

CORNERSTONE

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Where the Empire Lies, People Suffer

Nestor Míguez

Muhannad (10) and Hassan (6) stand next to the separation wall in Bethlehem.

Photo by Ryan Rodrick Beiler/MCC

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Who commands our allegiance, God or Caesar?

by Naim Ateek

The Middle East has seen the presence of many empires. Once the art of war began to be refined, the movement towards empire was inevitable. Empires are built on military power. They are created and maintained by the power of arms until the empire grows weak and decadent and is replaced by another empire, more superior in military power.

There is no benevolent empire. When it is threatened or opposed, empire crushes its opponents with vicious force. Some of its citizens might be economically prosperous, but

Photo by L. Aarvik, EAPPI



Israeli Police ensure the demolition of a Palestinian home in East Jerusalem. Home demolitions and illegal settlement construction continued throughout 2010.

its victims suffer terribly. In essence such is the nature of ancient as well as modern empires.

Israel is a small country that was created by the victorious western powers of WWII after the disastrous tragedy that befell their European Jewish compatriots under the Nazis. Its greatest champion and sponsor at the time was the British Empire that forty years before gave a promise to the Jewish Zionist leadership to help them set up a home for Jews in Palestine. This promise was fulfilled in 1948 at a catastrophic loss for the Palestinians.

As the British Empire waned, the Zionist state cleverly and shrewdly connected itself with the rising American Empire and gradually was able to occupy strategic positions within all of its governing branches – the Congress, Pentagon, State Department, and the

White House. Furthermore, the state was able to create links with church groups, such as evangelicals and more particularly Christian Zionists, that, due to their interpretation of the Bible, have become staunch supporters of the state of Israel.

Over the years, the state of Israel has become an integral part of American Empire. In fact, there seems to be an unbreakable bond on the economic, military, and political levels. “As of 2005, direct United States’ economic and military assistance to Israel amounted to nearly \$154 billion (in 2005 dollars), the bulk of it comprising direct grants rather than loans.”¹ Politically, the United States has consistently protected Israel in the UN Security Council. Between 1972 and 2006 the United States vetoed forty-two resolutions that were critical of Israel.² Due to American military help, Israel has become one of

the strongest military countries in the world today, and definitely the strongest in the Middle East. Moreover, Israel has itself been manufacturing and exporting arms to various countries of the world; consistently it is rated one of the top five countries in the world in regards to arms exports.

Due to this special relationship between the United States and Israel, it has become impossible for the United States to be an honest broker in the Middle East peace process. At a time when it is in the interest of the United States to find a just solution to the conflict over Palestine, this favoritism of Israel has been one of the great hindrances to that peace. Israel has become indistinguishable and inseparable from American Empire regardless of whether the President is Republican or Democrat.

It is interesting to point out that when I was researching speakers for Sabeel’s 8th International Conference, *Challenging Empire: God, Faithfulness and Resistance*, I discovered that most of the scholars who have published on empire are American. For over twenty years, one biblical scholar after another has written on various biblical themes relating to empire. It is an amazing group of first rate scholars who recognize the hegemony of an American Empire today and are seeking to address it.

As Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation, we have come to realize that Israel in its laws, policies, actions, and treatment of Palestinians, conducts itself like an empire because of its link with American Empire. In fact,

its special relationship with the United States allows it to do what it deems necessary for its own interest with little regard to international law because it knows it can get away with it. To a large extent, Israel guides and dictates American foreign policy in the Middle East. It is important to point out that although President Obama has tried repeatedly to make the Government of Israel stop settlement building, he has not been successful. At the same time, the United States' Administration is unwilling to support a UN Security Council resolution that censures the Israeli Government for repeated violations of international law. On the one hand, the United States admits that the settlements are an obstacle to peace and violate international law; on the other hand, the United States is unwilling to condemn them in the UN Security Council. What contradiction and what hypocrisy! Is the United States so weak that it cannot take a stand for what it knows is just and right?

Jesus lived all his life under the occupation of the Roman Empire and was killed by the occupation forces. From the beginning of his ministry, he preached about a different empire -- the kingdom of God. Jesus recognized that the empires of the world are built on the ideology of military and economic power. Such an ideology fills leaders with hubris, arrogance, and brutality. Empire might preach

peace and prosperity but in reality it suppresses and enslaves its enemies. Empire's power is shown through domination and exploitation while God's power is shown through love and mercy, justice and peace.

