experience 'entitles' them to stress the desired narrative. The Palestinian former-prisoner cum museum director allegedly has the right to represent the political narrative of the prisoners because of his professional and political background, even though it does not contain museology; the Israeli former Military Intelligence officer allegedly has the right to analyze Palestinian 'terrorism' and political resistance, and to evaluate their threat because of his personal and professional experiences of a political, if not museological, nature.

#### 5. Same Objects: Different Titles

While we do not wish to delve into arguments about the artistic merits of museum objects, it seems clear that 'aesthetic' or 'artistic' expertise is not the main basis for which items are included within these museums. What is clear is that many of the items that are placed within the 'terror exhibition' in the Israeli Center are also in the Palestinian exhibition. The fact that the same objects in different contexts and surroundings may carry a multiplicity of meanings is far from new (Crooke 2005, Bolton 1997). It is nevertheless striking to see the variant ways in which content is loaded with contrasting meanings in the two exhibits through their titles, related explanations, and contexts.



*Photo No. 5 A replica of the 'ship of return'. Made by a Palestinian prisoner and exhibited in the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. Photo taken by Yonatan Mendel.*

Maps of Palestine, for example, which were handmade by Palestinian prisoners, are utilized within the Palestinian exhibition as a symbol of the patriotic creativity shown by prisoners while jailed in Israel. The same maps are displayed in the Israeli Exhibition of Terror (see photo no. 4) with an explanation next to them stating that the 'absence of the name Israel, highlights the Palestinian refusal to recognize it.'

Another similarly dramatic differentiation of interpretation is showcased via replicas of ships (known as the 'ships of return/freedom') made by Palestinian prisoners. For Palestinians, these ships symbolize their yearning for freedom and for their return to their original homes, now located under the sovereignty of the State of Israel. The boats are centrally displayed in the Palestinian museum as both artistic and patriotic creations. In the Israeli exhibition, the Palestinian desire to return to what is today's Israel as exemplified by these ships is stressed as a threat to its Jewish majority and identity. The Israeli curator also chose to display a Palestinian ship in his Center as

an emblem of Palestinian chicanery – it has a hidden opening – and a text panel discussing the mobile phones which were smuggled into the prisons inside these replica ships (see photo no. 5 for the ship exhibited in the Israeli center, and photo no. 6 for the ship exhibited in the Palestinian center). The Israeli display stems from the axiom that the act of imprisoning the Palestinian convicts is 'just,' and therefore the attempts to smuggle communication devices into the prisoners are 'unjust.'

The act of smuggling is similarly highlighted in each museum under wholly different contexts and interpretations. In the Abu Jihad museum, where the Israeli prisons are seen as an 'unjust' result for 'just' Palestinian resistance, smuggling as a means of communication is framed as an example of the Palestinian courage and intelligence, which successfully allows Palestinian prisoners to maintain surreptitious communication. The sneaking of mobile phones, radios, or notes, into prison is therefore displayed as a sign of ingenuity and perseverance on behalf of the Palestinians and thus warrants a place of honor.

The Israeli exhibition emphasizes what it translates as the 'illegality' of smuggling through several different exhibits. The Center displays a notebook of a Palestinian prisoner with a hiding place for a mobile phone, and depicts it as an act of almost diabolical insubordination. The notebook is titled with *The 'Art' of Terrorism in Jails* (see photo no. 7). It is not hard to imagine that the selfsame notebook, if placed in the Palestinian museum, might have had the exact same label, but with a relocation of the citation marks from 'art' to

'terrorism,' highlighting the way in which even such use of the inverted commas is a political act.



*Photo No. 6 A replica of the 'ship of return'. Made by a Palestinian prisoner and exhibited in the Abu Jihad Museum in Abu Dis. Photo taken from the official website.*

## 6. The 'Objectivity' of Libraries, Archives and Research Centers

Both institutions feel their museums are bolstered in terms of objectivity by their relationship to the information and research centers they share space with. This is reflected in their public statements and their physical locations. The Palestinian museum is contained within Al-Quds University's campus, thereby encompassing its twofold purpose of educating the next generation on the values of patriotism and resistance to the occupation and giving the Center a respectable academic grounding or, depending on one's perspective, veneer. Comparatively, the Israeli site is more liminal: the Center is located just outside a military intelligence base, but still in 'civil' territory. This location, however, is hardly less calculated: within Israeli militaristic discourse, this is arguably a perfect location for a Center which focuses on security-oriented issues. It is on the border between the outside academic-civilian world, where 'scientific' and 'empiric' knowledge is being created, and the world of military intelligence, where the classified, and therefore 'reliable' and 'crucial' knowledge is being created, and where the IDF's evaluations take place.<sup>14</sup> The usage of geography in Palestine and Israel, of course, has huge import and it is hardly surprising that the museums' placement would be significant. Still, it is telling how instrumental location is in furthering the missions of these two institutions.

