SUMUD: Soul of the Palestinian People

Reflections and Experiences

Toine van Teeffelen, with Victoria Biggs
and the Sumud Story House in Bethlehem

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Illustrations by James Prineas, Fadi Abu Akleh, and Jenny Baboun
Front page photo by Jenny Baboun, 2011. Palestinian women of the Sumud Story House singing in front of the Wall around Rachel's Tomb.

The "Culture and Palestine" series explores expressions of Palestinian culture, including popular customs, arts, and traditional stories, as well as writings and reflections upon Palestinian daily life.

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Preface

"What does sumud mean to you?"
"It is my work with the choir. It makes me happy that even in a time of so much ugliness, I can help the women to make this beautiful music. It reminds us that *we* are beautiful – all children of God."
"As Palestinian mothers, sumud is the hope we have for our children. Our determination to make a better life for them."
"Sumud means telling my story even when I am afraid to speak."
"It is my strength to go on."

This book highlights a vivid strand of the Arab Educational Institute's work in Bethlehem and beyond: the creation and collection of stories, using words and film, art and music. Storytelling is both a way of building up personal strength and a means of resistance, a defiant, "I am here; this is me," in the face of material dispossession and cultural erasure. It is a powerful example of sumud in action.

Literally translated from the Arabic as steadfastness, sumud is more than just a personality trait. As this book reveals, it is a powerful cultural and psycho-educational tool, and it has become a distinguishing feature of non-violent resistance in Palestine. Contained within the book are many stories from the women at the AEI's Sumud Story House in northern Bethlehem, which lies in the stranglehold of the separation wall. Ever since the wall was constructed, and the Sumud House was established in response, AEI has encouraged Palestinian women and youth to share stories of their daily life during the weekly group meetings at the house. They are also invited to tell their stories to visiting international guests, thereby cutting windows into the wall's dour concrete and allowing the outside world to catch a glimpse of the real Bethlehem. These deeply personal acts of resistance have recently attracted attention from academic circles, which led to the 'Sumud and the Wall' conference in spring 2010. Held in Bethlehem, the conference was organised in collaboration with the universities of Oxford Brookes, Paris-Est, Bethlehem and Utrecht, and Al Quds

Open University. It was supported by the Dutch development agencies Cordaid and Oxfam Novib, and the Rotterdam-based Street Paper. The conference demonstrated that sumud has become a focal point for academics, aid workers, and local people alike – a real testimony to its potential. This book attempts to bring that potential to life.

It also captures something of my personal development. While living in Holland, I did a PhD on popular discourses surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict. I focused on how fictional bestsellers smother Palestinian voices and distort the reality they claim to represent. From 1995 onward, I continued my studies at Palestine's Bir Zeit University, conducting interviews on topics such as 'Palestine and Education', 'Palestine and Narrative', and later on the effect of the separation wall on everyday life. These interviews led to an increased understanding of sumud's educational value, especially as a reflection of the collective Palestinian experience.

Moreover, the years after my traveling to Palestine, from 1995 up until this year, I have been involved in various educational projects in which story plays a constitutive role, such as diary writing, story telling, blog-writing and video-making. These work experiences, both in Holland and Palestine, have guided the book and shaped its motivation. On the one hand, sumud brings out human will and agency; in doing so, it shows the Palestinian narrative of loss and liberation and invites Palestinians and others to share and reflect upon it. During the Arab Spring the concept of sumud has become all the more pertinent; it was one of those key words often heard at Cairo's Tahrir Square. Sumud comes here as a living, universal model of keeping one's head high in an extremely difficult situation. Such a model has a great learning potential, certainly in Palestine, I wish to argue, where the sumud tradition comes in many shapes and forms. On the other hand, sumud is about a rooted Palestinian narrative challenging the many attempts to suppress or deform it, such as in the case of much western popular discourse on Palestine. Sumud is thus an act of existence and of assertion.

This work was further enriched by discussions with my AEI

colleagues. This book bears their fingerprints. I wish to express gratitude to Fuad Giacaman and Elias Abu Akleh, whose sumud, inspiration and commitment over the years made the Arab Educational Institute into the lively organization it has become; to Rania Mourra, for her guiding and coordinating work at the Sumud Story House, so valuable for its development; to Fadi Abu Akleh and Rojer Salameh, for their support as colleagues in media development and youth coordination, and crucially, to all the women involved in the various activities at the House.

On behalf of AEI, I also wish to thank the scholars with whom we have worked. Throughout the years that we collaborated, Dutch educationalist Thom Geurts helped AEI to develop and systematize sumud's learning and narrative aspects. British theologian Mary C. Grey showed a deep interest in sumud as a spiritual concept and encouraged us to move on with it. Belgian development specialist Brigitte Piquard of Oxford Brookes gave support in developing the spatial meanings of sumud, and bringing supportive groups of French and British students. Dutch theologian Riet Bons-Storm gave helpful detailed remarks about the final draft of the book. Thanks also to Sytske van Bruggen and Nina Koevoets, who both made highly useful series of interviews with women of the Sumud Story House.

Several Palestinian friends and colleagues shared their ideas about sumud: Zoughby Zoughby, Nora Carmi, Abdelfatah Abu Srour, Salah Ta'amari, Walid Mustafa and Adnan Musallem. We further worked with representatives of international and local organizations that taught us sumud by their very practice, such as the staff and members of Pax Christi in different countries; Christian and other CSOs in Bethlehem and Jerusalem; our colleagues at Sabeel and the JIC; and the volunteers of EAPPI (the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel, initiated by the World Council of Churches). The members of the Ecumenical Support Group Twente-Bethlehem in Enschede, and the Friends of Young Bethlehem in Holland created international lifelines for both the AEI and the Sumud House.

Some of the photos are by James Prineas, the founder of www.

palestine-family.net, who some years ago created an impressive photo essay on the 'Spirit of Sumud' in the Bethlehem and Jerusalem region.

I would further like to deeply thank Vicky Biggs. As a volunteer at AEI, she shared many of the women's group sessions and meetings at the Sumud Story House during the academic year 2010-2011. Originally we invited her to edit language and style of the text, but her contributions grew beyond editing to the extent that she in fact became co-author, providing stories of her own, sharpening the points of the book, and transforming a text that advocated the use of stories into a story itself.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to KerkinActie, AEI's core funder and strong supporter over the years, who made this publication possible. We think that sumud lies at the heart of its bridge-building work, encouraging as it does ordinary stories from ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. We are proud of AEI's Culture and Palestine series, in which this publication appears. Each book in the series reveals a different facet of sumud, including social history, customs and folklore, educational methods, recipes, and Palestinians travelogues. It is to be hoped that this book will weave together the elements and ideas that make up the others in one vivid tapestry: sumud, the soul of the Palestinian people.

Toine van Teeffelen
Bethlehem
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1. Soul of the Palestinian people

The last one hundred years of Palestinian history are scarred with displacement, dispossession, exile, and loss. In addition to ethnic cleansing and the expropriation of their lands, Palestinians have also faced the wilful distortion of their history and humanity. This book was written in Bethlehem, a town that is rarely described as what it is: a Palestinian city. Its inhabitants feel day by day the effects of a military occupation that is now one of the longest in recorded history, having lasted for forty-five years. The roots of this injustice go deeper than that: 1948 saw the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from what was to become the state of Israel. The Palestinians who remained are subject to state-sponsored discrimination that affects every aspect of their lives. To add insult to injury, the bleak reality of the Palestinian plight has been clouded by an ineffective discourse of 'peace' that left no room for everyday stories of Palestinian hardship.

Given the length of time for which they have endured this oppression, there is a certain mentality that binds Palestinians together. It is often left unseen and it is certainly not shared by all, but it is still perceived as something typically Palestinian. It relates to a shared sense of identity, the maintenance of inner strength in the face of all odds – wholeness in the face of fragmentation, life in the face of death. This is what Palestinians mean when they talk of sumud, steadfastness.

We will explore sumud and its relevance to the quest for peace from an educational angle. Peace is understood here not as a utopian vision that is divorced from the daily realities of the conflict. Nor is it seen as a prize to be won through further years of oblique and aimless diplomatic manoeuvring. Instead, it is presented as something already in existence and rooted deeply in the routine challenges faced by Palestinians. It is made of the humdrum stuff of everyday. It is the hallmark of all those Palestinians who lead hidden lives behind the wall, unknowingly showing remarkable humanity in their efforts to keep their dignity and never give in to despair as they continue to

battle displacement and discrimination.

The view from within

A Palestinian cultural value can only be expressed in the language of Palestine. This is why we speak about sumud rather than steadfastness. By using the original Arabic term, we preserve all the ideas and images that have come to be associated with it, which are abruptly lost when the word is translated into other languages. Most importantly of all, use of the original term allows Palestinians to reclaim their narrative, which is so often ignored or obliterated by occupiers and foreign powers alike.

The late Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educator whose work continues to inspire, would describe sumud as a 'generative theme': an idea that is constantly calling out for new stories[1]. Writing about sumud does not only mean reflecting on a shared past experience, but opening the door to a shared future. It means creating a space for more stories, enabling their tellers to discover new horizons and possibilities. It is an empowering act. It is the breaking down of walls.

The method of storytelling that is chosen will affect how the Palestinian experience is understood by the reader. Most of the stories in this book are simple descriptions of daily life as it unfolds, a method of storytelling that is best exemplified by diary-keeping. Raja Shehadeh's groundbreaking first diary *The Third Way*[2] presented sumud as a way of life, something that permeated everything he did throughout his day – a day that was not really his own, thanks to the terrible effects of the occupation. Sumud enabled him to reclaim his life and his dignity, and this spontaneous form of storytelling shows the process of reclamation in minute detail. Besides diaries and autobiographical interviews, this book draws on a variety of other materials that allow the reader to contrast the restrictive power of the separation wall with the liberating powers of sumud. Many of the stories are provided by women, who have a unique and often unheard voice in Palestinian society. Again, this brings us back to the heart of sumud: it offers a voice to people who have previously been deprived of one.

The view from without

Although sumud is a Palestinian and Arab concept, as it was born from an intimate sense of connection to the land, exploring it from other perspectives can increase our appreciation of its meaning and potential. My own understanding is coloured by both inside and outside perspectives: I am a foreigner, while my wife and children are Palestinians. I am an outsider who lives on the inside. Meanwhile, Palestinians who leave the country temporarily may find themselves in the opposite position: they are insiders who have to adopt an external viewpoint when they are confronted by people who are only familiar with a one-dimensional narrative, especially if that narrative is hostile. Talking about Palestinian issues when abroad often forces Palestinians to focus on different topics than the ones that ordinarily come up at home. For many people, especially refugees and those living permanently in the Diaspora, straddling the inside and the outside is simply part of the Palestinian experience. The resultant pain has permeated deep into Palestinian culture, adding a harrowing dimension to what is meant by sumud.



Photo: James Prineas

Viewing sumud from the outside has distinct advantages as well as pains. Distance allows us to see the whole tapestry and to understand its patterns more clearly, the sources of psychological strength and forms of personal resistance that have become common to many Palestinian communities. At its most basic level, the outsider's viewpoint

makes it possible to reflect on the meaning of sumud in a way that insiders often do not. For many Palestinians, sumud is as homely and familiar as morning coffee: it is a quality to be lived rather than something to be spoken about. While this might hold true as a motto for life – 'don't tell me about sumud, show me sumud' – words are also necessary in challenging the occupation's injustice.

Distance makes it much easier to recognise the absurdities and cruelties of life under occupation for what they are. For many Palestinians, oppression has become a fact of life – and for those who were born and brought up under occupation, it is the only reality they know. Sometimes an external perspective is needed as a reminder that the situation that gave rise to sumud is neither natural nor everlasting. Palestinians returning home after tasting freedom abroad are often galvanised into fresh anger when they witness hardships that they had previously come to somehow accept as the norm.

The external perspective casts a stark cold light on the stereotypes about Palestinian people that are so prevalent in western countries. These stereotypes typically isolate ordinary Palestinians from the very things that inspire them and lay at the heart of their cause: deep roots in the land, need for a livelihood, desire for their culture and history to be recognised. My research into English-language bestsellers on the conflict[3] found that Palestinian characters are typically portrayed either as pawns in the hands of faceless evil forces (terrorists), or as uneducated people who are governed by emotion over reason and are therefore incapable of understanding their own situation. They are not known as samidin (those who are steadfast). A fundamental part of their cultural identity is overlooked. However, certain qualities of sumud are of special interest to other societies and cultures, and these qualities may be a means of dispelling stereotypes and introducing outsiders to the world behind the wall. The tradition of hospitality that forms the bedrock of Palestinian society is now widely appreciated in Western countries, as people come to a renewed appreciation of family life and its benefits for the whole community. Sumud can act as a mirror for the world, enabling people from other

countries and traditions to glimpse a little of their own situation in the Palestinian struggle and take away something of value.

This fusion of inside and outside perspectives is brought to life by the Iranian-Canadian singer Azam Ali, who uses a set of Palestinian photographs called "Spirit of Sumud" by James Prineas in her Arabic-language music video[4]. Prineas, an Australian now living in Berlin, captured Palestinian sumud in action during his visit to the Occupied Territories, showing that sumud is something to be practised and shared; it spills beyond Palestine's borders.

Sumud in context

To prevent a short-sighted focus on Bethlehem, other Palestinian experiences have been included in this book, reflecting the varying challenges faced by people across Palestine. There are communities with even greater hardships to bear than those faced by residents of the central West Bank. This is especially true of Gaza, which suffers both regular air strikes and the effects of the Israeli siege, and is still struggling to regain its feet after Operation Cast Lead (January 2009). The Palestinians of Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, are confronting what many call a silent ethnic cleansing, and have become increasingly disconnected from other parts of Palestine. Meanwhile, Palestinian citizens of Israel face mounting prejudice and discrimination. Sumud is experienced and lived out differently in these communities. Yet there is strength in this diversity of experience, which fuses Palestinian communities together rather than dividing them further. Rashid Khalidi sums up the unifying power of sumud and its power to preserve Palestinian identity:

> [T]he past 60 years have shown that Palestinian society, whether the part that remained behind in the Jewish state in 1948, or that currently under occupation, or that in the diaspora, has shown enormous vitality and a remarkable capacity to re-knit itself and resist enormous pressure. Look at the Palestinians in Lebanon, who have suffered and suffer more than any segment

> of Palestinian society, except the people of Gaza. In spite of the serial atrocities committed against them, the multiple external foes they have faced, and the many terrible mistakes and failures of the political leadership, like the Gazans they manage to maintain their social cohesion in conditions of indescribable difficulty.[5]

In inviting Palestinians from all geographical areas and walks of life to tell their stories and reclaim their voices, sumud is a bridge-building concept. It is dynamic: the Palestinian story grows in depth and richness, with extra nuance being added with each new voice. Because of sumud's vitality, this book can never truly be finished. This exploration is just the beginning of a further journey; like sumud itself, it is a work in progress.

2. A land of testing

Not long after the Second Intifada began, with all its crushing hardships, the Bethlehem educator Susan Atallah remarked, "The Holy Land is a land of testing."[1] This provides a powerful insight into the meaning of sumud. It is impossible to understand this concept, so central to the non-violent resistance in Palestine, without reference to the hardship and pain that have acted as its refining fire. This book goes beyond simply describing the magnitude of that testing and the extent of human suffering involved. It explores both the psychological distress and practical difficulties that result from the military occupation of Palestine, in an effort to measure the depth of sumud that is needed to face them and to resolve some of the challenges people face as they attempt to cultivate this unique dignity in themselves.

This exploration begins on the Hebron Road in northern Bethlehem. That part of the Hebron Road used to have style. It was a pleasure to walk there. The road is bordered by middle and upper class houses, several of them dating back to the second half of the nineteenth century when the overseas sale of Holy Land products brought some wealth to Bethlehem entrepreneurs. The houses were built as 'little palaces' with a characteristically oriental flavour, their textured yellowish stone pillars and arches decorated by greenery and flowers. At the end of the 1990s the palace belonging to the Jacir family was transformed into the luxurious Intercontinental Hotel, which looked out over terraced olive tree groves and the forested hill of Abu Ghneim.

Soon afterward, the view changed dramatically. The Israeli settlement of Har Homa was constructed on Abu Ghneim, and then later came the separation wall. This was once the busiest road in Bethlehem, lined with restaurants that attracted a young and lively clientele. Now the road is sliced in half by the wall, its watchtowers, and the military terminal through which anybody wanting to reach Jerusalem must pass. The effects of dispossession reached this neighbourhood twenty years before the military occupation began

and almost fifty years before the construction of the wall. In 1948 the United Nations rented a parcel of land from a Bethlehem woman named Aida. The refugee camp that was built on that ground, initially intended as a transit camp for Palestinians who had been forced out of their homes during the creation of Israel, is still in existence today and bearing Aida's name. Consequently the Rachel's Tomb neighbourhood displays the multilayered Palestinian tragedy in microcosm. The initial wave of ethnic cleansing, the Nakba, is brought to mind by Aida Camp and its inhabitants. The occupation's elaborate system of control and suspended violence is felt through the menacing presence of the wall, the watchtowers, and the checkpoint terminal, while the nearby settlements of Gilo and Har Homa demonstrate the encroaching power of the occupiers. Fittingly, this area is the chosen home of the Arab Educational Institute's Sumud Story House. Its sufferings and deprivations have transformed it into sumud's crucible, the epicentre of a powerful and personal form of resistance.

The occupation before the wall

Between 1948 and 1967 the West Bank was under Jordanian control. During that time it was extremely difficult to travel between Israel and Jordan, two enemy states. After the Israeli occupation began in 1967, when passage between Jerusalem and Bethlehem once again became possible, the area around Rachel's Tomb was frequently visited by bargain-hunting Israelis who objected to Jerusalem prices. Shops and garages began to open on the Hebron Road. Bethlehem's inhabitants saw their income starting to grow with the steady influx of tourists and pilgrims who poured into Bethlehem from Jerusalem. Bethlehem had become a tourist city, and the hotels, shops, and craftsmen started to do real business.

That time is now remembered with some nostalgia. While people did protest against the occupation, with its prolonged curfews and army raids; and they did notice the worrying absence of planned and sustainable economic development, there was a measure of individual comfort and prosperity. The pro-Jordanian mayor Elias



AEI's women's group, at the Wall near Aida camp and Rachel's Tomb
Photo: Fadi Abu Akleh

Freij kept discreet workable relations with the Israeli authorities. Thousands of labourers, many hailing from Aida Camp, worked in construction, agriculture, and other labour-intensive sectors in Israel, legally or illegally. The construction of the Gilo settlement, built on land taken from neighbouring Beit Jala, was a grim sign that this situation couldn't last: the erosion of Palestinian land rights was to be the price for individual prosperity. The emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) testified to the longing for freedom, independence, and the restoration of nationhood that had always existed under the surface. The First Intifada, erupting in 1987 and lasting until about 1992, was the expression of that longing.

It was a time that the most normal daily life activities were not permitted to take place. For instance, arguing that regular classes led to political unrest, the Israeli army regularly banned formal education in the Occupied Territories, closing down the West Bank's universities and many thousands of schools. As of 1989, even nursery schools were closed. It could happen that people were arrested and detained if they

were caught in the street with textbooks. As with other places in the Occupied Territories, the inhabitants of Bethlehem organised secret classes for the town's students; underground education became a hallmark of popular resistance. However, its passion and fire began to flicker out in the early '90s, and the intifada slowly declined. There was no real end to the oppression, but rather a confusing combination of continued military occupation sweetened with a few concessions to Palestinian autonomy.

One fleeting burst of hope was offered by 'Oslo', the so-called peace process that began in 1993. Initially it looked like a breakthrough in Palestinian-Israeli relations. The Palestinian Authority was established in the mid-1990s and given full jurisdiction over certain parts of the West Bank, Bethlehem among them. These places are known collectively as 'Area A'. This was meant to be a step on the road to total Palestinian self-determination. However, the situation deteriorated rapidly, with settlements expanding to an unprecedented degree and cutting ever deeper into Palestinian land. A makeshift checkpoint between Jerusalem and Bethlehem was set up as early as 1993, the year of the Oslo agreement. This was the beginning of the imprisonment that later on became the main feature of life in the West Bank and Gaza.