Like in the time of Jesus, we stand before the presence of two empires – God's and Caesar's. The first is built on the power of justice while the second is built on the justice of power. The first preaches peace through justice while the second imposes "peace" through the power of the gun. We know that we live under an empire that dominates, exploits, and oppresses. Can we, though living under this empire, remain faithful to God and continue to challenge and resist the lure and snares of empire – not only for our own sake, but for the sake of our brothers and sisters in the world that are crying out for justice, peace, and freedom? May we all keep high before us the vision of God's Kingdom and continue to work and pray for its realization.

¹ Mearsheimer, John J. and Walt, Stephen (2007). *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. p. 24.

² *Ibid.* p. 40.

The Rev. Naim Ateek is the Director of Sabeel

May Your Kingdom Come

When I am down and helpless
When lies are raining
When fear and indifference are growing

May your kingdom come.

When joy is missing
When love is missing
And unbelief is growing

May your kingdom come.

To the sick and lonely
To the imprisoned and tortured

May your kingdom come.

Into the churches
Into our praying, into our singing

May your kingdom come.

Into our hearts
Into our hands, into our eyes

May your kingdom come.

No. 17 Czech litany, With All God's People, WCC, 1989; quoted by Richard Harries, Praying the Eucharist, SPCK, 2004, pp. 67-68.



A Palestinian woman in the occupied West Bank challenges Israeli soldiers on her land.

My Mother vs. Empire: *Al-ahaali* (people-in-community) is the hope

By Munir Fasheh

“Do not resist evil” Jesus said in his sermon on the mount. I always wondered what he could have meant by it and thought about it again when asked if I could write something for Cornerstone concerning the upcoming Sabeel conference on challenging empire. How can we make sense of his statement in today’s world, particularly in Palestine and in relation to empire?

During the past thirty-five years, whenever I faced a dilemma of this sort, I looked to my illiterate mother’s world for an answer. Like most Palestinians, she was the victim of much evil. She and her sisters sewed clothes for twenty-five years to build a house in Jerusalem. I was seven years old when we were driven out of it in 1948, but it is still there, occupied ever since by ‘civilized’ European Jews. After the 1967 war we were able to reach it, but every time we tried to take my mother, she would start crying so bitterly that we took her back to Ramallah. She died in 1984 without ever seeing it.

What is amazing is her reaction to the evil done to her and fellow Palestinians. She followed Jesus’ advice not to resist evil without even knowing that statement. She did not resist empire using its tools; but through embodying the spirit of

regeneration in all aspects of her life, through living in harmony with the wisdom in Jesus’ statement. If someone asked, ‘what did Jesus say?’ she could only cite: “love one another.” That was enough to embody Jesus’ spirit in her life. She seems to have discovered that the best way to fight a plague is by strengthening the internal immune system within the family and community – and empire is a plague. Loving one another is the main ingredient in such immunity. In connection to hope, hospitality, and vitality, it was enough for her to incarnate Jesus’ vision in her life.¹ Still, how she did it without being able to read a word is very hard for me to comprehend. I can only explain

¹ An-Naffari, an Arab Muslim Sufi, wrote 1,000 years ago in Bagdad (the city destroyed by the self-proclaimed spokesman for Christianity in the 21st century, President Bush), “The wider the vision, the narrower is its expression.” This is so true about my mother’s relationship with Christianity.

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it by believing that this spirit was regenerated and transmitted from one generation to another for twenty centuries through *ahaali*, or people-in-community.

Her deep understanding radically transformed my perception of knowledge, learning, faith, and a person's source of worth. I became convinced that a sure way to kill the spirit of anything is by institutionalizing it. Almost every child learns the language of his/ her community by the age of three without the help of any institution. Schools do not only ignore this biological ability to learn but also usually kill it. Does this mean we do away with institutions? I wish we could, but what we can do is build the internal immune system in every child to be able to resist the disease of institutions. For example, we can change our perception and relation to institutions. The best image – one I learned in Mexico – is to perceive them as trees: we go stand in their shade when we need them. The challenge is not to get rid of institutions around us (we can't) but to unplug them from our inside (which we can).

We can only think wisely about what we know well. "Think globally, act locally" is a modern superstition. Thinking and acting locally was Jesus' way. Modern "experts" (educators, missionaries, sociologists) live a delusion by carrying universal answers to distant places – thus unconsciously serving empire. Humility is a treasure.

I think Jesus' statement means "don't resist evil with evil" because that would only increase and deepen evil in the world. Empire destroys creation. Protecting life's ability to regenerate itself is the responsibility of religions. Scientists can not do it; wisdom is not a part of their makeup. They still follow the father of modern science, Francis Bacon, who defined science as subduing and conquering nature. In order for religions to play this role, they need to be de-institutionalized and brought

back to dwell within *ahaali*.