Both institutions also house an archive and a library alongside their museums, thereby bolstering their 'objective' and scientific credentials. According to the Palestinian website,



Photo No. 7 A notebook of a Palestinian prisoner with a hiding place for a mobile phone. Exhibited in the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. Photo taken by Yonatan Mendel.

'Abu Jihad Museum's library is *the most important part* of the museum... and it includes a computer hall, through which the visitor can obtain any information concerning prisoners...' (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup> That the library is referenced as 'the most important part' shows the value the Palestinian Center staff attributes to the library as a reservoir of knowledge, which can both give the museum an informative, scientific, academic 'authorization,' and can encourage researchers to conduct studies about and to receive information from the museum and its library.

The Israeli institution similarly highlights the importance of the presence of its library and archive. According to the Israeli website, 'the [Center's] library specializes in the twin fields of intelligence and terrorism, and houses the largest collection in those subjects in Israel, and one of the largest in the world.'<sup>16</sup> The website then mentions that 'the library and the computerized information center are important components of the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center and integral to the activities of the IICC,' thereby affirming the link between the museum and political aims of the state.

When Dr. Erlich, the director of the Israeli museum, was interviewed for this paper, and was told about this project, in which the Israeli and the Palestinian institutes are compared, he seemed rather unhappy. As a way of proving his Center to be more reliable than the Palestinian one, he was keen to press the distinction of the Israeli Museum as a *research center*. According to him, 'Unlike the Palestinian museum... the Israeli Center for Terrorism and Intelligence does not have anything to do with propaganda...our aim is to present the Israeli point of view, based on items of *data, facts and information*. *Information* is an important component in our Center, and therefore we function as a *research center*. We conduct *research* and then *publish* it. We are not speaking here about views, but about *facts*. This

differentiates us totally from the Palestinian museum, which is a propagandist center' (emphasis added). The distinction made by Erlich implies that the facts are on the Israeli side, and that the Israeli Center does not in any way manipulate the data as the Palestinian Center allegedly does. The suggestion, therefore, is that there are right and wrong ways to interpret facts, and the Israeli way is the 'correct' one.

These claims to factual legitimacy based on compounded information are used by both institutions to strengthen and supposedly prove the historical, factual and emotional inherent truths of which they preach. Ariela Azoulay has elaborated theoretically on the use of contact zones created by historical museums, libraries and archives by stating that, 'the conservation and perpetuation of the past takes place in the public domain through fixed behavior patterns' (Azoulay, 1993: 81). Her implication is that the 'building-institutions' (lit. *Mosdot Mivniyyim*), which she analyzes as institutions that produce fixed and rigid representations, do not act in isolation from one another: 'The book, the library, the memorial, and the museum, which allegedly serve different needs, actually perform with one another reciprocal relations – either complementary or competitive' (1993: 81).

Together, these objects and structures create a systematic historical framework through which the public interprets the political, and social, past and present. This combination of the political and social is particularly salient in Palestine and Israel, of course, because, as these exhibits clearly showcase, in each place there is often no distinction made by politicians between the personal and the political. The joining of historical concepts (the memory, the archive) with what is considered, at least by the two museums, as modern and objective research (the library, the computer center) enables the two different institutions to enjoy what they claim is 'scientific' credibility and the 'right' to analyze.

## 7. War Memorials and National Memory

Beyond their libraries and archives, both institutions also operate as war memorials. The Palestinian museum has a monument for victims of the Palestinian prisoners' movement (The Martyr's Hall) and the Israeli Center includes a memorial for the fallen soldiers of the intelligence community. This memorial aspect of the institutions' identity, we argue, further links state's policy and the social-historical expectations of the people in terms of perspective and 'politics.' Public criticism of these Centers therefore risks being misconstrued as indifference to national suffering.

