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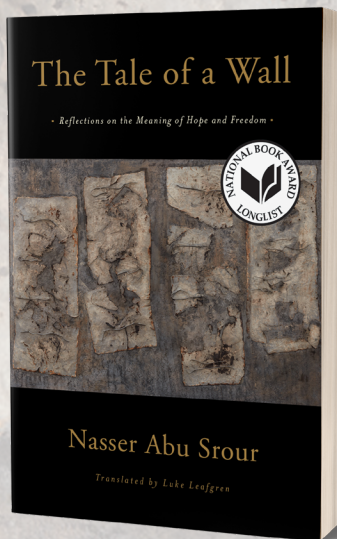
THE TALE OF A WALL REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF HOPE AND FREEDOM NASER ABU SROUR, TRANSLATED BY LUKE LEAFGREN

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“Nasser Abu Srouer’s poetic memoir, *The Tale of a Wall: Reflections on the Meaning of Hope and Freedom*, depicts more than three decades spent in Israeli prisons, where Abu Srouer is serving a life sentence without parole. Translated from the Arabic by Luke Leafgren, Abu Srouer shares how, during prolonged periods of solitary confinement, he turned to his imagination as a strategy for survival in this rumination on love, justice, and the far-reaching power of hope.”

From the National Book Foundation Award Announcement.

(read the full announcement [here](#))



This passionate autobiography—at once history lesson, prison memoir, metaphysical inquiry, love story, and cry for justice—provides insights into the Israeli occupation and the struggle of the Palestinian people.

One of more than 5,000 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons before October 7, 2023, Nasser Abu Srouer serves a life sentence with no possibility of parole. From the Nakba to the disastrous consequences of the Oslo Accords, he explains with great acumen how the Intifada of the Stones (1987–1993) ultimately provided the only option for young Palestinians in refugee camps to infuse meaning into their lives, especially as they faced a constant threat of humiliation and manipulation by Israeli intelligence. This uprising leads to Abu Srouer’s incarceration, after he was forced to confess, under torture, to involvement in the killing of a Shin Bet officer who recruited his cousin as an informant.

Within his cell, Abu Srouer turns the Wall that has deprived him of freedom into his interlocutor and the source of stability that allows him to endure a chaotic, hopeless existence. The limitations of this survival strategy—and singular literary device—become painfully evident when falling

in love causes Abu Srouer to lose his grip on the Wall. Only by writing the story of his imprisonment and the story of his love does Abu Srouer find his way back. In doing so, he has created a work of art that transcends his pain while shining a glaring light on the ongoing tragedy of the Palestinian situation.



Nasser Abu Srouer was arrested in 1993, accused of being an accomplice to the murder of an Israeli intelligence officer, and sentenced to life in prison. While incarcerated, Abu Srouer completed the final semester of a bachelor’s degree in English from Bethlehem University, and obtained a master’s degree in political science from Al-Quds University. *The Tale of a Wall* is his first book to appear in English. It will be published in the United Kingdom by Allen Lane, and translations are forthcoming from Gallimard, Feltrinelli, and Galaxia Gutenberg, among others.

Luke Leafgren is an Assistant Dean of Harvard College. He has translated seven novels from Arabic and has twice received the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, in 2018 for Muhsin Al-Ramli’s *The President’s Gardens* and in 2023 for Najwa Barakat’s *Mister N*.

PRAISE FOR THE TALE OF A WALL

"[Abu Srour's] experience might be difficult to imagine but for the extraordinary memoir he has written, translated into lyrical prose by Luke Leafgren... Abu Srour's humanity shines through, even as he endures an incarceration with no end in sight... It is this poetic sensibility that brings freshness to the telling of the well-rehearsed story of this long-running conflict: we see it anew." —*The Guardian*

"[Abu Srour's] flights of lyricism, capably rendered into English by Luke Leafgren, turn each scene of prison life into a kind of prose poem... that recalls the memoirs of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish... eloquent... a testimony to the conditions of writing—the punishing solitude of a life lived behind bars." —*New York Times*

"A thoughtful and honest book... [Abu Srour's] reflections on the past three decades of the Palestine-Israel conflict are filled with enlightening insights... brave... brilliant." —*Times Literary Supplement*

"The narrative is moving and formally inventive, painting a surreal portrait of a political prisoner's inner world." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"Nasser Abu Srour's passionate memoir delivers beautifully crafted observations about the nature of freedom... The result is an exploration of the possibilities—and limits—of the human imagination." —*Hadara Magazine*

"An absorbing, complicated personal history." —*Words Without Borders*

"Nasser Abu Srour doesn't allow his long incarceration in an Israeli prison to break his spirit. He turns the wall of his cell that is intended to confine him into his path to freedom, and in the process, out of the darkness of his cell produces a luminous memoir." —*Raja Shehadeh, author of We Could Have Been Friends, My Father and I: A Palestinian Memoir*

"Fierce and lyrical, Nasser Abu Srour's memoir bears witness to struggle and resilience—both his own, and that of the Palestinian people. It's also a devastating testament to the power of hope, and of its loss." —*Claire Messud, author of The Emperor's Children and This Strange Eventful History*

"It is rare to come across a book with such astonishing generosity and clarity. *The Tale of a Wall* is beautiful for its ability to examine the harsh realities of oppression with lush prose that creates its own uncompromising terrain. Nasser Abu Srour's story, which he wrote while condemned to a lifetime sentence in an Israeli prison, is further proof that no wall can restrain the imagination, no bullet can kill the idea of freedom." —*Maaza Mengiste, author of The Shadow King, short-listed for the 2020 Booker Prize*

"*The Tale of a Wall* is the reason we have literature. Nasser has made art out of poison with his honesty and golden pen. He brings to light the specificity of experience of the Palestinian prisoner in a manner that makes every reader think about the incarcerated in their own countries without forgetting Palestine. It helps us understand the consequences on others when we do not wield whatever power we each hold for solidarity. A profound and important work." —*Sarah Schulman, author of Let the Record Show and Conflict Is Not Abuse*

"The infuriating fate of being a refugee, and then a prisoner, in one's homeland is the subject of this brilliant memoir. There were moments when I felt I was reading what Samuel Beckett might have written if he had been confined for life in a maximum-security prison. *The Tale of a Wall* is the triumphant expression of Abu Srour's sensibility and inner strength, a rich living story borne, in the author's words, 'of iron

and concrete.' In searing philosophical prose Abu Srour lays bare the circumstances that led him to conclude taking up arms was his only recourse." —*Michael Greenberg, author of Hurry Down Sunshine*

"A unique, lyrical exploration of what his inhumane confinement has taught him about resistance, love, lies, forgiveness, and the complicated struggle for liberation of his fractured, occupied land. Rather than allow the many walls surrounding him from childhood to break him down, he has turned them into darkly luminous companions on a journey into the heart of cruelty and redemption." —*Ariel Dorfman, author of The Suicide Museum*

"Abu Srour's memoir is more than a tale of prison. His unflinching prose reveals a powerful truth: human beings are compelled to tell our stories in order to affirm our existence in an unjust world. Ultimately, he captures both the individual and collective spirit of Palestinians who, to this day, continue to resist dispossession, disillusionment, and despair." —*Sahar Mustafah, author of The Beauty of Your Face*

"Here, at a historical moment when Palestinian prisoners are again discussed only as a collective political lever, Nasser Abu Srour writes from Hadarim Prison about love, endurance, loyalty, and freedom. His voice rises above the wall of his desert cell, above his confession-under-torture and thirty years in the Israeli penal system, above his life sentence and Israel's broken promise to release him during the Obama-era peace negotiations. Fierce, lyrical, and defiantly beautiful, his testimony is full of generosity and white-hot courage. He turns his imprisoning wall into an instrument of his soul's freedom. For the reader, that wall becomes a mirror: an instrument of empathy and conscience. You will come away with a heart full of resolve—to work for solidarity, justice, and mercy." —*Sarah Cypher, author of The Skin and Its Girl*

"An extraordinary memoir. Abu Srour is not just a witness of his personal life but a witness to one of the major tragedies of our times." —*Amara Lakhous, author of Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*

"In contemplating the meaning of freedom, and the prison walls enclosing him, Nasser Abu Srour has produced a richly emotional and affecting memoir. His poetic prose, lyrically translated by Luke Leafgren, ranges far beyond physical confines to evoke steadfastness and universal human dignity, through the intellectual curiosity of a writer 'born into a family on the margins, living in a marginal place filled with marginal people.' Its resonance, and Abu Srour's vision, are far from marginal." —*Matthew Teller, author of Nine Quarters of Jerusalem*

"A stunning book. A poetic and remarkable account of decades of imprisonment and the effect it can have on the mind, body, and soul. This is a story of unimaginable loss, but also of survival." —*Sally Hayden, author of My Fourth Time, We Drowned*

"'Give me back myself!' says Nasser Abu Srour after more than thirty years in Israeli prisons. I read *The Tale of a Wall* all one night and half the next day. I was kept alive, overcome by his devotion to a people, a land. I saw injustice evolving into murder, war, genocide. Read and reread Nasser's tale. Take his hand and walk with him. You will find humanity, beauty of language, depth of rage, love. 'I am a witness,' screams Nasser. His cry will become yours!" —*Elaine Mokhtefi, translator of I Was a French Muslim: Memories of an Algerian Freedom Fighter*