Neither empire nor confronting it is – for me – an abstraction or academic term. In my lifetime, seventy years so far, I experienced three empires invading us as Palestinians: Britain, Israel, and the US. They invaded us not only with military armies but also through educational, cultural, and religious "armies." Through western institutions, I became a 'soldier' enlisted in the second type of invasion fighting dear aspects in my life without realizing it. I invaded and conquered my illiterate mother's math with the math I studied in schools and universities;² I helped conquer her Christianity with the institutional one I received from missionaries; I conquered her wise way of raising children by reading Dr. Spock's and following the path of experts instead of the wise. Only when I was thirty-five years old did I start to realize I was serving empire in its conquest of Palestine at the level of language, knowledge, source of worth, and Christianity – the only indigenous Christianity in the world. Empire not only killed or corrupted life around me but, like the HIV virus, was destroying the internal immune system within me and my community. Empire successfully built nests within me – but not within my mother.

² See my article "Community Education is to Regain and Transform What Has Been Made Invisible." Harvard Educational Review, Feb. 1990.



Sabeel youth build community while volunteering picking olives together in Beit Jala.



Dropping bombs on people is the work of colonialism; following bombs with packages of food is the work of empire. Occupying lands is the work of colonialism; occupying minds is the work of empire.

The first conquests of Palestine in the 1860s targeted children and indigenous Christian communities with tools of schools and cultural and religious missions. Without knowing anything about our communities and culture, foreigners came with ready textbooks to teach children. One would think American and European Christians would come to Palestine to learn from the only indigenous Christian communities in the world. But, no, they were only interested in preaching and gaining converts to their denominations. They could not see the living Christianity embedded in people like my mother. It is difficult for institutionalized minds to see aspects embedded in life. Those first schools and missions planted the seeds of empire from which *ahaali* started acquiring invaders' perceptions, terminology, norms, and lifestyles. Many started looking at their lifestyles as inferior, feeling ashamed of them. They started believing in absurd things, such as that people's worth can be measured by numbers, that all people should progress along the same path, and that western institutions and experts are the source of worthiness and progress. Since the 1970s, I started recognizing how difficult and distorting it is to express my experiences using categories that are the product of western knowledge-systems and academic disciplines. I believe that a main challenge we face is to unlearn much of what we acquired through institutions, to use words and meanings that are in harmony with our experiences, and to heal from modern superstitions.

Education has been very effective in shattering "inner worlds" of people, tearing apart the social fabric in communities, and detaching students from land, local culture, and local economy – everything that sustained *ahaali* and communities. In addition to education, the British brought with them another disastrous tool – the flush toilet – which they also claimed to be for progress. Especially in a place like Palestine, flush toilets are a disaster: they rob us of water and soil, pollute valleys and lakes, and steal our money.

Some may wonder why I consider Israel an empire. The reason is that it has almost all of what for me characterizes empires:

- They believe in a single undifferentiated path for progress – their path.
- They consume more than their share, and their citizens more than they need.
- Whatever they do (including massacres, torture, robbing resources, dropping bombs and wiping out villages) is always done out of goodness: bringing civilization, development, democracy, education, the flush toilet and other consumer goods. Their moral and intellectual superiority should never be questioned.
- They glorify wars and the military as main sources of their pride.
- They spread their terminology, meanings, values, and institutions claiming they are neutral, objective, universal and fit all societies. Using numbers to measure the worth of people, and countries is one of their most destructive tools.
- The core values that govern their behavior are unilateral control and winning.
- Just like Roman emperors, they let people fight and clap for the winner. In modern times, this is manifested best in schools.

The above can be summed up by saying that what characterizes empire is arrogance, part of which is the inability to learn from the spirit of people-in-community.

In this sense, I see that empire and colonialism mutually support each other. Colonialism engages in wars; empire engages in glorifying wars. Dropping bombs on people is the work of colonialism; following bombs with packages of food is the work of empire. Occupying lands is the work of colonialism; occupying minds is the work of empire. Building jails is the work of colonialism; building schools is the work of empire. Destruction is the work of colonialism; degrading people and cultures is the work of empire. Like most educated Palestinians, I talked for a long time against colonialism but served empire. My struggle since the early 1970s has been to unplug myself out of this double bind and focus instead on the sources of strength in us as people, communities, and culture. I feel lucky to have lived a good part of my life prior to development and without a national government (the only authority we had was Israeli military occupation, which was illegitimate

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for us); lucky to have as my best teacher an illiterate woman; and lucky to have been raised within the rich Arab culture. These aspects provided me with a worldview unattainable through institutions and professionals. I feel lucky because I had to constantly rethink the meanings of words, because I felt responsible for what needed to be done, and because we had to live with what was locally available to all people. I feel lucky because that combination freed me from delusions that are common among citizens of modern states: having rights but no dignity, information but no understanding, Medicare but no health, acquaintances but no community, technical knowledge but no wisdom, and expectations but no hope. Thank God I had in my home a person who incarnated a world radically different from the world of institutions which is obsessed with competition, control, winning, and progress along a linear path.



Palestinian clergy visiting communities in the West Bank.

The harmony among the different worlds I experienced at home, I also experienced in the community. I know Islam, for example, not through academic disciples, mass media, and Hollywood movies but from having Muslims as friends and neighbors.³ Unfortunately, I did not experience the same with Jews; I did not know Jews as neighbors but as soldiers and settlers. I experienced the spirit of Judaism through friends outside Palestine, but that was not on a daily basis.

Hospitality, dignity, hope, and neighborly relations are not only alien to empires but considered dangerous, deserving to be destroyed. During the first intifada (1987-91), one aspect Israel could not tolerate was neighborhood committees. Military order (Aug. 1988) against them was one of the harshest in its history. Without hope, dignity, hospitality, and neighborly relations, religions would be without soul; they are *ahaali's* main "weapons." Empire is built on spreading hopelessness and universal rights, defeating dignity and neighborly relations – acts that deepen consumption and serve empire.

If a person gets sick, the healthy part of the body is what heals the rest. The role of physicians is to make sure they don't interfere with this biological ability. This is also true about communities. If anything goes wrong in community we need to look for and build on its sources of strength. The main source of strength and hope in every society is *al-ahaali* (people-in-community). *Ahaali* refers to people who have shared for a long time common land, history, and living languages; to people rooted in local soil, local culture, and local economy – the basis of community. Words such as hospitality, dignity, hope, and neighborly relations characterize *ahaali*. I use 'hospitality' not only in the sense of opening one's home to 'strangers' but also one's mind and heart to strange ideas and beliefs. I use 'neighbor' in the sense I experienced it in Palestine and the sense Jesus used it. It is one of the words that seem to have been close to Jesus' heart; for example, "love your neighbor like yourself" and his elaboration on "who is my neighbor?" by telling the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27-37). This reflects how rooted Jesus was in his thinking and words – unlike us today. While he talks about neighbors who are real; we talk about abstract citizens living in abstract nation-states.

³ When the Pope made his comment concerning Islam in 2006 in Germany, I wrote him a letter about Islam as I know it through living.

I wrote about one kind of recognition earlier. A more recent one is my feeling that western civilization is getting old, though it is relatively young; it is reaching exhaustion manifested in desperate statements and acts. A main reason, I believe, is killing the spirit of regeneration embedded in creation and replacing it with what can be generated by minds, institutions, and corporations. We (especially Christians living in Europe and North America) need to recognize that most of the destruction done during the past 500 years (starting with European invasions of the Americas) was done in the name of Christ. Christ's message cannot be expressed in a meaningful way in isolation and arrogance but through cross-fertilization with other religions and worldviews. We need a complete turning around of mind, spirit, and heart. We as Christians need to unplug ourselves from the clutches of empire and make sense of Christianity in today's world. There is institutional Christianity and *ahaali* Christianity. There is no singular for *ahaali* in Arabic; it has no meaning in the individual. Religion has no meaning outside communities. *Ahaali* is a word that dwells within relationships. Religion is about relationships, how people relate and treat one another.

To think locally means that we must ask how much our gathering in Bethlehem will be in harmony with the spirit of Christ and of people-in-community, with creation, and with the wisdom of the place where we live. This means that each one of us will come with words and meanings that one feels express one's experience, contemplations, local reality and culture. We will meet in the spirit of the words of Rumi, a 13th century Iranian Muslim poet: "Beyond right and wrong, there is a field. I will meet you there." I hope we will meet in Bethlehem like the wild flowers in Palestine that coincide with the time of the conference; with the diversity of colors, kinds and shapes, none claiming superiority and each retaining its uniqueness and character. We meet to nurture one another. *Tanaaqush*, the word for "to discuss" in Arabic, comes from the same root as "to chisel": the purpose of discussion is not who is right and who is wrong but for all to come out of the discussion more beautiful.

Dr. Munir Fasheh, a Palestinian living in Ramallah, currently works with various groups, mainly in Palestine and Arab countries, on regaining stories as an important ingredient in life and learning. This is connected to his other important theme: people-in-community is the solution.

What She Said

by Lisa Suhair Majaj

"They don't have snow days in Palestine, they have military invasion days." (International Solidarity Movement activists, describing Palestinian children's lives under Israeli military occupation.)

She said, go play outside,
but don't throw balls near the soldiers.
When a jeep goes past
keep your eyes on the ground.
And don't pick up stones,
not even for hopscotch. She said,
don't bother the neighbors;
their son was arrested last night.
Hang the laundry, make the beds,
scrub that graffiti off the walls
before the soldiers see it. She said,
there's no money; if your shoes
are too tight, cut the toes off.
This is what we have to eat;
we won't eat again until tomorrow.
No, we don't have any oranges,
they chopped down the orange trees.
I don't know why. Maybe the trees
were threatening the tanks. She said,
there's no water, we'll take baths next week,
insha'allah. Meanwhile, don't flush the toilet.

*Lisa Suhair Majaj is a Palestinian-American writer, poet and critic. "What She Said" was a finalist in the 2004 War Poetry Contest on WinningWriters.com, and is included in her 2009 book *Geographies of Light*, which won the Del Sol Press poetry prize.*

And don't go near the olive grove,
 there are settlers there with guns.
 No, I don't know how we'll harvest
 the olives, and I don't know what we'll do
 if they bulldoze the trees. God will provide
 if He wishes, or UNRWA, but certainly not
 the Americans. She said, you can't
 go out today, there's a curfew.
 Keep away from those windows;
 can't you hear the shooting?
 No, I don't know why they bulldozed
 the neighbor's house. And if God knows,
 He's not telling. She said,
 there's no school today,
 it's a military invasion.
 No, I don't know when it will be over,
 or if it will be over. She said,
 don't think about the tanks
 or the planes or the guns
 or what happened to the neighbors,
 Come into the hallway,
 it's safer there. And turn off that news,
 you're too young for this. Listen,
 I'll tell you a story so you won't be scared.
 Kan ya ma kan - there was or there was not -
 a land called Falastine
 where children played in the streets
 and in the fields and in the orchards
 and picked apricots and almonds
 and wove jasmine garlands for their mothers.
 And when planes flew overhead
 they shouted happily and waved.
 Kan ya ma kan. Keep your head down.

*Children play in the shadow of the separation wall at
 Wi'am Conflict Resolution Center in Bethlehem.*



Photo by Ryan Rodrick Beiler/MCC

The Faith and Hope of Popular Resistance

By Mazin Qumsiyeh



Sewing up a bag of olives outside the village of Sakhneen

The rough, big hands of Ahmed Bargouti (Abu Nidal) brought the cigarette to his sun-dried dark brown face that resembled the terraced hills beneath his house. His eyes tensed as he watched his family's olive trees, some hundreds of years old, being uprooted by Israeli bulldozers. Ahmed was born in 1947 in the village of Al-Walaja, one of over 500 villages and towns destroyed in the largest post-WWII ethnic cleansing program (see Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*). His family spent a few years in a refugee camp and then rebuilt their lives on the part of their land that was still free of Israeli control. This new Al-Walaja village houses 10% of the original inhabitants. But Israel has coveted what remains since they occupied the area in 1967. A wall is now being constructed around the built-up area of Al-Walaja to separate the people from the remainder of their land and water, and force them to leave. Thirty-three homes were demolished and eighty-eight have pending orders of demolition. Ahmed's family members


are buried in an area below his house that will be beyond the wall. Yet, as I watched the determined face of this grandfather, he tells me that for him this is heaven, that he will never leave it, and will yet be buried near his mother. There is a word in Arabic, *Sumud*, that is hard to translate into English but is a combination of steadfastness, dignity, resilience, resistance and courage. When I think of Ahmed and thousands of others like him here, I think of *sumud* and a long history of hope and faith despite incredible odds.

Local Palestinian non-violent resistance in the late 19th century is the reason the Zionist movement failed to get support from Ottoman rulers, causing them to turn to Britain and France for support. Soon after WWI and the British occupation of Palestine, popular non-violent resistance resumed. In early 1919, the newly founded Muslim-Christian Society began work to influence the direction of the destructive policies

promulgated by Western powers in Palestine. For example, they sent a letter demanding that the King-Crane commission follow President Wilson's stated goal to let indigenous people determine their own future after so many decades of colonial rule. While the King-Crane commission issued favorable recommendations, these were ignored because the fate of the area was already decided by the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and the Paris 'Peace' Conference of 1919. But this Muslim-Christian partnership in rejection of colonialism was to get even stronger in time, though it was never directed against Jews.

The first obvious mass movement for liberation was the uprising of 1920-1921, where Muslim and Christian Palestinians together protested the appointment of the Zionist Herbert Samuel as high commissioner in charge of Palestine in 1921 and marched against his administration's unfair land laws that transferred land ownership from natives to European Jews. Together, Christians and Muslims participated in the nonviolent resistance of the late 1920s. Together, they engaged in strikes that paralyzed economic life in 1936, demanding freedom and an end to the colonial Zionist activities. This pattern of uprisings separated by periods of relative calm continued, although always with various forms of resistance, including *sumud*.

Lessons can be learned from these series of uprisings. For example, popular resistance in the 1936 uprising and strike achieved remarkable successes. However, the uprising was weakened by a number of factors: 1) massive oppression by the occupation authorities, including the destruction of large areas of Palestinian towns like Jaffa as a form of collective punishment, 2) collaborationist Arab regimes who pushed the Palestinians to "trust" the British authorities and 3) the mostly self-appointed

 Together, Christians and Muslims participated in the nonviolent resistance of the late 1920s. Together, they engaged in strikes that paralyzed economic life in 1936, demanding freedom and an end to the colonial Zionist activities.

Palestinian political leadership who first stood against the uprising, then claimed its leadership, then traded at its expense.

The Naksa of 1967 changed the geopolitical landscape with the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. The Palestinian cause actually received a significant boost from responses to Israeli oppression, from a reconnection of Palestinians throughout historic Palestine, and from a strengthening in Palestinian leadership. Self reliance developed slowly and made its most significant impact in institutional developments in the 1970s, such as the foundation of Palestinian Universities. Intellectuals joined hands with the rest of society to develop various forms of popular resistance, beginning with simple spontaneous protests and refusal to abide by military orders. These efforts were crushed ruthlessly, yet they continued and accelerated, finding their most dramatic manifestation in the 1987 uprising. The first call to action from the unified leadership of the uprising included a call for a strike and civil disobedience. Subsequent actions included holding more strikes, building public sites to commemorate victims of the occupation, developing self-sustenance through farming and other methods, mass resignations, refusing to pay taxes or unjust civil and criminal fines, holding public prayers, refusing to abide by military orders, flying Palestinian flags (illegal), and more.

The Oslo process harvested low fruits in exchange for ending Palestinian resistance and International pressure on Israel. Israel was then free to double colonial settlers, introduce massive restrictions of movements, isolate and Judaicize Jerusalem, and fragment what remains of Palestine. People were fed-up. Barak gave his ultimatum to Arafat to sign a final deal that would leave Palestinians in large Bantustans. The straw that broke the Palestinian back was the visit of Ariel Sharon with 1,000 armed Israelis to the holy Muslim site of Al-Aqsa. The following Al-Aqsa uprising of 2000-2005 mostly involved Palestinians and Internationals engaged in non-violent popular resistance with only a few Palestinians engaged in armed resistance; they faced the most brutal assault and mass slaughter with 4000 Palestinians murdered. But throughout these years popular resistance spread and accelerated. Small remote villages became famous in the media and among Palestinians and International pilgrims



For us to exist is to resist;
there is no other choice.
We are proud of a history
of incredible non-violent
resistance in the past 130 years.

coming to join the struggle: Budrus, Masha, Al-Walaja, Al-Ma'sara, Ni'lin, Bil'in, and dozens more. The globalization of the struggle is entering a new phase with a proliferation of Palestine solidarity movements around the world. Israeli attacks on Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem such as Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah saw the creation of active popular committees. Israeli massacres in Lebanon 2006, Gaza 2009-2010 and of humanitarian activists aboard the Mavi Marmara this past summer have set the stage for the upcoming global uprising, including the acceleration of boycotts, divestments, and sanctions (BDS).

Conclusions: Palestinian resistance by definition is a rejection of oppression and an attempt to gain freedom. It has deep roots in Palestinian psyche from religious and cultural backgrounds. Palestinians continue to pay a heavy price for acts of sumud and popular resistance. For us to exist is to resist; there is no other choice. We are proud of a history of incredible non-violent resistance in the past 130 years. Without this resistance, Palestine would have become a purely Jewish state and all would be either dead or refugees. Instead, there are over 5.5 million Palestinians living in historic Palestine today who, like Ahmed (Abu Nidal), will remain.

The Zionist project—well-funded, violent, and supported by superpowers—failed at its stated goals. While its state is militarily and economically strong, it has failed on moral, ethical, and management grounds. The recent demand for non-Jews applying for Israeli citizenship to declare a loyalty oath to a Jewish state is just its latest manifestation. Our struggle is now even more global than that carried out against apartheid in South Africa. Using tools of media, internet, lobbying, BDS,



Children maneuver a puppet to climb the separation wall at a protest against its construction around Al-Walaja village. Photo by Rachelle Friesen/MCC

moral persuasion and more, this global intifada is destined to achieve its goal of peace with justice that will benefit all the residents of the Holy Land.

Personally, I hope to live to see the day in which Ahmed's friends, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, can celebrate with him the end of colonial occupation and the reclamation of his family lands in Al-Walaja, on both sides of the Green line. Freedom and self-determination for us Palestinians is good also for Israelis, who can then shed their own chains of racism and oppression. It will free this society from the decades of conflict that came with the wave of political Zionism from Europe. Different religions will thrive together in this land, fulfilling its destiny to be a land of peace, a truly holy land. It is a future that many activists know is coming and work hard to speed its arrival.

Dr. Qumsiyeh is a professor at Bethlehem University and author of "Popular Resistance in Palestine: A history of Hope and Empowerment." His website is qumsiyeh.org and he sends weekly blogs about life in occupied Palestine.



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and Bible Study ~ Panel Discussions and Advocacy Workshops

Application Deadline: June 1, 2011

Learn about Sabeel and Liberation Theology at
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Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center
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Glimpses of Our Activities

JERUSALEM PROGRAMS



Praying for all those who suffer from violence and remembering those killed in Iraq at an Ecumenical Worship Service in the Dominican Church, Jerusalem.



Worshipping together in song at the annual Clergy Retreat in Taybeh.

NAZARETH PROGRAMS



Nazareth women's monthly meeting, currently studying the book "Justice and Only Justice" by Naim Ateek.



Service in Nazareth for the Christians killed in Iraq.



Children from Nazareth on a fieldtrip to Tiberius.

JOINT PROGRAMS



Women dance at a joint Sabeel Jerusalem-Nazareth Community program in Haifa.



Youth from Nazareth and Jerusalem volunteer picking olives in Sahkneen, a Palestinian village in the Galilee that has been resisting Israeli confiscation of their land.



Walking tour of Montfort Castle in the North after the Nazareth and Jerusalem youth volunteered in Sahkneen.



Jerusalem and Nazareth youth enjoy a day together at the Taybeh Oktoberfest.



Towards the end of 2010, we celebrated Nora Carmi's work with Sabeel when she retired after seventeen years of faithful service. We are grateful for the wonderful contribution she has made throughout the years she was with us, especially in the community and women's programs. Nora was active in a variety of ways in the work of Sabeel and also represented Sabeel in a number of international conferences and forums. We wish her well and pray that she will continue to enjoy good health as she continues her ministry in the community.



Photo by Ryan Rodrick Beiler/MCC

Candle-lit service inside a Colombian church threatened by both right-wing paramilitaries and left-wing guerilla groups.

“Where the empire lies, people suffer”¹

by Ofelia Ortega Suárez

“Vocation as Empire”

In September/November 2000, I had the opportunity to participate in the Campbell Seminar with the theme “Mission as Hope in Action” at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia.

Even before the World Trade Center towers were destroyed by terrorist forces on September 11, 2001, we observed dangers in the convergence of political hegemony, military superiority, economic near-monopoly and an ideology of exceptionalism. What we called the “vocation of empire” has produced a political-economic-military-ideological force in the world that

seemingly can proceed almost unchallenged with impunity to have its way in the world.

Walter Brueggemann, the leader of the seminar, affirms that “this political–military conviction [in the perfect hegemony of the United States which lies beyond challenge] is powerfully linked to the unanticipated globalization of the economy.”²

¹ Nestor Míguez, “El Imperio y después. Sostener la esperanza bíblica en medio de la opresión” en *Los Pueblos Confrontan al Imperio*, Ribla, No. 48 Quito, Ecuador, 2004, page 5.

² Walter Brueggemann, “Communities of Hope” midst Engines for Despair in “*Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context*” edited by Walter Brueggemann, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, U.S., 2001, page 152.



We can hear
the call of the countries
and the cries of creation...

This “vocation as empire” reaches all levels of social relations, creating a “civilization of inequality” in a world where the poles are marked by poverty and wealth with signs of irreversible vocation.

The Crisis of Life Today: Characteristics and Experiences of the “Civilization of Inequality”

In the 2003 South-South Forum held in Buenos Aires, we witnessed the untold sufferings caused by an economic crisis where indebtedness becomes the main way of bleeding the Southern economies and the main instrument of economical and political power of the North over the South. We were shocked to hear that twenty-five years ago Argentina’s population of 22 million people had only 2 million living in poverty, while today 21 million are poor out of a population of 37 million. In addition, the middle class, which represented 50% of the population in the past, has diminished dramatically, with only 30% of the population holding steady jobs. The number of poor people has advanced much faster than the population growth, and the people of Argentina, as in other parts of the world, have been led by an illusion.

It is obvious that we are undergoing a new phase of capitalism that uses all the different forms of power and affects every aspect of life. The capitalist system of production has become a financial system. Its far-reaching and all-embracing strategy has also changed and the global financial market is its empire and its God. The empire is a global financial empire that rests on military, political, and ideological power that has an impact on the survival of the periphery countries. The market empire and military forces oppress at the social, political, economic, ecological and spiritual level, generating a crisis for all peoples and all countries in the world.

The Latin American churches represented at the Forum spoke about the way in which economic globalization has provoked the debt crisis, marginalization, insecurity, economic inequality,

unemployment and the destruction of the environment. The lie that the free market was the solution to all economic and social problems has been unmasked. In its place neo-liberal economic policies have resulted in economic crises, especially for the middle class and the poor.

The threats posed by economic globalization in the Caribbean reflect what is happening in the rest of the world, although its problems are even more dramatic due to the small population and the fragile nature of the islands’ economies and ecosystems. Economic globalization has promoted loss of jobs and extreme poverty, an unprecedented growth of crime and violence, ecologic degradation and the spread of HIV/AIDS. All this has degraded life.

An Alternative Vision for a Community of Life

The system tells us: “there is no alternative.” Nevertheless, Jesus “was offering and instilling hope in the seemingly hopeless situation of a people languishing under foreign domination and its effects. To people in this despair over their poverty and hunger, Jesus declares, ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted’ (Matthew 5:4). To people who are anxious about where the next meal will come from and how they can clothe themselves, Jesus declares that subsistence needs will take care of themselves (in mutual sharing?) if they single-mindedly pursue the Kingdom (Matthew 6:31-33).”³ Jesus helped the poor and hungry multitudes, guiding them to share what they had at hand and building this way that we call “the economy of the Grace of God” (Mark 6:35 and 8:1). The early Church challenged the system of private property and emphasized the necessity to share all possible resources so that there were “no poor among them” (Acts 4: 34), allowing it to witness the full life in God, that is to say, the resurrection.

There are local and regional alternatives today that can be implemented and supported by churches and congregations. A new ecumenical vision for a community of life in justice and peace is being born in our day.

³ Richard A. Horsley, “Jesus, and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder,” Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2003, page 109.



Photo by Ryan Rodrick Beiler/MCC

Mother and child who have been displaced by right-wing paramilitary violence in Colombia.

»» “Be not conformed to the structures of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Romans 12:1-2

The values of respect to the human being, to its life in all dimensions, and to the life of nature question the system and require us to exercise resistance to intervene or transform it.⁴ We have to actively work toward concrete and feasible alternatives to the neo-liberal pattern of economic integration that service the great transnational corporations.

⁴ Hinkelammert, Franz I; Mora M. Henry, *Coordinación Social del Trabajo, Mercado y Reproducción de la Vida Humana*, DEI, San José, Costa Rica, 2001, pages 327-331.

⁵ From the Ágape Document of The World Council of Churches.

We are called to be nonconformist and transformative communities, because life is not possible unless we address the roots of injustice. We are called to meet ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds from the dominating and egoistic imperial mindset, thus doing the will of God that is fulfilled in love (AGAPE), solidarity (Romans 13:10) and grace (Isaiah 55). Communities are transformed by God’s living grace and practice, by an economy of solidarity and sharing. Even though we as churches are entangled and complicit in the very system we are called to change, we are called to create spaces for and become agents of transformation.⁵

Prayer: God in your grace, help us to obey your call to be agents of transformation.

Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega Suárez was the first Presbyterian woman to be ordained in Cuba. She is President of the World Council of Churches for Latin America and the Caribbean, a Professor of Theological Ethics at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas, Cuba, and the Director of the Christian Institute of Gender Studies.

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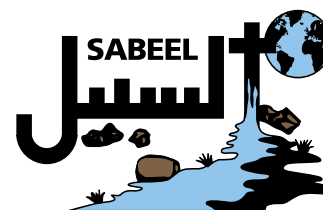
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PURPOSE STATEMENT *f* SABEEL

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on Friends of Sabeel groups in your area please contact our international representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.