Bernard Barber (1949: 66-67) has argued that memorial sites are social and physical arrangements constructed in order to keep alive the memories of persons who fought in wars sponsored by their countries, with the implication that the state's political thrusts benefit from this maintenance. According to Mayo, (1988: 65)

The addition of honor as a social purpose separates the sacred from the non-sacred. A nation can commemorate the persons who fought its wars, because its government is jointly obligated itself to protect and to defend its citizens and simultaneously call on them to fight. The government repays its citizens through honor.

The linking of honor with nationalism also serves to imply that those who do not internalize the beliefs disseminated by these centers are 'dishonorable' citizens.

Mayo also highlights the particular kind of memory provided by war memorials. According to him (1988: 75) 'War memorials in the landscape partially reflect a nation's political history. Commemoration through war memorials mirrors not only what a society wants to remember, but also what it wishes to forget.' This insight is an interesting one since it leads us to analyze more critically what these museological sites say about their societies, what they reveal and what they hide. As we have seen through the reinterpretation of 'information' and objects such as the ship models by the two Centers, facts always retain a bit of the 'underneath,' which can be flipped and used to its opposite effect.

## 8. Malleable Facts

To further explore the purpose and usage of factual elisions by these two institutions, we would like to attempt to describe the chronicle of the Palestinian prisoner in an impartial way, and to compare how he/she is displayed in each Center. Interestingly, in the Palestinian Center, one can only view two crucial stages in the life of the Palestinian prisoner: his/her life under Israeli occupation (previous suffering) and his/her life after being arrested by Israel (current suffering). The in-between stage (the operation or violent act for which he/she were arrested) is not found in the museum. The reasoning behind this, we can only presume, is that to illustrate 'the operation' might lend legitimacy to the act of imprisonment, thereby making Palestinian use of violence against civilians, even within the context of Israeli ongoing occupation, into a 'fact.'

To learn about this liminal stage – in which one is captured and unsure of what will come next, existing in an Agamben-esque *bare life* (1998) state – a visitor would need to visit the Israeli museum. The Israeli museum completely ignores the first stage of Palestinian life under occupation (the forty-four years they have spent under military occupation and the six decades of conflict) and the last stage (the 7,000 Palestinian prisoners currently jailed in Israel and the conditions they live under), and tells only of specific Palestinian acts of violence that resulted in incarceration. In doing so, the Israeli story dismisses all contextual information: the Palestinian is solely displayed as a terrorist, disconnected from and acting outside of political, historical or defensive contexts. This lends the impression to museum visitors that Palestinian acts therefore are pathological, done for reasons of perversion alone, thereby justifying any Israeli actions against the Palestinians.

When asked about the incompleteness of the stories the museums tell, the two directors unsurprisingly gave different answers. Al-Haj, the Palestinian director, said that

we are in an ongoing clash, and in this conflict, in this war, people from both sides are getting killed. Killing brings more killing. However, our actions are a *response* to the Israeli occupation. We did not initiate the conflict – we only try to fight for our rights.

Al-Haj therefore uses context as justification for 'ignoble' actions: the Palestinians have no choice but to fight.

Erlich, the Israeli director, offered a linguistic explanation for the contextual dissonance in his museum. According to him, one would not find reference to the Israeli occupation in the Israeli Center because 'terror is terror is terror... One should not explain or justify terrorism. When civilians die, or when a terror attack takes place in a restaurant, then any attempt to explain it is part of the legitimization process of the attack. We do not think that a terror attack could be legitimated. Terror is a destructive phenomenon and totally illegitimate.'

The two directors each stress the aggression of the other group, thereby justifying their own marginalization of actions that are arguably harder to explain in ways that further the political foci of their respective Centers. The museums therefore are not only used in order to stress or hide parts of the external political realities, but also to smooth over uneasy political situations at home regarding the justification of violence.<sup>17</sup>

By offering what they claim is a comprehensive national history and socio-political stance to their viewers, the Israeli and Palestinian museological sites studied in this essay seem to play a crucial role in creating cultural memory and serving political internal needs. This role can be better seen within the manifesto of the Palestinian museum. For Palestinians, the Hamas-Fatah internal conflict, with its battles over control, influence and legitimation, are arguably as destructive as the Israeli-Palestinian 'external' conflict. According to the Palestinian museum's website, the Center was established as 'a serious attempt to reflect the will power and the challenge of *the Palestinian people*... This museum is the voice and image to tell the whole world about the suffering of *Palestinian prisoners* in Israeli prisons *and outside*'<sup>18</sup> (emphasis added). It is clear that the museum claims to be striving to tell the story of *all* Palestinians, and also of *all* prisoners even though, in truth, its politics appear most aligned to those of the Palestinian current leadership.

Some political context may further clarify the museum's desire for comprehensive representation within the Palestine politics. Since January 2006, when Hamas won the last

democratic elections in Palestine, the party has clashed with the rival Fatah party over actual control in the Palestinian street, the conducting of the foreign affairs, and the responsibility of the security forces. The fact that Hamas won the elections was overshadowed by the international community's pressures, especially from the U.S.A., to include more 'moderate' figures and to give greater power not to the Hamas elected Prime Minister, but to the PLO President Mahmoud Abbas, who was one of the founding members of Fatah party. This culminated in an unstable Hamas-Fatah unity government that totally collapsed following a series of bloody clashes in June 2007. Since then, Hamas has controlled the Gaza Strip and Fatah the West Bank. Israel and most actors within the international community recognize Fatah's rule alone, but in Palestine the two movements continue to clash, covertly and overtly, on the right of representation of the Palestinian people.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, even the fact that the Museum is found in the campus of Al-Quds University, and not at another university site, in Gaza, for example, is telling. The president of Al-Quds is Professor Sari Nusseibeh, the former PLO representative in Jerusalem. Nusseibeh is considered to be a stalwart of Fatah party (Said 2004: 145), which, as is explained here, is Hamas's greatest political rival. The location of the museum should therefore be seen as a furthering of the internal political battle over the right to represent the Palestinian people.

One can argue that the Fatah-orientation of the museum is also found in its very name: Abu Jihad. Also known as Khalil al-Wazir, Abu Jihad was one of the founders of Fatah movement, and served as head of the military wing of the PLO; he was the assistant of late PLO leader Yasir Arafat, who himself founded Fatah. Al-Wazir was assassinated by Israeli forces in Tunisia on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1988. In naming the museum after him, and establishing the museum in Abu Dis on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the nineteenth anniversary of Abu Jihad's assassination, its founders aimed to highlight the sacrifice paid by him, as well as the Fatah and PLO, for the Palestinian people. His sacrifice stresses their common enemy: Israel.

Interestingly, according to the museum, Abu Jihad is '*The Patron of the Palestinian Prisoners Movement.*' However, he was never actually jailed in Israel, and was never known by this title before the museum was established. This strengthens the notion that the decision to name the museum after him was not a result of his struggle for the Palestinian prisoners, or even due to a unique personal experience in Israeli prisons, but due to the political significance his character represents.

Following this, one can notice that the Hamas-Fatah conflict is conspicuously not present in the Abu Jihad Museum. Strikingly, the Museum does not even mention the controversial imprisonment of Palestinian members of Hamas: In 2006, acting Palestinian city mayors, ministers, and members of the Parliament who were part of Hamas were arrested by Israel. This radical and unprecedented event was probably one of the most extreme methods taken by Israel with regards to Palestinian prisoners and detainees, especially at the leadership level. This incident, however, is not marked in the museum despite its claims to represent 'all Palestinians.' To display this event would be to acknowledge the role and legitimacy of Hamas, and the suffering of its leaders in comparison with those of Fatah. The politics of omission, therefore, are very evident even within the internal narrative of Palestinian 'facts.'<sup>20</sup>

The Israeli institution also tends to obscure internal conflicts while emphasizing what they see as the more serious, and external, threat of Palestine. Dr. Erlich, as noted above, claims that his Center's aim is to *present the Israeli point of view*. This statement attempts to diminish the voices of those Israelis – mostly Palestinian citizens of the state who make almost twenty percent of the country's population – and also Israeli-Jewish peace activists – who definitively have a very different point of view than the one conveyed by the Israeli Center and its exhibitions.

Moreover, by picturing Israel as an 'innocent' country which is surrounded with 'Palestinian terrorists,' and by offering archival and museological 'facts' that bolster this perspective, the Israeli Center helps promote a dominant and rather aggressive line of thought and action within Israeli society. One can extract from the Center's narrative that Israel sees itself as a constant *victim* of its regional political rivals. This victim-hood and one-dimensional worldview prevents large parts of the Israeli-Jewish society from considering its own wrongdoings (Ochs 2006, Yaron 2006). It also allows for the total omission by the



Center of the repercussions of Israeli political and military acts.

Not surprisingly, these were also the accusations made of the director of the Palestinian museum. When Abu Al-Haj was interviewed for this paper, and was told about the Israeli exhibition of terror he responded rather diplomatically saying, 'I have never been to the Israeli exhibition [of terror] and therefore cannot say what I think of it.' He was, however, willing to convey a message about the general Israeli perception of Palestinian prisoners as terrorists, especially those who were imprisoned after committing acts of violence. According to Al-Haj,

there is a something very obvious in Israeli political discourse... it is obviously totally turned upside down. They consider the victim as the aggressor, and the aggressor as the victim. They look at the Palestinian individual, who acted against the aggression and violence and occupation of Israel, and portray him as the terrorist and Israel as the victim. This is something very dangerous... as it means that Israel makes all its decisions in contrast to healthy logic.<sup>21</sup>

### 9. Peace in Israel? Peace in Palestine?

A crucial distinction between the two museums regards the place of a future peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the Israeli museum, the sense of anti-Palestinian propaganda is straightforward. This is visible in the exhibition hall, and in the museum's bulletins and website, where the focus is about the terrorist *nature* of the Palestinian struggle. This was also seen in the interview given to us by the director of the Israeli Center. In the interview, Erlich rejected the possibility of Palestinian prisoners acting as part of a future peaceful solution. According to him, 'the Palestinian prisoners are only a tool in the hands of external forces, such as Damascus and Gaza leaders... We have seen how released Palestinian prisoners talk, and how they vow to continue killing more Israelis.'

The Palestinian museum, meanwhile, contains a more complex and circumspect representation of Israel. Instead of using a single static synecdochical event – either 'the act of terrorism' in the Israeli Center, or 'the unjust suffering of the Palestinian prisoner' in the Palestinian museum – as a way to bolster their particular politics, the Abu Jihad Museum does not show the past or present as single eras, but instead, it displays them as linked to a hope for greater understanding as well as better and peaceful days in the future. This aspirational peacefulness is shown in the director's call for Israeli visitors: 'I wish that our *Israeli brothers* will come here... so they could see the human side of the Palestinian prisoner, so they will try to understand him' (emphasis added).<sup>22</sup>

The Palestinian Center also made a conscious decision to speak about the role of the prisoners in peace activities as well as their acts of resistance. This is visible in their choice to dedicate a wall in the Abu Jihad Center to the Prisoner Document. This document, also known as the National Reconciliation Document (lit. *Wathiqat al-Wifaq al-Watani*), is composed of 18 points, and calls to Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders, and to the creation of the State of Palestine in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It was signed by representatives of five different Palestinian political movements – Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine – and so represents all major political streams of Palestinians. Its importance lies in the fact that it called for the creation of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and so it, even if indirectly, recognizes the existence of Israel in historical Palestine, and accepts the Two State Solution. It is therefore seen as a call for a peaceful settlement of the conflict with Israel.

Furthering this implication, the words of the Palestinian Museum's director, which were quoted before, as well as many of the works of art, such as replicas of the peace dove, and even the architectural design elements such as the stones used in the staircase, include a call for forgiveness, not revenge, for reconciliation rather than the widening of the vicious circle of hate. When interviewed, the Palestinian director explained this with the following: 'I am a father of boys and girls. I want them to live in peace... God put us here in one geographic region, and we need to learn to live in peace. This museum is another kind of resistance, which is better than blood and missiles'.

This emphasis of peace over war, and of reconciliation over conflict, is found only within the Palestinian Center. The omission of a discussion of peace within the Israeli museum raises many questions about current Israeli discourse, the potential of a future reconciliation process, and the effects of Israeli's national(istic) inability to even imagine peace.

### Conclusions

This paper surveyed the emergence and operation of two museological sites in Israel and in Palestine, which are unique both for their engagement within ongoing political events, and for their locational choices within each nation-state. This paper has shown that the emergence of these two Centers during the same era is not a coincidence but rather, is directly correlated to the comprehension and internalizing of the realization that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not only a fight of bilateral combat, but also a war over images, knowledge and its distribution. The similarities between these two museums are at the core of their missions to reach out to a local and global population. They mirror each other in the similar timing of the creation of the two Centers, by the parallel departments within which both operate – i.e. the memorials, libraries, archives and computerized information-centers they coexist with, and by the deliberately subjective narrative each side took upon itself: the Israeli evasion of the occupation and the Palestinian omission of the acts leading to the imprisonment. This paper has shown how the museological sites can be seen as both revealing and perpetuating the internal political situations: inter-political rivalries, militaristic values and discourse, and the international battle over legitimization.

This essay examined the location of exhibits in both museological sites, and the effects of what we could call 'the politics of labeling.' Strikingly, the same exhibits and objects are used in both museums, albeit with different titles, and therefore with different political connotations and lessons. The last point stressed in the paper is the general lesson that each museological site brought to the fore: the capability of the Palestinian Center to see beyond the current one-dimensional picture of the 'Other' while the Israeli institution cannot. While both institutions contain disparagements concerning the other side: all photos of Palestinians shown in the Israeli Center are of gunmen, and all photos of Israelis in the Palestinian Center are of policemen and soldiers, the Palestinian museum strives to look to the future, and not to sink entirely into the frustrating contemporary muck. The call for reconciliation in the Abu Jihad center is very clear, especially when compared to the rigid and narrow line of the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Center.

This distinction, we believe, is the core difference between the two Centers, and it holds an important wider significance in regards to the Israeli-Palestinian current conflict, especially concerning the role of prisoners in conflict resolution (Lodge 1991, McEvoy 2001: 314-353, Moore 1997). While the Palestinian side has already realized that the prisoners play a key role in peacemaking, and not just fighting, the Israeli society, as represented by the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Center, portrays the prisoners only through the static, immutable and absolute framework of 'terrorists.' As we see it, until this linguistic, psychological and political distinction impasse is surmounted – in the museological space and, of course, outside of it – to reflect a wider range of political perspectives, there will be no progress towards true peace in Israel and Palestine.

**Timeline – main events in Israel/Palestine**

1947-1948	The outbreak of the 1948 War, which culminated in the creation of the State of Israel through the expulsion of more than 600,000 Palestinians. The Palestinians refer to this war as the <i>Nakba</i> (the Catastrophe); Jewish-Israelis call it The War of Independence.
1967	The outbreak of the 1967 War, which culminated in an Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights.
1987	The outbreak of the first Palestinian <i>intifadah</i> (uprising).
1993	Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian President Yasir Arafat sign the Oslo Accords.
2000	The Israeli-Palestinian negotiation in Camp David reached a dead-end and the second Palestinian <i>intifadah</i> broke out a few months later.
2006	The Hamas party wins the Palestinian elections, but due to increasing tensions between the party and Fatah, the international community, and the leadership of the PLO, political anxiety in Palestinian is heightened.
2007	The conflict between Hamas and Fatah reaches new levels. Following a few days of fighting, Hamas gets control on the Gaza Strip and the PLO, headed by President Abbas, gets control of the West Bank. There are now two Palestinian governments operating: one in Gaza headed by Isma'il Haniyeh, and one in the West Bank headed by Salam Fayyad.
2008	The conflict between Israel and Hamas intensifies. Hamas blames Israel for the siege on Gaza; Israel demands Hamas stop firing rockets into Israel. During Israeli Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009, approximately 1,400 Palestinians are killed by the Israeli army.
May 2011	Hamas and Fatah sign a reconciliation agreement in Cairo. There is uncertainty over whether this agreement will be kept.

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**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Museum and Society* for their important and useful comments.
- <sup>2</sup> One of the most interesting elements regarding this 'unconscious correspondence' will be highlighted later in this article, re: the lack of any information in the Palestinian museum to violence perpetrated by the prisoners.
- <sup>3</sup> See, the Palestinian Museum's website: <http://www.aj-museum.alquds.edu/aboutus/about.php>
- <sup>4</sup> The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, official website, homepage: <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/site/content/T1.asp?Sid=18&pid=121>. We will highlight the excessive use of the word 'terrorism' in Israeli-Jewish society later in this essay.

- <sup>5</sup> See, the Israeli exhibition's virtual tour: [http://www.tourwise.co.il/virtualTours/?tour=408\\_EN&p\\_win=1](http://www.tourwise.co.il/virtualTours/?tour=408_EN&p_win=1)
- <sup>6</sup> Of course, there are ongoing repercussions to these events and these museums play a role in how the state discusses the past. For example, while Apartheid may be officially over in South Africa, no one would claim that segregation is no longer an issue.
- <sup>7</sup> This information comes from one of the in-person interviews Yonatan Mendel conducted for this paper. All further quotations by the staff members of these two institutions come from statements made directly to Mendel.
- <sup>8</sup> During more heated periods the Center seems to intensify its activity, especially with regards to publishing the bulletins. For example, during January 2009 – when the Israeli attack in Gaza took place - it posted 116 bulletins in six languages: 32 in Hebrew, 31 in English, 24 in Arabic, 20 in French, 7 in German, and 2 in Russian.
- <sup>9</sup> Renowned journalist Robert Fisk wittily argued that 'The Israeli political lexicon goes like this: Terror, terror.' See: Robert Fisk, 'Fighting Talk: The New Propaganda', *The Independent*, 21.6.2010: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/fighting-talk-the-new-propaganda-2006001.html>.
- <sup>10</sup> Official website: <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/HebSite/content/t1.asp?sid=24&pid=198>
- <sup>11</sup> Levy, Gideon, 'Prison within a Prison', Haaretz website, 24.8.2007: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/896790.html>
- <sup>12</sup> The Jibril Agreement was made between the Israeli government and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – the General Command. It included the release of three Israeli soldiers who were captured during the 1982 War in Lebanon, in return to the release of 1,150 Palestinian prisoners who were held in Israeli prisons.
- <sup>13</sup> Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center, official website:[http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/schools/rris/acad\\_prog/ugrad\\_prog/gov\\_prog/Pages/Faculty.aspx](http://portal.idc.ac.il/en/schools/rris/acad_prog/ugrad_prog/gov_prog/Pages/Faculty.aspx)
- <sup>14</sup> For further read about Israeli militarism, see: Uri Ben-Eliezer, *The Making of Israeli Militarism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
- <sup>15</sup> Official website: <http://www.aj-museum.alquds.edu/library/library.php>
- <sup>16</sup> The web-page of the library, in the Center's Official website: <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/HebSite/content/t1.asp?sid=24&pid=198>
- <sup>17</sup> Similar insights have been highlighted by Rana Mitter (2000) who studied the Beijing War of Resistance Museum. According to her, the self-legitimization of the People's Republic rests upon defining fundamental fissures, and the most important fissure for decades was less that between China and Japan than between the Communists and the Nationalists. Mitter then argues that the War of Resistance Museum, which deals with the *external* Japanese 'enemy,' ideologically and politically serves the establishment in its struggle for hegemony by shaping the *internal* Nationalists-Communists fissure. This museum has also played a part in the shaping of official memory which in turn 'legitimizes the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a post-Marxist world' (2000: 279). Similarly, the Israeli and Palestinian Centers can be seen as directed at shoring up national support first and foremost, using an external enemy to diminish internal rivalries.

- <sup>18</sup> Abu Jihad Museum's official website, <http://www.aj-museum.alquds.edu/aboutus/about.php>
- <sup>19</sup> On 4 May 2011 a key reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah was signed in Cairo. Both Israel and the US, however, seem skeptical with regards to its ability to last or to promote peace between Israel and Palestine. Furthermore, both Israel and the US continue to perceive Hamas as a terror organization, and therefore – at least at the time of this writing – they do not support the Palestinian reconciliation agreement.
- <sup>20</sup> The visits to the Palestinian museum were made before a principle reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah was signed in Cairo on 4 May 2011. It is still uncertain whether this agreement is going to last, and also whether the rivalry between the two parties will disappear. It will be interesting to see whether this political agreement will be reflected in the Palestinian museological site. This, however, is beyond the scope of this essay, and too recent to be critically examined.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Mendel, Yoni, 'Brukhim ha-Ba'im le-Museum Abu-Jihad' ('Welcome to the Abu Jihad Museum'), in Walla News Website, 7/8/2007: <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=/1155177>

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