The stranglehold tightens

During the 1990s Rachel's Tomb became a stronghold for the Israeli army. One of the inhabitants of the area remembers that from that time on, an increased number of Jewish pilgrims started to visit the Tomb as an expression of religious nationalism – a desire to settle the whole land of Israel, including the West Bank. Although sacred to Muslims and Christians, the Tomb was placed off-limits to local people. What had been a shared place of prayer and the neighbourhood's distinguishing landmark had been transformed into a symbol of occupation, complete with armed guards and barbed wire. Travel restrictions were tightening. The youth in Aida refugee camp were finding it increasingly hard to access education and work. As was the

case across the West Bank, it was Aida's young people who were at the forefront of resistance to the occupation. The role of the refugees in struggling against a situation that grew more oppressive with each passing month reveals the origins of sumud. Its roots are in Palestine's darkest experiences, of which the camps are perhaps the most poignant and shattering reminder.

Despite local protests, the settlement of Har Homa was completed in 1996, as the Second Intifada took shadowy shape on the horizon. During the Intifada years Rachel's Tomb became the main flashpoint between the Israeli army and Palestinian fighters in Bethlehem. In time, the site was transformed into a heavily protected fortress. The neighbourhood became a war zone, with walls scarred by bullets and tanks rumbling through the streets. Houses were routinely commandeered by Israeli soldiers. Claire Anastas, living within sight of the Tomb, recalls the agitation that descended on her children every evening as they waited for the dreaded pounding at the door:

> The soldiers would come and beat at the door with their guns. I had to go down. It was always me. If my husband had gone, they might have shot him. It was too tense. I went down the stairs with my knees shaking and I let them in. Upstairs my children would be crying, "Now is the time for shooting."[2]

Like many local people, Claire and her family slept on the floors for safety. Often they would be corralled into a corner of the living room while the soldiers shot from their windows. Because the area was under direct military control, the army searched houses on a regular base, and inhabitants were severely restricted in their freedom of movement, even in entering and leaving their homes. Claire remembers waiting at the military barrier in front of her house for nearly six hours before the commander finally announced that she would not be allowed to cross the twenty yards to her doorstep. It was past midnight. She had to hurry through the deathly silent streets to a relative's house, praying not to meet a military patrol.

The separation wall went up in 2004-5, amputating Rachel's Tomb from its neighbourhood. The old checkpoint was transformed into a large indoor terminal, cold and clinical, that one neighbourhood resident described as 'like an abattoir'. It incorporated locked turnstiles, metal detectors, rooms for strip-searches, and narrow barred-in corridors where hundreds of people could wait to be processed. Israel justified the presence of the checkpoint and the wall by pointing out the need to protect Israeli civilians from attack; Palestinians argued that the wall sliced deep into Palestinian land and cut hundreds of thousands of people off from work, schools, family, and livelihood. They saw it as a continuation of the land confiscation that began long before the wall was built. In 2004 the International Court of Justice upheld the Palestinian position[3], but the wall continued to snake across the West Bank. "We were losing everything we had. We felt forgotten by the world," one local resident commented.

The test

After the wall was built, almost all seventy commercial establishments along the Hebron Road in northern Bethlehem had to close. AEI women's group participant Melvina commented,

> The wall affected our economic situation in a terrible manner. As we say in Arabic, 'We lost below zero.'"[4] In the past people from Bethlehem could work in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, cities presently on the other side of the wall. Now it is very difficult to get there. My husband and I had a drugstore and a store for different kinds of products. We had twenty-three people working for us; twenty-three families lived from our business. Now there are no employees anymore.

The area became desolate. Standing at the crest of a hill near the home of Claire Anastas, visitors can see verdant olive groves sloping away from Bethlehem on the other side of the wall. Far from being a sign of life, the green boughs – so close that you can see birds perching on their

branches – are a poignant testimony to the death of the neighbourhood. The area's land owners have either had their land confiscated outright or rendered practically unreachable by the wall. Volunteer Sytske van Bruggen describes one family's loss:

> Michael and Linda possess three large pieces of land with olive trees. They are in the area where the Israelis established the Har Homa settlement. Five years ago, the Israelis built a military road from the settlement to Jerusalem. It cuts through their land. Michael, Linda and their relatives are in exceptional cases allowed to enter their olive garden. "This year, we asked the Red Cross to help us. Finally we got permission to go to our fields. But there were hardly any olives. Bedouins are allowed to enter these zones. Maybe they picked the olives, or their sheep and goats ate them."[5]

Loss of land was only one of the major challenges faced by Rachel's Tomb residents after the building of the wall. In spring 2010 AEI Open Windows organised a conference to discuss the ways in which lives had changed and to explore the relationship between these changes and the question of sumud. In what ways was people's steadfastness tested, and how did the physical hardships and psychological pain affect its development?

In addition to land confiscation, the conference focused on the wall's impact on freedom of movement, property value, community services, and interaction between different communities.[6] Isolation and loss were recurring themes. Due to its proximity to the military base, other Bethlehem residents were afraid to come to the Rachel's Tomb area. Like the bullet gashes that remain in certain walls, the fear generated during the years of the Second Intifada has never been totally removed. One inhabitant told me that when she tried to organise a birthday party for one of her children, no one accepted the invitations. Neighbours had been split from other over the course of one day when the wall was erected in the middle of the street, and although they

could still reach one another by taking the long way round, it would be a long time before people began to feel psychologically ready to walk that road.

Aida camp was the most severely affected part of the neighbourhood, becoming one of the most isolated quarters of Bethlehem. The wall separated the cramped refugee quarters from the olive groves where they used to enjoy picnics and outdoor fun. As the municipal rubbish collectors were afraid to venture into the area, the stench of uncollected refuse filled the narrow walled-in road leading to the camp.

A neighbourhood around the Wall once famous for its traditional architectural elegance and beautiful views over the landscape had become an urban wasteland, with its physical appearance mirroring its' inhabitants psychological reality. Antoinette Kinesivich, whose house is boxed between the wall and Aida camp, describes the loss of a vibrant community life and her own cherished friendships:

> I belonged to the Anglican Church and was a volunteer there. I arranged the flowers and was active with the women. Now I cannot go to Jerusalem; the Wall separates me from my church, from my life. All my life was in Jerusalem! I was there daily: I worked there at a school as a volunteer and all my friends lived there. I rented a flat but I was not allowed to stay because I do not have the Jerusalem ID card. We are imprisoned. All my relations with Jerusalem became dead. I am a dying lady.[7]

With her final words, Antoinette makes it starkly clear that the loss of her Jerusalem connections caused her to feel as though she was losing her own life and identity. Interviews with other people in her position demonstrate that feelings of connection are lost in this fragmenting and shrinking environment. It is not only physical imprisonment that is felt, but a profound sense of alienation because of the radical changes in your environment, in what you see, feel, hear, touch, and smell. Antoinette is not the only person to experience a sense of

'dying'. Claire, whose house is surrounded on three sides by the eight-meter wall, commented that her children felt at first as though they were living in a tomb. They asked her whether they were going to die themselves.[8]

These feelings and anxieties are almost tangible as you walk in that area along the wall. This is especially true for those who know how lively it used to be in the past, and how normal life still is a few hundred meters northwards, where a busy highway that looks as though it might be in California carries Israeli traffic to Jerusalem and beyond. Walking in that northern Bethlehem area, passing houses whose elegance now looks strangely out of place, you experience a feeling of deep loss. This is not just because of the dour view of the wall. The sumud test here goes beyond the practicalities of life and the reality and feeling of being imprisoned. It is about coping with a sense that you do not exist any more, that you loose your ground or roots. Some of the inhabitants find it difficult to bring back any memories of the place as it used to be. Psychologically, the wall erases memories by its daunting appearance.

This paralysing sense of erasure is one of the problems that AEI tries to confront through the cultivation of sumud. Melvina unconsciously gives some insight into how light creeps in through her account of life after the wall:

> That time was terrible. Nobody was walking here, only the cats and dogs. The wall creates a feeling…the feeling that it surrounds you; that you are not permitted to move. Every time, every day you see the wall. When I look outside through the window to see the sunrise or the sunset the wall is in front of me. When I go to the wall I feel that something closes in on my heart, as if the wall is on my heart... When I see the wall I also feel ashamed of myself, because it is created by human beings.[9]

Although the wall had severed her from her neighbours and plunged

her into isolation, it taught Melvina to remember the humanity that she holds in common with the people who built it. A new way of relating to people – both neighbours and oppressors – is one of the products of sumud. This understanding continues to grow in spite of the message projected by the wall: that 'we' are here, and that 'they' are there. 'They,' the Israelis, are on the good side, 'we,' the Palestinians, are on the wrong side (although the Wall in practice also divides Palestinian communities from each other). 'They' regard themselves as civilized; 'we' are the 'terrorist', uncivilized side of the wall against which the civilized world has to insulate itself. The wall is a powerful symbol of rejection. The shared humanity that Melvina touches on is essentially a refusal to be rejected or forgotten, and this leads to some basic questions about the nature of sumud.



Rania Murra, coordinator of Sumud Story House
Photo: Jenny Baboun

The questions

The first questions are purely practical. How to survive? How to go on with everyday life, keeping yourself safe in the meantime? What support do you need to even begin to think about sumud in this situation? Moving beyond the practicalities of daily living, how do you find the human spirit needed to fight back? How do you draw pure values – a love for dignity and a dedication to justice – from a life that is severely constrained by years of military occupation?

Here the complications and the objections begin to emerge. How can you keep on fighting when it becomes increasingly difficult to know, even recognize, your land and home; when it does not have the value it once had; when it doesn't even feel like home any more? When you become a prisoner in your own house or an exile in your own land? How do you put down roots when the soil is poisoned? How do you give meaning to your living environment when a glance out of the window shows you that the environment is dying?

How can you keep your self-respect and self-confidence in the face of what Israelis call *hafrada* or separation – others call it Apartheid - that tells you and the world that you are too dangerous to be deserving of normal dignified life? How can you be true to your own story when the architects of this segregation, from the military to the media, have already cast you as the villain? How can you raise up your voice when there is nobody to hear?

And what can you do as a human being against this huge wall, apart from pounding your fists against it? After all, doesn't the wall signify the end of resistance? The grim checkpoints, watchtowers, and other installations attached to the wall send their own message: forget about resistance, subdue yourself, you are being watched.

It all comes down to the difficulty of keeping hope alive.

3. Sumud at the checkpoint

People here make the wry joke that every Palestinian street is a potential checkpoint. They know literally hundreds of 'checkpoint stories' – cruel or funny, mundane or surreal, profound or banal. During the first years of the new millennium it was not uncommon to find people waiting at checkpoints for a whole day or even longer, especially in parts of Gaza. Or waiting for a day in order to get a permit or a magnetic card so as to be able to pass a checkpoint later on (or not pass, when the magnetic card turned out not to work). These stories can still be heard today, and it is very rare to find a Palestinian who has not experienced checkpoint violence.

This violence takes several forms. Verbal aggression is the most common, delivered rapid-fire by unseen soldiers over loudspeakers. Bad Arabic, bad Hebrew, insults and terse commands, inarticulate screams and yells – this is the checkpoint theme tune, played on a loop. The volume can be painful, especially if you have been standing in the echoing checkpoint terminal for hours at a time. Punching, shoving, and other overt forms of physical violence do happen, but the most common forms of physical aggression are less obvious and much more painful. Palestinians are often required to queue for hours out of doors, in all weather conditions. The workers who gather at Bethlehem's Machsom 300 at three a.m. in mid-December are numb with cold; they jostle together for warmth. In summer they try to reach the checkpoint as early as possible in order to escape waiting in the burning heat after sun up. There is a water fountain at the machsom – located on the other side of the locked turnstiles, perhaps hours away from the last person in the line. Its location feels like a form of mocking torment. Finally, there is sexual harassment. Strip searches can happen suddenly and without warning, with people being ordered to remove their clothes in full view of everyone in the line. This happened to my own daughter in 2006. She was nine years old at the time.

Everything is uncertain at the checkpoint, with the threat of violence flowing beneath this uncertainty like a deadly undertow. At

Machsom 300 you may feel relieved to arrive and find only a handful of people in front of you, but a person setting off the metal detector and refusing to strip publicly can cause a stand-off lasting half an hour or more. The challenge is to cope in a situation where you and your most basic needs do not seem to exist to those responsible. It's the humiliation of being studiously ignored – a real emotional test. People are emotionally vulnerable at the checkpoint. A bad experience can break your day. "Having to be patient is eating me," my wife says as she waits. It happens that the people in the queue push and jostle one another, losing self-control. You realise that you may have to wait because the other side wants to play with you, and trying to maintain a peaceful space inside you becomes a refusal to be dragged into this twisted game. In such a situation sumud means not allowing the frustration to push you away from yourself and into the stereotype of the 'angry Arab' that has been imposed on Palestinians. Sumud is here a special kind of patience that helps to stand your ground and protect your dignity.

Unexpected checkpoint closures come and go. There may be a series of strict closures followed by a temporary lifting – 'easing' is the famous word – of the pressure. This destructive pattern is sometimes used as a test to discover how easily a new control mechanism can be used against a particular category of people. There is probably no people in the world who have been subject to so many arbitrary classifications as Palestinians. The checkpoint system fragments Palestinian society through splitting its people into these categories, which govern freedom of movement – and, by extension, community life. This situation was highlighted when Berlanty Azzam, a young student from Gaza, was deported from the West Bank in handcuffs and refused permission to complete her degree course at Bethlehem University. As a resident of Gaza, she was not allowed to live in the West Bank, whose residents carry a separate ID.[1]

In addition to separating West Bank and Gazan Palestinians, Israel distinguishes between permanent residents of Jerusalem, Palestinian-Israelis with an Israeli passport, Palestinians with a

foreign passport, non-Palestinian spouses of Palestinian ID holders, Christians and Muslims. Each of them is confronted with a different set of restrictions. This can make it hard for them to interact with one another freely. Under the checkpoint and permit system, Muslims are no longer able to celebrate Easter with Christian friends in Jerusalem, and West Bank residents cannot visit Jerusalemite relatives who are ill in hospital. The wall and its checkpoints are splintering the character of the Palestinian community.

Such arbitrary classifications test people's integrity and sense of solidarity. Many Christians in Bethlehem remember times when they were offered preferential treatment at the checkpoint in the presence of waiting Muslims. "Are you a Christian? Please come here and pass." As categories are determined by so many different criteria – religion, age, place of residence, passport(s) held, possession of particular permits – there can be uncertainty about the group to which you belong. I know a man with dual nationality whose life has been dominated by such uncertainty. On his daily journey to Jerusalem he feels like a fugitive. Will he be 'detected' and treated as an 'illegal' Palestinian rather than as a "legal" foreigner? Of course such stories usually cannot come out into the open for fear that the tellers might be barred from getting a permit in future. After all, nobody explains why you receive a permit or not. With the process so arbitrary, it is safest to say nothing about your experiences, to subdue yourself in the hope that your silence will buy you some semblance of a normal life.

Symbols and metaphors

It is impossible to escape brutalising symbolism and metaphor as you wait along the wall to enter the checkpoint terminal. The caged-in corridors suggest that you are a mouse caught in a maze, part of a psychological experiment that is out of your control. (In fact a student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem once wrote an essay on the subject, contending that the checkpoints are a means of testing people's behaviour and trialling new means of social control.) Maha Abu Dayyeh, director of a Ramallah-based legal aid center for women,



Morning queue waiting at the checkpoint
Photo: Fadi Abu Akleh

compares the queue of waiting Palestinians at the checkpoint to 'lined up cattle' waiting to enter a slaughterhouse. "And you know what happens to them – the machine takes them one by one while they can't move, as though they were in a cage."[2] She speaks about the barriers that the wall has created in people's minds. The violence penetrates the mind; outposts in the head cause you to lose your sense of inner freedom, even your grasp of your own personhood. How can these occupied minds be liberated?

After our nine-year-old daughter was forced to strip by a female soldier, in full view of the queue, my wife Mary decided that she didn't want to travel any more. She felt that she could no longer put up with the humiliation. She once lost a valuable bracelet during a security check, which was never returned. The theft of both material possessions and personal dignity led her to stay at home for some time, refusing to pass the checkpoints. But what is sumud here? Staying in the queue or staying at home? Can you rescue your dignity by effectively putting yourself under house arrest? (Of course, for

many people in Bethlehem these questions are irrelevant, as they are never given permits to travel at all.) It is a choice between accepting humiliation as the price for limited freedom, or accepting inability to move as the price for keeping your dignity intact. Such dilemmas go deep and are very difficult to talk about. I know one person who refuses to consider crossing the checkpoint on principle, but is never willing to explain why.

In the light of the dehumanising roles that Palestinians are forced to play in the checkpoint drama, the desire to break out and to defy manipulation is obvious. People long for alternative images and metaphors to carry with them to the wall. Palestinian artist Samira Badran attempted this through the creation of a sculpture that she fittingly named *New Walk*, bringing a different meaning to the queue at the checkpoint:

> In her piece almost five meters long, *New Walk*, meandering images of artificial limbs reflect on the universal conditions of oppression in face of the onslaught of manmade tools and barricades, which result in all forms of incarceration. In this work the prosthesis is a metaphor for the indomitable spirit of the Palestinians who seem always to find alternate routes to crossing barriers. The congested artificial limbs – some broken, others bandaged – do not beg for sympathy, instead their seemingly frenzied march portrays boundless determination and resilience, a tribute to the Palestinians' steadfastness in the face of military and political domination, and that despite all constraints, they continue to cross artificial boundaries and barricades.[3]

Badran presents sumud as the ability to keep moving on, blazing new trails in spite of injuries received and sacrifices required. The broken limbs in her piece represent breaking into freedom, snapping one's chains, reaching out to wholeness, overcoming fragmentation. Palestinian refugees living in Syria and Lebanon brought the sculpture

to life when they tried to walk peacefully into the occupied Golan and the Galilee during May/June 2011, in spite of the bloody histories that they have endured and the very real risk of further death and suffering.

To stay or to go?

Emigration is another painful and ever-present dilemma in Bethlehem. In general, Palestinians who have the chance to study or work abroad grasp it with both hands. With employment so scarce and education so lacking, it makes sense that capable young people would try to leave the country. However, a life abroad is only possible for the lucky few who have good contacts (perhaps a foreign spouse), enough money to support themselves, or the talent to win scholarships and prizes – and the choice to leave still isn't easy even for those who have these things. People are torn between the allure of a better future and the heartbreaking tug of their personal history and present reality – their family and friends at home. Often the choice results in a family becoming polarised, with some members desperate to leave and others determined to stay.

Once St Joseph's School in Bethlehem devised a theatre piece in which several girls were waiting at Tel Aviv Airport for their plane to come. However, just before they were called to the departure gate they started to wonder whether the choice to leave was the right one. They remembered the stories of their parents and grandparents. The play offered no answers, but ended with the question left unresolved – a situation that must have reflected the thoughts of many audience members.

For Palestinians abroad, the homeland is a magnet. Although they have embraced other countries and integrated into other societies, Palestinians in the diaspora may say that they long even for the smell of the garbage in Palestine's streets. One woman from Bethlehem, Jizelle, recalls a visit to Shatila refugee camp in which her hostess broke down in tears when she discovered where Jizelle was from. "She wanted to

hug me. She was crying. She said, 'Please take me back with you.'"[4] Once I was told that a Palestinian woman who lived abroad expressed the wish to be buried in Palestine at the end of her life. At that same time, my own wife, then in a fragile mood, told me that her dignity and self-respect were so compromised by life here that she wanted to be buried outside, so as not to experience the humiliation of staying in a country which was not hers anymore. Although she later came back from that opinion, the journey was not easy, and it continues to cause anguish and agitation to many Palestinians.

4. The power of community story

The best way to understand what sumud means to the residents of Bethlehem is to listen to their stories. In doing this, the listener does not only gain a better understanding of sumud as concept; he or she helps the sumud of the teller to grow deeper. Sumud is about retaining a shared cultural and national spirit as communities are deliberately broken apart, and listening receptively to stories is one way of safeguarding that spirit. Sumud is about overcoming the stereotypes that class Palestinians as uncivilised barbarians at best and terrorists at worst, and listening to them speak of their lives in their own words is a powerful weapon in that battle.

Accompanied by two French students, in late summer 2009 I went to interview Salah Ta'amari, who was then governor of Bethlehem. Our conversation took place in front of the Church of the Nativity, perhaps the town's best-known symbol. He stood there, a man who had become somewhat disillusioned with Palestinian internal politics, and emanated a quiet strength and a sense of purpose. His stiff posture gave him the air of a soldier. He spoke slowly and with great care and precision.

Ta'amari's life reads like a story of the Palestinian national movement. He grew up in Bethlehem in the 1950s, during the time that young Palestinians, identifying variously as communist or nationalist, were protesting against Jordanian rule. He completed his higher education in Cairo, receiving an MA in English Literature. After his return to Bethlehem, he joined the Fatah movement's armed struggle and took part in the battle at Karameh in 1968. Karameh is now considered one of Fatah's defining moments in its quest to prove itself as a movement representative of the Palestinian people. He went to Lebanon and became active in Palestinian politics there, becoming both a military commander and a charismatic youth organiser.

His clout only grew with his marriage to the former Queen of Jordan, Princess Dina, a former wife of King Hussein. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 he was imprisoned in the


Salah Ta'amari

notorious prisoner camp of Ansar in South Lebanon, along with thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese. His gift for leadership did not desert him even in the camp, where he quickly became prominent among the prisoners. After his release, he moved again – this time to the US to become a youth leader among Palestinian-Americans. Here he began to promote contact between Palestinians and Israelis, entering into a detailed correspondence with the journalists Amalia and Aaron Barnea. They were later to publish a book about their exchanges with him, *Mine Enemy*.[1]

Ta'amari returned to the West Bank in 1994. He had come to aid in the process of building a state, a dream that looked achievable in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords and the resultant establishment of the Palestinian Authority. He was elected in the Bethlehem district as a member of the Palestinian legislative council. As a politician, he encouraged non-violent resistance against land expropriations and the building of settlements around Bethlehem. For some time he was Minister of Agriculture in an Arafat-led cabinet, and he then became Governor of Bethlehem, a post that he held until 2010. His tall solitary figure is a familiar sight at public events in Bethlehem.

My interest in Ta'amari began with my research into the way that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is portrayed in bestselling English-language fiction. At the beginning of the 1980s, prior to his imprisonment in Ansar, Ta'amari played host to the famous British writer John le Carré. Le Carré was working on *The Little Drummer Girl* at the time, a thriller starring less-than-good Israeli heroes and not-all-bad Palestinian villains.[2] According to the preface and acknowledgement of that novel, Ta'amari showed Le Carré the 'human heart of the Palestinians. Some say that Le Carré modelled the Palestinian hero-villain in the novel after Ta'amari himself. Ta'amari himself denies this and stresses the difference between fiction and real life. His wife Dina,

however, did not feel able to make the separation quite so easily. *The Little Drummer Girl*, while giving a more nuanced and authentic voice to its Palestinian characters than any other fiction at the time, still borrows heavily from the store of popular literary stereotypes about Arabs. Dina was wounded by the portrayal of Palestinians in the novel, who are not allowed to escape the category of villain even if they are accorded a dash of goodness here and there.[3]

As a public figure with a remarkably varied history, what does sumud mean to Ta'amari? Interestingly, Ta'amari sees his imprisonment in Ansar – the time when he was arguably the most powerless, both over his own life and how other people perceived his actions – as the clearest illustration of what sumud means.[4] He stresses the inner human side of sumud: before you cannot connect with the land, you need to connect with your own will and come to an understanding of who you are as a person.

> In order to explain the concept of sumud I will start with Ansar. I was not the most courageous in Ansar, nor the most intelligent or talented. In those respects, there were many who were much better than me. Among the ten thousand of prisoners – Palestinians and Lebanese – there were headmasters, teachers, lawyers, and prominent figures. But there was one difference between me and them. The Israeli invasion into Lebanon made them lose their mental stability. They could not absorb the shock. Their minds were hit. I did absorb the shock, immediately. My mind remained normal and clear, and I coped. Sumud starts with our mental ability to stay steadfast, to be able to adhere to our culture or beliefs, to what we represent, to what we are. The Israelis did their best to demoralize us, to leave us empty and hollow from inside, without beliefs. They dealt with the prisoners as things or objects and the prisoners accepted that treatment.

For Ta'amari, sumud is about mental clarity and moral agency, the ability to retain a strong sense of self and conscience even in a dehumanising environment. It was this clear-sightedness that enabled Ta'amari to distinguish between genuine desire for peace and passive capitulation to the oppressor:

> In the middle of the section where I was put, there was a sort of monument built of pebbles, with the words 'peace' on it in English, Hebrew and Arabic. And there was the dome of a mosque with a star of David on it. It was built by the prisoners. To me that was a sign of their slavery. The first thing in my mind was to have it pulled down. Which happened, in three days. I pulled it down with the help of one of the young people.

Ta'amari wanted to protect the Palestinian and Islamic identity, symbolised for him by the Dome of the Rock. To put a Star of David on a mosque's dome was for him a tacit acceptance of Jerusalem's occupation. In order to break his influence over the other prisoners, he was put in solitary confinement. Ironically, his understanding of the power of community was perfected in his isolation cell:

> In the solitary, I used to sing. Once they threatened to apply a plaster on my mouth. I told them, I will sing in my mind. Songs were a weapon. Every prisoner had to sing. After I came back from the solitary, I taught the prisoners to sing. We had four songs. I would wake them up in the middle of the night, stand in front of the barbed wires, and sing. Imagine, thousands would sing. All the villages around us woke up. The Israelis were bothered. When a group sings, they feel closer to one another. They feel stronger.

Sumud is human resistance. Singing can be a form of resistance which connects to humanity, which expresses some kind of resisting human joy under impossible circumstances. Note that there is also a connection

to an audience: the prisoner-singers sang not just to themselves but to surrounding villagers too. Sumud is about communication, communicating sumud. But there is more.

> To be steadfast, you need to maintain unity. (…) Unity could only be begotten by justice and fairness. We developed the rules, I wrote pamphlets. Because of the cold I used to wake up at four AM. I had hundreds of people to write down the rules, using all kinds of things: pencils or ballpoints stolen from of the Red Cross or the soldiers. I called it the prisoners' guide. The rules were about how to maintain unity, how to deal with the collaborators, how to maintain a high morale. My stand was very solid. They did not intimidate me. They tried, but they could not. When we talk about steadfastness, it is not about the guns, it is not about high numbers, it is not about suicide missions. Sumud comes from the inside, your belief in yourself, in what you represent. This is the basic element, the infrastructure of sumud. Without it, there is no sumud. If you don't believe in yourself and in what you are, you will lose.

Steadfastness is keeping a connection to one's beliefs, to the cause one stands for. And it can be done only in connection with each other, with one's community. Through Ta'amari's narrative, we not only see the importance of community, but the power of narrative and story in keeping that community alive.

Ta'amari returned to Palestine after a prolonged wait. "I came back in 1994, after thirty years." Patience, which is a kind of anticipatory waiting for the important moment to come, is a core part of sumud. Sumud means keeping a difficult but meaningful connection with time. After his homecoming he barely left Palestine for visits abroad since there was always the possibility that he would not be allowed to return:

> I declined every invitation I received to go to all kinds of countries in the world, when I was a minister or a governor or parliamentarian. But I am not going to leave, not even for a visit. I want to be buried here. This is my hometown, this is my country, I will not leave it, no matter how difficult it is.
> But to be honest, I enjoy every minute of living here. When I was in the legislative council, I was a speaker on one of the eleven committees, the Land Committee. I used to invite the committee to the field. We went to a village and convened there. Every time I went there, I never failed to find something that elated me. Once I went to Salfit, and I went to a village which was destroyed maybe hundred years ago, in a tribal conflict. I was demoralised, and there was nothing to raise my morale. I was depressed and I walked back to my car. Luckily the car was far away. I looked at the stone walls, the kind which we build in our fields. Then I suddenly saw a kind of wild flower, which I had not seen in decades. When I saw it, something was lifted inside me. It made my day. My morale was rescued.

Joy flowers from places that have known great pain. This is sumud's paradox, with which all samadin are well acquainted. Ta'amari's whole life – in Diaspora, in the homeland, in prison and in parliament – is a vibrant affirmation of that.



Photo: Jenny Baboun

5. A living and human ideal

When the word 'sumud' began to appear in discussion during the 1970s and 1980s, it was used to refer primarily to the outcomes that Palestinian people were striving for as a community – the right to remain on the land, the need to resist forced expulsions, the desire to have many children who would inherit the struggle and hopefully the victory. The term was popularised in 1978 by the creation of an Amman-based organisation called Sumud Funds, which had a very practical mission: to provide financial support to residents of the Occupied Territories who needed help to stay. Unsurprisingly, sumud came to be defined by these pragmatic efforts.

Raja Shehadeh's *The Third Way*, published in 1982, uncovered a different facet of sumud: its spiritual and human dimension. This aspect has received more and more attention over the intervening years, with people starting to look beyond the practical and economic concerns posed by life under occupation and to think about their own attitudes towards this life. The need to stand steadfast on the land remains central to the concept of sumud, but it is the cultivation of a particular mentality that lies at the heart of the concept, not physical location or strategies for liberation, important as they are.

> In fact, there are two perceptions of sumud: to stay on your land, the national land, and also to stay steadfast in the Diaspora, when you yearn and struggle to come back and keep the connection with your people - by supporting, or being ambassadors, or working in advocacy, or investing in your country, sending delegations. When people are in solidarity with you, it is sumud by itself. So sumud is not only about being in a place (…) it's a journey or process. Sumud is not static, it is action, life. I should not say: "What a beautiful word, sumud." Sumud is an art of living, an art of existing and working, manifested in building living stones, building human beings

> and building relationships between people. (Zoughby Zoughby, director of Wi'am Conflict Resolution Centre, Bethlehem)[1]

I heard Zoughby's definition echoed several times in the interviews I conducted for this book. People were adamant that sumud could also be practised by Palestinians living outside Palestine. This insistence on the inclusivity for sumud stems partly from an unwillingness to exclude from the community of samadin Palestinians who are forced to live abroad by poverty, Israeli policy, or both. But it is also because treating sumud as a practical ideal that can only be expressed in a very circumscribed way (staying on the land) does not express the sheer breadth and richness of its true meaning. Equally, the interviewees frequently acknowledged that it is possible to live in the Occupied Territories as a Palestinian and show a painful lack of sumud, such as in the case of those Palestinians who, often because of circumstances in the family, at one point became liable to manipulation and then started to collaborate with the Israeli army.

Location and residency status are not what matter most. Even if Israeli law does not allow them to retain their residency rights, samadin can still keep their inner sense of connection to Palestine and all that Palestine represents and encompasses. Most important to the cultivation of their sumud is a continual awareness of the humanity of Palestinians, which binds the community together even in diaspora. This prepares the ground for practical work, with each person making his or her unique contribution from wherever they are in the world, according to Zoughby:

> Sumud is not a single, demonstrative action. It is not just planting a tree and saying, "This is sumud." It is about how to nourish the tree, how to trim it, how to harvest it, how to create a healthier atmosphere for all, how to make the field around the tree safe for the kids to play, to show environmental awareness. The last relates to an area of work which we have neglected here. Sumud needs nourishment - socially, psychologically, economically, religiously. Creating supportive institutions is sumud. You need to be a hive. You have to make this place better for your community. You need to work hard, to be productive. In doing so, sumud will create the unimaginable and the impossible. In sumud there is transformation.

Sumud has as many faces as the samadin themselves. Together, they express Palestine in its totality – the demands of everyday life under occupation, Palestine's cultural and economic potential, the vulnerability and strength of Palestinian people. As we have already seen, there are some heavy weights pressing down on this inner strength, and each of these pressures requires a special kind of stamina, energy, and creativity if it is to be resisted. How these qualities are manifested will vary depending on the individual's personality, talents, and particular circumstance. People's inner strength and vitality express themselves in diverse ways, and this diversity is also an integral part of sumud.



Celebrating sumud, Artas Folklore Troupe
Photos: James Prineas

Abdelfatah Abu Srour is the director of the Ruwwad Cultural Centre in Aida refugee camp. He grew up in that camp, but as a young adult he left Palestine to pursue advanced studies in France. He decided to return in order to take up the refugees' cause. He regards both these choices as a personal expression of the sumud that he sees around him in the camp[2]:

> Let me give you a quick summary of what sumud is. Sumud is continuing living in Palestine, laughing, enjoying life, falling in love, getting married, having children. Sumud is also continuing your studies outside, to get a diploma, to come back here. Defending values is sumud. Building a house, a beautiful one and thinking that we are here to stay, even when the Israelis are demolishing this house, and then build a new and even more beautiful one than before – that is also sumud. That I am here, is sumud. To reclaim that I am Palestinian, wherever I am, is sumud. To reclaim that you are a human being, and defending your humanity, is sumud.

As a man immersed in Palestinian culture and heritage, Abu Srour is particularly interested in the value of memory and what it means for sumud.

> Names have been changed, and new Hebrew names have been given to villages, cities and streets. But the Palestinians still remember their histories and they have children and grandchildren who too remember. Sumud is preserving the identity, the memories, the customs and habits, the popular arts, the attachment to the land, the values that make us into human beings, across generations. It is about attachment to the Palestinian embroidery, the meals, the hummus, falafel, tabuleh [Palestinian salad] – now misrepresented as the traditional food of Israel – as served during national, historical or religious events. Preserving memory and history helps to keep faith in the future and to have hope.

Bethlehem University professor Adnan Mousallem, a specialist in oral history, also focuses on the unity and joy that spring from the practice of sumud. He is not only attuned to the concept's value on an individual level, but to its relevance to Palestinian society as a whole. He sees it as a glue that both holds his own beleaguered society together and makes it strong enough to reach out and learn from very different societies[3]:

> Sumud is a broad, active, human concept. It is refusing to let yourself be dehumanized. Let me give you an example. Part of showing your presence is keeping your ability to laugh. Laughing is a defensive mechanism. You are laughing, chatting, joking, so that you can continue to be like a human being. When you become totally pessimistic you are really saying, I am ready to die, I don't want to live anymore. You dehumanize yourself. Humor is essential to be able to stand up and stay steadfast. It's part of saying: I am here and nobody can deny my presence here… Sumud is worth to be given courses about at Palestinian universities. You can come across sumud in Palestinian poetry, essays, the literature of resistance. It's a multidisciplinary subject. Take poetry. Mahmoud Darwish exemplifies the poetry of steadfastness. His small village was completely wiped out, but he didn't give up, he went to a neighbouring town there and he practiced his poetry of resistance, also in exile. His poetry is definitely about Palestinian identity.
> Sumud can be applied to architecture. Look at these beautiful homes all around the place, it shows that people are not hopeless. I looked at the terrain in Bethlehem ten years ago, when there were wide open fields around and now, when there is no space left for homes. Building a home, especially a traditional home, in traditional architecture, is an assertion. If people were so desperate, they would ask themselves, why should I build a home?

> Religion is related to sumud. The religious community gives you needed spiritual support, so that you don't become hopeless. Again, sumud should be viewed as a broad, human subject. Part of steadfastness is that Palestinian people are people who believe in interfaith dialogue. You shouldn't be close-minded. You want to live in this land, but in a good atmosphere, where people are dialoguing with each other, as in a normal society. Steadfastness does not mean that you close your mind and just stay on the ground.

Mousallem's comments on close-mindedness raise an interesting point. In the past sumud has sometimes been confused with stubbornness, perhaps because of the enduring stereotype of the stubborn peasant who is resistant to any sort of change. It is important to be clear that true steadfastness requires an enquiring and respectful spirit, in addition to a profound awareness and appreciation for one's own heritage and traditions. This symbiosis gives strength to the community.

Nora Carmi, until recently the programme coordinator at Sabeel (the Palestinian Centre for Liberation Theology in Jerusalem) nurtures a spirituality that is based on her Christian belief in the beauty of humanity and the entire created world, of which even her oppressors are a cherished part. She speaks of harmony in creation, and argues that sumud preserves that harmony by making it possible for her to reach out to people who are very different from herself[4]:

> I realize that our daily existence under 43 years of occupation represents the many forms of sumud: not accepting the facts on the ground: waking up and going to a checkpoint and living the humiliation but still wanting to do something - not only for our sake as Palestinians, but also to change and bring back the oppressor into that beautiful harmony of the creation of God. I think that last aspect is also part of sumud. This is what propels me, moves me, to be part of a wonderful human community, resisting, non-violently. For me the model of Jesus

> Christ has always been my guiding point, you cannot do it alone. You can decide not to leave the country, and live poorly and accept all the suffering, but without living and sharing in the community, it cannot be done. Sumud is a personal and gratifying acknowledgement of being tools on earth. It is more rewarding when you know that you are not all alone. The words of Jesus come to my mind and ring in my ears, "Be not afraid, little flock." You are not alone in the flock, you have your brothers and sisters… Sumud is for the dignity of every single person. And then you bring it from the person into the community. Then the community becomes larger, and you connect it with international rights, which give you the right to resist. And there is here also a definite link towards other faiths. When you start with the moral values that you have to preserve humanity and creation, we can all work together.

For Walid Mustafa, a Bethlehem University professor in geography, the most important aspect of sumud is the beauty it brings to everyday community life. His definition of homeland and community is not nationalistic, or even overtly political, but surprisingly prosaic – and consequently all the more powerful.[5]

> Remaining in your homeland is not only sacrifice and suffering. Sumud is a lifestyle, for people living now and for generations to come. You are practicing the joy of living, in this environment, on this land, with these people. I like here to quote a Russian poem. It says that 'for me, the homeland starts from the bench in front of our house, in front of the street where my grandmother and my mother, together with other ladies, sat and talked about the issues of life'. Sumud is about the beauty of daily life. When you remember your homeland, the beauty comes to you, it is part of you. So when you practice sumud you are not suffering all the time, on the contrary, you practice the love for the land. By practicing sumud we show how much we want to continue living in it as previous generations did.

All these stories are written from the same ink, yet they are different in nature and focus. This is the beauty and power of sumud: each person's story is valuable, and each tale adds another page to the greater story that is still unfolding in occupied Palestine.

6. Mapping sumud's meanings

The human definition of sumud that emerges in all the interviewees' stories had a difficult birth. Although Raja Shehadeh explored sumud as a vital part of Palestinian non-violence in *The Third Way*, he seemed later on wary of using the term. His fear was that the term would not survive its dogmatic use as a slogan. Sloganeering is a way of stripping all meaning from a concept, rendering impossible the fruitful interaction between word and action that Paolo Freire describes in his writings. It leaves no space for thoughtful questioning: sloganeers demand that their followers pledge loyalty to a struggle, without giving them space to ask about the nature and direction of that struggle. When the word rather than the deed is stressed, the life is taken out from both. Then sumud becomes propaganda. Conversely, when sumud is considered only a deed, there is a risk that the word will come to refer to a frozen list of acceptable activities. You are just staying on your land, and that's it. But as Mousallem says, sleeping in your home is (normally) not an act of sumud, nor is sumud just determination to remain in a particular building on a particular plot of land. Critical and creative thinking is needed to keep the concept alive. Freire: "To speak a true word is to transform the world. Word without action is mere verbalism, word without reflection is mere activism."[1]

Without critical, value-based thought and self-reflection, another more frightening risk emerges, the separation of sumud from justice:

> Steadfastness refers not only to our Palestinian character of never – ever – giving in. It refers to our standing up to overwhelming odds time and again without a single friend in our corner. It is about our being beaten and abused in every way known to humanity, only to get back up with our heads held high. This is impressive; but if steadfastness were

> understood only in this way, it could easily be exchanged for a different, less appealing word: stubbornness.
>
> Not giving up, in and of itself, is not an admirable quality. After all, the rather unsavoury and racist group of Hebron's Tel Rumeida settlers could also be described as steadfast. After all, they too display 'unwavering loyalty' or 'firm convictions' and they seemingly 'never give up'. What makes our steadfastness admired and mythologized around the world is the combination of not only our perseverance, but the justice of our cause and the methods by which we have chosen to pursue it. (Mustafa Barghouti, political leader of the Palestinian National Initiative)[2]

Barghouti's words are a reminder that sumud, while rooted in the Palestinian experience, should act as a sheltering tree for every person who needs its shade. It is about universal rights and values, standing in the service of a larger human cause. As the Quaker author Jean Zaru wrote in her book *Occupied with Non-Violence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, "Sumud means to remain steadfast on one's land and, more generally, to remain steadfast in service to one's homeland and to the struggle for freedom."[3]

From definition to meaning

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine is ongoing. Those people outside of Palestine who have heard of the Nakba are often tempted to use the term as shorthand for the mass expulsions of 1948, when in reality it is still happening – it has just assumed a different but equally dangerous form. In addition to house demolitions and land confiscation, there is psychological erasure, epitomised by Golda Meir's infamous pronouncement that, "There is no such thing as Palestinians; they never existed," and illustrated by the widespread use of the term 'Arab' over Palestinian in Israeli political life. All these experiences, a fact of Palestinian life for over sixty years, have given Palestinian steadfastness a basic meaning: the assertion of one's existence as

opposed to political and cultural attempts to deny that existence.

Some people argue that it is pointless to try and define sumud, as it is so very natural. Nothing has to be explained about the concept, because what could be more normal than living in one's home and land in an everyday setting, a setting characterised by family and friends and the taste of the olives plucked from that one tree in the back garden? But when the home itself becomes a place of oppression, even a prison, staying does become a choice - an extraordinary choice to preserve an ordinary life. According to scholar and activist Mazin Qumsiyeh, who recently published a volume about popular resistance in Palestine[4], sumud in Arabic implies a degree of agency that the English 'steadfastness' cannot capture. Sumud is about actively keeping your ground even though you are longing for that moment that homely life will be natural and quiet.

Keeping your ground relates to labour, too. At its simplest level, sumud is about plain survival. Palestinian social scientist Rima Hammami[5] has studied 'sumud economies', focusing on the industries that have sprung up at checkpoints – such as when bakers or greengrocers set up stalls of produce in front of the queue, or taxi drivers form a rank there. In the second Intifada, some farmers were even hiring out their donkeys to enable people to cross the rugged hills instead of waiting for hours at roadblocks.

I remember myself that one woman in Nablus once decided to knit 'checkpoint socks' that were designed to keep the feet extra comfortable if the wearers had to stand up for a long time. Flowing from these creative strategies is an awareness that sumud has to be about more than personal benefit or survival. 'Checkpoint socks' do not just exist to protect blistered feet, but to enable you to remain standing as part of your community, shoulder to shoulder with one another, in a flesh-and-blood illustration of the words that have been spray-painted on the separation barrier near Bethlehem: "We are bigger than this wall." This attitude fosters hope for the future, a profoundly important quality in sumud. Samadin are always on the lookout for opportunities to bring about change, even if what they can do is relatively small.

Palestine's dark history of ethnic cleansing and endless, meaningless negotiations have imbued samadin with an awareness that liberation does not lie just around the corner. As the Bethlehem-based Lutheran pastor Mitri Raheb once said, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not "a hundred-metre run but a marathon."[6] It is about a long breath, a deep breath[7], about a different rhythm which makes life possible – that militant patience once again. In this attitude, sumud combines idealism with realism, an approach that the noted Palestinian-Israeli writer Emile Habibi flippantly termed 'pessoptimism'.[8] Sumud is not about harbouring grand visions and ideals, but recognising the promise of a different future in the most basic activities of life. The endurance demanded by these aspects of sumud do not amount to masochism, but a willingness to embrace the consequences of one's choices. Choosing to resist is itself a liberating act, as Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are rarely offered the chance to make any sort of political choice. This is one that they can take to their hearts and freely make their own.

Perhaps surprisingly, sumud is also the capacity to enjoy life. Palestinians do not have available to them the instant pleasures that are there for the taking in the developed world, but they have access to a joy that is grounded in the culture and the customs they are working so hard to preserve – even things as simple as the cup of coffee under the grapevine. Joy nourishes the spirit, even though it is much affected by pain. Visitors to Palestine sometimes say that despite people's suffering a Palestinian restaurant still looks livelier than restaurants in many other parts of the world. Hospitality is always there yet the suffering is real and never far away. Hemingway's definition of courage as 'grace under pressure' comes to mind.[9] This balance between strife and joy reflects wisdom that is also found in many other parts of the world – the Tao teaches that the audacious courage that prepares one to take on suffering should be balanced by a gentler courage that enables one to rejoice in being part of humanity.[10]

Living the joy of sumud invites attention to another aspect of sumud: its beauty. At first, any talk of beauty may sound jarringly out

of place when applied to a country where checkpoints, walls, fences, and other obstacles are never far away. However, philosophers have argued that the aesthetic ideal of beauty cannot be separated from the idea of moral beauty, and sumud is a good illustration of this insight. Though the context of sumud is ugly (because oppression is ugly), beauty shines through the behavior of the samadin. Their integrity and their values, expressed through their way of life, appeal to the heart as well as the senses.

Sumud is closely connected with the heritage of Palestine, which has a hidden beauty of its own. We will return to this cultural beauty later on. It is important to stress here that both moral and aesthetic beauty may well be contagious. Learning about sumud creates a sense of attraction, a desire to go deeper into the ideal. As always when people show themselves at their best – whether through cultural activities (like women showing the Palestinian embroidery, lovingly and painstakingly done), their beautiful integrity, or both combined – others feel touched. This is the source of sumud's great communicative power.

Recently, academics conducted research about the contagious power of laughter, optimism or sadness. Such emotions turn out to have a ripple effect on people both close to and distant from to the "senders." Would it be far-fetched to assume that the sumud lifestyle is contagious too, and that this is part of the reason why it is found so widely in Palestinian society?

As we have seen, sumud unites concepts that appear to be opposites. Some aspects of sumud are related to the immediate tasks of keeping house and caring for a family, while others relate to the preservation of the Palestinian community on a national and also international level. See here a table which shows how sumud brings together these two sides – national and international struggle on the one hand, and duty to the family and life at home on the other.

Mapping sumud's meanings

Dimensions Level	Broader national identity	Home, family and community	Synthesis
Land and community	Staying proudly connected to the homeland, national identity, and national rights.	Deeply connecting to the concrete place, and the family and community in Palestine where one lives or comes from, despite the difficult circumstances there.	Demonstrating the connection to the homeland in the details of family and community life
Action/will	Making a conscious pro-active choice to be part of the national struggle. Asserting Palestinian identity and rights.	A resolution to go about ordinary life as normally as possible, in spite of the extraordinary circumstances.	Integrating a "Palestinian" assertiveness into the personal lifestyle and life plan.
Values	Serving the whole community, e.g. through teaching Palestinian rights and values of generosity, respect, and peace.	Caring for the family and valuing each individual member; respectful treatment of one another in the home, keeping humanity	Ensuring that each member is aware of their place in the wider Palestinian and world community and of their basic rights and values as human beings.
Aesthetics and joy	Preserving and developing the beauty of the material and immaterial Palestinian culture.	Showing the moral beauty of steadfastness. Taking opportunities to rejoice, e.g. at traditional celebrations.	Integrating the beauty and joy of Palestinian culture into family and community life.
Passage of time	Visualising a different future.	Cultivating patience.	Pessoptimism, 'militant patience', remaining alert to any opportunity for change.
Labour	Sumud economic strategies to keep people on the land, and making the occupation unsustainable.	Economic survival of the family.	Connecting between the survival of the family-community and national economic strategies.
Demography	Preserving the demographic presence in Palestine. Supporting the preservation of communities.	Staying as families and communities on the land, keeping an embodied connection to it, returning to it.	Social networking out of the home to preserve families and broader communities.
Struggle	Suffering and ongoing resistance against oppression and temptations to give in.	Struggling to cope with the many difficult aspects of daily life in Palestine.	Protecting home and land as part of the national struggle.
Communication and solidarity	Internationals supporting and empathizing with the cause of Palestine and sumud of Palestinians.	Sumud contagious in the family and community. Recognizing the "codes" of sumud.	Communicating sumud struggles: actions shared by locals and internationals. Internet activism about local struggles.

The most essential meanings of sumud can be found in the syntheses displayed by the last column: resistance as part of a personal lifestyle; the integration of one family's needs, labor, values, networks and interests into the community's struggle; the 'pessoptimist' mentality that is found in oppressed societies everywhere; the ability to find joy and beauty even in occasions of suffering and struggle; and communicating the local and the homely within the national struggle. In fact, a family's sumud system can be seen as a set of nested eco-circles that places individuals at the center and the family, extended family, community, and social polities and their ideologies on the outer rings. Sumud is never more clearly in evidence than when individual families are plunged into the broader national and international struggle, such as when villagers are forced to defend their livelihood from the encroaching wall, and are supported by locals as well as internationals.

This multi-layered definition of sumud makes it easier to see why sumud lends itself so well to narrative accounts. Popular narratives about 'people's journeys' often deal with the struggles of communities and nations. They may contain descriptions of courageous deeds that verge on the truly heroic. These deeds may take place in all landscapes of life. However, these breathtaking stories usually start (and often end) in a humble and homely environment, where the focus is on the faces of family members rather than on the grandiloquent speeches of politicians, and the thunder of shelling is muted by the sound of a child singing playground songs by the fire. These things are the bare bones of sumud. It is impossible to have sumud and not to have stories – and stories are something that everybody carries inside them. Sumud's power to direct, unify and reconcile is to be found here.

Supporting sumud

Any discussion of how sumud can be cultivated is essentially a discussion of how to support human life under adversity. When the word 'sumud' was becoming a common part of Palestinian discourse, back in the early 1980s (though the phenomenon to which it refers was

already there since the beginnings of the Zionist colonization of the land), people often spoke about it as a precursor to the development of broader political and economic strategies for Palestine's liberation. Its defensive, protective side was stressed. The 1970s saw the development of a social grassroots movement that aimed to help the most vulnerable people in Palestinian society – women, young people, peasants and Bedouins, those living in the shadow of the rapidly developing settlements. It was felt that these activities were the embodiment of sumud, and they would eventually equip people (especially those living in rural communities) with the tools they needed to remain on the land. Supporting these practical initiatives is one way of fostering sumud. Mustafa Bargouthi calls this "resistance development". Such a philosophy is founded on "the dual principles of supporting the people's power to withstand the hardships of the occupation and reducing dependency on foreign funding and foreign aid." The strategic aim of the Palestinian struggle, under this philosophy, must be to "make the costs of the Israeli occupation and its apartheid system so great as to be unsustainable".[11]

However, such strategies are only complete when they take into account sumud's community aspect, and how this can best be nurtured and protected. A Birzeit University-based mental health study conducted during the Second Intifada shows this clearly.[12] The researchers' primary aim was to assess the resilience of Palestinian youngsters whose lives were being damaged by conflict, but they were adamant that they needed to focus not just on resilience as an individual trait, but as a wider social phenomenon. "We also argue that the concept of resilience developed in predominantly Western settings ignores a local idiom of communal care and support." As Palestinian culture honours community, this is the first place to look for an understanding of how to foster and support sumud.

Awareness of one's place in social time is a crucial part of sumud. It is crucial to a community's heritage too, an important dimension of sumud. Sumud would not be possible without community memories, such as a grandfather's recollection of a traditional wedding dance, a

compilation of village recipes passed down from a great-great-aunt, or family stories that are still told in the dialect of a village that no longer stands. Many of these memories are at risk of being killed off by Israeli government policy towards Palestinians, which focuses aggressively on dismantling and splintering communities; globalisation, which can lead to cultural distinctiveness being dissolved in an amorphous global soup; or simply lack of interest.

In his recent book *Hidden Histories*[13], the social scientist Basem Ra'ad provides a critique of how imperial colonizers and adherents of certain theologies have distorted the history of the Levant in order to serve imperial goals, fit their religious beliefs, or both. He calls for a "full listing and annotating [of] all books, articles and archives related to Palestinian and regional heritage, as well as existing scholarship and documentation from all sources, in all languages. An inventory of ancient regional customs, popular medicine, farming practices, religious beliefs, superstitions and language expressions." The aim would be to see how these tessellate with their present-day equivalents. In this way the cultural continuity of Palestine would be re-established, and the values characteristic of that culture rediscovered.

Communication is one way of resurrecting and sustaining cultural and community memory, which brings us back to storytelling. Knowing and sharing stories of cultural identity, and of the origins of a people's connection to their land, identity and cause, are vital for bolstering people's spirit on their road to liberation. For a Palestinian, one of the most effective ways of supporting sumud is to tell his or her story. For an international supporter, sumud is fostered through listening.

The remainder of the book explores the different manifestations in more depth, illustrated by personal stories from Palestine (including those gathered from the Rachel's Tomb area of Bethlehem). The interview excerpts given in preceding chapters have shown that sumud can encompass anything that express will to go on living under duress, be that involvement in non-violent resistance or commitment to revitalising Palestine's lost cultural traditions. The book will

conclude with a discussion of how this sumud can be nurtured from an educational point of view, enabling young Palestinians to confront the injustices in their lives with joy and beauty in their hearts – a joy that stems from pride in their heritage and a profound awareness of who they are and what they have to give.

A glossary of sumud

As noted earlier, the historian Adnan Mousallem has called on people to take sumud seriously as an educational field. He mentioned several academic disciplines that relate to sumud, such as architecture, life in the diaspora, history, and psychology of sumud. Here is a list of related concepts that have emerged during our discussions so far, and that readers may want to bear in mind as they journey through the remaining chapters. They can also act as a springboard for independent further research.

Resilience, nowadays a central concept in the field of mental health, is closely linked to sumud. It stresses the dynamic aspect of veering back on course after being brought low by circumstance. It is common in Palestine to hear talk of Palestinians' resilience, their ability to come back from setbacks. As mentioned, there has lately been a movement towards a more social understanding of resilience which does not only focus on personality traits, but on the utility of social resources.[14]

Courage. During the last two decades a major movement in psychology – 'positive psychology' – has asserted that the field of mental health has previously focused far too much on trying to solve psychological deficiencies rather than on identifying people's strengths and encouraging them to draw on those as a way of facing life's problems. This new approach requires people to draw courage from the fact that they exist as they are, instead of trying to become somebody different in order to escape their demons. Research on courage has moved from the military battlefields to the family living room, looking at optimism, zest for life, and hope as crucial ingredients.[15]

Steadfastness. The Bible and the Qu'ran treat human steadfastness as a reflection of God's own loyalty to human beings, his creatures.

Consequently Palestinian sumud is veined with theological or spiritual concepts: faith, obedience, patience, compassion and love. More research is needed on sumud as an integral part of the major monotheistic religions practised in Palestine.[16]

Non-violence. This is the sumud-related concept that is most explicitly related to prolonged conflict, discrimination, occupation, and colonisation faced by Palestinians. It is a book in itself, as it is characterised by many different approaches and attitudes. It has been variously known as soul-force (one literal translation of Gandhi's *satyagraha*), relentless persistence (*firmeza permanente* in Spanish, sometimes used as an umbrella term for the tenacity exhibited by peasants struggling for their rights in Latin America), and *Zivilcourage* (a German term for a courageous action undertaken out of a sense of responsibility towards one's community). Sumud has parallels with all of these.[17]

A sense of connectedness with the land and the community. The African concept of *ubuntu* (freely translated: "I am because we are") is a concise expression of the popular Palestinian understanding of community sumud. Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish Nobel Laureate, wrote about this flesh-and-bone connection to the community in his book *Istanbul*, illustrating the concept of *huzun*, a melancholic and painful sense of affinity with a cultural and natural environment which is (at risk of) being lost.[18]

7. Home and hospitality

If the Palestinian home has become the heart of sumud, it is only partly because the home is where sumud's qualities are cultivated. There is another, sadder reason for the home's significance: this is simply the place where suffering has penetrated most deeply. Former Sabeel coordinator Nora Carmi saw the truth of this during her earlier work with Muslim women in a refugee camp near Ramallah[1].

> I learned the meaning of the word sumud in the refugee camps without realizing how important the teaching of the Muslim women with whom we worked was. In Jalazon camp where the YWCA runs a pre-school attended by most of the children of the camp, we worked with women whose children were killed, who saw their homes demolished, but who still could say, amidst all their deep suffering: We believe and trust in God. We will stand firm and resilient no matter what happens to us. Evil cannot last. We all know that there are families who did not just lose one child, but two or three, or whose children were thrown into prison. For me, Jalazon refugee camp has really become a symbol of sumud. While we were trying to give development skills to women, we ourselves were at the same time gaining so much from the women's own experiences and abilities, their strength and sharing. Sometimes you believe it is not possible to have that moral strength.

Traditional gender roles are dominant in Palestinian society, and the home is very much the woman's preserve. This has important implications for sumud. Nora Carmi gave the example of Jalazon to show not only how much development workers may learn from the refugee women, but also to what extent the cultivation of sumud rests with women in Palestinian society. One young man at an AEI family meeting once said, "My mother is my sumud." The truth of this statement, which was echoed by so many of the other attendees, is

illustrated powerfully by a story told by Claire Anastas. She describes the simple activity of hanging out the laundry with soldiers watching[2]:

> 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. I live in the Rachel's Tomb area in Bethlehem which is surrounded by a military base. The soldiers stayed and lived there and observed everywhere and everything around us.
>
> While I put up my laundry a soldier inside a watchtower, in front of my balcony, was shouting and yelling for quite some time. I felt sorry for him and asked myself who made him so angry and what let him shout and yell like that. I didn't understand that he in fact was yelling at me so I continued putting my laundry and didn't pay attention to him. Suddenly, the soldier opened a small window and started climbing up. He put out his gun to threaten me. At that moment I realized that the last fifteen minutes he had been shouting because of me. I tried to communicate with him to ask what was going on but he refused to speak. He just pointed his gun apparently to force me to go inside or to kill me. It was forbidden for me to stay on my own balcony. 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. I somehow felt satisfied to struggle with the soldier and finish my laundry.

Claire's older children remember this incident. Seeing their mother pitting her wits and her persistence against the might of the Israeli military was part of their formative experience. In Palestinian culture there is nothing more important than the family's well-being, and a

normal part of family life is learning how to care for one another in the face of the serious risks posed by the military occupation. This is part of every child's upbringing, and it presents a challenge to all parents. How to teach your children human dignity, self-confidence and perseverance under such demeaning and often impossible circumstances?

I am writing here as a parent who raised children during the Second Intifada and its aftermath. The experiences of me and my Palestinian wife Mary are not representative of those of Palestinian parents in general. Our life in a comfortable middle-class neighbourhood, and my Dutch passport, gave our children more protection from violence and intimidation than most other Bethlehem children enjoyed at that time. Nevertheless, our experiences do reveal some of the dilemmas that Palestinian parents and their children face.

At the beginning of the Intifada, in the last months of the year 2000, our three-year-old daughter Yara grasped that all the shooting and shelling going on around our house was not normal. At the same time she did not understand the real meaning of violence. Each evening when shelling started, Mary told her that it was going to 'rain' and that we therefore had to stay inside the house. At one point, while all our family, including Mary's sister and mother, were hiding from the army and the shelling in the kitchen, we told Yara that St George, a patron saint in the Bethlehem area, was riding on his horse over the clouds, and was producing his thunderous bangs. On another occasion, we made a little orchestra in the kitchen with Yara on her drums, Papa playing the guitar, and St George providing the background noise. After the Israeli army's violent house search at a neighbour, Mary, Yara and I visited it. Yara was shocked to see a house in which all furniture was in pieces. Next day we went to play in the garden, pretending to witness the house search and telling our story to an imaginary journalist. It was for Yara a way to cope with what she had seen.[3]

Art and imagination are powerful ways of instilling sumud in children. Samia, who is a teacher at Terra Sancta School in Bethlehem, shared a story from the time of the Bethlehem invasion. For forty days,

soldiers locked her family in one room and took over the house. Seven people were trapped in one room, including Samia's sick grandmother and her two children. The home became a prison. In order to keep her children's minds away from the soldiers and the shooting, Samia got them to draw on the walls and encouraged them to sing songs, assuring them that the soldiers would leave soon and that this was their home no matter what.

Antoinette Kinesevich, who lives near Aida camp in Bethlehem, was a music teacher[4]:

> When I was 17, I bought an accordion. It was with me to let the children be happy, to change the situation for them. During the uprising, when nobody could go out, I opened my home to the children. And I played the accordion for them. They were singing: "The world is beautiful. Let us be happy. Let us love each other. Let us have peace here." Here at home it was scary outside when there were shootings. It happened that I played the accordion with the children on the veranda so as not to keep them afraid because of the shootings over our house. I let them make drawings. When the shooting was heavy we used to go into the cellar of the house and then I also encouraged the children to draw and make music.

In a deadly environment, creative arts can help to keep children's connection with home and community alive, through providing them with some semblance of normality.

In Palestinian society it is still common –though to a somewhat lesser extent than in the past – for a family to take care of each other very deeply, both practically and emotionally. People often live as extended families. This creates a feeling of togetherness not only during feasts and celebrations, but at the breakfast table every day. It enables people to give one another support during times of crisis, such as family sickness or military curfew. The Palestinian home is a porous structure that is open to neighbours and friends; traditional village

homes before the Nakba were frequently built onto a courtyard that was open to several houses. In the West, the home is experienced as a kind of buffer; the family as a 'haven in a heartless world'. However, for Palestinian-Arab and Mediterranean families, the boundaries between home and wider community are more fluid. This makes the home an ideal place to learn about the value of sumud, and to connect with people who display extraordinary sumud. Meanwhile, the openness of the home makes it easier for visitors (including foreigners) to enter the bloodstream of Palestinian daily life very rapidly, becoming well acquainted with its traditions of hospitality and the culture of sumud.

Bayti baytak: "My house is your house"

The sharing of food is an important part of Palestinian hospitality, and a profound symbol – Palestinians seek to nourish whoever sets foot in the house. But another kind of nourishment is offered in the form of stories. The Palestinian pedagogue Mounir Fahsheh once told me that the most significant learning experience in his life was the customary sharing of the day's stories during the late afternoons and evenings at home, an activity that was open to anyone passing.[5]

Once I went with my three-year old son Tamer to explore the gardens in the neighborhood around our home. The little journey somehow became quite an adventure, because in this country you often have areas between gardens that are not clearly cultivated and therefore have the appearance of a wilderness. On the slope that we followed, earth terraces divided the land into several elongated steps, forming a giant staircase. The edges of the steps were marked by little walls made up of irregularly shaped stones. Our neighbour (neighbours are people living in a circle of some hundred meters around one's home) saw us appearing from his roof and invited us to come down. Tamer and I carefully climbed the path and were subsequently invited to share the neighbour's delicacies: looz (almonds, now bitter-fresh), and ka'ak and ma'mul (the sweets distributed during feast days). Tamer explored the garden, while the neighbour and I shared our stories of the day, drinking half-sweet black Arabic coffee, the smell of

which mingled with the fresh air warmed up by the morning sun. It is impossible to think back to our story-sharing without being aware of the hills that surrounded us, the heritage that Tamer was exploring.

Creating a hospitable home and shared social space is a vocation in life for many Palestinians. Many peasant women in the surrounding countryside of Bethlehem live an incredibly difficult life, but still the ultimate challenge of sumud for them is to keep the doors open. Here is the story of a woman from Al-Walaja, to the west of Bethlehem, who provides hospitality to many visitors both from inside the village and from outside (including the women of the Sumud Story House). Hind's words were recorded by the American volunteer and scholar Jane Toby, a testament to the priorities she has identified in a life pockmarked with hardship:

> Today I live with my family in Walaja village. It isn't really our village. We named it after our original village that we had to leave behind [in 1948, during the Nakba]. We can still see our village on the hillside across from us, but we aren't allowed to go there. The Israelis live there now. Most of our family live in Jordan. Some live in other places like Beit Jala, Dheisheh Camp and Aida Camp. Some of our family live in America. My son Taha was taken to prison when he was thirteen. When we visited him, he could only talk to us from behind thick glass. When he was in prison, he built a miniature replica of the Al Aqsa Mosque. He dreams of praying there one day, though the Israelis won't give Palestinian men a permit to pray there till they are over fifty. My son Mustafa is a farmer. This winter he was carrying firewood home to us. The Israeli soldiers stopped him and made him stand out in the rain till nightfall. They took his donkey and told him they were taking his donkey to prison. I like to sew and embroider designs on dresses. I sew by hand. I make bread [shraak] every day for my family. I keep the dough under the covers so that it will rise well. I hope people will visit me so I can offer them warm bread, olive oil, and sage tea.[6]

The Nativity story

Hospitality can even be found in Bethlehem's name. The word 'beit' in 'Bethlehem' does not just mean 'house' as a building structure but refers to house as a 'living stone,' a hospitable place, a life-giving symbol of fertility and fruitfulness, of meat (the meaning of Bethlehem in Arabic) or bread (in Hebrew). Both the Arabic and Hebrew meanings of the name take on special significance in the light of Jesus' birth there, as he is regarded by Christians as both the bread of life and the spotless lamb of sacrifice.

Once it happened that students from a school in the Bethlehem area took part in a nativity scene. The student who played the inn-keeper opened the door for the Holy Family, but then deviated from the script, spontaneously saying "tfadlu" (come in) to the visitors rather than refusing entry. The Arab hospitality script overrode the Biblical script. When you open the door in Palestine and elsewhere in the Arab world it is an ingrained habit to immediately invite friend or stranger to come in. It is part of the natural, ingrained sumud.

Julia Dabdoub, the deceased founder of the old Bethlehem House, a small but interesting museum near Nativity Square, once confided that she could not believe in the interpretation of the Bible story that has Bethlehemites refusing shelter to the Holy Family – especially as Mary and Joseph were in search of family members, with the wife pregnant, and both of them tired after a long journey. She said: "Could it not be that Mary gave birth not in an inhospitable stable in the wilderness, but in a grotto under the house, since many Bethlehem houses are built over a grotto? Was it not possible that there was no 'inn', but that the visitors were brought into a normal family house, and were taken down, away from the crowded family meeting place on the first floor, to a cave where, as in a stable, the house animals were kept and where it was warm and quiet?"[7]

She contacted a Benedictine father, who said that her interpretation was quite possible. In fact, Luke's *katalima* in the Greek translation does not mean 'inn' – a Western interpretation – but rather 'dwelling place.' The Old Bethlehem House now shows its visitors a

grotto under a normal house with a wooden manger in the middle, to underscore the point.

Coming home

The sense of cosy togetherness that dominates a traditional Palestinian home forms a paradoxical juxtaposition with the grim reality of the occupation. Too many homes have the air of a prison. Learning how to feel at home in spite of the occupation takes sumud, and it is an act of resistance – many of the occupation's policies are explicitly designed to alienate Palestinians from their home and strip them of their ease. Hania Bitar is the director of the Palestinian NGO Pyalara, which aims to encourage the use of media amongst Palestinian youth. Once I asked her whether travelling away from home brought her a sense of freedom.

> As a Jerusalemite, as a representative of a youth organization, and as a journalist, I usually have the opportunity to travel. And we do our best to provide travel opportunities for our young people. But it's funny: If I am in another country – for example, Holland, Germany, or the United States – and I am enjoying whatever those countries give, believe me, I don't feel relieved or relaxed until I reach Kalandia checkpoint. Only then am I back home [laughs].[8]

Jizelle, a teacher from Beit Jala who works at the Freres School in Bethlehem, tells about her experience of leaving and coming home. Her story takes us right into the centre of paradox:

> I remember the days when I went to Europe. In Holland I travelled by train. You can go from one city to another without a passport and, after some hours, I discovered that I was in Belgium. Wow! Nobody asked for my passport. I was free! The journey back home was my biggest problem. When you return, you find the opposite. You find checkpoints, you find yourself stuck in cultural issues, you can't move, you can't do anything. I was really frustrated and depressed during the first weeks after I returned. It was almost as if I had never lived here before. I asked myself: "Did I really used to live in this situation?" All I wanted was to leave again.
>
> But then, all of a sudden, after I had been home for three weeks and had filled my days with the dozens of things that one has to do after traveling, I actually felt attracted to being here – as though there were a magnet that was pulling me to stay or reminding me of my attachment to this land. I don't know exactly what it is. After all, you can only scratch the surface of your life. You don't know what lies beneath the surface. But sometimes, for a brief moment, there is a feeling that captures you. If you were to ask me the reason, I wouldn't be able to tell you. At first you think that there's nothing to do here, and you can't bear your life any longer. There are dozens of problems that fill your head, and then, all of a sudden, something comes like this [snaps her finger]; maybe it is the smile of a friend, or a word from an old woman, or a cup of coffee with your relatives, or your relatives coming to help you. Maybe it is our family life, maybe it's our friends. I can't describe precisely why I want to stay here. It's just an irresistible desire. It's strange, but that's the reality.[9]

After the trip, Jizelle says that she was completely at ease with her friends and family. She was reacclimatised to 'our normal prison life [laughs].'

Makram al Arja has a restaurant on top of Beit Jala, with marvellous views. Not for nothing is the top of Beit Jala called the 'Everest'. During the Second Intifada it was very difficult for Makram to do any work at all, and he opened his hotel and restaurant to Beit Jala families who had lost their homes. While most of his brothers and sisters decided to leave the country, Makram remained. Rania Murra and Sytske van Bruggen interviewed him.[10] He had been offered several

million dollars by Jewish settlers in exchange for his land, who wanted to use it for expanding the Har Gilo settlement. He refused. Nowadays, the situation of the Everest remains difficult. The settlement Har Gilo is nearby, and there is an Israeli military post close the restaurant's turnoff. The wall is being built. Many Israeli soldiers are hanging around. It lies in 'area B', under Israeli military control. Palestinians are hesitant to go there. But Makram sees it as part of his vocation to be on this special spot and open doors to people, and now he hosts meetings for both Palestinians and Israelis. "Even though I live in a difficult situation, I am happy that the Everest is a place where Palestinians and Israelis can meet. I never think about leaving my place! In this way, I show my sumud to the Israelis and the whole world."

In a book published by AEI, the journalist and activist Greg Wilkinson told the story of Hibba, a Palestinian woman whose house was demolished. When asked what she would tell Israelis visiting her, she said, "If you did not destroy my home, I could give you tea."[11] Faced with imminent and terrible loss, hospitality was uppermost in her mind. In the spirit of Hemingway, Makram's and Hibba's sumud is truly grace under pressure.

Sumud tourism

Along with many other peace and justice organisations in the area, some of which specialise in tourism, AEI-Open Windows facilitates home visits for international tourists. We call this 'sumud tourism'.[12] A hotel stay can feel artificial, but sumud tourism brings about authentic contact, allowing visitors to taste Palestinian family life and to experience the culture through immersion. It enables visitors to understand sumud and to carry it away with them.

To enable real entry into family life the visit should not be too short. Short visits run the risk of becoming tokenistic, and tokenism perpetuates stereotypes rather than dismantling them. Visitors need to experience family life in all its fullness, sharing in the minutiae of day-to-day life. Many everyday Palestinian concerns will be very familiar to outsiders, such as how to celebrate a birth, the best way to

dress a cut, and how to persuade a struggling student to sit down to his homework. Sharing these mundane aspects of daily living paves the way for the sharing of more intimate and painful aspects of life in Palestine, which international visitors typically only see through the media. Now they are about to become participants in the story instead of mere observers, and in telling that story when they leave, they nurture sumud. The home is a story, and as such an ongoing learning experience, Freire would say.

8. The land and the heritage

To what shall I liken me?
To little birds in their nest.
If the father and mother do not bring them food, they die of hunger.
Thus is my soul without You, Lord; it does not have its nourishment, it cannot live!
To what shall I liken me!
To the little grain of wheat cast into the earth. If the dew falls not, if the sun does not warm it, the grain molds.
But if You give your dew and your sun, the little grain will be refreshed and warmed; it will take root and will produce a beautiful plant with many grains.
To what shall I liken me, Lord?
To a rose that is cut and left to dry up in the hand. It loses its perfume; but if it remains on the rosebush, it is always fresh and beautiful and keeps all its perfume.
Keep me Lord, to give me life in You.
To what shall I liken You, Lord?
To the dove that feeds its little ones, to a tender mother who nourishes her little babe.

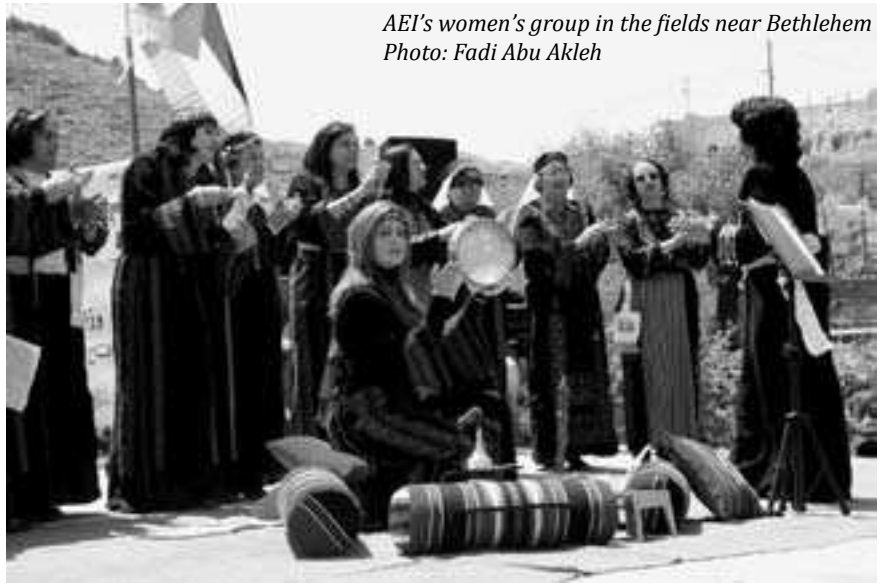
Maryam Baouardy, a 19th century nun from the Galilean village of Ibilin, who travelled to India and France, and finally established the Carmelite monastery in Bethlehem.[1]

To be connected to the home is also to be connected to the land. Going on *rihlaat* (journeys), culminating in a special picnic, is – or used to be – a familiar leisure activity in Palestinian households. This sense of connection with the land has inspired many poems, some explicitly

religious in focus (as with Maryam's), and others deeply personal in other ways. The musician Tania Tamari Nasir, writing about her youth in the Ramallah area, once walked through the Palestinian hills as a celebration of the renewal of life in springtime:

> From one spot to another we ran, stopping from time to time to munch on wild herbs like the tangy, vivid green, bushy stalks of fennel or the tiny, tender, piquant, gray-green leaves of thyme. We gathered sage and chamomile to take home with us to add to our tea on cold winter nights and we would compare our bouquets: who has the largest, most beautiful one? Which has the rarest of flowers, the most colorful? Then, having rested, we would resume our flower picking, unable to resist the beckoning of a purple iris in the distance. Upwards we moved, guided by the flowers. We climbed the rocky fences and the naturally terraced fields, scratching hands and knees, hair flying, shoes muddied, clothes torn and dishevelled. Unawares, we reached the summit, and there we stopped, breathing in the purity of light and the effervescent freshness of the magic of the Palestinian spring. Alone, like a bird on top of a giant cypress we scanned the horizon, rejoicing in our closeness to earth and sky, embracing our harvest of flowers, celebrating the resurrection and the renewal of life.[2]

Nasir's experience is reminiscent of an old custom that was once dear to the residents of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour. Occasionally Jerusalemites would participate as well. They would go into the hills en masse for a long picnic. Everybody in Beit Jala went to the Maghrour, the countryside to the west of the city; or to Sharafeh, further in the direction of Jerusalem. All the people in Beit Jala had land in the countryside, or rented some. The landowners were joined by labourers, neighbours, friends, and other visitors. Aida Kattan, a retired teacher of Beit Jala, describes such picnics as they happened fifty years ago:



AEI's women's group in the fields near Bethlehem
Photo: Fadi Abu Akleh

The Nuzha was not a picnic of a day. It went on for several months. People came in April or May and stayed, with breaks, in the countryside until September - from the time of Easter to the Feast of the Cross [September 14]. Some people remained even until October, when the olive harvest takes place and there is a lot of work. But in that season they went back home in the evening because in October the weather is colder. I remember it very well, I was a small child. By going to the countryside people wanted to take care of their fruits and vegetables. The countryside was open, there was space and fresh air. It was pleasant to stay there. In case people had work in the town during the day, they would come in the afternoon to the countryside…

Storytellers told stories about persons called Abu Issa, Abu Hanna, stories from long ago, folk stories. People did not know how to read and write. They memorized the story. When somebody talked, the children learned those stories by heart.

> After a year or two the stories were told further to each other. Remember - fifty, sixty years ago few people went to school. The stories were derived from the history of Arab literature; they were real stories. About Abu Zeid al-Hillali or Harb al-Bissous, and similar ones. Somebody stood up and started telling the story. Or somebody was asked to come forewords: "Ya Flaam…" [Oh people…]. The stories were told by men. The women told stories for the smaller ones, the children, about the ghoule [witch] for instance, or about animals. That happened earlier in the evening. I remember that there were older men who performed poems, sometimes accompanied by the rababeh [kind of violin with one snare]. These were also memorized. Such poems were like stories.
>
> People stayed up after dinner from about eight until midnight. All people. They slept in little 'castles' that were built from stones and rocks. Beds and mattresses were brought into them. There were maybe also caves in which they slept or they slept on roofs, or under big trees. They even made little huts of branches of trees, as in the Jewish Sukkot feast.[3]

Mitri Raheb, pastor at the Lutheran church in Bethlehem, has similar things to say about the role of story-telling in the ancient Palestinian culture of the land, and makes a connection to the religions of the region:

> Story-telling was an important, meaningful aspect of Palestinian peasant life. In fact, many of the old Christian and Jewish feasts are nothing but old Palestinian Canaanite feasts. For instance, the Thanksgiving feast which we have today in the Protestant churches and elsewhere is actually a Canaanite feast. During the Canaanite period the peasants used to go out to their field where they had small towers from which they watched their olives or grapes during harvest time. They would live there for weeks. Imagine a valley with perhaps a hundred families and a hundred watch towers. During the evening, after a day of hard work, all these families and their children would come together, having a bonfire and Arabic coffee. Then the elderly people would start telling stories and singing folk songs. These celebrations had a religious meaning. In this way the idea of Thanksgiving came into being.
>
> Story-telling was an important Palestinian practice even during pre-Jewish and pre-Islamic times. The Old Testament and the four Gospels are nothing but narratives. Those narratives didn't come from heaven but were transmitted from one generation to the next long before they were written down. Some parts of the Bible, like Deuteronomy, suggest that when your child asks you about your identity, you would answer by telling a story about your ancestor, for instance Abraham; that he was Aramaic, came from Ur, and so on. People did not respond to such a question in an analytic way like now. Narratives were very much alive; they stayed from the beginning till the end as they were.[4]

But today this culture of narrative and the stories it keeps alive are at serious risk. The former governor of the Bethlehem area, Salah Ta'amari, once told me that for many young people the environment, the Palestinian land, has become too abstract for them. The bare earth, the wildernesses between the houses with their trees, rocks, and grass, the thoughtfully designed buildings, their drama and stories – none of these things hold much meaning for them. Some young people are prepared to die for the land, as a symbol, Ta'amari said, but would not care about throwing litter on it because they do not experience the land itself, the earth.

At the AEI we talked about how to revive that connection with the earth amongst the youth. We felt that their sumud would suffer without it. Teachers wanted to have the students going into the environment, to touch, feel, and smell it; to hear the stories of the people; to bring the places alive. This was not easy. For one thing,

many present-day youngsters in Palestine are not used to walking, and they see it as a chore. Closely examining things, making notes, and interviewing people require skills that they haven't learned. In many cases, the only meaning they assign to their environment is whether it is 'fun' or 'boring', and this decision is made after a cursory glance at a place. How is it possible to make this environment alive for kids? In other words, to bring them face to face with a meaningful cultural identity? That was the sumud question we faced during fieldtrips into the countryside.

Artas: stories of heritage

Artas is a beautiful village located on the slope of a hill and inhabited by some five thousand Muslim Palestinians. It was the destination of several of AEI's heritage fieldtrips. In their own way, many foreign anthropologists and missionaries also appreciated the cultural significance and value of this little place south of Bethlehem, decades ago. There have been approximately ten books written about Artas, among them four anthropological monographs by Hilma Granqvist, now out of print.[5] A priest once collected proverbs from the peasants of the village, feeling that the sayings closely resembled quotations from the Song of Songs, the biblical canticle legendarily ascribed to King Suleiman.[6] Opposite the village is a monastery named Hortus Conclusus. The church is owned by an Italian order of nuns who commemorate the valley as the 'closed Garden' and 'sealed-off spring' of the Song of Songs (4:12). The closed garden perhaps refers to the idea of the forbidden Garden of Eden, or Paradise; some commentators see it as a reference to Mary's virginity. Artas is steeped in the stories of three great faith traditions.

Once I had a conversation with Musa Sanad of Artas, who passed away in 2005. He started a folklore revival in the village. As we looked down on Artas from the hill's summit, he told me that the land is so beautiful that it must have been here, on this very spot, that King Suleiman wrote his Song of Songs. Mahmoud Darwish, the famous Palestinian poet who died in 2008, once acknowledged that his poetry

has been influenced by the Song of Songs, one of the world's greatest love poems.[7] He spoke about how this poetry is a product of the meeting of civilisations. Darwish considered himself as a depository for all the cultures and cultural works that had emerged in the Holy Land, including the Bible. When he wrote his own book of Genesis, he added, he would do so in the form of a dialogue between the cultures that have succeeded each other in the land of Palestine. The holy texts are the propriety of all humanity, and the eastern Mediterranean is the birthplace and the infancy garden of many great human civilisations, he said. Fittingly, the book with interviews in which this is written is called *Palestine as Metaphor*.

In a way, sumud is also about bringing out this deep longing for the paradise-like garden of culture that is now hidden from view behind a maze of walls and checkpoints. The garden is the perfect place for an intimate and joyful encounter between peoples, as we see in the beautiful imagery of the Song of Solomon. Darwish's words resonated with Musa Sanad, for whom the stories of Artas had a local colour but a universal significance.

Back to the sumud question: how do you make such an unbelievably rich heritage accessible to Palestinian teenagers, knowing that you have to compete with computer games and TV programmes, with Star Academy or the popular songs of Lebanese Nancy Ajram and British Lady Gaga, and considering that you have to take into account the short attention span of present-day youth and children?

The Arts have a special role to play in bringing young people in touch with their heritage. But looking at static objects – architecture, costumes, traditional artefacts – is clearly not enough. This is a problem for many of the traditional Palestinian folklore museums, including the Artas Folklore Centre. Some of the active arts are helping. Music and traditional dance (dabkah) are able to bring young people to a newfound appreciation of their heritage, especially when these activities take place in the villages where the songs have been sung for centuries, and where the audience is always keen to participate. This creates a warm and lively atmosphere, a real sense of involvement,

a feeling of flow. The Palestinian-British singer Reem Kelani calls it duende[8], the moment that people find themselves in the centre of the music and everything that the music represents, a moment during which life, spirit, and also pain and death become connected. She became inspired by Palestinian rhythms by witnessing women at a village wedding:

> "But at that village wedding, I thought, 'Gosh, this is good'. These women were not crying, they were not feeling sorry for themselves, they were not the image of a Palestinian woman crying at the grave of her son that you see on the news. They were quite modestly dressed but they were sensuous, flirtatious - mother earth. I'm in love with them. I call them the big mammas."[9]

In his book *Soul and Soil*, the Scottish theologian Alistair McKintosh terms this 'the soul of place'.[10] Australian photographer James Prineas, founder of the heritage site www.palestine-family.net, once tried to catch that same soul during a performance of the Artas folklore dabkeh group in a series of photos. He later named them 'Spirit of Sumud'.[11]

During the Second Intifada, youths from the AEI performed open-air musical plays in front of the Artas monastery. We kept the decibels low so as not to alarm the nuns in the monastery – nor the soldiers in the tanks, who were a few hundreds of metres away, watching us. The musical plays were good, but still not sufficient. What was missing was that other artistic spark, imagination. You need to capture the children's imagination in order to bring the past and the heritage alive. To understand the heritage you have to see the people who lived and still live there in front of your very eyes, in their humanity and vulnerability and strength.

During the 1990s, with the help of the PNA's Directorate of Archeology, a drama was developed in Artas in which youths re-enacted the villagers' hospitality to the anthropologist Hilma Granqvist during the 1920s.[12] Students played out the encounter in the open air. The play

was based on the assumption that the Holy Land is a place of encounter between strangers who can become real neighbours, hospitable to each other. Like the home, the land is a shared social space, with hosts, neighbours and visitors. Doing drama helped to create that feeling of surprise, the sudden understanding that you can always learn new things about people and events that you thought you knew. Since then, AEI has been developing many open-air plays, tableaux, music recitals, and dances, most of which take place in a rural setting. Like the home, the land can be an inviting space for story-telling. Through this use of the imagination, sumud grows stronger and the land is brought alive to the people who will inherit it.

9. Communicating sumud to the world

One of the greatest hardships faced by Palestinians over the years of dispossession and conflict has been lack of media access and denial of a voice. They have not been given what Edward Said called 'permission to narrate'.[1] In the research I conducted on the representation of Palestinians in Western popular literature, the Palestinian characters – not just the designated 'terrorists' – were typically free-floating, rootless, without any apparent meaningful connection to the other characters populating the stories. As a plot device, this intensified the threat that they stood for. Rather than being settled in family and community life, they were pictured as themselves posing a threat to that rooted way of life. The reader could not easily relate to them and their story. The Palestinian voices in those bestsellers were not capable of telling stories.[2] They underwent agonies in self-absorbed inner monologues, made threats, resorted to overly formal political speeches when speaking to others, used dry jargon, and so on – there was no living dialogue of the sort that might be found in a Palestinian household.

In popular TV soaps, family life sets the scene for good characters to emerge as good: they are able to display all their best qualities. Conversely, disconnecting characters from their community, family, and heritage is a powerful way of discrediting their values, certainly in media renditions. When this is done, viewers are prevented from entering the characters' stories through the familiar window that family and community life provides. When Palestinians tell their stories, they are aware that there is a subgenre of literature (thrillers and war stories) that presents them in this light, and they know that they may automatically be shelved with their paper portrayals unless their words strike chords within the listener.

Narrating is an art. In fact, there is a long history of Palestinian sumud arts, the primary examples being painting and visual design. Palestinian painters have turned national pride and pain into an

aesthetic form. Sumud has been expressed – sometimes even overused[3] – on canvas, on paper, and now on the wall. There is an enduring image of a Palestinian woman with the Dome of the Rock and the distinctive Jerusalem skyline in the curve of her cloak, and another of an olive tree with its roots deep in the land and branches reaching out to the sky. These are recurring motifs in Palestinian popular art. Part of the educational challenge posed by sumud is to awaken the imagination, so that young samadin learn to convey their steadfastness in sensitive and creative ways that testify both to their sense of community and their own unique personalities. Ultimately, these flights of imagination – different for each person – always lead home:

> On the trunk of an olive tree
> I shall carve my story and the chapters of my tragedy,
> I shall carve my sighs
> On my grove and on the tombs of my dead...I shall carve the number of each deed
> Of our usurped land
> The location of my village and its boundaries.
> The demolished houses of its peoples,
> My uprooted trees...And to remember it all,
> I shall continue to carve
> All the chapters of my tragedy,
> And all the stages of the disaster,
> From the beginning
> To end,
> On the olive tree
> In the courtyard
> Of the house.[4]

Thus the poem of Tawfiq Zayyad, a poet and mayor of Nazareth, and a major figure in what is called the sumud stage of Palestinian poetry and literature.

Palestinian Israelis (people who lived through the Nakba without becoming refugees, and remain in what is now Israel; sometimes called '48 Palestinians) have made many significant contributions to the literature of sumud. This literary movement in fact originated with them during the times, until 1966, that they themselves lived under military government. Sumud is still a key word in the struggle of the Palestinian Israelis to retain their identity in a state which wants to define itself "Jewish" while 20% of its inhabitants are Palestinians. In the final chapter of Dr Hatim Kanaaneh's recent book about his work as a doctor in Galilee, there is a homage to an ancient olive tree in which, according to one reviewer, 'the past is linked to future in the implicit assumption that Palestinian sumud (steadfastness) will triumph'[5]:

> This gnarled behemoth, with its two-meter wide, beautifully sculpted trunk and over ten square meters of exposed root system saw it all. I can prove my belonging to this piece of the earth's crust through it; its roots are my surrogate roots. And they are taking hold in my land that I inherited from my father, who inherited it from his father, who…

Publishing an autobiography is not something that every Palestinian can or wants to do. Diary-writing, blogging, video-making, or using social media are equally valuable and effective ways of sharing stories. However, even these methods are not always easy to encourage among the new generations of Palestine, not even among tech-savvy Bethlehemites. In AEI's experience, the problem does not lie with a lack of technical or artistic ability amongst the youth, or even with a lack of enthusiasm. The issue is that many young people fail to recognise the extraordinariness in their family and community histories. They feel as though they have nothing special to tell, because 'everybody already knows it'.

AEI teachers and youth workers urged the young people to 'discover what you know'. They wanted them to look at their reality as

though they saw it for the first time, to create a sense of fresh wonder and appreciation for people's resilience and their beauty. Of course, fresh anger was also awakened in the face of the occupation's multitude of injustices. But that was accompanied by a renewal in hope, as the youth saw what it meant for them to resist.

At the Bethlehem St Joseph school, guided by the teacher Susan Atallah, students wrote diaries in English during the Second Intifada.[6] Next they turned their diaries into a play script, and subsequently developed, with the help of professionals, a theatre performance that combined dance, music, and drama. Telling their ordinary stories about life under curfew helped them to step back from the situation and communicate their basic human message from a fresh perspective. This was their resistance.

A democratic concept

Diaries convey the rhythm of ordinary life. They are not vehicles for polemic or politically charged rhetoric. As such, they can be more powerful than either of those things. Many diaries depicting life against the odds – such as various published diaries from the time of the prolonged curfews in the West Bank, 2002-2003[7] – convey not only an understandable rage but also a tragicomic appreciation for the absurd. The diaries present a reality in which everything that was normal becomes abnormal, and vice versa. Going to school, finding work, traveling outside town, all tend to become personal or family 'projects' requiring strategic planning, uncommon imagination, and enormous endurance.

Because of the absurd circumstances, sumud stories may elicit a liberating laugh – such as in Suad Amiry's diary *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law*, which started life as a set of e-mails written to friends abroad as Suad struggled to cope with the dual hazards of curfew and a mother-in-law. "I ended up with two occupations: one inside the house, and one outside, and to tell you the truth I don't know which one was more difficult." Although there are certain prototypical stories of Palestinian sumud – like the man or woman standing in front of

the bulldozer and refusing to go away, or the family rebuilding their 'illegal' home for the fourth time, replanting uprooted olive trees – the most salient and educational feature of sumud is simply that it can be expressed in innumerable ways. It is thoroughly democratic in scope, allowing everybody to participate in its creation and maintenance. *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law* reveals this in a wickedly clever and humorous way.

Given the absurd reality, the diaries sometimes remind the reader of a broader literary genre centring on the (seemingly) naïve and bumbling hero who manages, often in funny ways, to preserve humanity while living in a terribly dehumanising situation. Examples are the 'good'soldier Schweyk, the creation of the Czech writer Jaroslav Hasek[8]; or, in the Palestinian context, the character of Saeed in Emile Habibi's *Pessoptimist*.[9] Palestinians may face many challenges in their lives, but even these afford some bittersweet happiness: the sense of exhilaration after having tricked a soldier at a checkpoint, the psychological nourishment drawn from the family gathering. The stories of such experiences have a typically Palestinian feel.

It is no coincidence that humour is the lynchpin of this genre. Samadin sometimes feel the need to laugh at the grimly bizarre aspects of their lives, and sometimes they poke fun at their own selves. Humour creates light-heartedness in an unbearable situation. Hania Bitar calls it the 'unbearable lightness of being'[10], borrowing the famous literary phrase. This feeling is part of a communicative code amongst people sharing similar experiences. Once Edward Said wrote in a travel reflection that Palestinians have a code of 'internal' communication that can only be picked up on by other Palestinians.[11] The publication of Palestinian diaries enables outsiders to understand the experiences that form the basis of the code, giving them the ability to learn about Palestine from the inside out.

Diary-writing demands honesty and self-awareness from the writer, and these are core characteristics of sumud. Truth is essential if samadin are to retain their focus and inner clarity. A diary can show ambiguities and doubts; it is not about showcasing yourself for

the world. There is beauty in this honesty, as Abdelfatah Abou Srour comments:

> Al Rowwad uses the concept of beautiful resistance: we are human beings, and we have this beauty and humanity in us. We should use the beauty in our humanity; using theatre, using arts, standing behind the camera instead of always standing in front of it, to tell our story from our own point of view, creating our own images. Al-Rowwad's project 'Images for Life' expressed exactly this philosophy: that we should tell our own stories, without diplomacy, without trying to please the others. The others have to listen to what we have to say. They can agree or not agree – that's their problem. But we have to get this out of us. Our children have to get this out of them.[12]

Art and the wall

It is time to return to the Sumud Story House. Here we once discussed non-violent ways to draw world attention to the caged existence of schoolchildren in Palestine. The bird was suggested as a symbol of education. Birds take one's spirit to distant horizons. "Speak, bird, speak again,"[13] family members used to exclaim during the long winter nights in the countryside when they wanted their mother or uncle to continue telling folk stories. The brainstorming students added more natural elements: air, seeds, flowers, sun – 'that's all what we need' for a non-violent action. We decided that we would fly kites and balloons close to the wall, and sing our songs there and practise our dances. All this was advocacy.

By reclaiming the space next to the wall and celebrating life there, the relationship between Palestinians and the wall is defined as one of sharp contrast. Among other things, the Sumud Story House organized a piano concert and a nativity tableau under the military watchtower; a summer festival next to the wall; and a musical performance that saw orchestras and choirs being placed on rooftops on both sides of the wall. Here, sumud was evident in the contrast

between the participants' beauty of spirit and the wall's grim ugliness; their human frailty and the military's metallic might; their gratitude in living and the army's arrogance in taking; their voices raised in song and the wall's crushing grip on the throat; their devotion to life and the wall's predilection for death.

Dima, an architect who lives just opposite the wall, summed up her reasons for supporting these cultural events in an interview by Nina Koevoets:

> I think that to live your daily life and come to your work is already a way of resistance. We have to continue to live, which a lot of us are doing of course, and to tell the world. (...) The Israelis basically want us to stop life, so any sign of life that we give is great, I think. It doesn't have to be political. You can organize a concert, or another cultural activity. These activities make people want to stay here, as it enables them to do and see something else than daily troubles. I think it is good for the mind and spirit. There are many things happening (...). Our existence is in danger; we are disappearing… But by these activities we can show the outside world that we exist and that we continue our lives. We have to reach the world and the world has to reach us.[14]

Get close enough to the military watchtower, and you will discover that the lower half has been papered with children's drawings. Several rainy seasons have passed since the AEI children taped their depictions of Palestinian life to the foot of the tower, and still the colours have not run.

10. The sumud of resistance

An activist involved in non-violent resistance once told me that while sumud and resistance are both vital, they are not the same thing and must not be confused. Sumud is about keeping people on the land; resistance is about fighting the occupation of that land. He preferred not to blur the two concepts because otherwise anybody in Palestine could claim to be 'resisting' the occupation simply by running a household and going about his daily life. Sumud affords a kind of quiet anonymity. Real resistance, which involves directly challenging the occupation instead of trying to get on with life in spite of it, has difficult and often painful consequences for those who resist.

Although the point is legitimate, divorcing sumud from resistance entirely can present problems of its own, causing people to dismiss sumud as something second-rate, a lifestyle that does not require the conscious courage or creativity of active resistance. Yet sumud is about much more than basic survival. If a peasant family continues to farm their land in spite of demolition threats and the ever encroaching wall, their resistance is obvious in every seed planted and every olive harvested.

> Cramming chemistry in class
> blowing vases of Hebron glass
> making the best *makloubeh* you've ever had
> dancing at a wedding
> figuring out how to wash the bedding
> when we've had no water all summer –
> this is our resistance, our persistence,
> our ordinary living.
>
> – *excerpted from the poem 'Life is Good Again' by Victoria Biggs.*

It cannot be denied that the samadin who inspired this poem, South

Hebron villagers whose communities lie under demolition orders and the constant threat of settler violence, are not waging active resistance against the occupation. They are on the front line, and resistance has become a way of life for them.

However, there can be real tension between sumud and resistance, even though they are so closely bound together. We previously mentioned how difficult it is for Palestinians to apply for permits to move around – not just because of the practical problems in getting such a permit, but because even asking for one is to submit to the regime. Although no one could blame them for getting caught up in the occupation's machinery, which is so frightening in its efficiency, people help to keep it running by queuing at the checkpoint and showing papers, having their handprints scanned and submitting to body searches. Yet pulling yourself out of bed at two o'clock in the morning in order to queue for hours requires a great deal of sumud, and the people who do this day in and day out in order to put food on the family table command respect.

There is a way to resolve this tension between sumud and resistance, and that is through refusing to play by the rules at the checkpoint – refusing to talk when acknowledged by the soldiers, for example, or embracing other subtle forms of non-cooperation. On one occasion at Machsom 300, soldiers ordered a child to strip publicly; her mother refused, and remained steadfast in that refusal until the soldiers capitulated and allowed the search to take place privately. Although the victory may appear pitiful, this was also a way of fighting back; that mother brought her rights into a place that tells her she has no rights. When it is used like this, sumud becomes a characteristic of resistance.

The sumud of resistance is visible beyond the checkpoint. It is present whenever a new school is built without a permit in Area C, an action that issues a direct challenge to the occupation and at the same time reinforces the message at sumud's heart: that life must be kept dignified against all odds. In the village of Nabi Samuel, the army keeps demolishing the toilet attached to the one-room school.

"The children are determined to fight for their bathroom," the village mukhtar (headman) explained. "This is what our struggle has become: the battle for this village is a bathroom."[1] The most basic activities of daily life can require great courage and resourcefulness, and it is in activities such as these that sumud and resistance are brought together.

Resistance becomes even stronger when all these individual stories are woven together as part of a Palestinian tapestry (and, one would be inclined to add with the Arab Spring, as part of an Arab tapestry of change). Bearing witness in the face of an occupation that seeks to deny your existence, never mind your voice, is itself an act of resistance; and sumud is never clearer than when Palestinians tell their stories. There is a reason why the AEI centre in Bethlehem is called the Sumud Story House. As we argue throughout this book, sumud and storytelling belong together. This creative response to the occupation emphasises Palestinians' humanity and makes resistance beautiful.

Jean Zaru offers a story as the very definition of sumud. In the Jalazon refugee camp north of Ramallah, during a curfew, the military severed the supply of gas and electricity. The women made a communal fire, which was kept burning by old shoes and rags when the wood had run out. When the soldiers came to put the fire out and throw away the dough, the women resisted, shouting: "Go tell your leaders no matter what you do, no matter what kind of restrictions you impose upon us, we will not allow our children to starve. We will find a way to bake bread, and all your efforts to destroy our spirits are not going to succeed. What God has created, no one can destroy!" Zaru adds, "What a testimony! This is sumud."[2]

Can it be said that Palestinian women have brought the sumud of resistance alive in a particular way, perhaps because (generally male) soldiers feel more embarrassed to use unrestrained violence against women? Or could it be that the women bring out the soldier' own sense of humanity? The following stories mostly come from the time of the First Intifada:

> Israeli soldiers were beating up a man in a crowded street. From all sides people rushed to the scene. Suddenly a woman with a baby came forward to the man and shouted: "Why is it always you who makes problems and goes to demonstrations! I am fed up! Take this baby of yours! I don't want to see you ever again." She laid the baby in the hands of the man, and ran away. The soldiers left the scene in confusion. When quiet came, the man returned the baby to the woman. They had never seen each other before.[3]
>
> One time, there were troubles in the streets of the Old City of Nablus. One young man ran into a nearby house, which had only a young woman and her daughter living in it. The girl was sleeping in her own room. The woman closed the door behind the young man, but the soldiers were chasing him and started pounding at the door. She said to the young man, "Go into that room, change your clothes, put on this pair of pyjamas and get in bed next to my daughter. Please hurry up and don't hesitate." The young man did what the woman told him to do, while she went and opened the door for the soldiers. They said, "We believe that a young man just ran into the house, where is he?" She answered, "There is no one in the house except me and my daughter and her husband. You can go in and see for yourselves." They went in and there was no one except a man sleeping with his wife. So they left.[4]

During the first Intifada the Beit Sahouris had quite a lot of verbal confrontations with soldiers. At the time they organized a tax revolt under the banner of the American civil war: "No taxation without representation." They refused to pay taxes and after some weeks, the Israeli army passed by their houses, one by one, to confiscate household items. Some of the Beit Sahouri women told the soldiers after their house was robbed empty, "Please stay, you forgot something, you cannot leave without my curtains." It even happened that the soldiers

in an effort to break the strike begged people to pay just one shekel so that they would get back their TV or fridge. All refused.[5]

A decade later, in March 2001, a woman from Beit Sahour whose house had been so thoroughly damaged during the Intifada that her family had to move somewhere else, returned to her almost empty house to pick up some household items that she had not carried away before. While standing in the kitchen, she suddenly saw the high boots of two Israeli soldiers passing the window. Her house was in Area A, which the Israeli army is supposedly forbidden to enter. She told them, "So you have come here to see what you have done?" One soldier answered, "The *Tanzim* [Palestinian militants] did it." "The *Tanzim* have such weapons that they can destroy a house?" she queried. There was no answer. The other soldier, who was friendlier, took his wallet out and offered the woman fifty shekels, intended as a kind of 'compensation'. She refused. Dignity is not for sale.[6]

In all these stories, the women take a role that is radically different from the one usually associated with Palestinian Arab women. In that sense they not only resist the violent force of the army but also the stereotypes imposed upon them. They embody morality, integrity and creativity in the face of military oppression, demonstrating the liberating powers of sumud.

The International Solidarity Movement

It is no coincidence that so many stories of sumud originate from Beit Sahour. Located to the east of Bethlehem and traditionally believed to have been the place where the shepherds grazed their flocks on the night of Christ's birth, the town has developed a reputation for its creative approach to non-violent resistance. During the First Intifada, the army reacted to the birth of a calf on a dairy farm by telling the farmer that if he did not kill the calf by morning, the whole farm would be demolished. The perplexed farmer was informed that 'these cows are a serious threat to the national security of the State of Israel'. Rather than killing the calf, he distributed the cows amongst sympathetic Beit Sahouris under cover of darkness, and organised an illegal milk round

to serve the townspeople. This remarkable story has become the subject of a recent animated documentary, 'Israel in Search of Cows: A Story of Cows and the Most Powerful Army in the Middle East'.[7] Other notable incidents include the tax revolt described above and the later establishment of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), which was founded with the help of the Beit Sahour-based Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement Between People.

ISM's founding acted as a stimulant on nonviolent activism in the area. It arranges for international activists to travel to Palestine and do practical solidarity work with people who live in areas that few internationals visit, such as Gaza and the Jordan Valley. The activists support Palestinians simply by sharing in daily life, their very presence a challenge to the system of segregation that has carved the Palestinian community into small and tightly controlled Bantustans. American cultural heroes such as Martin Luther King, Margaret Mead, and Robert Kennedy have been embraced by the ISM – its growth is arguably due to this ability to tap into other stories of oppression and triumph and bring them to life in Palestine. The organisation's spirit is best expressed through the words of Rachel Corrie, the young activist who was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer as she tried to prevent a house demolition in Rafah: "I am also discovering a degree of strength and of basic ability for humans to remain human in the direst of circumstances – which I also haven't seen before. I think the word is dignity."[8] It could also be called sumud.

The ISM's activities are determined by the needs of the Palestinian communities in which the activists serve. Farming, house-building in the wake of demolitions, and accompanying children to school in areas where settler violence is a problem are all key ISM activities. Most significant of all is the ISM's emphasis on giving testimony, through articles, social media, blogs, speeches – even simple e-mails home. The ISM is remarkably successful in capturing the 'here and now' of Palestinian daily life and in bringing that story to the public. In doing so, they not only subvert the popular perception of Israel as a modern David against a backward and intolerant Goliath,

but they shake up the old image of Palestinian terrorist plotting harm against Israeli civilian. The ISMers are unarmed and visible as civilians. They emerge as the protectors of everyday life, with the Israeli army set against them as people who target it. The personal backgrounds of the ISMers themselves often adds colour to this new and evolving plot; a significant percentage of them are Jewish. Others are people who have turned their backs on an easy middle-class lifestyle to travel to what Albert Aghazarian terms 'the cutting edge of humanity'.[9] The image of these people (who are usually young) putting themselves at risk and making personal sacrifices in order to better somebody else's life enhances the story's dramatic quality. It has the power to appeal to an audience that has previously been untouched by Palestinian issues. When handing out the Romero award to Yesh Gvul, an organisation of soldiers who refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories, American author Susan Sontag invoked that story and its power: "At the centre of our moral life and our moral imagination are the great models of resistance: the great stories of those who said 'No…. I will not be complicit.'[10]



Photo: James Prineas

The life of the black American author Alice Walker offers another example of the sumud of resistance at its most powerful. As she prepared to set sail for Gaza as part of the second freedom flotilla, an initiative that was launched by a group including ISMers (the founders of the Free Gaza Movement), she described how her Jewish husband had become active in the black struggle for civil rights in America. The childhood event that led him to join that fight had a profound influence on Alice's later activism for Palestine[11]:

> I once asked my best friend and husband during the era of segregation, who was as staunch a defender of black people's human rights as anyone I'd ever met: how did you find your

> way to us, to black people, who so needed you? What force shaped your response to the great injustice facing people of colour of that time?
> I thought he might say it was the speeches, the marches, the example of Martin Luther King Jr, or of others in the movement who exhibited impactful courage and grace. But no. Thinking back, he recounted an episode from his childhood that had led him, inevitably, to our struggle.
> He was a little boy on his way home from yeshiva, the Jewish school he attended after regular school let out. His mother, a bookkeeper, was still at work; he was alone. He was frequently harassed by older boys from regular school, and one day two of these boys snatched his yarmulke (skullcap), and, taunting him, ran off with it, eventually throwing it over a fence.Two black boys appeared, saw his tears, assessed the situation, and took off after the boys who had taken his yarmulke. Chasing the boys down and catching them, they made them climb the fence, retrieve and dust off the yarmulke, and place it respectfully back on his head.
> It is justice and respect that I want the world to dust off and put – without delay, and with tenderness – back on the head of the Palestinian child. It will be imperfect justice and respect because the injustice and disrespect have been so severe. But I believe we are right to try.

It is clear from Walker's testimony that the blockade-breaking mission, with all its attendant dangers, had sumud at its heart. She was inspired by the simplest and gentlest of actions. When she attempted to reach Gaza, she didn't go with medicines or construction materials or other supplies: she went with her husband's story, her own history, and a boatload of letters of support written by American activists to the people of Gaza. She described herself as the mailman.

During a previous visit to Gaza, made in the wake of Operation Cast Lead, she identified in people a personal awareness of struggle

that resonated with her own memories:

> Everyone you see has an awareness of struggle, of resistance, just as you do. The man driving the donkey cart. The woman selling vegetables. The young person arranging rugs on the sidewalk or flowers in a vase. When I lived in segregated Eatonton, Georgia I used to breathe normally only in my own neighborhood, only in the black section of town. Everywhere else was too dangerous. […]
> There is, finally, a sense of overwhelm, trying to bring comfort to someone whose sleeping child has been killed and buried, a few weeks ago, up to her neck in rubble; or a mother who has lost fifteen members of her family, all her children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, her husband. What does one say to people whose families came out of their shelled houses waving white flags of surrender only to be shot down anyway? To mothers whose children were, at this moment, playing in the white phosphorous laden rubble that, after 22 days of bombing, is everywhere in Gaza? White phosphorus, once on the skin, never stops burning. There is really nothing to say. Nothing to say to those who, back home in America, don't want to hear the news. Nothing to do, finally, but dance. […]
> And then, the rising that always comes from such dancing; the sense of joy, of unity, of solidarity and gratitude to be in the best place one could be on Earth; with sisters who have experienced the full measure of disaster and have the heart to rise above it. The feeling of love is immense. The ecstasy, sublime. I was conscious of exchanging and receiving Spirit in the dance. I also knew that this Spirit, which I have encountered in Mississippi, Georgia, the Congo, Cuba, Rwanda and Burma, among other places, this Spirit that knows how to dance in the face of disaster, will never be crushed. It is as timeless as the wind. We think it is only inside our bodies, but we also inhabit

> it. Even when we are unaware of its presence internally, it wears us like a cloak.[12]

Experiencing 'the full measure of disaster' and 'having the heart to rise above it' is a profound definition of sumud. Sumud does not run away from pain; it transcends it. Sometimes there is very little that international solidarity activists can do in practical terms, not when pitted against the might of the Israeli military and Civil Administration. The history and spirit of the ISM and related organisations, crystallised in Alice Walker's story of warm human love and solidarity, are a gentle reminder that when all else fails, we can always dance together on a shared earth.[13]

Resistance and its resonance

The West Bank village of Bil'in has become a symbol of popular resistance in Palestine. When the separation wall was constructed on village land, the villagers united with their international and Israeli supporters to mount a protest. Abdallah Abu Rahma, recently released after a year of imprisonment for his non-violent political activities, is one of the leaders of the struggle. In an interview given in 2006, he made it clear that this is not just a struggle for Bil'in's land, but a fight undertaken on behalf of all people facing oppression across Palestine:

> Our actions aim to expose the injustice of the Wall and the treatment of Palestinians. Last week we wore orange masks, the kinds worn by convicted persons before their execution. It was to tell the world what is happening in Gaza. When you destroy power stations, you are killing people. Last Friday we made a kind of soccer play with the adults holding a big ball on their shoulders and wearing T-shirts and flags of the various countries participating in the World Cup. On the other side of the field, some 20 children wore red-painted T-shirts that symbolized the occupation. The message: while everybody is watching football on TV, many Palestinian children are killed.

> Each time we bring a new element into our actions. We lock ourselves up in barrels, boxes, jails, cylinders, and cages. We put tape over our mouths, chain our hands, and even chain ourselves to the Wall.[14]

Activists in Bil'in laid down kitchen utensils, toys, and other everyday objects in front of the Israeli bulldozers to demonstrate how the building of the wall puts ordinary life in jeopardy. They also moved caravans onto land that was due to be swallowed up by the wall, and even built a house on there in the space of one night. These activities emphasised the connection between the home and the frontline of resistance. Here resistance brings out new stories that once again challenge the popular definition of the conflict: who is the oppressor, who is the victim; who is the civilian, who resists.

The Israeli activist Jeff Halper, founder of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, observes in an article, significantly titled "Sumud vs Apartheid," that this sumud is a powerful long-term asset for the Palestinians:

> Knowing that the conflict is too destabilizing for the global system to let fester, the Palestinians are saying: We will remain steadfast. Impose on us an apartheid system, blame us for the violence while ignoring Israeli state terror, pursue your programs of American empire or your self-righteous notion of a 'clash of civilizations' – we Palestinians will not submit. We will not cooperate. We will not play your rigged game. And in the end your power will be for naught. So costly will we make this conflict to Israel, the US and the international community that you will come to us to sue for peace. We will be ready for a just peace that respects the rights of all the peoples of the region, including the Israelis. But you will not beat us.[15]

Sumud's defiant quality may lead people to view sumud as a psychological facet of Palestinian nationalism. In reality it goes far

beyond the nationalist rhetoric of belonging or exclusivity, evoking the idea of a just peace to be shared by all. It aims to knit people together, irrespective of their ethnic or cultural identity. There is a powerful photograph of Palestinian villagers and their supporters trying to form a human chain to prevent bulldozers from tearing down a house. Their outstretched arms suggest defiance, but also welcome – they are simultaneously blocking the bulldozers and inviting onlookers to join their circle. Sumud's creative defiance has a revitalising effect: it encourages people from varying backgrounds to share their stories (especially if those stories have been repressed or denied) and to draw strength from one another's experiences, creating a strong foundation on which to base all kinds of peace and justice work. (Note that the word 'solidarity' is related to 'solidity', or firmness).

An example of sumud's versatility is the interest many Palestinians currently have in Turkey – both the present-day Turkish state and its Ottoman past. One aspect of the orientation towards Turkey – some call it a fashion – are the ongoing Turkish soap operas to which many Palestinians in the West Bank are glued. The series never fail to show the water of the Bosporus as background to the plot, evoking the dream of many Palestinians to see the sea. But there is also the policy of the modern Turkish state, which is attempting to become a powerful regional broker by integrating western and eastern cultures within a modern Islamic framework. Its change in policies towards Israel, also reflected in popular TV series, and the Turkish activists' support for the first Gaza flotilla, all play a role. The attachment to the city of Istanbul resembles the attachment some Palestinians feel for the lost image of Jerusalem as a multicultural city.

In his latest book about the travels of a distant family member during the first part of the twentieth century[16], Raja Shehadeh evokes a different, more tolerant Ottoman Empire than the one known from the genocides during and after the First World War. Although there is no need to idealise Turkey, it is possible to see that Turkish identity as revealed through modern politics, media and literature is helping to empower Palestinians in the reclamation of their own past.

Globalisation may be a threat to certain aspects of cultural identity, but it also provides opportunities to learn from other perspectives. This ability to go beyond boundaries is a particular quality of sumud, and one that American scholar Jane Toby focused on during the Sumud and the Wall conference in Bethlehem in 2010:

> Sumud surpasses the confines of the Wall. Sumud is an international movement. A movement that extends beyond Bethlehem, beyond Palestine to each one of us in all the countries represented here today. This gives me hope. What sparks that hope? What the women of Bethlehem, of Beit Sahour, of Beit Jala, of Aida Camp, of Al-Walaja village have told me sparks that hope. They have told me unequivocally and unanimously that: Despite the Wall that divides us, that separates Palestinians from Palestinians: "I like my place even though it's like a prison. Because I'm living with the people. We help each other, we take care of each other. We have so many troubles in our life, but because we care for each other, we love each other, we will continue." What is sumud? I have come to understand that sumud means caring.[17]

Victoria Biggs recognised this aspect of sumud very early on in her tenure with the AEI, during a lecture in 2011 given to the women's group by the feminist theologian Mary Grey. Mary spoke about the plight of Dalit women in India, formerly known as untouchables, and described the work she has done to alleviate their terrible difficulty in getting adequate clean water. "Her listeners were completely absorbed," Victoria wrote afterwards. "Hearing the ideas everybody shared in the discussion, I was moved by the sheer concern and love demonstrated by the Palestinian women: their physical movement might be restricted, but their compassion carries them out into the world and it stops for no checkpoints."

The courage and imagination of sumud do not exist in a void. Palestinian stories of resistance echo similar stories from other

countries. Comparing these stories gives birth to new insight, helps us to expand our knowledge of oppression and the other adverse conditions that we face, and makes us perpetually aware of our common humanity. Here is one such personal story.

When I was working in Amsterdam some twenty years ago, I used to pass the Anne Frank House daily. I would see lines of tourists snaking down the canal front and round the corner. At that time I didn't relate to Anne Frank much, even though her story is said to have become part of the Dutch psyche. As a young Jewish girl in the Second World War, Anne Frank and her family hid from their Nazi persecutors in an annexe at the back of an office building. She chronicled her life in hiding for two years, until she and the other occupants of what she called the Secret Annexe were finally discovered by the Nazis. She went to her death in Bergen-Belsen; her diary was left behind.

For me, her story only came alive when the diary project at St Joseph's School in Bethlehem started. Teenaged Palestinian girls who were no older than Anne was at the time of her murder learnt about Anne's diary, and also diaries from other painful contexts, such as the journal of eleven-year-old Zlata Filipovic (written in Sarajevo during the civil war in former Yugoslavia)[18] and that of a Native girl living in nineteenth-century America. The girls were encouraged to start keeping diaries themselves.

When they first read Anne Frank's story, they rolled their eyes, according to the teacher Susan Atallah. The Second World War and the occupation of Holland by the Germans were not a setting to which they easily could relate or desired to relate. But after a while they started to identify with Anne Frank, not in the least because they could understand Anne's predicament of being closed up in a room. After all, curfews are a familiar phenomenon in Palestine.

Some visitors to the school confided in me that they were not sure about the use of Anne Frank's diary by Palestinian youth. Could it not lead to the comparison of two incomparable situations, even to subtle forms of anti-Semitism? But the interest in Anne's diary grew. It was warm and genuine. Susan asked me to bring more copies of the

diary, in English. Able to move freely through the checkpoints with my Dutch passport, I brought a consignment of diaries from the Steimatsky bookshop in Jerusalem to Bethlehem. They were snapped up. Now it wasn't just the teenagers who were reading the diary, but their parents. Even from the distant Ta'amreh area to the east of Bethlehem, a parent was interested in reading Anne Frank's story.

Now it happened that one of the girls involved in the diary project lived in a house that was occupied by the Israeli army during the siege of the Nativity Church, in April 2002. This house oversaw Bab al-Deir (Nativity Square) in Bethlehem. The family was obliged to live in one room. They even had to get permission from the soldiers to go to the toilet located on the same floor. The girl, like her classmates, continued her diary-writing – indeed an act of sumud under such circumstances. At one point she went to the Israeli soldier in the corridor and asked him: "Do you know the story of Anne Frank?" "Of course," the soldier said, and added, "Do you want to read it?" "No," said the girl, "I've read it. But I want *you* to read it!"



Christmas actions in Bethlehem
Photos: Fadi Abu Akleh

11. Sumud: hope and vocation

Sumud represents agency and choice in the face of powerlessness. With their backs against the wall (literally), people make a conscious choice to keep on hoping. This hope involves both persevering with daily life and consciously refusing to allow oneself to become resigned to humiliation, oppression, and discrimination. Although these things are the norm for Palestinians, samadin never allow them to become normalised. Sumud may not be liberation itself, but it is still a profound achievement on both a personal and community level. It is important to realise that it is not just about specific activities – planting a tree or refusing a soldier's order. It is so tightly woven into the fabric of daily life that it has become a way of living. Some might even describe it as a vocation. Palestinian politician and intellectual Hanan Ashrawi describes it as a personal commitment to one's community and one's own humanity:

> I think what gives me hope is the commitment to the Palestinian people, their essential human being, the fact that I see how for no fault of their own, the Palestinian people have paid an enormous price for being born in that part of the world, for being unwitting victims of history. And in that kind of victimization, the human will and human spirit to endure ultimately has to triumph. And I've seen how despite all attempts, the Palestinians have not been defeated or broken, and it's that human spirit that gives me hope.[1]

It is a cliché to say that peace education is about hope. That description has been used so casually and carelessly as to become almost meaningless. Hope is not the same thing as optimism, but a hard-won and painful awareness that there is always, even in the most restrictive and oppressive situations, human will and the ability to make a free choice for good. Optimism comes and goes, but hope is a necessary part of steadfast living: it is the compass for the journey and the alpenstock

for the ascent. Here are some voices from the women of the Sumud Story House, which reveal more about sumud as a vocation and the hope at its heart. The women ask themselves profound questions such as, "What is my place in the world? What is the meaning of home and place? Who am I?" The responses are all shaped by their understanding of sumud, which they see as a personal duty.

Fayza, from Doha (south of Bethlehem), is a town councillor:

> I am steadfast, working hard inside my house, cooking, doing my homely daily tasks, taking care of both husband and children while at the same time working to earn a living. I also try to volunteer and participate in public activities, where women and family strengthen my sumud and enhance my capacities as a woman in the field of peace-building, as well as in Christian-Muslim living together, and in interreligious and intercultural communication skills.[2]

Sandra, from Bethlehem, has a son born with diabetes:

> Nasser's case obliged me to take him four times a day to the Caritas Hospital, sometimes walking under the rain, and even though there was a curfew. I was pregnant and I felt really depressed and tired. At the beginning I refused to give him the shots myself, I couldn't bear seeing him injected daily with all those shots. I thought for a while but then I took a decision that I had to be strong in order to support him. Since that day I started giving him the shots and kept encouraging him and giving him hope. Nasser is now twelve years old, in the seventh grade, an excellent student in his class and wants to study medicine. He is very active; he plays football in a team and lives his life normally as a twelve-year old boy. These days, he tests his sugar levels by himself and takes the shots four times a day. So my son is now strong as I taught and raised him up.[3]

Odette Sleiby conducts the AEI women's choir:

> As for me, I can't imagine myself to be apart from this Holy Land. Even my parents in the US are always encouraging and pushing me to join them in their freedom…But I wonder which freedom I'm looking for! My roots are in Bethlehem... and my bright future is just here in this Holy Land. I have my Palestinian ID, relatives, my house and my land where the olive trees have such strong roots that no one in the world can uproot them.[4]

Once I attended a school play in the village of Battir, to the south of Bethlehem. The play, organised by Sana' Abu Ghosh, followed the story of a young Palestinian man unhappy with his poverty-stricken life in Palestine: "I am eating only bread and olives, olives and bread." Against his mother's wish, he left the country and married a foreign woman. As he wanted to forget his Palestinian ties, he did not tell his wife that his mother was still alive. However, his wife wanted to see the village from where he came. Upon arrival, his mother recognized him and wanted to embrace him, but he avoided her. The story relentlessly showed that he could not escape his destiny or vocation: Israeli bullets critically injured him and when his mother was willing to give him her kidney and blood in order to save his life, he reconciled with her. He invited her to join him in the West, but his foreign wife told him, "No, we are going to stay here." And so it happened. At a time of great weakness, when her husband was critically ill, the wife discovered the meaning of sumud and let it guide her choice. During the play, Israeli military airplanes repeatedly broke the sound barrier overhead, bringing the play to life in a macabre way.[5]

Another example of a life-changing event which strengthened sumud, this one factual, occurred in the case of teacher Jizelle Salman. A sense of being privileged to be in the land, of sumud as both responsibility and vocation, is present throughout her account. Her final decision to stay in Palestine was influenced by a journey to Lebanon for a workshop. Let's read once again her encounter with the woman from Shatila.

[After this] I was able to say without hesitation, "I am so lucky to be in Palestine and Bethlehem." I went to the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. There I met a lady – she was in her late sixties maybe – and we were carrying flowers to take to the collective graveyard that commemorates the massacre [of Sabra and Shatila, in 1982, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon]. She asked: "Where are you from?" "I come from Bethlehem, Palestine," I replied; and she hugged me and kissed me. She even wanted to kiss my hand. She started to cry. She didn't want to leave me, and she said, "Please take me with you." There were about sixty of us there at the time. We had all come to visit, and we represented six Arab countries. And all of us were crying at that moment. Refugees have a strong desire to see their land. When I asked them: "Where are you from?" They replied, "from Safed," or "from Acca," and they even mentioned the names of Palestinian villages that I had never heard of.

When I came home and saw my family around me, I knew that I would remain here, despite the fact that life is very difficult and really a struggle. In fact, the struggle makes me stronger. I have been through a lot. If you have everything, a tiny problem becomes a big problem and you become frustrated by it. But if you face a lot, if you face a really tough experience, it makes you stronger, it gives you a challenge. So I said to myself, it's either me or life; life is not going to get the best of me. So now I can say that I am here because I have certain choices – better choices than many other people – and I must stay here in order to save my home, to save my life, and to encourage others. And that's what keeps me going – hope. I hope that I can be a catalyst for change. When you're young, you can do a lot to bring about change. Many foreigners stay here to live in solidarity with us; they give. So what about us Palestinians? Why don't we give? In fact, I believe that we give a lot. But we still have the energy to give more, to stay in our country and raise our children. We love our country and its people. We love our home.[6]

Jizelle Salman shows that experiences abroad can cause you to look at home differently. (She is a Palestinian with full residency rights, but the same is true for the refugees whom she met – as Edward Said once explained, the viewpoint from exile, while never comfortable, may open up different perspectives on the value of home.[7]) As we discussed before, sumud is not inward but outward-looking. It not only connects Palestinians with their land, home, identity, and cause; it also connects them with other identities and communities.

Learning more about other people, their histories, and their cultures is a way of learning more about the self. Travelling means suspending your routine and even leaving behind your own ideas and interests, which makes you receptive to stories that you might otherwise ignore or not register as that important. It is all about crossing borders, leaving home and roots, in order to find (even create) them anew, and to look at the familiar with fresh eyes. During encounters abroad, you may become more attentive to other people's identities, their life styles, and conditions of living. Through doing this, you find yourself looking at your own identity, as though in a mirror. You see more sharply who you are through the eyes of the others, which may enable you to discover your own true vocation. Once Edward Said wrote that he prefers travellers to sultans. Travellers move, mentally and physically, while sultans are stuck to their seats.[8] Raja Shehadeh captures this spirit in his description of the special walks that he used to go on, known as *sarha*, meaning 'to roam freely, at will, without restraint…A man going on a sarha wanders aimlessly, not restricted by time and place, going where his spirit takes him to nourish his soul and rejuvenate himself…Going on a sarha implies letting go. It's a drug-free high, Palestinian style.'[9]

Sumud, like hope, is a journey into the unknown – but each time it brings samadin back to their roots, with a renewed appreciation for what they are. Here is one final story about hope and vocation, again a sumud story with a dramatic event at its centre as well as a

homecoming experience. It is told by Sylvana, another AEI woman, and it contains an additional value: forgiveness.

> During one of the Intifada days, I, a young Palestinian woman, was trapped between two groups of Israeli soldiers and Palestinian stone throwers. Gas grenades were thrown and I had to close the windows of her car. I was four months pregnant. I felt about to suffocate but managed to go home. However, my pains increased and at night I was admitted to the hospital. Next day I had a miscarriage and saw my four-month-old baby boy dead. I was terribly depressed since it was the second miscarriage I suffered during the last three years.A week later I visited a medical doctor in Jerusalem for a check up. When 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.
>
> After this incident, I came to know and understand that I could only be myself: Sylvana, the steadfast woman, the samida – the patient, the one willing to sacrifice in spite of all the misfortunes that befell me. I decided to go ahead and renew my faith and sumud together with my husband, son, and three daughters.[10]

12. Sumud and education in Palestine

What can we learn from these stories, and what is sumud's significance for education? Its primary pedagogical value is that it involves stories of everyday life, the kind of story that any Palestinian is able to tell. The tellers may be children, adults, or elderly people, women or men, Diaspora Palestinians or those who remain in the homeland, Muslims or Christians. Israeli policies have deliberately sought to fracture Palestinian society, but sumud stories knit it together again and enable Palestinians to feel a sense of community, what theologian Mary Grey calls 'the epiphany of connection'.[1] Thanks to these stories, a Palestinian girl in Bethlehem can learn to appreciate her connection with an elderly woman in a Lebanese refugee camp, even though they may never meet face to face. The stories also give a voice to people who have often been stifled or marginalised in international conflict discourse.

Learning about sumud instils positive values in people. These values include preserving the harmony with land and nature through a balanced lifestyle and the use of 'conservationist' practices (which were known in Palestine's agricultural communities before the word became common). Other values involve nurturing age-old traditions, such as the renowned culture of hospitality; listening to elders and keeping community memories alive; and celebrating the beauty of the land and its people in a myriad of ways. Above all, it means valuing the unique history of the Holy Land, the birthplace and continued meeting-place of many cultures, civilisations and religions.

A second group of values relates to the challenges and dilemmas that Palestinians face continuously, and which makes the way of life inspired by the first group of values so difficult to keep up. These values are sparked by adversity, like fire from flint. They involve dignity, resilience, inner strength, a sense of humour in confronting the Kafkaesque absurdities of life under occupation, ability to stand your ground, a sense of justice and willingness to pursue it at a price, and – of course – the preservation of hope.

Both groups of values are bound together by the need for staying power. Having sumud means staying alert in time: not continuously 'blowing up' because of the frustrations but keeping an eye open for opportunities to make a change – a militant patience. It means staying one's ground in the literal and metaphorical sense: keeping connected with place and the natural and social environment, not leaving or forgetting about the people and the cause, but at the same time not succumbing to passivity or resignation.

Working within this ethical framework helps to unearth the core of Palestinian identity. It fosters moral character and leadership among Palestinian youth; learning about sumud teaches them about who they are. By asking themselves what it means to be a Palestinian, a question that faces samadin whenever they stand at the checkpoint and have to decide how to act, people may gain a sense of their purpose in life. A strong sense of identity and vocation makes one less liable to be overwhelmed by frustration and doubt, resulting in a hope that is not easily doused.

It also reduces the likelihood of being manipulated by others. This is all the more important in view of Palestinian history, in which the Palestinian cause has been manipulated not only by Palestine's explicit adversaries, but by many of those who purport to strive after peace or desire to solve the Palestinian question. In order to respond to this co-opting of their voices and their history, Palestinian youth need to be taught how to develop their self-awareness and to remain grounded in their own sense of identity and culture.

Important here are the efforts of local and international agencies and persons to bring a different image of Palestinians to a world that has only been given certain pictures by the mainstream media (usually involving rocket launchers and suicide bombs). An example is the work of UNRWA. Karen Abu Zayd, its previous commissioner-general, once remarked on the ability of peace education and Palestinian sumud to change popular perception of Palestinians as individuals:

There have been a lot of low points because there have been

so many crises since I started, but at the same time there are quite a lot of high points when you're working with Palestine refugees because they're, as we say, perhaps too resilient a people who keep coming back and demonstrate the quality of steadfastness…



Dutch educator Thom Geurts at an interreligious conference in Bethlehem
Photo: Jenny Baboun

[With the Universal Declaration for Human Rights marking its sixtieth anniversary] our message for this year was to ask people to take a look at that Declaration and see where the Palestinians fit into that, because if you look at the twenty-eight articles, not one of them really applies to Palestinians. And I think it's kind of a wake-up call for what's been happening to these people for sixty years…We would like to show the resilience of the Palestinians and the things they've been able to achieve despite being refugees and in exile, and without any human rights really for sixty years. It's been quite an achievement when you see how they've gotten their education, how popular they are around the world because they are so

talented and so hardworking and so well-educated.[2]

Self-discovery is intimately intertwined with the question of how Palestinian history and culture should be taught, and nowadays it is much discussed by Palestinian educators. This complex subject has been a huge challenge for Palestinian curriculum developers, academics, teachers, and students alike. Teachers have criticised the exclusion of politically controversial topics from the history of Palestine been eliminated from the curriculum, and condemned the methods of learning that have been applied over the past ten years. Parts of the curriculum are said to have led to shallow teaching and learning, placing too great an emphasis on rote learning rather than by the development of individual thought that is so crucial to self-awareness – and without awareness of the self, how can a child be made aware of his community history and culture?

Another problem concerns the amount of time that should be allocated to Palestine-specific education, especially when students have so many other demands on their time and interests that they want to pursue. Should students really be obliged to memorise an anthology of a thousand of the most important Palestinian stories, real and fictional ones, as once was suggested? And what is 'Palestinian' – even 'Arab – in an educational context? The meaning of national identity in an increasingly globalized world is a topical question, discussed in many countries across the world where people are having to question their roots and identity.

Earlier we suggested that sumud should not be considered as just a symbol of belonging to a particular community, a nationalist hallmark, but rather as a practice of searching for common humanity through creative activity – especially the sharing of stories. When defined like this, sumud could easily be adopted as an educational technique. Think of Palestinian folksongs on the veranda, stories told in the house, dances performed on the land, traditional wedding celebrations, political conferences and meetings. All these everyday things unite 'living, loving, and learning', as the educator Buscaglia put it[3], and consequently they all have real educational value. Sometimes

these are the only educational opportunities that a Palestinian may have. An oral history student of Susan Atallah's was once working on a project when the electricity went off, as often happens in Palestine. When you can no longer see to write, what else can you do but tell stories? At such a moment it can happen that a student suddenly becomes immersed in the stories of her grandpa to whom she had never listened before. She breathlessly listens to her grandpa now, so absorbed that in the end his old-time stories feel like her own.[4]

Some of the best places for learning in Palestine are at first sight the most hostile and unwelcoming. Albert Aghazarian once pointed out that while checkpoints might be 'factories of hate', they are also places where all those waiting are made equal, no matter whether they are students or professors, bricklayers or doctors, poor or wealthy, Muslim or Christian.[5] Despite their intimidating purpose, checkpoints can become places where stories are shared and people from very different families and communities grow closer together. Victoria Biggs saw this in action at Checkpoint 300 on the morning of Good Friday 2011, when the hall was jammed with Christians who wanted to be in Jerusalem for their holy day and Muslims who wanted to attend Friday prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque:

> We waited for hours. The soldiers were screaming. The loudspeakers jarred my head. Sometimes the turnstiles were locked for no reason that we could see. The queue stagnated. The crowd swelled. And just ahead of me was an elderly Muslim man, his *misbaha* (prayer beads) in hand. The *misbaha* was made of chunks of ruby-warm carnelian. Slowly he passed it through his fingers, bead by bead. Silently he prayed. He was not alone; looking around, I saw others doing the same. Reaching in my pocket, I brought out my own rosary and began to pray too. A Christian friend joined me, ending the recitation of Hail Marys with, "We pray for all those who are having to lay their dignity down, and we pray for the soldiers…" Behind us, I heard a young Muslim man from Hebron give the *ameen*.

As Victoria's experience showed, such story-sharing can involve visitors as well as locals. At Checkpoint 300, there is a separate lane for tourists, designed to minimise their discomfort and their waiting time. For any international visitor who prefers to stand in the packed queue that is simply marked 'Entry', the checkpoint can become a place of learning for them too, and a chance to see sumud at work in a bitterly inhospitable environment.

Given Palestine's mild climate it makes all the more sense to tell stories and perform plays in the open air, in traditional settings such as an old Palestinian courtyard. This has been encouraged by AEI's cultural tourism program. And when the Catholic patriarch Michel Sabbah made his call to turn checkpoints into prayer places, is that not also a plea for a human story of love and compassion to be narrated in what would otherwise be a deeply violent place? Qu'ranic chant and traditional Christian prayers form a quiet but powerful undercurrent to the crackling of the loudspeakers. Meanwhile, the desolated areas close to the wall are sometimes recreated as social spaces for festivals and other celebrations. The wall suggests divisiveness and death, but local Palestinians have turned it into a backdrop for their own creativity and hope. They have not brought it down physically, but they are still undermining its power.

Preserving the word is an important educational activity. Many people like to tell their stories of sumud and to have them recorded. They can be put in books, on the Internet, in films. These years, several schools in Palestine have encouraged diary writing and story sharing with students abroad[6]. Documenting stories in an accessible manner is an important practical aspect of reclaiming the national story. Inspiring Palestinian stories of daily life are innumerable but they are still spread out and fragmented; people are not aware of their existence. James Prineas' Palestine-Family.net is the home of one effort to collect and make accessible sumud stories. The 'I Am Palestine' project is another.[7]

Other creative examples of story-sharing are video screenings on the Wall, and the TEDxRamallah event in summer 2011, which used the Internet to make the lively cultural and political conference

available to people all over the world.[8] In future years, the use of new media may even be considered a distinguishing characteristic of sumud in action – a modern way of sharing stories, with the modest aim of changing the world. With this in mind, Paolo Freire's definition of education can just as easily be applied to sumud: "Education ... [is] the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."[9]

NOTES

1. Soul of the Palestinian people

(1) Paolo Freire, The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation, South Hadley MA, 1985. According to Wikipedia, a generative theme is a single word or phrase that Freire would use to start a problem-posing dialogue as part of his critical literacy method. Freire would choose a theme very relevant to the lives of the people with whom he was working. This theme would be the first word learned and be the launching off point for various questions concerning the implications of the theme within the community.

(2) Raja Shehadeh, The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank, London, 1982.

(3) For a summary of this research, references, and implications for the concept of sumud, see Toine van Teeffelen 2004 "(Ex)communicating Palestine: From Bestselling Terrorist Fiction to Real-Life Personal Accounts," Studies in the Novel (University of North Texas), Volume 36, no. 3 (Fall 2004, Special issue on "Terror/ism in the postmodern novel").

(4) Azam Ali's video is at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTMRIXgKU9o. For James Prineas' photos, see: www.sumud.net

(5) Rashid Khalidi, interview by Akiva Eldar, Haaretz, December 4, 2008.

2. A land of testing

(1) Susan Atallah, A Land of Testing, in: When abnormal becomes normal, when might becomes right: Scenes from Palestinian life during the Al-Aqsa Intifadah. Culture and Palestine Series, Arab Educational Institute, Bethlehem, Palestine, 2001.

(2) Claire Anastas, interview by Victoria Biggs, 10 July 2011.

(3) Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion, July 9, 2004, paragraph 163.

(4) Interview with Melvina (first name), by Nina Koevoets, June 2008, see under the section History/Oral History on www.palestine-family.net.

(5) Michael and Linda Costa Halabi, interview by Sytske van Bruggen, February 2009, see under section History/Oral History on www.palestine-family.net.

(6) For more information about the conference, see: http://www.palestine-family.net/index.php?nav=8-18&cid=17&did=7955&pageflip=1 (section community resources/archive-research)

(7) See the audio-slide show "The Wall at Rachel's Tomb," made by Leo B. Gorman and Nikki Thanos for AEI-Open Windows, at www.aeicenter.org

(8) Claire Anastas, We are imprisoned, buried alive in a tomb, 2005, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, http://electronicintifada.net/content/writing-wall-claire-anastas/5820#.Tr5v2lZCrcM

(9) Melvina, see note 4, above.

3. Sumud at the checkpoint

(1) See the interview with her by Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/expelled-west-bank-2010-04-28

(2) Maha Abu Dayyeh, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 2005, http://electronicintifada.net/content/writing-wall-maha-abu-dayyeh/5433#.Tr5uxlZCrcM

(3) Samira Badran, *This Week in Palestine*, ed. 114, October 2007.

(4) Jizelle Salman, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 2004, http://electronicintifada.net/content/writing-wall-jizelle-salman/5363#.Tr5wPFZCrcM

4. The power of community story

(1) Amalia and Aaron Barnea, Mine Enemy. Grove Publication, 1988.

(2) John Le Carré, The Little Drummer Girl. New York, 1983.

(3) Dina Abdel Hamid, foreword by John Le Carré, Duet for Freedom. London 1988.

(4) All following quotes from interview by Toine van Teeffelen, February 2010: http://www.spiritofsumud.ps/gal-Salah.shtml

5. A living and human ideal

(1) Interview by Toine van Teeffelen, January 2010, http://www.spiritofsumud.ps/gal-19.shtml

(2) Idem, February 2010, http://www.spiritofsumud.ps/gal-

Abdelfatah.shtml

(3) Idem, August 2009, http://www.spiritofsumud.ps/gal-12.shtml

(4) Idem, March 2010, http://www.spiritofsumud.ps/gal-NoraCarmi.shtml

(5) Idem, August 2009, http://www.spiritofsumud.ps/gal-5.shtml

6. