

SUMUD STORY HOUSE: WOMEN'S ADVOCACY AND RESISTANCE

Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem, Palestine



Storytelling is part of social change. When people gain the confidence to tell their own stories it transforms their lives. Developing a sense of your own sumud is a necessary step toward fighting injustice. Through storytelling women become leaders and resisters and they begin to learn how to use their own inner power.

Sumud

The Arabic concept of *sumud*, literally steadfastness, guides the women's work at the Sumud Story House of the Arab Educational Institute, a Palestinian organization for community education in the occupied West Bank and part of the international peace movement Pax Christi.

Sumud refers to an active, nonviolent lifestyle in which one neither resigns to the occupation nor become absorbed by hate. *Sumud* is a third way in which one stays actively connected to the land and the community, and challenges occupation by a peaceful lifestyle with preparedness to suffer.

The Wall Cannot Stop Our Stories

is a slogan often used by the women of the Sumud Story House in North-Bethlehem, occupied West Bank (Palestine).

They want to bring out their sumud or steadfastness vis-à-vis the Wall, settlements and occupation through stories and songs.

In this information package you find more information about sumud, the Wall, and what the women have done in order to spread their stories.

There are also specific suggestions how to link up with these courageous Palestinian women who in their ordinary life show resistance and advocacy.

A resource section lists films, photos and stories which can be employed

At the time when the concept started to become widely used in the Palestinian movement in the occupied West Bank, at the end of the 1970s, its meaning was rather static. *Sumud* primarily meant the determination to stay on the land, not to leave, despite the Israeli occupation. Over the years the concept has come to increasingly stress the *inner* strength of people to cling to their home, not in despair but in dignity - with the feet standing fast and the head kept high. How to strengthen this inner power in the face of a never-ending occupation which leaves a diminishing living space for Palestinians surrounded by no-travel zones, settlements, checkpoints and borders? How to hope against hope?

The resistance expressed through *sumud* represents a way of believing in a better and more human future, and a rejection of the unjust relationship between occupier and occupied that Israel after many decades of occupation has posed as natural. As expressed by Hala, a woman involved in the Sumud Story House: “Even though we are occupied, we want to stay on our land. By staying on our land, we are resisting this occupation. This means that by being steadfast, by being *samid*, you are resisting.”ⁱ Nur, another woman of the Sumud Story House, added that “this is something they [Israel] don’t want, they want us to be dead, not to enjoy life.”ⁱⁱ

What can be seen here is that *sumud* represents a more inclusive notion of resistance. Resisting the occupation is not exclusively the job of the men and women who engage in oppositional activities such as demonstrating. Resisting the occupation is also part of the daily life of people focused on going forward and keeping their hope in a more just and human future alive.

The root meaning of *sumud* is the mentality to stay on the Palestinian land against the many odds—land expropriations, bulldozers, the Wall, the checkpoints, you name it. However, in a series of interviews about the meanings of *sumud* carried out by AEI, it transpired that *sumud* is not just about staying on the land but rather connecting deeply with the land and its community, with Palestinian daily life and culture, causes and rights, memories and histories.

Sumud is about staying actively committed to grounded Palestinian life despite knowing that liberation is not around the corner. It therefore requires an attitude of what South American peasants once called ‘relentless persistence’, an active form of ‘hoping against hope’.

Acts of resistance such as openly celebrating dignity, identity and life have been categorized as essential, though ignored, ways of dealing with structures of dominance like occupation. Seemingly small acts, such as standing up to a soldier at a checkpoint when asked to undress or keeping a smile on one’s face while standing in line in the early morning to get to work, express a strong sense of agency. *Sumud* is explained as the agency of the everyday acts that prevent Israel’s successful subordination of Palestinians.



Sumud is a concept which gives space to stories and voices of individual women, families and communities. Strategy means that women have

to work on educating and liberating people, and especially raising women's voices. Women have to participate and present their stories. At the same time, they should also be decision-makers in their communities. Each woman has her own way to make a difference. This has also a personal, family and educational dimension. It is about raising children in the spirit of *sumud*, against the occupation, against despair and emigration, against bare survival. In working on women's rights, you try to build your country and ending occupation.

The Sumud Story House is located close to the Wall that surrounds Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem.

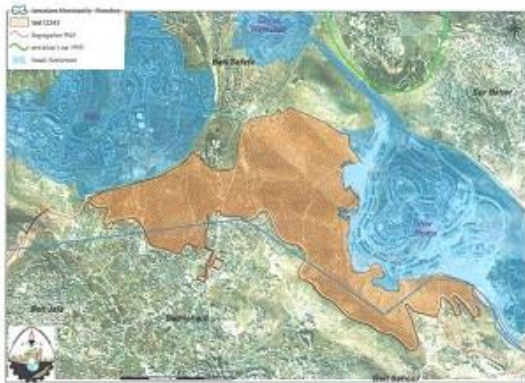
Rachel's Tomb

A holy place for various religions, Rachel's Tomb (Moslems call it Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque) is located inside Bethlehem town along the traditional Jerusalem-Hebron road. Once the area around Rachel's Tomb was one of the liveliest in Bethlehem. The Hebron Road connected Jerusalem with Bethlehem, and its northern section was in fact the busiest street in town. This area used to be the entry point to Bethlehem from Jerusalem, with a lively atmosphere and quality restaurants, shops and garages.

The reality now is completely different. During the 1990s Rachel's Tomb developed into an Israeli military stronghold with the Jerusalem-Bethlehem checkpoint close by. It was appropriated by orthodox nationalistic Israeli settlers who appropriated the place for their own purposes. It became a flashpoint of fighting during the Second Intifada and onwards, as it is the main Israeli military stronghold in Bethlehem city. In 2002, the Israeli government ordered the *de facto* annexation of Rachel's Tomb and it became enclosed in the Jerusalem municipality boundaries ("security envelope" was the army's expression). In summer 2005, an 8-10 meter Wall was built around the military camp opposite Rachel's Tomb and further along a shoe-shaped road that connects Rachel's Tomb with Jerusalem for use by primarily Jewish pilgrims. As a result, the neighbourhoods in the northern parts of Bethlehem became totally fragmented. Visitors to Bethlehem have to take a narrow by-pass road to enter the centre of town. The Tomb became forbidden territory to inhabitants of Bethlehem.

In the course of time no less than 64 shops, garages, and workshops along the Hebron Road closed their gates. This was not just because of the fighting, shootings and shelling going on during the second Intifada, but also because of the area's growing desolation as a result of the Wall building. People still remember that parents warned their children not to visit the area with its imposing 8-9 meter high concrete Wall – almost twice as high as the Wall in Berlin – and army incursions.

The land to the north of Rachel's Tomb is part of a large area of 7000 dunam or 700 hectare agricultural land located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Due to 'security' considerations as the land is close to the Wall, the Israeli government made it largely inaccessible to its 182 Palestinian owners. Since the second Intifada they have not been able to cultivate it except for a few days a year. Israel then made use of an old Turkish Ottoman law stipulating that land uncultivated for three years becomes 'state land'. Since 2010-11 the area has actually become 'absentee property'. The land owners are still waiting many years for a decision of the Israeli High Court about the status of their properties.



Above in Brown: The Affected Lands
Below: View of the Olive Tress



Appeal from the Holy Land

"We, people of Bethlehem, are called 'absentees' on our own land."

Where in the world is it possible to be denied access to your own land and then called "absentees"? This is happening to us, land owners and farmers in Bethlehem.

Our land is grabbed by Israel against all principles of international law and human rights. In flagrant defiance of successive United Nations resolutions; despite the 2004 judgement of the International Court of Justice; and despite pressure of international public opinion, the present Israeli government headed by Netanyahu is fully engaged in implementing its expansive settlement program in the occupied Palestinian territories. Since the construction of the separation wall in 2002, the forces of occupation have confiscated large areas of Palestinian land in the Bethlehem area.

Bitter Irony

No less than 182 Bethlehem land owners and farmers have been prohibited access to their lands in the northern part of the city. They have not been allowed to harvest their olive trees and cultivate their lands - behind the separation wall - unless they could obtain permits issued by the Israeli authorities. However, during 2010 and 2011 these authorities stopped issuing permits for land owners and farmers to enter their lands and harvest their olive trees. The Israeli authorities claimed that these lands of Bethlehem behind the wall lie within the boundaries of Jerusalem. Please note that Jerusalem was expanded illegally after Israel's occupation of the West Bank in 1967. The area of robbed lands exceeds 7000 dunums (1 dunum = 1000 square meters).

The land owners have been informed officially that Israel now considers the owners of these lands as "absentees." Their lands have been put under the authority of the Guardian of Absentee Property in Israel, one step away from formal confiscation. This procedure is an act of piracy in broad daylight which completely violates human rights and international law. First we are denied access to our lands; then we are defined as "absent". What bitter irony!

Not turning a blind eye

We bring this information to your attention and appeal to you and all people of goodwill to put pressure on Israel in order to stop its policy of aggression and apartheid against the people of Bethlehem. Present and future generations will never forgive turning a blind eye to this ugly crime perpetrated by Israel against the people of Bethlehem, the city of peace and love.

During this Christmas season, we wish to express our deepest appreciation for any help to protect the lands of our Holy City.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The People of Bethlehem
Christmas season, 2011

Sumud Story House

When the wall construction was announced by Israel during the Second Intifada, the local community around Rachel's Tomb developed various 'small' types of popular resistance. For instance, Jihad Al-Bandak in Aida camp used his camera to document the building of the wall from his balcony. He quickly changed his film when soldiers became suspicious and came to

check his camera. "My way of resistance is documenting crimes," he said. Likewise the Anastas family, who lived opposite the tomb, held sit-ins in front of their house. After the wall was built, the resistance collapsed. Parts of the wall were erected in one day. Despair sank in. "We are living in a Tomb, like Rachel," said a child in one family.

Slowly new voices developed. Activists began writing or painting graffiti on the wall. This was initially done by foreigners, as they had less chance of being caught and imprisoned than Palestinians from the area. Later on direct resistance came centre stage, such as throwing stones at the Israeli military. Soldiers consistently responded with gunfire, resulting in many injuries and deaths, especially in Aida refugee camp to the west of Rachel's Tomb. There were various kinds of open-air advocacy meetings, workshops, and theatrical and musical performances to protest the Wall in this area, several of them organized through the AEI and its partners.

Backstage, "hidden" protests happened when an atmosphere of defiance developed among inhabitants in the area. People often did not cooperate with the army's many regulations, such as the regulation that "any screw" placed in the wall requires a military permit.

A young resident of the area, Dima Musallem said, "The Wall was killing us. My father used to say, 'Our life has ended, our future had ended.' The word 'end' is difficult to say. But then it dawned to me that this word 'end' could also be seen as pointing to a new beginning of *sumud* and resistance for myself. Through the pain and suffering of the past, you reach hope for the future. By transforming the meaning of this word 'end,' it gave me the space to resist and be *sumud*. The weapon of the occupied is to stay on the land and to resist by staying alive and make living and resistance sustainable."



Claire Anastas, whose house is surrounded by the wall on three sides said, "In these circumstances, being surrounded by the wall, we are potential refugees. In a way, we are refugees, the new refugees. We are expelled from our home, not literally as we are still in the same place, but because our whole environment is not a home anymore. This wall is a new kind of *nakbah* (disaster). But still we keep our *sumud*." Like others in the area, she emphasised that faith in God is for her a strong weapon to resist the present state of affairs.

Initially the Sumud Story House started in response to the building of the Wall in the Rachel's Tomb area in 2003-5. Several women members of AEI live there and asked themselves and AEI what to do about this oppressive Wall which not only separates and robs Palestinians from their land but also creates an ongoing psychological experience of being under siege. Around 2007-8 AEI staff went in the neighborhood from door to door to invite women to join the groups at the House, and to develop mutual solidarity. Five women groups including a large choir as well as a family group have since then been regularly coming together at the House.

Besides weekly meetings and workshops on non-violent communication and arts work, the women in the House have been meeting foreign visiting groups interested to learn about daily

life in Bethlehem, the besieged city of peace. In the context of an international project on women and human security – with partners in the Netherlands, Palestine and Iraq – the women linked up with women in the countryside and refugee camps in the Bethlehem area to jointly dialogue with local Palestinian authorities and police. They challenged them to give higher priority to women’s rights and security.



As a peace organization, AEI has been active in developing symbolic protest activities next to the Wall. Inspired by the example of cultural protest movements against the Wall in cities like Berlin and Belfast, AEI has undertaken many public activities challenging the Wall, often in collaboration with international visitors and Palestinian Christian organizations. Examples: a piano concert under a military watchtower, prayer and silence sessions, a living Christmas star of people carrying torches, a musical dialogue across walls from roofs and balconies (RAP music, trumpets, drums), an Arab coffee play expressing hospitality in an inhospitable environment, choir singing, meetings for the International Day of Prayer for Peace in September, public meetings for the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, and since 2009 an annual Sumud Festival.

Bethlehem Sumud Choir

Five years ago, some twenty of the Sumud Story House’s members formed an amateur choir, the Bethlehem Sumud Choir. Initially the women came together in order to be able to “breathe” a little and release the tensions of their lives—stressed as they are by the burdens of the occupation, the restrictions on their freedom of movement, as well as the multitude of chores they have at home. Singing is an excellent way to experience what the women call “refreshing the soul,” “bringing joy to the heart,” or “expressing love poetry,” all of which come from deep inside the body.

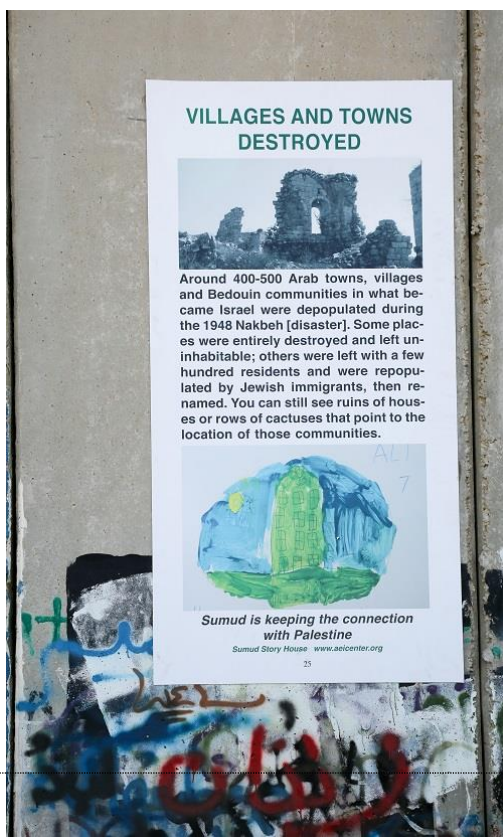
Over the course of time, the women paid more attention to communicating the Palestinian cultural identity, especially because many of their performances have been held at national or heritage occasions like agricultural or seasonal festivals. In most of their performances, the women wear traditional dresses with Palestinian embroidery, as they say, “to bring the past through beauty alive in the present.” They whistle, clap, gesture, and ululate, as is customary

during Palestinian weddings and other happy feasts, and they communicate Palestinian culture through all kinds of songs—national, religious, didactic, and folkloric. By doing so, they bring alive a spiritual kind of *sumud*, of love and connectedness.



After increasing numbers of foreign visitors came to enjoy their performances, the choir included English-language songs in its repertoire, with a strong message of freedom like “We Shall Overcome” and Bob Dylan’s “Blowing in the Wind.” The spirituality evoked by these songs is obviously not contemplative but engaging. The audience is inspired to clap and dance together with the women during songs, which can also be humorous or satirical. Group singing and dancing undermine the traditional tourist routine of observing. Tourists participate and express themselves. Singing also brings to life the human stories, which the choir members share with visitors before and after their performances.

For those interested in a performance by the Bethlehem Sumud Choir, please contact the Sumud Story House, 02-2746595.



The “Wall Museum”

Palestinian stories on the Wall in Bethlehem

In the period 2011-2018, the Arab Educational Institute has put 270 large thin-metal posters (2 by 1 meter) on the Wall that surrounds Rachel’s Tomb in North Bethlehem. Most of the posters display a brief story-from-life of a Palestinian. The stories are about restrictions Palestinians face and also about Palestinian *sumud*. Together the posters make up the “Wall Museum.”

The “Wall Museum” is the last stage of AEI’s cultural activities in challenging the Wall. Community activists initially had no idea what to do with the wall - visually a more imposing fait accompli than checkpoints and settlements. It is after all difficult to fight a wall through physical means. And nobody wants to “beautify” or “normalise” this Wall. But bringing out the connected stories of human strength and will to live creates a powerful contrast and, in fact, a formidable challenge to this inhuman wall of separation. The Wall itself and all the destruction it brings cannot be changed, at least not for the moment, but the human flame of hope and freedom, including the freedom of telling one’s story, is kept alive.

Against the background of the Wall the human stories on the posters cannot but have a very special meaning. The fragile, human, personal stories stand in a stark and comprehensive contrast to the concrete Wall. The personal story humanizes, opens up, asks for human understanding, whereas the Wall kills the environment, closes up, takes away the human horizon. By preserving and communicating human memory, the human story is a challenge to the Wall. By its very setting, the story is a statement of saying no to occupation and to all the restrictions on the freedom of movement in one’s own country.

While most of the stories are from people in the towns of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour, they also bring out experiences from the countryside and refugee camps. The stories



represent Palestinians, whether they are Muslim or Christian, young or old. Most of the stories show stories of *sumud* in the face of war, expulsion, occupation and oppression from 1948 onwards. Many show a Palestinian women’s viewpoint, as they have been written down or collected at the Sumud Story House. Some stories show Muslims and Christians living together in the Bethlehem area and in the larger Palestinian society, challenging stereotypes about

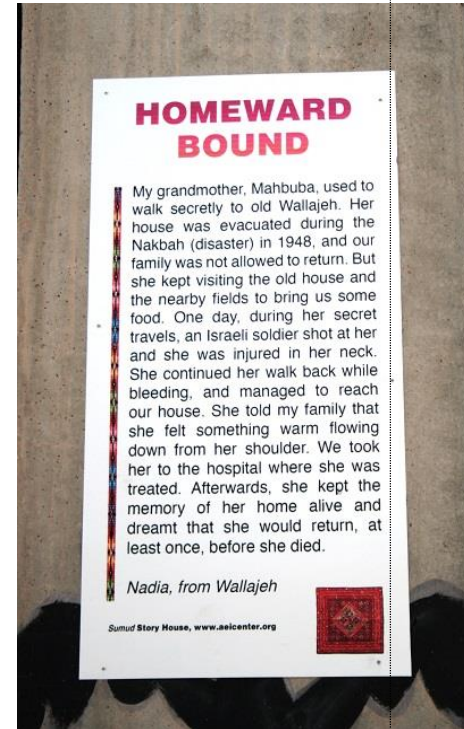
Muslim-Christian relationships that are often part of the mental luggage carried by visitors to Bethlehem. Not all stories are political, even though the context is inescapably political.

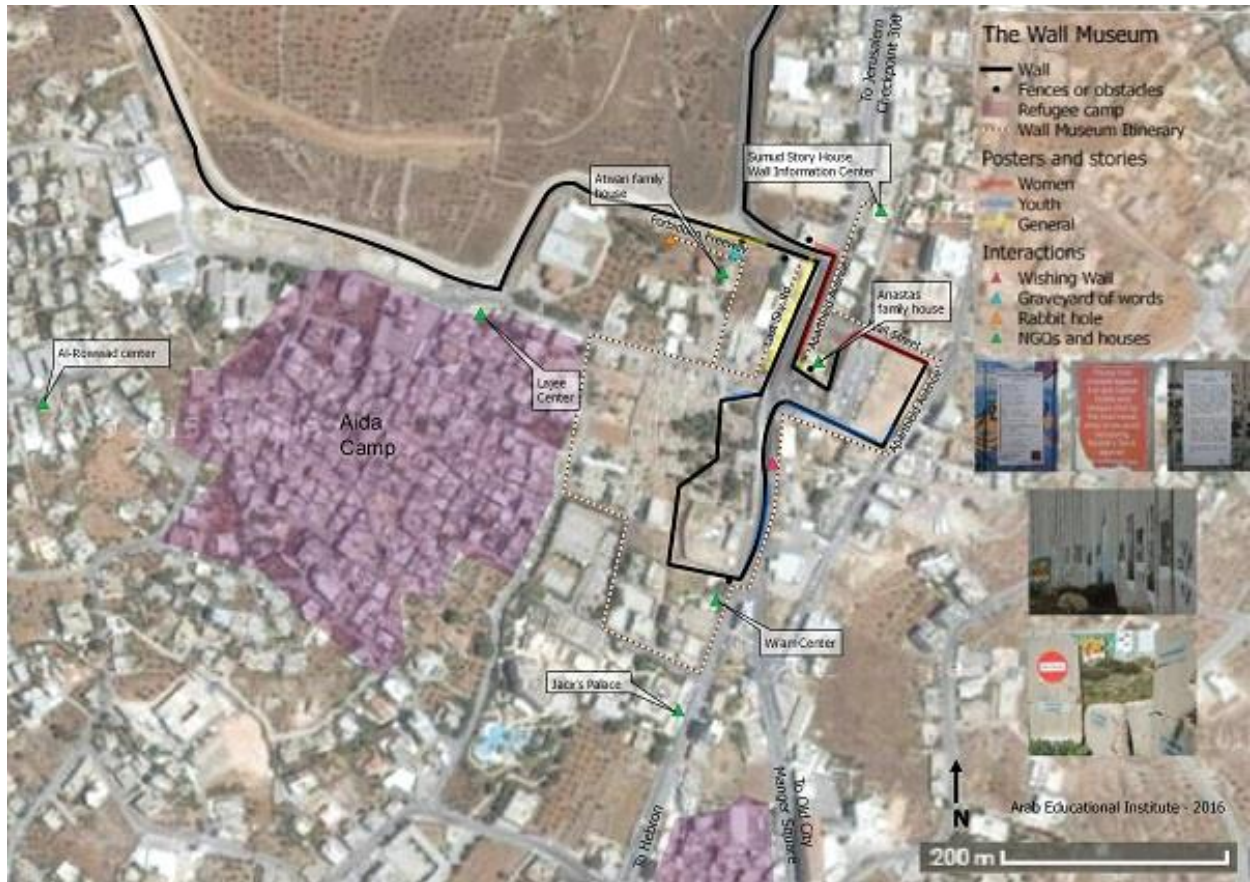
AEI has expanded the Wall Museum on the other, western side of Rachel’s Tomb, near Aida refugee camp, with lively youth stories and photos as well as children fantasies. There is a special series of stories documenting the dreams of the youth, speaking about their hopes and desires. Near the lone Anastas house are posters with historical photos of Rachel’s Tomb from the Ottoman times on. This series of visuals bring to life memories of the past. The photos remind Bethlehemites of the shape of Rachel’s Tomb, now completely hidden from view.

Near the car entrance to the checkpoint between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, following the road along the Wall leading to the Benedictine church, is a new series of women's stories narrating the accumulation of daily problems Palestinians have experienced over the last decades when trying to get a permit and travel to Jerusalem.

The stories together recall the tragic story of the Palestinian people as a whole as well as its story of resilience and hope. The personal stories converge into community stories and into a national story. This story has long been denied by the stereotypes obfuscating a reality-based view of Palestinians, in a second layer of seemingly impenetrable walls. At the same time, the stories show Palestinian women's *sumud* or steadfastness; the human longing for values of care: the healing of home and the creation and preservation of life over destruction. The stories give a sense of history unfolding and suggest the possibility of change from a woman's daily life perspective.

The "Museum" is still very much in construction. It's ongoing, with new ideas coming. Some of those ideas will come from the community around the museum which already gave suggestions about the content and place of the posters, and who encourage us to continue. Visitors are presently purchasing books with the compiled stories, and taking photos of the wall posters and spreading them through social media. By advocating against this deadening wall, they support the strategic aim of the "museum," which is to destroy itself physically so that its living stories will be valued and documented later on in real museums and libraries. After thousands of visitors have read or photographed the stories, it happened in the summer of 2016 that the Israeli army came at 2:00 in the morning to document the Wall poster stories nearby the Sumud Story House. Over a period of two hours, a soldier read the stories in English, another translated them into Hebrew, and a third kept the recorder in his hand. Will the stories be registered as a form of 'incitement'?





Story posters on the Wall around Rachel's Tomb in North-Bethlehem

Spirituality and the Wall

UK-based Christian theologian Mary Grey wrote a trilogy of books on spiritual pilgrimages in the Holy Land, taking the seasons of Advent/Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost as starting points for an approach in which the lives of ordinary, struggling Palestinians stand central. Spiritual moments are said to be about an “epiphany of connection.” For Grey, this represents a radical departure from the familiar stereotypical categories usually applied by tourists when observing or interacting with the people they visit.

Grey's approach is still uncommon in most tourism programs in the Holy Land, even those that include meetings with Palestinians. When visitors meet Palestinians, it all too often happens that the setting, atmosphere, and time available induce visitors to stereotype their Palestinian hosts for example, as victims, or as exemplars of a culture or religion.

Small miracles

The epiphany of connection happens when there is a moment that you suddenly see the “other” as fully human and you are able to relate to the other in mutuality and recognition. Such moments of breaking through barriers are actually small miracles in human interaction which usually do not come just like that but need an appropriate setting in which the quality of the encounter receives due care.

Important in creating a suitable atmosphere for spiritual encounters is the setting. In the case of spiritual tourism we tend to think of a quiet, natural place or a striking piece of symbolic or religious architecture, such as in a mosque or church. But what about spaces adjacent to the Wall? Does a violent and oppressive place lend itself to spirituality?

In fact, yes, a space next to the Wall can be a “sacred place” too. Once Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah from Jerusalem commented that even checkpoints could be turned into a place for prayer, a “sacred place” and he made a call to people to do so. The Bethlehem Sumud Choir regularly performs near the Wall, creating symbolic events. Examples are a living star of people holding torches in the form of a Bethlehem star, a living key to symbolize the right of return of Palestinian refugees, or even a Christmas stable in front of the military watchtower where the Bethlehem Sumud Choir made a video called “The Birth of Jesus Between the Walls.”

Often held in the context of the World Week for Peace in Palestine convened by the World Council of Churches, it has been common during spiritual meetings near the Wall in Bethlehem not only to sing but also to read out loud or silently, wishes and prayers in various languages gathered from all over the world by the peace movement, Pax Christi, and the World Council of Churches.



Singing is a way of releasing inner tension, but it’s also a beautiful way to connect. These concerts lead visitors to contemplate what this place once was in the past, and what it could be in the future. The deadly silence of the Wall is replaced by the living silence of reflection and meditation and the vibrant sounds of group singing.

Mary C. Grey, *The Advent to Peace: A Gospel Journey to Christmas*. SPCK, London 2010.

The Resurrection of Peace: A Gospel Journey to Easter and Beyond. SPCK, London 2012. *The Spirit of Peace: Pentecost and Affliction in the Middle East*. Sacristy Press, Durham 2015.

Singing

Singing can facilitate the required atmosphere for spiritual tourism. At the Sumud Story House near the Separation Wall in north Bethlehem, some twenty women formed an amateur choir, the Bethlehem Sumud Choir. Singing turned out to be an excellent way for their audiences to experience what the women call “refreshing the soul.” In the experience of the audience, the deadly silence of the Wall is replaced by the living silence of reflection and meditation and the vibrant sounds of group singing.

Choir song

Refrain

Decorate the courtyard, oh Palestinians
Oh soil of our land
It is shining with dignity

Verses

Our *sumud* is wisdom through knowledge in grace
We are steadfast through truth and discretion

From the Lord of the world we request grace
Through *sumud* and continuity we will overcome the siege

We will dismantle the Wall through our determination and perseverance
Let us remain faithful to our righteous victims of violence

The Wall: Questions and Answers

The figures are from the UN based OCHA, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2015).

What does the Wall consist of?

The Wall consists of concrete walls, fences, ditches, razor wire, groomed sand paths, an electronic monitoring system (cameras), patrol roads, and a buffer zone.

What is the total length of the Wall?

The total length (constructed and projected) is approximately 708 km, more than twice the length of the 1949 Armistice (‘Green’) Line, which separates Israel from the occupied West Bank.

An estimated 62 per cent of the Wall is complete, 10 per cent is under construction and 28 per cent is planned but not yet built. So at present the Wall is 439 km in length, and another 70 km is under construction.

What is the width of the Wall?

The average width of the Wall is 60 meters. In the countryside, the width is larger, in the cities smaller. Note that in cities the streets along or near the Wall are area C, under full Israeli control.

Where is the Wall of barbed wire, where of cement?

In general in or near the cities the Wall is of cement, and in the countryside of barbed wire.

How high is the Wall?

It is between 3-9 meters high. The Wall is at its lowest near settlements, so that settlers keep their view...

What are the terms used for the Wall (in English)?

Separation barrier, separation wall, West Bank barrier, apartheid wall, wall, fence.

How should we look at these terms? Which ones are used by Palestinians?

A term like 'separation' barrier does suggest that the Wall's main purpose is to separate Palestinians from (Jewish) Israelis. However, the Wall separates Palestinians from Palestinians as well. The term 'fence' is highly misleading. It suggests a kind of neighborly 'small' barrier, yet the Wall is a highly militarized barrier. The term 'apartheid wall' as used by Palestinians puts rightly the emphasis on the extreme inequality between Palestinians in the West Bank and East-Jerusalem on the one hand, and the settlers on the other.

How much of the Wall is built on West Bank land?

When completed, some 85%, of the route will run inside the West Bank, rather than along the Green Line.

How much West Bank land does it confiscate?

When completed, the Wall isolates or confiscates some 9.4% of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

How many settlers are on the 'Israeli' side of the Wall?

71 of the 150 Israeli settlements in the West Bank and over 85% of the total settler population are located on the 'Israeli' side of the Barrier's route.

How many Palestinians live on the 'Israeli' side of the Wall?

Around 7,500 Palestinians reside now in areas between the Green Line and the Barrier/Wall (Seam Zone), excluding East Jerusalem; another 23,000 will be isolated if the Wall is completed as planned.

There are about 150 Palestinian communities which have part of their land isolated by the Wall.

How can they continue living there?

The Palestinians who reside in areas between the Green Line and the Wall (Seam Zone), excluding East Jerusalem, require special permits to continue living in their own homes. The 150 Palestinian communities which have part of their land isolated by the Wall must obtain 'visitors' permits or perform 'prior coordination' to access this area.

How can peasants go to their agricultural lands on the other side of the Wall?

Access to agricultural land through the Wall is channeled through 80 gates. The majority of these gates only open during the six weeks olive harvest season and usually only for a limited period during the day.

During the 2011 olive harvest, about 42% of applications submitted for permits to access areas behind the Wall were rejected citing 'security reasons' or lack of 'connection to the land.'

What is the legality of the Wall?

On 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The ICJ stated that the sections of the Barrier route which ran inside the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, violated Israel's obligations under international law.



The Wall Cannot Stop Our Stories

Silvana: "I want freedom and peace to feel secure. We have to raise our voices. Hand in hand together, and with love, one day this wall must be transformed into a bridge for reconciliation between people."

Eileen: “This wall separates us from relatives in Jerusalem. It separates Palestinians. We need to show that we refuse this wall. We are surrounded, as if in a prison. We need to raise our voices so as to bring it down!”

Farida: “ This project is needed. Through it we can explain and demonstrate the negative impact of this wall – economically, socially, psychologically. Also, we need to gain international support. People should visit us and see the wall. In this way we will change the international point of view, and that will bring down this wall.”

Sanaa: “ I joined this project so as to help people seeing the suffering that the Palestinians face because of this wall. The Palestinian people has the right to live in dignity and freedom. We need to convey a true and clear image of Palestine despite the distortions by the media.”

Unknown: “I want to show internationals how we as Palestinians live. Even though the situation is hard we still have hope because we love our lives and country. We need to talk about this wall, which takes away most of our lands and as a result of which we live in a big prison. Despite this we are still steadfast, simply because we are the owners of this land.”

Katherina (from Germany): “*Visiting the Sumud Story House was the best beginning of a very moving, intriguing week.*” “*Through the choir we could really feel what sumud means.*” “*This trip was so perfectly organised. I was so impressed. The program was amazing.*” “*This trip was very special and unique, as is the country. Through the AEI we really got a very profound insight.*” “*It was very emotional and depressing, but with every encounter we heard: there’s hope, there’s sumud!*”

Advocacy and educational suggestions

Walk along the Wall around Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem: AEI/Sumud Story House offers to guide a morning two-hour walk along the Wall around Rachel's Tomb, from the Jerusalem-Bethlehem checkpoint to Aida camp in north-Bethlehem. You will learn about the impact of the Wall and about the Palestine question in general. The walk can be combined with a 1-hour visit to the Sumud Story House and a conversation there with Palestinian women about daily life in Bethlehem. Costs and precise schedule to be arranged in coordination with the Sumud Story House (02-2746595, mornings except Sunday).

Support the Wall Museum: The "Wall Museum" gives Palestinians a voice and is a creative way of saying "no" to the Wall in Bethlehem and elsewhere. You are invited to expand the "Wall Museum" and sponsor a new poster by (the equivalent of) 100 Euro or 135 US dollar, including the costs of design, printing and fixing. You can also buy a small book with photos of 60 posters showing stories by Palestinian women. In addition, there are paper posters on sale with a selection of stories (1 Euro per poster).

Organize a 'ritual' in front of the Wall: You may organize together with the women of the Sumud Story House a session near the Wall with a declamation of prayers or wishes, a moment of silence, or other rituals. In this way, an 'epiphany of connection' can be created (see above under 'spirituality and the wall').

The Wall Cannot Stop Our Stories

*Wishing
the
Wall
away*

Let your wishes, prayers and
hopes be heard
#wishingwallsaway
aei@p-ol.com

Organize an exhibit of posters from the Wall Museum: AEI sells posters, while in Germany Pax Christi recently organized a story poster exhibit which is available for further use.

Make a lesson plan. Many of AEI's materials are in English, and so can be used in educational contexts abroad. Below in this info package are samples of Wall poster stories and some legends from the Bethlehem area where women play a central role. We can send more stories, also based on thematic areas or values. They can be helpful materials for educational lessons or training sessions. A central question in discussing the stories can be the meaning of *sumud* in the circumstances Palestinians face. See also the audio visual resources listed below.

Support a peace garden. The women of the Sumud Story House have sometimes planted an olive tree adjacent to the Wall as a symbol of *sumud* (roots deep in the earth and branches high in the sky). SSH also plans to develop a garden behind the House, with plants and trees symbolizing care, peace and growth. You are welcome to sponsor and plant a tree.

A language workshop. The Youth Media House of AEI developed a section of the Wall Museum which focuses on the distorting language often used with regard to Palestine and the



occupation. AEI and SSH can facilitate a language workshop in the area near Aida camp, to the west of Rachel's Tomb, where 'language posters' are fixed on abandoned checkpoint blocks.

International volunteering: Together with staff, preparing and sharing the activities of various women groups weekly coming together. A main aim is that the women become more able to communicate effectively across cultural borders. We hope also that the volunteer can note down brief stories, for the website, publications and a wall story poster project. Experience with visual media or arts is an asset. We expect the volunteer also to do some practical office tasks, especially some administration, reporting, taking pictures of meetings for instance, and website contributions.

Contributions to the Sumud Story House: In these demanding times for Bethlehem and the dispersed communities of Palestine, allow us to ask for your support and partnership. International cooperation is essential to our work! Presently we are in urgent need to strengthen our women's work in the face of many challenges ahead; political, developmental, and economic. By helping us, you will make a real difference in the life of Palestinian women and educators. Please give contributions to SSH through the Netherlands-based Friends of Young Bethlehem, see:

<http://www.fofyb.org/engfofyb/index.html>

Contact AEI/Sumud Story House



Rania Murra
02-2746595, 0598-912795

The Sumud Story House is near the Bethlehem-Jerusalem checkpoint on the Hebron Rd between Karawan restaurant and Tabbash souvenir shop. See the sign along the street and on the building upon 150 meters to the left when leaving the foot passengers exit of the checkpoint.

The Wall Information Center at the Sumud Story House

The Wall Information Center gives voice to Palestinians directly hurt by the wall that is imposed by the occupation. It advocates their right to a dignified life in freedom and self-determination.

The Wall Information Center in Bethlehem provides information about the impact of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territories. It gives attention to people's narratives of loss as well as *sumud* [steadfastness, resilience]. The Center will advocate the right to protection, human security and human development in accordance with principles of human rights and international humanitarian law. Following Security Council Resolution 1325, it amplifies the voices of Palestinian women living in the shadow of the wall and support women's participation and protection at all levels.

Arab Educational Institute

AEI-Open Windows is an Arab-Palestinian NGO which is member of Pax Christi International. Established in Bethlehem in 1986 by a group of Palestinian teachers, AEI works with youth, women and educators in the field of community education in the West Bank. It contributes to the general causes of participation in public life and in human rights, peace and justice; the building of a free, democratic and culturally pluralistic Palestine, and the sharing and communication of the daily life reality of Palestine with broader audiences.

This is done by –

- Activating youth and women and developing leadership skills
- Raising awareness about values, culture and identity
- Training in effectively communicating Palestinian reality
- Developing the capacity, sustainability and outreach of the organization.

Tel. 02-2744030 (headquarters) or 02-2746595 (Sumud Story House), or.... (Youth Media House).

For correspondence Info@aeicenter.org

www.aeicenter.org

Resources

Films related to the “Wall Museum”:

A Christmas film from contemporary Bethlehem (19 minutes). The Birth of Jesus between the Walls: Bethlehem Sumud Choir with Marianne Murra and Judith Abu Akleh. In this Christmas DVD, the birth of Jesus is shown in a present-day Bethlehem hemmed in by the Separation Wall. Biblical songs and hymns together with readings from story posters on the Wall bring out a unique women’s perspective on the Palestinian narrative of oppression and *sumud*.

A 20-minute **documentary about children’s life near the wall** made last year by Rinske Bosch for Dutch TV (IKON, series Mensjesrechten), English subtitled, in cooperation with AEI and Al-Rowwad in Aida camp

<https://vimeo.com/143601177>

password: Yazan 2 (with space between Yazan and 2)

Helpful for school lessons.

A 9-minute **video about the Wall Museum** around Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem:

<https://vimeo.com/143457242>

Supported by ArtLab in East-Jerusalem, AEI facilitated the making of two brief **animation cartoons**, in English, made by Palestinian children from the Bethlehem area:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1ttfKBifIs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu-yX5uElXo>

Heather Kiernan, of Pax Christi UK, made two **photo slideshows** about Palestine and the Wall.

1. What about the children?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6NawvvKJsY>

2. Occupied Walls (about graffiti and stories on the Wall in Bethlehem)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DljvhZ0vz0&feature=youtu.be>

Another slideshow is about “The Pigeon,” telling a **child’s story** shown on a Wall story poster

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDtMYELs5L8>

Lars Lilholt, a Danish folksinger, made a **contemporary Christmas song about Bethlehem** and the Wall. The song’s lyrics are on two Wall posters, one in Danish, one in English. See the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXHLPHenuVE>

Reporters of daily life: Members of AEI’s women’s groups and volunteer Ida from Germany made photo series about daily life in Bethlehem together with Sibylle Hofter of Agentur

Schwimmer (Germany) who made many of her own as well. Themes: official, city councils, occupation, teen killed, teen's funeral, Christianity, private, agricultural project.
<https://www.agentur-schwimmer.de/content/desks-local/palestine/?L=1%2F%5C%5C%5C%27%2F>

A mock permit: see picture

STOP Number: 00-860-532000
 Telephone for clarification: 0611-410923
 Department of Permits

Issued by the
State of Permitland

STOP forbidden entry

A PERMIT TO ENTER BETHLEHEM

PERMISSION TO ENTER BETHLEHEM EXCEPT RACHEL'S TOMB

Name	Father	Grandfather	Family
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Resident in

Passport number

Purpose of visit: for a Christian feast.
 He/she is permitted to move without a magnetic card. He/she is not allowed to drive a car.

Validity:
 The permit is only valid during the Christmas and Easter seasons. Daily it is valid until 21:00.

For the Department of Permits and Additional Restrictions,
 The Coordinator and Liaison Office Representative of the State of Permitland Jan. 2012

VALID from date of arrival to date of departure

Date 1 Jan. 2012 Time 00:00

FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Put your photo here

1. This is a personal permit and it is not allowed to be used by any other person.
2. This permit does not entitle its holder to work in Bethlehem - i.e. this permit should not be considered a work permit.
3. The holder of this permit is permitted to enter Bethlehem for the defined place and purpose only and in accordance with the prescribed time mentioned in the permit.
4. This permit is only valid when the person carries a personal identity card.
5. The validity of the permit is guaranteed only if all the passengers of the bus/car in which the person travels hold valid permits to enter Bethlehem.
6. Access to Bethlehem using this permit is only possible through one of the crossing points in accordance with the written details of the order which pertains to the crossing points.
7. Anyone who finds a lost permit should hand it over to any nearby police station or to the nearest Liaison Office of the State of Permitland.
8. It is prohibited to alter or change any of the details in this permit. Any change leads to the cancellation of this permit and will expose the perpetrator to punishment in accordance with the law.

Wall Poster Stories: A Sample

Hug

During the first Intifada Israeli tanks stood in front of our house. Our young men had to pass here to reach their work places in Jerusalem. The soldiers used to stop and delay them. They were sometimes made to stand for hours with their head directed towards the wall of our house. One day, the soldiers stopped two young men. We couldn't hear the talk but the soldiers started to beat them. Suddenly, a woman in the street came shouting and screaming.

We heard her saying that the young men were her children. She hugged them and asked the soldiers what they wanted. She saved the young men whom she actually did not know.

Melvina, from Bethlehem

Homeward Bound

My grandmother Mahbuba used to walk secretly to old Wallajeh. Her house was deserted during the Nakbah (disaster) in 1948, and our family was not allowed to return. But she kept visiting the old house and the nearby fields to bring us some food. One day during her secret travels, an Israeli soldier shot at her and she was injured in her neck. She continued her walk back while bleeding, and managed to reach our house. She told my family that she felt something warm flowing down from her shoulder. We transferred her to a hospital where she was treated. Afterwards, she kept her memory and dream alive to once return to her old house.

Nadia, from Wallajeh

I caught his hand

During the June war in 1967 I was in grade three. I stayed in a simple shelter, a cave for sheep. My parents divided the cave into two parts: one for the animals and the other for our family. My family thought about leaving to Jordan. All were afraid for the Israeli army. They appealed to my father to leave the cave. But I was worried about him and about us. So many terrible things could happen when we would try to escape to Jordan. One day he wanted to leave. He was at the doorstep and was about to put on his shoes. I decided to hide his shoe among the remainders of an animal. I also caught his hand and held it tightly. At the end, he managed to stay steadfast in our house. He did not become a refugee another time.

Maysara, from Bethlehem

Laundry

It was during the second Intifada, or uprising, when the conflict was hot. One day in 2002, while it was curfew, I was putting up my laundry on our balcony. Suddenly, the soldier opened a small window and put out his gun. I tried to communicate with him to ask what was going on but he refused to speak. I was obliged to go inside but I observed him from my bedroom window until he went inside his tower. So then I returned doing my laundry again. Unfortunately, the soldier again climbed out of the window and I moved quickly inside. This happened no less than ten times and in the end I really drove him crazy and made him loudly screaming inside his watchtower.

Carol A. from Bethlehem

Rescue

During one of the Intifada days, I, a young Palestinian woman, was four months pregnant and lost my baby because of Israeli tear gas. I was terribly depressed since it was the second miscarriage I suffered. A week later I visited a medical doctor in Jerusalem for a check up. Coming out of the doctor's clinic, I saw, nearby, on top of an escalator an Israeli child who was recklessly playing and about to fall down. Thoughts rushed through my mind. Should I leave him and let him die the way the Israeli soldiers let my boy die a week ago, or should I make a desperate attempt to grab him? All of a sudden, I felt an impulse that made me hurry forwards. Throwing myself in front of the boy I prevented his fall.

Sylvana, from Bethlehem

The pigeon

There was a little boy who was holding his toy, a pigeon. While he was playing, he had a dream. He dreamed about another world where he could talk about his toys and his hobbies, his interests and his dreams, instead of talking about guns, blood and killing. A world where he could run and play with his friends. In that world was no war, no tanks, no rockets, and no shelling and bombing. A world full of peace. A bullet, an evil bullet, came like a thief and entered his heart. It took his soul and his dream away. His pigeon was beside him, right there next to his motionless body. But the pigeon remembered the boy's dream, and came to life and flew away. It decided to tell his dream to the world. And it decided to make this dream come true.

Story by Jennifer, Jumana, Rasha and Nisreen, 16 years



Traditional Legends Expressing Sumud

The white flower of innocence

Between forty and fifty years ago there lived in Al-Khadr, near Artas, a girl of happy nature, who would laugh and talk with everyone. Now you must know that in the village such conduct is not thought well of. A woman should walk abroad in seemly fashion, looking down at the ground, with her head veil well pulled down on the forehead and wrapped round over shoulders and breast, and if she has to hold converse with any, she should not smile or show her teeth, O how shocking it is to show the teeth! But this girl went on smiling and showing her teeth, laughing and talking with everyone.

Then her brothers came to her and said, "Why do you do so? We will not have this. You shall be punished if you do not behave differently." But she was such a merry girl, she could not change her ways. Therefore one day her brothers slew her in their anger. Very soon afterwards, a white flower grew from her grave. It was the flower of a gourd plant climbing upwards, and some of the people passing by saw it. "Ashka el khabbar-all is now plain," they cried, "Look at the white flower, what have we done? She is innocent."

The Caliph and the Neighbour

Once a famous Persian ruler, King Casroe, wanted to build a palace. However, a widow had her home exactly on the spot where he wanted to build and she did not want to sell the house against any price. The King invited her into his palace, angry that she did not want to sell it but also curious to know why. The widow said: "Houses I can find everywhere, but not a neighbor like your Majesty. This honor I will not give away for any price." The King was pleased by the woman's wit and courage and ordered the house to be left in the possession of the widow.

Miriamiya

Why is the Miriamiya plant so blessed? This is the story of the Miriamiya. When Our Lady Miriam fled from King Herod into Egypt with Our Lord Jesus and he was yet a little Child, she sat down, weary, under the shade of a shrub. And she broke a sprig from the shrub and wiped the sweat from her face with the leaves until she found refreshment because of its fragrance. Then she said to the plant "Be thou blessed for ever" and since that day the plant is called Miriamiya in her memory, and truly it is blessed.

The Virgin Mary and the plowmen

When the Virgin Mary, peace be on her, was on the flight to Egypt with the son in her arms, she passed by some plowmen making furrows in their field. She said to them: "Though today you are only sowing, before the sun rises tomorrow morning, your field will be ready to harvest. But

remember, if anyone comes this way and asks about me, say, "She was here just as we were getting ready to plant these chick-peas."

Indeed when the people who were after the Virgin, came to the place on the very next day, these same plowmen were busy harvesting chickpeas. The people asked: "Has a woman carrying a child passed your way recently?" The plowmen replied: "By God, such a one did go by, but that was when we were digging the furrows to sow this crop." "O ho," said her persuers, "that must have been some time ago. How will we catch up with her now?"
