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“THE ARCHITECTURE OF ERASURE
IN JERUSALEM”

Speaker:

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The aim of these dialogues is to create a space for open and informed dialogue and debate around key local and global political, social and economic issues facing South Africa.

The Architecture of Erasure

Saree Makdisi

The most sublime act is to set another before you.

—WILLIAM BLAKE, “The Marriage of Heaven of Hell”

It was a glorious afternoon in May 2004, and the advocates, fundraisers, and backers of the newly launched Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem (MOT-J) could not have asked for a more auspicious groundbreaking ceremony. Dozens of important guests were in attendance to mark the realization of the project by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center (which had for some years already been running the original Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles), including the building’s world-renowned architect, Frank Gehry; the dean of the Wiesenthal Center, Rabbi Marvin Hier; the Israeli president, Moshe Katsav; and the governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger. “In the darkness that pervades the Middle East,” proclaimed the governor in the ceremony’s keynote address, “this building will be a candle to guide us.”¹ Schwarzenegger’s words spoke to the museum’s lofty proclamations about itself. The complex aims to offer, according to Rabbi Hier, “a great landmark promoting the principles of mutual respect and social responsibility.”² The museum’s marketing literature says that, in the face of a “rising crescendo of ethnic tensions, civilizational clashes

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1. Quoted in Samuel G. Freedman, “Frank Gehry’s Mideast Peace Plan,” *New York Times*, 1 Aug. 2004, p. A1; hereafter abbreviated “FG.”

2. Quoted in Mike Boehm, “Israeli Court OKs Museum of Tolerance’s Controversial Branch,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Oct. 2008, latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2008/10/a-frank-gehry-d.html; hereafter abbreviated “IC.”

and the use of religious justification for acts of terror,” it intends to provide “a great institution” that “will focus on issues of human dignity and responsibility.”³

Following the groundbreaking ceremony, everything seemed to be going well for the development of the Jerusalem branch of the Museum of Tolerance, including fundraising toward the \$200 million cost from Jewish philanthropists in the U.S., until a legal challenge was presented to Israel’s High Court in February 2006, which led to the suspension of construction. Workers excavating the site had come across human remains and were quietly removing them until the news was leaked to the local media, which broke the story, precipitating a major crisis.

The site for the Museum of Tolerance, it turns out, includes a cemetery—in fact, the largest and most important Muslim cemetery in all of Palestine, which had been in continuous use for hundreds of years from the time of the Crusades until the uprooting of Palestine in 1948. It contains the graves of family members of living Palestinians. Palestinian and Muslim individuals and organizations had been pointing this out and warning of the consequences from the time the museum project was announced. They had even managed to suspend excavation (for two days) in 2004, but otherwise their protests had been dismissed—at least until the news broke that excavators had actually been digging up human remains and then hurriedly (and improperly) trying to dispose of them.⁴

What followed is one of the most remarkable—and surely also one of the most profoundly indicative—episodes in the entire conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The project leaders refused to consider any alteration in the museum plan following its encounter with a cemetery that

3. “The Center for Human Dignity: MOT-Jerusalem,” Jan. 2003, www.kintera.org/atf/ctf/%7B5069FFFA-8F81-49D6-80E6-CF54C45C4DDD%7D/motj.pdf. The MOT-J website has now been taken down.

4. See, for example, Donald Macintyre, “Israel Plans to Build ‘Museum of Tolerance’ on Muslim Graves,” *The Independent*, 9 Feb. 2006, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-plans-to-build-museum-of-tolerance-on-muslim-graves-466028.html, and Jonathan Lis and Amiram Barkat, “Treatment of Skeletons Found at Museum Building Site Raises Storm,” *Ha’aretz*, 8 Feb. 2006, www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=680072

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had been in active use until 1948 (and was still being visited by the family members of those buried there). Rabbi Hier, the directors of the Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, and the museum's backers in Israel were adamant that the project would go ahead as planned, on the original site, cemetery or no cemetery; they could not see what all the fuss was about. Palestinians and Muslims, on the other hand, were asking how, in all seriousness, a "Museum of Tolerance" claiming to represent "mutual respect" and "human dignity" could be built on top of a dispossessed people's graveyard—and how such a thing could happen a mere stone's throw from militarily occupied and contested territory, close to by far the most impressive material manifestation of the Israeli occupation of Palestine: the oppressive concrete slabs of the separation wall that Israel has built on, in, and around the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which the curving titanium-clad slabs of Gehry's design seem to consciously call forth and to delight in echoing back across the Old City.

The Ma'man Allah (Mamilla) Cemetery lies just to the west of the old city of Jerusalem, close to Jaffa Gate. Covering some fifty acres by the early twentieth century, it is estimated to have been established in the seventh century and to contain the remains of companions of the Prophet Muhammad as well as warriors of Salah al-Din's (Saladin's) army. The boundaries of the cemetery were not clearly delineated until the middle of the nineteenth century; Jerusalem, like most ancient cities, buried its dead outside the city walls, and there was no need to delineate cemetery boundaries until the 1840s when urban development started spilling over the walls of the old city.

By the 1860s, the borders of the cemetery were clearly delineated from the emerging residential district to the west of the old city by a wall and a surrounding road. According to Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, these delineations are clearly visible in maps dating from this period, as well as in the first aerial photographs of Jerusalem. "During the last sixty years of the Ottoman rule, during the thirty years of the British Mandate in Palestine, and during the first twenty years" following the creation of Israel and the concomitant uprooting of Palestine in 1948, the cemetery's boundaries, notes Ben-Arieh, "remained intact and were not violated" (fig. 1).⁵ Highly detailed maps—indicating buildings, contours, roads, and trees—from the time of the British Mandate show that the dozens of buildings constructed in the vicinity of the cemetery during the late Ottoman period never in-

5. Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, "The Tolerance Museum and the Mamilla Cemetery: The Plain Facts," Jan. 2009, www.ipcri.org/files/yehoshua-eng.html; hereafter abbreviated "TMMC."



FIGURE 1. Photograph of Jerusalem's old city walls from c. 1880, showing Ma'man Allah Cemetery in the foreground. From Griffith Institute, University of Oxford, www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-lm-lmakeenla.pl?&sid=1235984907-66.249.66.107&t1=Jerusalem&t3=x&en=drive005

truded across its delineated boundaries. This remained true of nearby construction during the Mandate period as well (see “TMMC”).⁶ In the 1920s, for example, the Palace Hotel was built on land adjacent to the cemetery, on the other side of Mamilla Road, but its (Jewish) architect was careful not to intrude into the grounds of Ma'man Allah.⁷

It was during the Mandate period that the cemetery was entered in the official Jerusalem land registry, as one single tract of land: “Bloc No. 30036, Plot No. 1” (“TMMC”). It was registered in the name of the Trustees of the Waqf, the Muslim religious endowment funded by charitable donations, which are an integral part of the Muslim faith. The endowment had once held up to 10 percent of the land in Palestine, including schools, cemeter-

6. It has been suggested that in the 1930s the then Grand Mufti of Jerusalem drew up plans to build a Muslim university campus on the site of Ma'man Allah, but the feasibility of those plans has been questioned, and in any case nothing came of them. Nevertheless the mere possibility that such plans may have existed has been used by the advocates of the Museum of Tolerance as justification for their own plan, which is absurd. See also the discussion of the Grand Mufti's plans in Daniel Monk, *An Aesthetic Occupation: The Immediacy of Architecture and the Palestine Conflict* (Durham, N.C., 2002).

7. Ben-Arieh points out that the Simon Wiesenthal Center claims that the Palace Hotel was built on cemetery grounds; he demonstrates that this was not the case. See “TMMC.”

ies, religious monuments, and mosques, many of which were converted to meeting halls, bars, cafes, discotheques and barns by their new Jewish occupants after 1948.

Ma'man Allah fell to the Zionist militias that would coalesce into the Israeli army during the uprooting of Palestine in 1948; so did most of the rest of Jerusalem. Multicultural, multiconfessional Palestine was deliberately uprooted in order to clear the space for the creation of a state with an exclusively Jewish identity, to be populated—that is, once most of the Muslim and Christian Palestinians had been driven away—largely by newly arrived European Jewish colonists and settlers.⁸ The lands, homes, livestock, furniture, personal effects, clothes, dishes, family heirlooms, papers, books, photographs, and all the other personal possessions of the Palestinians driven from their homes and expelled beyond the borders of what would become the state of Israel and blocked from returning after the fighting ended—and ever since—were confiscated by the agencies of the Jewish state and eventually transferred to the newly created Custodian of Absentee Property to be distributed to Jewish immigrants.

The Palestinians who survived the expulsions and remained in their homes in what would become Israel have posed a problem for the identity of the state ever since and have as a result faced various forms of proscription. Non-Jews in the Jewish state, they were ruled by martial law until 1966, whereas Jewish citizens of the state enjoyed the protections of civil law. And to this very day the Palestinian citizens of Israel are denied various rights and privileges accorded only to Jews, who alone are considered *nationals*—not merely *citizens*—of Israel. Legally speaking, there is no such thing as secular Israeli nationality: the state recognizes instead what it calls Jewish nationality, which obviously excludes Palestinians; and access to various rights and privileges depend on nationality, not the lesser category of citizenship.⁹

8. Even with extensive Jewish immigration from Europe before, during and after the Holocaust, Jews—the vast majority of them recent immigrants—constituted barely a third of the population of Palestine as late as 1948. The 1948 war began with a series of carefully scripted massacres and expulsions of Palestinians months before Israel's formal declaration of independence in May that year, only after which did neighboring Arab states make an attempt to intervene. See Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York, 2000), pp. 28–53; Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York, 1988); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge, 2004); Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882–1948* (Washington, D.C., 1992); Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford, 2006); and Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Berkeley, 1996).

9. See the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel (Adalah), "Suggested Issues for Consideration Regarding Israel's Combined 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th Periodic Report to the UN

What befell the rest of Palestine was also the fate of Ma'man Allah cemetery and the other properties of the Waqf, which were transferred to the Custodian of Absentee Property and henceforth placed under Israeli control; they remain under state control or under the control of "national agencies" such as the Jewish National Fund to this day.¹⁰

At first, Israeli authorities and state planners respected the delineations of the cemetery that had been established under Ottoman rule.¹¹ However, Ma'man Allah's protected status started to erode in the late 1950s and early 1960s—a time when the Palestinian citizens of Israel were subject to martial law and were, hence, ill-equipped to protest. First, a road was paved through the cemetery to connect two neighboring streets. Then, in 1960, a parking lot was built on a small part of the cemetery; this project was given the approval of an Israeli-appointed Muslim official (who was subse-

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination," 15 Dec. 2005, adalah.org/eng/intlo6/CERD151205.pdf; Al Haq et al., "Israel's Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: Institutional Discrimination Affecting Persons without 'Jewish Nationality,'" 31 July–18 Aug. 2006, www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/ceerd/docs/ngos/jointngo4-ReportI-II.pdf; and UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, "Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 9 of the Convention: Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Israel," 15 June 2007, documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G07/424/79/pdf/G0742479.pdf?OpenElement

10. The question of land rights and state land in Israel is very complex. The kinds of covenants that used to forbid home ownership in many American cities to "non-Caucasians," including blacks, Latinos, Asians, and in many cases Jews remain in force in Israel to this day. Palestinian citizens of the state are barred from living on land held by "national institutions" such as the Jewish National Fund (JNF) or the Jewish Agency. They are legally excluded from residing in officially designated "Jewish community settlements" or "Jewish rural settlements" organized into rural councils that, between them, control some 80 percent of the land in Israel. In all, 93 percent of pre-1967 Israel—almost all of it the expropriated property of Palestinian refugees—is classified as state land, of which 13 percent is owned by the JNF. The Israel Lands Authority (ILA) took over the management of all state land, including JNF land, in the early 1960s; however, the ILA has to administer JNF lands according to JNF's discriminatory criteria (that is, enabling access only to Jews). In response to a 2004 legal challenge to its discrimination against non-Jews, the JNF said that it "is not a public body that works for the benefit of all the citizens of the state. The loyalty of the JNF is given to the Jewish people and only to them is the JNF obligated. The JNF, as the owner of the JNF land, does not have a duty to practice equality towards all citizens of the state" (quoted in "Land Controlled by Jewish National Fund for Jews Only," *Adalah's Newsletter* 38 [July 2007], www.adalah.org/newsletter/eng/julo7/1.php). The JNF position was upheld by a 2007 law, which passed its first reading by a comfortable majority of Israeli members of parliament (sixty-four to sixteen); see *ibid.* See also Adalah, "Special Report: The Jewish National Fund," www.adalah.org/eng/jnf.php

11. Shortly after 1948, an official in the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yaacov Yehoshua, wrote that "the Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem is considered to be one of the most prominent Muslim cemeteries, where seventy thousand Muslim warriors from Salah al-Din al-Ayubi's [Saladin's] armies are interred, along with many Muslim scholars. Israel will always know to protect and respect this site" (quoted in "TMMC").

quently arrested and removed from office because of corruption).¹² In 1985, the Ministry of Transport established a parking lot on another large section of the cemetery; further excavation was involved, as it was also during the installation of sewage lines. Dozens of graves were destroyed during these excavations, and human remains were removed and scattered.¹³

All over municipal Jerusalem, the same fate was befalling Muslim cemeteries, which, as the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti points out, have been “turned into garbage dumps, parking lots, roads and construction sites.”¹⁴ It was only a matter of time before the same thing happened to Ma’man Allah, its historical significance notwithstanding. In 1967 the Waqf proposed the restoration and rehabilitation of Ma’man Allah; Israeli authorities rejected that idea, just as they have blocked the preservation or restoration of Muslim sites elsewhere in the country. “Throughout Israel there are hundreds of sites that were once Muslim graveyards, whose remains are still evident at a few dozen of them,” notes Benvenisti. “The rest have vanished, whether because the tombstones crumbled or because the sites were used for roads, farming or building institutions and residential buildings. The Muslim cemeteries’ condition is so outrageous that if it existed in another civilized state it would raise a public storm.” From time to time, he adds, conflicts “between the al-Aqsa Association for the Construction of Islamic Holy Places based in [the Palestinian Israeli town of] Umm al-Fahmm (and other Israeli-Muslim groups) and Israeli bodies erupt over the damage to these graveyards and the efforts to preserve them. Open burial sites are scattered throughout the country, human bones are strewn about, and tombstones are shattered, covered with garbage.”¹⁵

In 1992 the Custodian of Absentee Property transferred the cemetery to the Jerusalem municipality. The Palestinian Muslim community and religious institutions protested that transfer, but to no avail. In the same year, city officials established Israel’s Independence Park on a large section of the cemetery. The construction for that project involved the excavation of graves and human remains and the planting of trees and shrubs. Crumbling tombstones can still be seen between the trees of the park (fig. 2).¹⁶

12. See Gershon Baskin, “Encountering Peace: A City of Tolerance, Not a Museum of Tolerance,” *Jerusalem Post*, 5 Nov. 2008, p. 15.

13. See Tarek Ibrahim, *On the Margins: Annual Review of Human Rights Violations of the Arab Palestinian Minority in Israel*, trans. Shaul Vardi (Nazereth, 2007), pp. 133–35.

14. Meron Benvenisti, “The Hypocrisy of Tolerance,” *Ha’aretz*, 9 Feb. 2006, www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=680580

15. *Ibid.*

16. See Steve Weizman, “Israeli Court Clears Way for Jerusalem Museum,” 29 Oct. 2008, www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-10-29-3306352661_x.htm



FIGURE 2. The crumbling graves of Ma'man Allah Cemetery in Israel's Independence Park. From Palestine Remembered, www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Mamilla_Pool_3991/Picture_11716.html

Today, Independence Park embodies and expresses Israel's uneasy attitude toward the Palestinians—an unstable mixture of acknowledgement, repression, denial, erasure, and resentment. The sense of incompleteness captured in the park also conveys the difference between Israel and other more successful settler-colonial projects.¹⁷ In this case, the removal or eradication of the indigenous population to make room for the incoming settler population was not completed successfully. Palestinians comprise 20 percent of the population of Israel within its pre-1967 borders—and about half of the total population of the territories over which Israel rules.

The sheer persistence of the Palestinian presence represents a threat to Israel's claim to an exclusively Jewish identity. How can a state claim to have *one* identity when such a large proportion of the people over whom it

17. See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409 and "Structure and Event: Settler Colonialism, Time, and the Question of Genocide," in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. Dirk Moses (Oxford, 2008), pp. 102–32; Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics, and Scholarship in Israel* (London, 2008); Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London, 2006); and the classic Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* trans. David Thorstad (New York, 1973).

rules have *another* identity? Even leaving aside the occupied territories (although it has controlled them for over four decades or two thirds of its existence as a state), how can Israel claim to be both a Jewish *and* a democratic state? How can a sense of Jewish homeliness be secured when there is a competing Palestinian narrative of home attached to the same land? These are the conundrums to which Zionists from across the political spectrum keep having to return. Even the countless brave Israeli individuals and dedicated organizations (Machsom Watch, Zochrot, Ta'ayush, B'Tselem, and so many others) who favor peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians and have done so much to contest the violence imposed by Jewish colonists and the Israeli army on Palestinians in the occupied territories have to reckon with this existential problem:¹⁸ how can the Jewish identity of the state be maintained without continuing to override or simply negate the unyielding Palestinian claim to home inside what is today Israel? How, in short, can Zionism, as an exclusive form of nationalism, be reconciled with Palestinian rights?¹⁹

Even from the standpoint of Israelis who favor coexistence with the Palestinians, there is no easy answer to those questions. Indeed, there may not be an answer at all. As Ghassan Hage points out, a nationalist discourse of homeliness “clearly implies not only an image of nation that is one’s own, but also of a self that occupies a privileged position vis-à-vis that nation, a privileged mode of inhabiting it.” This is, he adds, evident in the way in which the nationalist treats the other who is present in the space conceived as the national home as an object to be managed or removed in order to secure the homely space, “while treating the self as spatially empowered to position/remove this other.”²⁰

In the case of Israel, the attempt to secure a sense of Jewish national homeliness involves an endless process of covering over, removing, or managing a stubbornly persistent Palestinian presence. Sometimes this is done rhetorically, for example, by denying that Palestinians exist (“there were no such thing as Palestinians,” Golda Meir once famously said);²¹ by trying to wish them away by referring to them using the generically deraci-

18. See, for example, David Dean Shulman, *Dark Hope: Working for Peace in Israel and Palestine* (Chicago, 2007), and Jeff Halper, *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel* (London, 2008).

19. See Salman H. Abu-Sitta, *The Return Journey: A Guide to the Depopulated and Present Palestinian Towns and Villages and Holy Sites* (London, 2007).

20. Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (New York, 2000), p. 42.

21. Golda Meir, interview with Frank Giles, *The Times* (London), 15 June 1969; rpt. as “Golda Meir Scorns Soviets: Israeli Premier Explains Stand on Big-4 Talks, Security,” *Washington Post*, 16 June 1969, p. A15.

nated term “Israeli Arabs” rather than the national term “Palestinians,” which they use themselves; or by seeking—as is happening today—to make it illegal for a Palestinian to commemorate the Nakba, or catastrophe, of 1948 (this extraordinary attempt at historical repression is packaged into a bill currently making its way through the Israeli parliament with strong government support).²² And sometimes the attempt to cover over or deny the Palestinian presence inside Israel is done materially, for example, by using massive force to break up peaceful protests by the Palestinian minority inside Israel asserting their national rights²³ or refusing to officially recognize the existence of dozens of Palestinian villages inside Israel and hence denying their populations state services and cutting them off from state infrastructure.²⁴ Every time Zionists seem to have resolved matters to their satisfaction—whether through repression, denial, or outright violence—the Palestinians remind them that they still exist, that they still haven’t gone away, that the would-be Jewish state is still not exclusively Jewish, that despite everything a Jewish sense of homeliness has still not been fully consolidated in what had been—and for Palestinians will always remain—Palestine.

This is precisely the source of resentment tapped into by the far Right in Israel, most recently under the spectacularly successful leadership of the current foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, and his tellingly named party Yisrael Beiteinu (“Israel Is Our Home”), which wants to remove the remaining Palestinians from within Israel and, as Benny Morris puts it, complete the “job” of 1948.²⁵ It is also the source of recurring anxiety for most of the rest of the Israeli political spectrum, which, while it too openly

22. See Tomer Zarchin and Jack Houry, “Ministers Okay Bill Banning Nakba Day,” *Ha’aretz*, 26 May 2009, www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1087978.html

23. See, for example, the YouTube video of the Israeli police violently breaking up a peaceful demonstrations by Palestinians inside Israel in commemoration of the *nakba* of 1948: Alarzp, “www.alarz.tv 8 5 2005,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-P4LLIceGA

24. The unrecognized villages are Palestinian villages that predate the state of Israel but whose existence is not officially recognized by the state, so they do not appear on official maps and are cut off from state infrastructure. See Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation* (New York, 2008), pp. 227–36; hereafter abbreviated *PIO*.

25. Morris is not referring specifically to Lieberman. “My feeling is that this place would be quieter and know less suffering if the matter had been resolved once and for all [in 1948],” says Morris. “If Ben-Gurion had carried out a large expulsion and cleansed the whole country—the whole Land of Israel, as far as the Jordan River. It may yet turn out that this was his fatal mistake. If he had carried out a full expulsion—rather than a partial one—he would have stabilized the State of Israel for generations.” He adds: “If the end of the story turns out to be a gloomy one for the Jews, it will be because Ben-Gurion did not complete the transfer in 1948. Because he left a large and volatile demographic reserve in the West Bank and Gaza and within Israel itself” (Morris, “Survival of the Fittest,” interview with Ari Shavit, *Ha’aretz*, 8 Jan. 2004, www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=38986).

speaks of the “demographic problem” posed by Palestinians inside the state,²⁶ would rather go on dealing with the Palestinian presence by further—and even more elaborate—mechanisms of denial, repression, or foreclosure rather than outright expulsion.

This latter position gives rise to the strand of Zionism from which the idea of the Museum of Tolerance would emerge (as I will explain a little later in the present essay). But if Israel’s Independence Park expresses the current unsettled state of Israeli attitudes towards Palestinians, the museum project, among other things, aims to resolve these tensions and contradictions by removing the last remaining traces of dissonance and symbolically purifying the settled site once and for all. It seeks to secure a sense of Jewish homeliness by erasing the traces of the Palestinian other.

It was in February 2004 that the local media reported that the Israeli government and the municipality of Jerusalem had approved the construction of the Museum of Tolerance on what remains of Ma’mān Allah cemetery. Protests from Palestinians and Muslims went unheeded, and the groundbreaking ceremony was held in May that year. Protests were stepped up when the actual excavations began in September. Especially vocal were Palestinians in Jerusalem whose relatives were buried in the cemetery, including, for example, Mohammed Hamdi Bader, who used to visit his grandfather’s grave in the cemetery regularly to pray by it. Bader says that he supports the idea of a museum of tolerance. “But you can’t build this museum on any graveyard, regardless of religion,” he says. “How can a museum carrying the name of tolerance be built on a graveyard?”²⁷ That month, Palestinian-Israeli human rights organizations, representing the Baders and other families whose relatives are buried in the cemetery, secured an order from a Muslim religious court ordering the halting of the work. However, work was resumed two days later, on the grounds that—according to the municipality, the Israeli government, and the backers of the museum project—the Muslim court had no authority to issue such orders.

After news broke that human remains were being disinterred in February 2006, the case was taken to Israel’s High Court, which issued temporary orders halting construction in the spring of 2006 and appointed an arbitration panel. In May, the authorities sealed off the cemetery and threat-

26. See, for example, Jonathan Spyer, “Israel’s Demographic Timebomb,” *The Guardian*, 14 Jan. 2004, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/jan/14/comment

27. Quoted in Martin Patience, “Row over Israeli Tolerance Museum,” 17 Feb. 2006, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4721336.stm

ened to prosecute anyone entering the area, including those, like Mohammed Bader, attempting to visit their relatives' graves. That order prevented legitimate visits by Muslims, but it did not prevent Jewish groups from vandalizing graves, including the spray painting of racist graffiti and the destruction of several graves and tombstones.

On 29 October 2008, the Israeli High Court gave its final go-ahead to the construction project, thereby bringing to an end all legal attempts to stop the project. "Moderation and tolerance have prevailed," declared Rabbi Hier, of the Wiesenthal Center (quoted in "IC"). "From this half-century former parking lot in the center of west Jerusalem will rise an institution that offers hope and reason to all the people of Israel and the world," he added.²⁸ There will be "protests for two or three days," Hier conceded, but then things will go back to normal (quoted in "IC"). Palestinians and Muslims in Jerusalem did indeed organize demonstrations against the court's decision. The mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Mohammad Hussein, said it was hard to believe that the project's backers would want to build the Museum of Tolerance "whose construction constitutes an act of aggression."²⁹ "We came to announce to the entire world in the name of all Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, those within the Green Line [that is, inside Israel] and in the Diaspora," announced Sheikh Kamal Hatib at one of the protests, that "we will not reconcile with you and will not forgive you for violating the graves of our mothers, fathers, and grandparents."³⁰ The protests notwithstanding, work on the Museum of Tolerance immediately resumed.

The High Court suggested, however, that the project engineers construct an underground—horizontal—separation barrier between the foundation of the museum building and the remaining bodies below, thereby separating the living Jews in the structure above from the dead Arabs in the ground beneath their feet.³¹

Such a separation barrier—a wall on the horizontal plane—would, of course, perfectly mirror *the* separation barrier—a wall constructed on the

28. Quoted in Yaakov Lappin, "Wiesenthal Dean Rejects Museum Protests as Extremist Agitation," *Jerusalem Post*, 6 Nov. 2008, www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1225910055540&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull

29. Quoted in Etgar Lefkovits, "Museum of Tolerance Construction Resumes in Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Post*, 30 Oct. 2008, www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1225199611911

30. Quoted in Lappin, "Wiesenthal Dean Rejects Museum Protests as Extremist Agitation."

31. See Steve Weizman, "Israeli Court Clears Way for Jerusalem Museum," and Lefkovits, "Museum of Tolerance Construction Resumes in Jerusalem." The court's decision should also be read in the context provided by a long history of Orthodox Jewish opposition to archaeological projects and to the desecration of cemeteries in particular.



FIGURE 3. The wall, Jerusalem. Photo by author.

vertical plane—that Israel has built elsewhere in and around Jerusalem. I have described the wall in great detail elsewhere (see *PIO*, pp. 15–54). In the present context I need only point out that it constitutes merely one component of a complex of physical and bureaucratic mechanisms and procedures designed to impose nearly absolute Israeli control over the movement and lives of Palestinians in the occupied territories in total disregard for Israel’s responsibilities as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the other constitutive documents of international humanitarian law, which require it to facilitate rather than to disable the inhabitants’ conduct of everyday life. The illegality of the wall was confirmed by the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice in the Hague in 2004, which had little impact on Israel (fig. 3).³²

We can think of the wall as expressing a kind of apartheid because of the principle of ethnic separation it involves; and the term *apartheid* is intended here not rhetorically but by way of reference to the body of international law pertaining to racial discrimination, notably the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), to which Israel is a signatory, and the Apartheid Convention,

32. See International Court of Justice, *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Advisory Opinion*, 9 July 2004, www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=71&code=mwp&p1=3&p2=1&p3=6&case=131&k=5a

which builds on ICERD. Indeed, an exhaustively comprehensive recent report published by the South African Human Sciences Research Council finds that Israel exercises control in the occupied territories “with the purpose of maintaining a system of domination by Jews over Palestinians and that this system constitutes a breach of the prohibition of apartheid.”³³ The South African study finds, moreover, that the form of apartheid practiced by Israel in the occupied territories is sustained by the same three pillars of apartheid that were once maintained in South Africa: the designation of a racialized identity with preferential legal status (whites in South Africa, Jews in Israel and the occupied territories); the fragmentation of territory for the purposes of segregation and domination; and the maintenance of “security” laws directed against one population (blacks, Palestinians) for the protection of the racially privileged group.

Ironically, South African apartheid was actually never as extreme as the form of apartheid currently practiced in Israel for the simple reason that the supervision, control, and exploitation of black labor was the whole point of apartheid in South Africa. Blacks could never be simply corralled because the state *needed* them (to work). “While black and white bodies were, in theory, assigned to certain localities, fixed in space, in point of fact, they were caught up in continuous circulatory migrations and asymmetrical intimacies,” notes Lindsay Bremner. “Black bodies were needed to nurse white children, to clean white homes, to labor in white industry, to work on white mines. White bodies policed, regulated, and administered black space. Bodies moved through and interacted with each other’s space on a daily basis.”³⁴ Israel, on the other hand, *can* try to separate itself from Palestinians because Palestinian labor (from the occupied territories) is now irrelevant to the Israeli economy, having been replaced in the 1990s by a new wave of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, topped off by cheap labor from southeast Asia and eastern Europe. Thus very different economies of separation obtain in the two contexts. It is not that one is better and one is worse; they serve different purposes. South African apartheid was about the exploitation of blacks; Israeli apartheid is about the irrelevance, removal, and erasure of the Palestinians. The former works

33. Virginia Tilley et al., *Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid? A Re-Assessment of Israel’s Practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories under International Law* (Cape Town, 2009), p. 22.

34. Lindsay Bremner, “Border/Skin,” in *Against the Wall: Israel’s Barrier to Peace*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York, 2005), p. 131.

according to a biopolitical logic; the latter functions according to what Achille Mbembe has recently theorized as a necropolitical logic.³⁵

Apart from the wall, the other major components of Israel's "matrix of control"³⁶ in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are the hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints maintained by the Israeli army (totaling 613 as of June 2009, in addition to a further 84 barriers to Palestinian movement in the city of Hebron alone and a weekly average of 70 flying checkpoints randomly set up in the West Bank) and the pass and permit system the army imposes on the Palestinian population.³⁷ These mechanisms severely restrict—and often suspend altogether—the movement of Palestinians within the West Bank and cut them off from East Jerusalem and Israel (not to mention Gaza) (figs. 4–5).

On the other hand, there is a network of bypass roads *connecting* the sprawling network of Jewish colonies³⁸ in the West Bank and East Jerusalem to each other and to Israel while at the same time *disconnecting* Palestinian towns and villages from each other and the outside world because Palestinians are not allowed on (or even near) the bypass roads. Thus the wall, the permit system, and the bypass roads together *enable* the free movement of Jews while *disabling* the movement of Palestinians.

Indeed, the enabling of the one population is inseparable from the disabling of the other, for, as Eyal Weizman points out, the whole point of the matrix of control is to superimpose two separate political geographies—one Jewish, one Palestinian—on the same physical landscape. The parts of the Jewish West Bank, Weizman explains, are seamlessly tied to each other and incorporated into Israel; the parts of the Palestinian West Bank, on the other hand, are fractured and broken and fragmented, shards of territory cut off from each other. For Jews, the West Bank is—to invoke the terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—a smooth space; for Palestinians, it is severely striated.³⁹ The result, according to Weizman, is an Escher-like representation of geography best understood in terms of what he calls the

35. See Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

36. See Jeff Halper, "The Key to Peace: Dismantling the Matrix of Control," Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions, www.icahd.org/eng/articles.asp?menu=6&submenu=3

37. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Occupied Palestinian Territory, *West Bank Movement and Access Update*, June 2009, www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_movement_access_2009_june_english.pdf

38. I have chosen to use this term rather than the more conventional *settlement* because it more accurately conveys the legal status of Jewish residential complexes established in the occupied territories in violation of international law.

39. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, vol. 2 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1987), pp. 474–500.



FIGURE 4. Palestinian road diving under Jewish bypass road, West Bank. Photo by author.



FIGURE 5. The wall as seen by Palestinians, Qalqilya, West Bank. Photo by author.

“politics of verticality.”⁴⁰ Weizman’s notion is not merely figurative; it is literal as well. For example, where the West Bank’s unlit, broken, potholed, or altogether unpaved Palestinian roads cross the well-lit, well-paved, and vigilantly patrolled Jewish bypass roads they plunge beneath them into tunnels. Jews traverse the landscape *above*; Arabs, *below*.

Israeli apartheid, in other words, functions in the vertical plane as well as in the horizontal. One effect of this is, whenever possible, to render Palestinians invisible to Jewish colonists and to Israelis driving within eye-sight of the West Bank (and if not invisible then at least part of the background over and against which the modern infrastructure is built). Thus, Jewish colonists traversing the West Bank, or Israelis driving on Highway 6, roughly parallel to the West Bank, very often do not see Palestinians; they are in tunnels below, or on the other side of the twenty-four-foot-high separation wall.

Seen from the Palestinian side, the wall is, unmistakably, a wall. Its brutalist design communicates unequivocally to the Palestinians what Israel thinks of them (figs. 6–7). Seen from the Israeli side, however, the wall is often not really a wall; in many sections, it is smoothed into the landscape, and its scale is disguised by shrubs, trees and landscaping that gradually rises and falls, offsetting the severity that is so brutally—and expressively—naked on the Palestinian side. From the Israeli point of view, the effect is not only to render the Palestinians on the other side invisible but, even if only in fits and starts, to render the process of rendering them invisible *itself* invisible. When possible, then, the wall as the signifier of erasure is itself erased in turn—as though there were some magic trick that could erase the Palestinians from the landscape without the trace of that erasure being evident.

In other places, the wall is written into the landscape in the sense that it is painted over (from the Israeli side) in such a way as to render it as pure background. In some cases, a pristine landscape is painted on to the wall, replacing not only the actuality of the wall but also the undesirable real landscape of living Palestinians; in others, the wall is painted over with decorative arches to disguise it as something other than what it actually is, even as something that connects (like a Roman aqueduct) rather than separates. None of these attempts to disguise the wall really succeeds, however; as W. J. T. Mitchell points out, they are easily subverted (fig. 8).⁴¹

40. Eyal Weizman, “The Politics of Verticality,” www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-politics/verticality/article_801.jsp and *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation* (London, 2007).

41. See W. J. T. Mitchell, “Christo’s *Gates* and Gilo’s Wall,” *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Summer 2006): 587–601.



FIGURE 6. The wall, as seen from the Palestinian side, Qalqilya, West Bank. Photo by author.



FIGURE 7. The same section of the wall, but this time as seen from the Israeli side. Photo by author.



FIGURE 8. Painted background on the wall, West Bank. Photo by author.

Nevertheless, what these adjustments to the wall on the Israeli side express is the same unstable combination of acknowledgement and denial, knowledge and repression (both self-repression and repression of the other) that can also be seen at work in Israel's Independence Park. On the one hand, there is a desire to do away with or deny the Palestinian other—to retroactively fulfill the Zionist dream that Palestine is a land without a people for a people without a land—while also denying that such a denial is taking place (by disguising its traces). On the other hand, once the willing suspension of disbelief wears off, or once the Palestinians intrude themselves yet once more on the scene from which they were supposed to have been evacuated, there is the returning knowledge that the other is, despite everything, actually really still there—and that even more denial (or perhaps some other more effective method of dealing with this stubborn and unrepentant otherness) is therefore necessary.

The vertically oriented apartheid expressed by the wall applies to housing units as well as to roads and walls in the West Bank, though here visibility and invisibility play a very different role in the project to secure a Jewish sense of homeliness in Palestine. Many of the Jewish colonies in the West Bank are built along the central mountain ridge that bisects the ter-

ritory along a north-south axis or on other hilltops. Not only do they command a prospect of the Arab landscape below but their very location is an integral element in Israel's strategy of control over the occupied territory. "A belt of settlements in strategic locations increases both internal and external security," noted Mattiyahu Drobles, the author of Israel's 1978 revised West Bank colonization plan; "therefore, the proposed settlement blocs are spread out as a belt surrounding the mountains, starting along the western slopes from north to south, and along the eastern slopes from south to north, within the minority population as well as surrounding it" (*PIO*, pp. 120, 122).

Drobles refers to the Palestinians as a "minority," even though they compose the majority of the population of the West Bank. This suggests their new status (literally their minoritization in geographic and spatial as well as political terms) as a disenfranchised group trapped—pinned down in—a smooth Jewish-Israeli space surrounding them on all sides, from which they are excluded by virtue of not being Jewish. "Being bisected by Jewish settlements," Drobles explained on a different occasion, "the minority population will find it hard to create unification and territorial contiguity" (quoted in *PIO*, p. 122). Jewish colonies, according to Drobles, should thus be implanted in order to maximize damage to the preexisting Palestinian communities of the West Bank by squeezing them ever *inwards* and *downwards*, cutting them off from the hilltops. As with the road network and the wall, Israeli colonies from the beginning separated Palestinians vertically as well as horizontally.

Precisely because of their role in what Weizman calls the politics of verticality, the Jewish colonies in the West Bank were conceived of not only in strategic terms but also as integral elements in Israel's tactical military control and surveillance of the Palestinian landscape. Here, however, the point is precisely to render the Palestinians visible (rather than invisible), but only when they intrude into the Jewish geography. The Jewish colonies above keep the terrain below "under perpetual surveillance," as Mitchell puts it, and the "fractured, agonized appearance" of the landscape itself can be thought of as the product of the struggle to control it in visual terms.⁴² Indeed, as Weizman and his colleague Rafi Segal point out, when Israeli tactical and strategic planning called for new colonies, the visual field was of the utmost priority. The Israeli Ministry of Construction and Housing's 1984 guideline for settlement construction, for example, recommends building homes along the West Bank's mountain ridge in order to

42. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. Mitchell (Chicago, 1994), p. 29.

maximize the outward view of the surrounding landscape, while orienting inward views toward the colony's inner core, with concentric rings surrounding each mountain peak. "With respect to the interior of each building, the guideline recommends the orientation of the bedrooms towards the inner public spaces, and that of the living rooms towards the distant view," Weizman and Segal explain.

Vision dictated the discipline of design and its methodologies on all scales. Regionally, a strategic function was integrated into the distribution of settlements around the entire territory, creating a "network of observation" that overlooks the main traffic arteries of the West Bank [most of which are now off-limits to Palestinians and constitute the core of the Jews-only bypass road network]; topographically, it was integrated into the siting of the settlements on [mountain] summits; urbanistically it was integrated into their very layout, as rings around the summit, and in the positioning of homes perpendicular to the slope; architecturally, it was integrated into the arrangements and orientation of rooms, and finally into the precise positioning of windows.⁴³

Given this, it is hardly any wonder that Jewish colonies in the West Bank and East Jerusalem—Har Homa, built on Jabal Abu Ghneim, is a typical case—often have a fortresslike appearance, in terms of visual function, and sometimes aesthetically as well (figs. 9–10).

The choice of Frank Gehry as the architect for the Museum of Tolerance project needs to be seen and evaluated in two seemingly (but not really) contradictory ways at once. On the one hand, precisely in the sense in which Daniel Libeskind would have been the obvious candidate—because of his work on the Jewish Museum in San Francisco, the Danish Jewish Museum, the Jewish Museum in Berlin, and several buildings in Israel—the selection of Gehry makes no sense at all. On the other hand, he is the perfect person for the job. I want to explain both positions and show how they can be reconciled.

Far from being associated with specifically Jewish-themed projects, Gehry's work has come to be seen as both consummately self-referential and homogeneously global. Rather than addressing the specificities of this particular location and historical context, the resulting edifice will look like so many of Gehry's later projects (from Bilbao to Los Angeles)—

43. *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture*, ed. Rafi Segal, Eyal Weizman, and David Tartakover (London, 2003), pp. 85–86.



FIGURE 9. Jewish colony of Har Homa, on Jabal Abu Ghneim, East Jerusalem. Photo by author.



FIGURE 10. Artist's impression of Frank Gehry's design for the Museum of Tolerance, Jerusalem.

almost as though it had been beamed down from outer space without regard to local context. Indeed, the presence of a new Gehry structure in any city in effect lifts a site out of its immediate context and ties it to the global network of other high profile Gehry sites—the Guggenheim in Bilbao, the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, the EMP building in Seattle, the new Guggenheim in New York, and so on. It will become the locus of a certain kind of global cultural (and financial) capital. According to Kriston Capps, these recent projects express one of the recent trends in architecture, in which, “in lieu of context-driven work, the field’s high stylists (Gehry foremost among them) have focused instead on developing drag-and-drop designs that any project can be made to fit.” There is, he points out, a “Gehry look,” with which cities and global corporate clients want to be associated; but it has little or nothing to do with the specificities of a particular site.⁴⁴

Thus, any one of Gehry’s recent CATIA-designed and titanium-clad buildings, featuring what Hal Foster identifies as “the non-Euclidean curves, swirls and blobs that became his signature gestures in the 1990s,”⁴⁵ is instantly recognizable as his, no matter where it is located. A Gehry building actually draws attention to itself and away from the site it occupies; it can even draw people to the site in spite of the site itself—which was exactly why Gehry’s plan for Disney Hall was seen as the anchor for the rejuvenation of a downtown Los Angeles that had been “abandoned” by the city’s cultural and financial elite (“Build It and They Will Come,” reads one of the funding appeals for Disney Hall published in the *LA Times*).⁴⁶ There is, as Foster puts it, a kind of “anti-contextual” energy in Gehry’s recent work, quite at odds with his early work, still best exemplified by his own house in Santa Monica. “The gestures of his early houses were often idiosyncratic, but they were also grounded in two ways—in an LA vernacular of common materials and against an International Style of purist forms,” Foster argues.

As these gestures began to lose the specificity of the former and the foil of the latter, they became not only more extravagant (almost neo-Expressionist or neo-Surrealist) but also more detached: they became signs of “artistic expression.” . . . Why this curve, swirl or blob here,

44. Kriston Capps, “A Monument to Frank Gehry,” *The Guardian*, 2 Apr. 2009, www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2009/apr/02/frank-gehry-eisenhower-memorial-washington

45. Hal Foster, “Why All the Hoopla?” review of *Frank Gehry: The Art of Architecture*, ed. Jean-Louis Cohen, *London Review of Books*, 23 Aug. 2001, www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n16/fosto1_.html

46. See *Symphony: Frank Gehry’s Walt Disney Concert Hall*, ed. Gloria Gerace and Garrett White (New York, 2003), p. 54.

and not that one? If there is not much in the way of apparent constraint—of formal articulation derived from a resistant material, structure or context—architecture quickly becomes arbitrary or self-indulgent.⁴⁷

And that is exactly why—on the other hand—it makes *perfect* sense for Gehry to be chosen as the architect for the Jerusalem museum; his design will draw the site out of and away from the specificities of the local context. The site of Ma'man Allah cemetery will now be much closer (in a sense) to Bilbao and Los Angeles than to, say, the Mount of Olives on the other side of Jerusalem. The logic of separation in play in the museum plan will be made complete by this last stage of removal from local context and the ground occupied. Occupation will in fact be turned into removal and symbolic transfer not merely of bodies but of the entire site. The doubts and hesitations expressed in other Israeli projects (Independence Park, the wall) will be transcended in an effort to enable a site for the construction of a form of homeliness that not only finally erases the last traces of the Palestinian other but lifts the very land, as it were, away from itself and plugs it immediately into global space. This is emphasized in the artists' impressions of the design, which occlude the project's urban context. This museum could be anywhere in the world—and that is part of the point.

But on this point another set of contradictions now has to be taken into account. Although Foster and others argue that there is a kind of self-referential arbitrariness in Gehry's late style, Gehry himself insists that his work is always site-sensitive and so do many of his admirers (Foster's point, indeed, is that that very insistence itself suggests its opposite). "The important urban idea is to fit a building into the fabric of the city," Gehry says; "it takes time to get the body language of a building, to fit it into an environment."⁴⁸ J. Fiona Ragheb writes that "Gehry's building looks to its physical site for its definition, twisting and bending in order to root itself more firmly into its surroundings."⁴⁹ Jean-Louis Cohen says that Gehry's buildings are designed with "what he calls the specific 'body language' of each city" in mind. "Only when it is grasped, sometimes intuitively, does the city's architecture find its place in Gehry's work."⁵⁰

In looking at Gehry's design for the Museum of Tolerance, both prin-

47. Ibid.

48. "Agreement Reached: Frank Gehry [and] New York Guggenheim Museum," www.arcspace.com/architects/gehry/gug_ny/

49. J. Fiona Ragheb, "Sites of Passage," in *Frank Gehry, Architect*, ed. Ragheb (New York, 2001), p. 345.

50. Cohen, "Frankly Urban: Gehry from Billboards to Bilbao," in *Frank Gehry, Architect*, p. 335.

ciples seem to be in play; on the one hand, the design has nothing to do with the specificities of this site and its environment or its proximity to the Old City; on the other hand, there are elements of the design that do engage with Israeli colonial architecture. It must also be pointed out that the design differs markedly from the playful, deceptively “sculptural” look of billowing sheets of titanium cladding that—however misleadingly—seem to express Gehry’s freedom of artistic expression and even “freedom” as such.⁵¹ The Museum of Tolerance is much more angular than all of Gehry’s recent projects. Rather than conjuring up movement, freedom, waves, or billowing sails (like Bilbao or Disney Hall), it suggests castles, fortresses, and watchtowers—and, above all, walls. This design is about location, surveillance, power, and control—not freedom.

It is in this sense, then, that Gehry’s design actually does seem consciously to integrate all of the major elements of Israeli colonial architecture. And it involves the same kind of play of the visible and the invisible that are at work in occupied East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. The centerpiece of the museum complex is the Grand Hall, which is surrounded by sixteen titanium Pillars of Tolerance. “Frank O. Gehry saw the Grand Hall as the starting point of his design because of its openness on all sides,” the museum’s website says; “to him, it symbolized the ‘living room’ of Jerusalem. The exterior of the 118-foot building is supported by sixteen sculptured titanium pillars, which can be seen from miles away. Before visitors enter the Grand Hall, they will see the name of a different donor inscribed on the outside of each of the pillars.”⁵² The circular Grand Hall has windows and entry doors all along its 360-degree circumference; every other structure in the complex faces toward it, so it commands the entire visual field. In this sense, its design recapitulates the panoptic and surveillance features that, as Weizman points out, have become essential to Israeli colonial architecture in the occupied and colonized Palestinian territories.

“Protected” by its titanium walls, the symbolic glass-and-steel “fortress” at the heart of the museum complex functions as an observation site from which to track the movement of bodies in and through the complex. “Families and children are constantly in view, in your face, so that you never escape from the issue of what this place is all about,” Gehry says of his plan for the Grand Hall. It is about the transfer and circulation of bodies. “I was trying to make a building that had body language,” says Gehry.

51. Foster, “Why All the Hoopla?”

52. Museum of Tolerance—Jerusalem, www.motj.com; emphasis added; hereafter abbreviated “MOT.”

“People can come from all directions, and all kinds of people can come” (quoted in “FG,” p. A31).

In this sense, too, Gehry’s design perfectly recapitulates the politics of exclusion that are evident throughout the occupied territories; *some* people can come from all directions, *some* people can be surveyed coming and going, *some* people can enter the visual field dominated by the Grand Hall, *some* people can feel at home in the “living room” of Jerusalem, but by no means do “all kinds of people” have access to the museum or to the particularized sense of homeliness that it wants to convey. Palestinians from the West Bank and much of East Jerusalem *cannot* come to the museum because they are blocked from access to Jerusalem by the wall and the other mechanisms that Israel uses to control the movement of Palestinians. But that act of exclusion is invisible—indeed, irrelevant—to Gehry. He probably doesn’t even know about it.

In this sense, what he says perfectly aligns the living Palestinian bodies who are excluded from access to the museum (because they are separated from the museum by a barrier built on the vertical plane) with the dead Palestinian bodies in the soil beneath the museum complex (who may, if the court’s suggestion is taken up, be separated from it by a barrier built on the horizontal plane). Not only are Palestinian bodies rendered invisible, but (again, perfecting the logic only partially enacted by the wall in the West Bank as seen from the Israeli side) the process by which they are erased, removed, or transferred is itself rendered invisible. Thus the foundational act of erasure and re-placement is placed beyond scrutiny and legibility; or rather it is placed *before* what is seen in the visual and textual field, as a condition of possibility for what will be seen, said, and read.

Thus the logic of occupation and colonization cuts seamlessly across from the surrounding colonial context to the museum itself. If the museum is like a home with a “living room,” as its marketing literature puts it, the residents of this home are all of one kind to the exclusion of *other* kinds of people. A sense of homeliness is enabled for the privileged national self at the expense of the other, who has been managed out of sight. For, in the context of occupation and colonization, “all kinds of people” actually means (without admitting it) “only Jewish people” because of the invisible process of exclusion and erasure by which the universal is restricted to the particular. In exactly the same sense, when the Israeli government expropriates land from Palestinian families in order to build a Jewish colony, it always does so officially “for public use.” It never says that the universal formulation “the public” actually refers in the particular sense to the specifically Jewish public (Palestinians are excluded from Jewish colonies). Thus, in a situation where only the particular is visible (because its other

has conveniently been covered over, buried underground, or transferred elsewhere) the particular seems to *become* the universal—a point to which I will return in a later section of this essay.

What is enabled, then, is an act of self-contemplation (perfectly expressed in the self-referential circle of titanium-clad pillars with their donors' names engraved on them) founded on a violent act of exclusion symbolized by the walls so essential to Gehry's design. In this sense too the choice of Gehry as architect makes perfect sense. The architect best known for his self-referential structures is chosen to design a building that is thematically all about a form of self-referentiality constructed on the premise of the physical and symbolic exclusion of the other—a sense of the homely predicated on the evaporation of the other.

Walls are among the design's most prominent features: the Pillars of Tolerance, which will be *visible* from miles away (or so the marketing literature says), and which, as I said, resemble nothing so much as the slabs of *the* wall; the wall surrounding the entire complex; and the wall that seems to hang, suspended, in front of the visitor center. It makes perfect sense not only that walls should feature so prominently in Gehry's design but that in the museum design *the* wall is repeatedly summoned forth and echoed back across Jerusalem (figs. 11–12). At the entrance to the visitor information center, what looks so much like a scale replica of a section of Israel's West Bank wall seems to hover in mid-air. What is so politically laden out there (that is, a few hundred meters away) is here so relieved of its burden that it actually floats, its shabby concrete transformed by the alchemy of Gehry's design into the pure essence of separation, so that the hovering wall is freed of the mud, dirt, and graffiti contaminating its real-world counterpart. The Pillars of Tolerance themselves render Israel's wall in shiny curved titanium cladding rather than drab, rectilinear concrete. Just as the Jewish geography of the West Bank is smooth and unrestricted while the Palestinian geography is striated and closed, the wall here is open and lit, rather than forbidding and closed; it enables panoptic vision but does not shut down the visual field, as the wall does in the West Bank. In Gehry's design, that which is separated is so utterly separated that it has disappeared into thin air—the separated other is so far gone that the self constructed through the process of its removal is left all alone in blissful self-contemplation.

Here, then, is the resolution to the apparent contradiction implied by Gehry's design: look at it one way, and you see Bilbao, Disney, late capital, freedom of expression; look at it another way, and you see the wall. The design takes the building blocks of Israeli colonial architecture and translates them into the realm of freedom by which this site would be—wants so



FIGURE 11. The wall under construction, al-Ram, East Jerusalem. Photo by author.



FIGURE 12. Visitor Information Center and store, Museum of Tolerance, Jerusalem.

desperately to be—tied to Bilbao and LA. One kind of viewer, one kind of subject, is tied down and hopelessly fixed; the other is free. One moves, the other is bound.

In this sense, the project represented by the Museum of Tolerance fits in neatly—even perfectly symmetrically—with another project taking place today in Jerusalem, exactly on the other side of the Old City from Ma'man Allah cemetery.

The Bustan neighborhood of the Palestinian district of Silwan, in East Jerusalem, consists of about ninety houses, home to about one thousand Palestinian residents. Most of the homes were built without permits in the 1980s and 1990s, though a few were built prior to Israel's 1967 occupation of East Jerusalem. They were built without permits because the Jerusalem municipality, while doing everything possible to facilitate the illegal colonization of East Jerusalem by Jewish immigrants—for example, by expropriating land from Palestinian families and granting immediate permission for Jews to build homes there—only under exceptional circumstances grants building permits to Palestinian residents of the city, on land that has belonged to their families for generations.⁵³

As an inevitable result of all the official bureaucratic limitations and controls on Palestinian growth and development in Jerusalem, Palestinians have turned to what Israel considers illegal construction.⁵⁴ Thousands of housing units have been built without official permits by Palestinians since 1967. But this is done at considerable risk. Between 2004 and 2008 alone, 402 Palestinian homes in Jerusalem were punitively demolished by

53. The illegality of Israel's colonial project in East Jerusalem has been repeatedly noted by international legal bodies. To name but one example, UN Security Council Resolution 465 (1980) reiterates that "all measures taken by Israel to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, or any part thereof have no legal validity and that Israel's policy and practices of settling parts of its population and new immigrants in those territories constitute a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and also constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East" (daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/399/58/IMG/NR039958.pdf?OpenElement). The ICJ Advisory Opinion of 2004 makes the same point. This is but one component of the long-standing Israeli project to Judaize and de-Arabize the city. For a complete account, see Makdisi, *PIO*.

54. See United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Special Focus: The Planning Crisis in East Jerusalem: Understanding the Phenomenon of 'Illegal' Construction," Apr. 2009, www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_planning_crisis_east_jerusalem_april_2009_english.pdf

Israeli authorities.⁵⁵ There are today around 9,000 Palestinian homes that have been built “illegally” in Jerusalem. All of them are subject to demolition.

Clearly, Silwan is only one case among others. What makes it unusual is that, rather than targeting a single family for punitive home demolition, the Israelis are going after an entire neighborhood, threatening a thousand Palestinians at once with instant homelessness and displacement—a scene more typical of Gaza than of Jerusalem. And they are doing so not on the pretense that they are merely enforcing city building codes but in order to help clear space for an exclusively Jewish archaeological park that is taking shape literally beneath the foundations of the Palestinian homes of Silwan.

The archaeological park, the so-called City of David—only one of a network of such parks intended to consolidate Israel’s hold on Jerusalem⁵⁶—is being run by Elad, a secretive Zionist organization with ties to overseas Jewish donors such as Irving Moskowitz as well as to the fundamentalist colonists’ group Ateret Cohanim, which has been working alongside Elad to establish a Jewish colony in the middle of the Palestinian neighborhood, either by buying Palestinian property (usually by means of extortion) or by fabricating documents claiming ownership, thereby forcing Palestinian families out, or by taking advantage of Israel’s Absentee Property Law (the same one under which Ma’man Allah Cemetery was taken over) to obtain properties in Silwan from the Jewish National Fund, to which they were transferred by the Custodian of Absentee Property in the 1990s.⁵⁷ There are by now around 250 Jewish colonists in Silwan, surrounded by tens of thousands of Palestinians.

In 1998, the municipality of Jerusalem transferred control of the City of David archaeological park to Elad, which now runs the archaeological digs there, while simultaneously bringing massive pressure to bear on the Palestinian residents to move out—a move that the municipality itself embraced in late 2004 and early 2005 when Uri Shetrit, the city engineer, directed the municipality’s building supervision department to demolish all the Palestinian houses (but not those of Jewish colonists) in the Bustan neighborhood of Silwan. Demolition orders were actually secured in early 2009 and made global news headlines partly because Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was visiting Israel at the time; she called the plan to demol-

55. See “Planning and Building: Statistics on Demolition of Houses Built without Permits in East Jerusalem,” *B’Tselem*, www.btselem.org/english/Planning_and_Building/East_Jerusalem_Statistics.asp

56. See Rory McCarthy, “Israel ‘Using Tourist Sites to Assert Control over East Jerusalem,’” *The Guardian*, 10 May 2009, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/10/israel-expansion-east-jerusalem

57. See Adina Hoffman, “Archaeological Digs Stoke Conflict in Jerusalem,” *The Nation*, 30 July 2008, www.thenation.com/doc/20080818/hoffman

ish the Palestinian neighborhood “unhelpful.”⁵⁸ As I write, the demolitions are set to go forward; they would be the largest carried out in Jerusalem since 1967 (when another Palestinian neighborhood, the Mughrabi district, was summarily bulldozed to create space for Jews to worship).

Israel’s deliberate destruction of Palestinian family homes is, unfortunately, nothing new. The point is that in Silwan the demolitions are beginning the development of an archeological park realized by blasting through layers of other cultures—scattering, destroying, or simply trashing artifacts and human remains in the process⁵⁹—in order to get to a supposedly Jewish layer allegedly containing King David’s palaces and ancient Jewish graves. (A similar logic was seen at work in the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India by a mob of Hindu fundamentalists in 1992.)

As Nadia Abu El-Haj has scrupulously shown, much of the self-fashioning essential to Israeli archaeology hinges on matching a priori textual evidence with material dug out of the earth to come to the most tenuous (and tendentious) conclusions. “In such arguments and interpretations, the key (historical) texts and the key (archaeological) evidence remain in a circular relationship of discovery, explanation, and proof,” she points out. “The history produced through this work of archaeology relies on an already-existing story, which is used, in turn, to interpret the evidence found. Once so interpreted, the empirical evidence comes full circle to stand as *independent* proof of the story itself.”⁶⁰

This is certainly true of the dig sponsored by Elad in the City of David, and even mainstream Israeli archaeologists themselves, including several from Tel Aviv University, have been casting doubt on the company’s claims, which are clearly politically rather than academically motivated. But a dispute carried on in academic journals has little impact on the fortunes of Elad, which now draws some 350,000 tourists a year to the “City of David,” whose very presence adds to the pressure building on the Palestinians of Silwan, even if what the tourists are here to see is a Disney-like sham. According to Yonathan Mizrachi, there is no evidence tying the site to King David; all that is known is that the archaeological remains can be dated to the Canaanite period; what their actual function was—or

58. Quoted in Paul Richter, “Clinton Criticizes Israel Plan to Raze Palestinian Homes,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 Mar. 2009, mobile.latimes.com/inf/infomo?view+World+News+Hein&feed:a=latimes_min&feed:c=worldnews&feed:i=45400382&nopaging=1

59. See, for example, Meron Rapoport, “Islamic-Era Skeletons ‘Disappeared’ from Elad-Sponsored Dig,” *Ha’aretz*, 1 June 2005, www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/988803.html

60. Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israel Society* (Chicago, 2001), p. 146.

whose they were—is anyone’s guess.⁶¹ “Even if we did find a Hebrew inscription saying ‘Welcome to King David’s palace,’ that would not justify Elad’s political aims,” Mizrachi points out. “The residents of Silwan and their ancestors have been living here for hundreds of years and their rights cannot be ignored.”⁶² None of this affects what has been happening on the ground, however. The neighborhood’s once open spaces are now all closed off to Palestinian residents, and, even as Elad continues to make spurious claims about what it is discovering underground, above ground the municipality of Jerusalem has been busy changing street signs in Silwan, eliminating longstanding Arabic names and replacing them with new Hebrew ones.

It must be noted that although Elad is leading the charge, it is not acting alone. It is working closely with the Israel Antiquities Authority. And, in disposing of the Palestinian neighborhood in Silwan, it has the full support of the Jerusalem municipality, the Israeli court system, and ultimately the full power of the state of Israel.

Thus, on one side of the Old City—in Silwan—living Palestinians are being removed to make room for dead Jews; and on the other side of the Old City—in Ma’mān Allah cemetery—dead Palestinians are being removed to make room for living Jews. It is little wonder that the white tents into which the skeletons now being removed from Ma’mān Allah are taken bear such a resemblance to the white tents that have been the hallmark of the Palestinian refugee for over six decades—or the white tents no doubt being prepared in order to house the residents of Silwan once Israel’s Caterpillar bulldozers move in on their homes.

“The most sublime act is to set another before you,” William Blake once wrote.

What is happening in Jerusalem is the exact opposite of what Blake called for. Indeed, a form of self-contemplation so cleansed of the traces of otherness that the particular comes to think of itself as universal—because the act of exclusion on which it is founded is so extreme—is precisely what will be on offer within the Museum of Tolerance. The themes that Gehry’s design elaborates in visual terms are, in other words, also to be addressed in textual terms in the museum’s content.

Let me give some examples of how this is to be played out in the mu-

61. See Jonathan Cook, “Archaeology Used Politically to Push out Jerusalem Palestinians,” *Electronic Intifada*, 26 Sept. 2008, electronicintifada.net/v2/article9856.shtml

62. *Ibid.*

seum, which, according to its marketing literature, will take the tendencies already built into the MOT to their ultimate extreme. "In the [Los Angeles] MOT's bare whispers and loud silences about the Middle East, Israel's current woes are also tacitly figured as continuous with the situation of the Jews through history—that is, as besieged by enemies for no reason other than being Jewish," Wendy Brown argues. "No other context is offered for hostility toward Israel, its policies, or its actions. Jews are depicted as persistently in need of tolerance and, at the same time, as advocates of a tolerant world."⁶³ According to Brown, the LA museum thus positions Jews and Israel as the ultimate embodiments of tolerance and indeed as defenders of civilization and humanism against an intolerant and barbaric other. How, she asks, in her trenchant critique of the LA museum, "are Palestinians made to appear as enemies of tolerance while Jews are only ever victims of intolerance? How is Israel depicted such that it is not a problem for tolerance? How is tolerance constructed such that Israel is not a problem for it? That, is, how is Israel identified with tolerance?"⁶⁴ The Jerusalem Museum of Tolerance will have its answers to those questions, and it will frame them in much more extreme, even absolute, terms than the LA museum has been able to. For if otherness haunts the fringes of the LA museum, it will be altogether purged from the Jerusalem one, and the conclusions derived as a result will be much purer, once they are on display in their setting on the ruins of Ma'man Allah cemetery, than what is on offer today on Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles.

The aim of the Jerusalem institution is, we are told, to offer "a social laboratory that speaks to the world and confronts today's important issues—like global antisemitism, terrorism, and hate. A place that will remind *us* that greater than any external threat is the internal divide that separates *us*. A place that will reinforce the idea that Jewish unity is not a slogan, but an essential recipe for survival in the 21st century" ("MOT"). The remarkable thing here is the seamlessness of the move from universal statements about what might have seemed—at first glance—like matters of global concern to statements that make it clear that this is not an institution interested in the global and the universal but rather an institution that, by excluding the other, reframes the particular as the universal (there's no one else left, after all). Not hate in general (the universal) is at stake, for example, but hatred of Jews specifically (the particular).

The problem here is that the slippage from universal to particular is so

63. Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, N.J., 2006), p. 135.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

subtle that one almost doesn't even notice it, and even after some consideration it remains unclear who exactly is the us invoked: are we everyone in the world? Or are we only Jews? For the passage that begins by addressing "the world" ends by invoking "Jewish unity," as though there were no difference between Jews and the world. Consider the description of one of the installations in the museum:

The Social Laboratory is the dynamic hub of the Museum's outreach to the world. Its exciting interactive environment challenges visitors to confront the contemporary complex issues facing humanity. Here visitors are placed on the fault lines of regional and global conflict, becoming active players in real-time scenarios, confronting such threats as radical ideologies and global terrorism, and the resurgence of antisemitism. Compelling high-tech exhibits engage visitors in finding common ground and understanding between different communities, including religious and secular, immigrants and veteran residents, and the poor and affluent. The vital experience in The Social Laboratory puts into practice the essential values of Judaism—mutual respect, social and personal responsibility—that have sustained the Jewish people and impacted the world. ["MOT"]

Here again there is a remarkable slippage between "the world" and "the Jewish people." The "threats" facing "humanity" are actually the threats that are imagined to be facing "the Jewish people" or rather Israel itself (for the museum does not recognize a distinction between the Jewish people and Israel; or, as Rabbi Hier puts it, "Israel didn't start in 1948. Israel is part of the Jewish people" [quoted in "FG," p. A31]). Thus "radical ideologies" and "terrorism" refer not to ideologies and violence directed against *anyone* (ideologies and violence directed by Israel against the Palestinians, for example), that is, as universal phenomena but, on the contrary, ideologies and violence that are taken to be directed against Jews and Israel in particular—hence "the resurgence of antisemitism." The language that follows also clearly refers to Jewish communities inside Israel, differences between religious and secular Jews, for example, or new immigrants and "veteran residents." The latter is an especially telling and probably unconscious formulation, for only in a place like Israel and the occupied and colonized territories are "residents" to be thought of in militarized terms as "veterans" (Jewish colonists are heavily armed; almost all are army veterans as well).

If it is not already abundantly clear that the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem aims to recode the particular as the universal, the description of

the institution's central and most important exhibit will surely drive that point home:

"A People's Journey." This experiential historical walkthrough, using the ship *Exodus* as a metaphor, dramatizes the seminal events and the pivotal moments in Jewish history. A People's Journey takes the Museum visitor on a voyage through the ages—an evocative environmental multi-media 1.5 hour presentation of the *Golden Age of Spain*, the *Spanish Inquisition*, the *Protestant Reformation*, the *Dreyfus Trial*, and *Theodor Herzl's Zionist Conference in Basel*, immersing the visitor among heroes and amid layers of memory. The exhibit serves as a gateway, connecting the past and serving as an introduction to the challenges confronting the modern State of Israel in the Museum's second section, the Social Laboratory. ["MOT"]

By this stage in the museum's account of itself, the conflation of the universal and the particular has been taken to its logical conclusion. The point is that this is not simply a museum dedicated to Jewish history (there would be nothing wrong with that, apart from its being built on top of a Muslim cemetery). It is not even simply a museum dedicated to an attempt to rewrite Jewish history in teleological and specifically Zionist terms (with Israel as telos). It is, rather, a museum that, having purged itself of the traces of the other, seeks to represent a Zionist teleology in terms of universal values—to rewrite Zionism *as* a universal value. What is on display, then, is not Zionism as such but rather Zionism as translated into the realm of value and recoded as tolerance. Otherwise, why not simply call it the Museum of Jewish History or the Museum of Zionism? Why call it the Museum of Tolerance? What is at stake in the desire to package a museum about the particular (Zionism) in terms that so grandly invoke the universal (tolerance)?

What is interesting about the deployment of the term *tolerance* here is not simply that Zionism is presented as the expression of tolerance, whereas resistance to Zionism (that is, resistance to the ethnic cleansing and racialism through which Zionism has expressed itself to the Palestinians since 1948) is presented, ipso facto, as intolerance. It is also that the term *tolerance* itself is used as though it could be redefined as exclusive rather than inclusive. For the notion of otherness and the existence of an other are both built into the very concept of tolerance—which is, by definition, tolerance of some *other*. UNESCO's 1995 Declaration of Principles on Tolerance—the closest we get to an international convention, even if it is aspirational rather than binding—defines the term as the appreciation of diversity, the ability to live and let *others* live, the ability to adhere to one's convictions while accepting that *others* ad-

here to theirs, the ability to enjoy one's rights and freedoms without infringing on those of *others*.⁶⁵ Otherness saturates the term. Moreover, as David Theo Goldberg has argued, the discourse of tolerance is generally expressed from a position of power and is articulated by those in power toward the less powerful or the altogether powerless.⁶⁶ The language of tolerance is used to admit the particular into the universal; here, however, it is being used the other way around.

Morally speaking, the museum makes a mockery of the usual understanding of tolerance. It is best, however, to understand this gesture not simply in moral terms—as an act of hypocrisy or grotesque self-satisfaction, for example. That may be in part what it is, but there is much more at stake in the project as well, both symbolically and politically speaking. For one thing, as with everything connected to this project, the act of exclusion and erasure of the Palestinian other is so clean, pure, and total that it is no longer recognizable as such; in fact, it is an act of erasure that—far more successfully than Israel's Independence Park or its West Bank wall—erases itself in turn. This double erasure leaves the Jewish self alone in a homely space whose condition of possibility is the removal of the other (a sense of self-isolation perfectly conveyed in the closing shot of Eran Riklis's recent film *Lemon Tree*). The particular has become the universal because, once the other is gone, literally all that remains is the particular self, albeit a self constituted first through an act of cleansing and displacement and then by the secondary erasure (forgetting, foreclosure) of that primary act.

The redefinition of *tolerance* as an exclusive claim and the usurpation of universality enacted by the Museum of Tolerance must be read in this context as well—as a profoundly ironic gesture, though one for which the irony must be seen as unavailable to the project's backers, even when it is stated as baldly as in *The Independent's* headline reporting the story, "Israel Plans to Build 'Museum of Tolerance' on Muslim Graves."⁶⁷ (Or for that matter when it is considered in terms of the fact that this museum so unrelentingly hostile to the other in the name of tolerance is being designed by an architect who has only recently publicly embraced his Jewishness but who, in an age of actual intolerance in America in the 1950s had felt compelled to change his name from Goldberg to Gehry and to suppress

65. See www.unesco.org/webworld/peace_library/UNESCO/HRIGHTS/124-129.HTM

66. See David Theo Goldberg, "The Power of Tolerance," in *Philosemitism, Antisemitism, and "the Jews": Perspectives from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Tony Kushner and Nadia Valman (London, 2004), pp. 31–48. He notes that the term is hardly innocent or neutral, being typically used by the powerful to offer a place of inclusion, exclusively on the terms of those who are powerful, to less powerful others. Also see Hage, *White Nation*, pp. 78–104, and Brown, *Regulating Aversion*.

67. See Macintyre, "Israel Plans to Build 'Museum of Tolerance' on Muslim Graves."

his Jewish identity in order better to fit in with a mainstream from which he felt he might be excluded as other).

Indeed, the point here is that the museum project is a breathtaking endeavor not because of the audacity that it represents—not simply, in other words, because of the way in which this self-congratulatory act of self-contemplation is founded on, premised on, quite literally and materially *built* on, a violent act of exclusion and denial—but because the deep, appalling irony of this foundational gesture is completely invisible, inscrutable to the initiators and backers of the museum project. When they say that they don't see a problem with building a museum of tolerance on a dispossessed people's graveyard or that "moderation and reason have prevailed" when people are prevented from visiting their relatives' graves—or that Zionism is a force of tolerance—they must be seen to be *absolutely sincere* and convinced of their own deep morality. This is not just an act of hypocrisy, in other words—which is exactly why we need to go beyond a moralistic approach in trying to understand it.

What is being expressed here is a kind of genuine blindness, an inability to understand or even to recognize the other. We can think of it as a kind of racism, though not the kind that one encounters in, say, Foreign Minister Lieberman, who came to Israel as a twenty-year-old Moldovan Jewish immigrant and now (as an *immigrant*) wants to expel the remnant of the *indigenous* Palestinian population ("they have no place here," Lieberman said of the country's indigenous Palestinians; "they can take their bundles and get lost").⁶⁸ Lieberman's kind of racism is blunt, but it is also honest; it acknowledges the existence of the other and says frankly that it seeks to remove or destroy the other. The point is that the violence it directs against the other is premised on an acknowledgement of the other's existence and the threat the other's sense of home poses to the Zionist project to create an exclusively Jewish home in Palestine.

This other kind of racism, by contrast—the one that the Museum of Tolerance embodies and expresses so perfectly—is much more complicated. Its premise is not simply denial of the other or erasure of the other but rather, as I have been saying all along, the denial of denial, the erasure of erasure. This is a form of foreclosure that produces the inability—the absolutely honest, sincere incapacity—to acknowledge that a denial and erasure have taken place because that denial and erasure have themselves been erased in turn and purged from consciousness; because a form of Zionist consciousness has been built on the premise of that denial of

68. Quoted in Ahmad Tibi, "A Harsh Reality for Palestinians," *New York Times*, 6 Apr. 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/04/07/opinion/07iht-edtibi.html

denial—a form of consciousness blissfully unaware of the forms of denial (of denial) on which it is based. This is why so often even the most principled criticisms of Israeli policy are received with the eruptions of blind rage in the United States that cloud discussion of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict; when that which has been for so long denied is forced back into the view of the consciousness that has denied it, the reaction is sheer fury rather than intelligent and articulate counterargument (of which there is such a paucity in contemporary American Zionism).

Here it must be pointed out that not everyone who participates in this form of Zionism endorses the museum project. Indeed, there have been denunciations of the museum project—or, actually, its choice of site⁶⁹—from individuals who are otherwise committed to Zionism (as well as American Jews who have long been critical of Israeli policy, including Richard Silverstein).⁷⁰ Several prominent Jewish Israelis and Jewish Americans—including Bradley Burston, Reuvin Rivlin, Gershon Baskin, Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, Meron Benvenisti, and Eric Yoffie—have published their opposition to the idea of building a Jewish museum on a Muslim cemetery. But their voices are the exceptions to the overwhelming public complicity with and state and official support for the project.⁷¹

And, in any case, almost all of the Jewish-Israeli opposition to the choice of building site—and it's only the choice of site to which they object, not the idea of having a Museum of Zionism packaged as a Museum of Tolerance—actually

69. Some of the criticism of the choice of site even hinges on reframing the issue in Jewish terms. “This is not a Muslim issue, it is not an Arab issue, it is not a Palestinian issue. In my view, this is a Jewish, an Israeli and a Jerusalemite issue,” Gershon Baskin states; in other words it’s not so much about the other as it is about the self, after all (Baskin, “Encountering Peace”). “There is something profoundly disturbing about the idea of putting a Jewish Museum of Tolerance on a plot of ground where Muslims have been burying their dead for most of the last 800 years,” admits Eric Yoffie, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism in a piece he wrote for the *Jewish Journal* of Los Angeles; but what is the point of his critique? “If one were intent on undermining Israel’s claim to Jerusalem, there would be no better way to accomplish this goal than to build a Jewish museum atop a historic Muslim cemetery in the heart of the city.” It is especially telling, in fact, that Yoffie says in his piece that the cemetery was in use “until at least the 1930s,” which (given that he cites many of the same sources I have cited in this article which indicate that the cemetery was used until 1948) is an odd way of stepping around the formative crisis—the *nakba*—of 1948 and what it means for both Israelis and Palestinians (Eric Yoffie, “Is There No Other Site for a Museum of Tolerance?” *Jewish Journal*, 11 Feb. 2009, www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/is_there_no_other_site_for_a_museum_of_tolerance_20090211/).

70. See, for example, the posts on Silverstein’s blog, Tikun Olam, concerning the Museum project (www.richardsilverstein.com).

71. “Where are the rabbis? Where are those Jerusalemites and Israelis who believe that in Jerusalem we can truly create a city of tolerance, understanding and peace between civilizations?” asks Baskin, looking around for more dissenting voices, and not finding any (Baskin, “Encountering Peace”).

aims to reinforce Israel's claims to Jerusalem rather than seeing the whole museum episode as a way to open up and think through anew the inherently problematic nature of Israel's exclusive claim to the city (and to Palestine itself). This kind of opposition to the museum site ends up reinforcing the very same chauvinist blindness of which the museum project is in any case only one manifestation.⁷²

The assumption underlying these protests against the choice of the museum site is that if it were not for the museum project the legitimacy of Israel's claim to Jerusalem would not be at issue, and Israel's "moral claims" on the city would remain intact. Such critics are more worried about the appearance of impropriety than the substance; building on the cemetery is problematic because it manifests what is (to them) an otherwise invisible injustice. It is not the *fact* of injustice itself that matters, in other words, it is the *appearance* of injustice. We could here reiterate almost word for word Tom Paine's fierce rebuttal of Edmund Burke in *Rights of Man*: he "is not affected by the reality of distress touching his heart but by the showy resemblance of it striking his imagination;" he "pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird."⁷³

The museum is not something that came from out of the blue; it embodies a tendency that is manifested across the spectrum of Zionist politics, which is why so much of the (little) criticism that the museum's siting has generated in Israel or among Zionists unwittingly reiterates the museum's own claims. We have—as I suggested above—arrived at a kind of Zionism different from the one represented by Lieberman. This is the form of contemporary Zionism (the dominant one in the United States) that is founded on the repression or denial of the knowledge of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. This is the Zionism that, in its more liberal formulations (Amos Oz, say), is even happy to talk about Israel relinquishing the occupied territories, as long as the *nakba*, the fate of the refugees of 1948, and the status of Israel's second-class Palestinian citizens—that is, the constitutive racism of Israel as a state (as indicated, for example, by its systematic violations of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination or the Apartheid Convention)—is not brought into the discussion.⁷⁴

72. "In a city sacred to a majority of the world's population, the bedrock test of the legitimacy of Israeli rule is the degree of respect the Jewish state accords the sacred sites of other faiths," writes Bradley Burston in *Ha'aretz*, for example. "The chosen location of a Muslim cemetery in Jewish West Jerusalem casts doubt on Israel's guardianship of holy sites. It calls into question not only Israel's moral claims to ruling all of Jerusalem, it erodes its claims to any of it" (Bradley Burston, "Dividing Jerusalem, One Wall at a Time," *Ha'aretz*, 19 Nov. 2008, www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1038842.html).

73. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1792; Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 51.

74. See the revealing *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial*

What is at work here, then, is not a first-order kind of denial and erasure, but rather a second-order kind. This form of Zionist subjectivity is premised on the act of denying that there has been a denial, erasing the fact that an erasure has taken place. Rather than denying the rights of the Palestinians, it denies that their rights have been denied. The form of subjectivity and identity that emerges from this second-order denial is then not premised on repression but rather on the repression of repression itself or a kind of psychical foreclosure.

It is, in other words, the opposite of the much harsher kind of Zionism we see in Lieberman, Morris, Sofer, and others. Morris, in a recent interview, argued that “there are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing.”⁷⁵ Sofer concludes, like Morris, that “a state with an overwhelming majority of Jews,” *which he supports*, fundamentally requires the deployment of endless violence. So, Sofer concludes, “we will have to kill, and kill, and kill. All day, every day.”⁷⁶

It is difficult for most people to be quite so blunt, quite so strident, quite so uncompromisingly honest in their support for violence, mass murder, and ethnic cleansing, what Mbembe calls the necropolitics essential to Israel’s control over the Palestinians. Most people who support Zionism and Israel—especially here in the United States—are decent, humane, intelligent, cultured, well-educated people, motivated by the best intentions and by what they believe to be a just cause. The tragedies of Jewish history and the immense loss of the Holocaust loom large in their minds. I have no doubt that the overwhelming majority of them would be incapable of voicing—let alone actually consciously supporting—the kinds of monstrosities that Sofer or Lieberman have no hesitation in expressing. But, in order for it to be possible at all, their position is founded on exactly the kind of denial of denial and repression of repression that the Museum of Tolerance so perfectly embodies—not merely ignorance (readily facilitated in any case by the mainstream media in the U.S.); not merely the

Discrimination, Mar. 2007. Also see the extensively documented *Parallel Report* jointly submitted to the CERD by a coalition of Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations in May 2006. See www.ohchr.org

75. “There are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing. . . . A Jewish state would not have come into being without the uprooting of 700,000 [the actual figure is closer to 800,000] Palestinians. Therefore it was necessary to uproot them. There was no choice but to expel that population” (Morris, “Survival of the Fittest”).

76. Arnon Sofer, “It’s the Demography, Stupid,” interview with Ruthie Blum, *Jerusalem Post*, 21 May 2004, proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=644788901&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=13392&RQT=309&VName=PQD

denial of Palestinian history, Palestinian dispossession, and Palestinian rights; but the denial that they have been denied in the first place.

This second-order denial is exactly what the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem is all about; the museum is to be built for people like this. And it is perfectly fitting, then, not simply that such a museum should be built on top of an ethnically cleansed graveyard but that those who will eventually gather to celebrate its opening—and those who will visit it in the years afterwards—will have no idea of the profundity of the historical, material, and psychical layers of denial on which they stand.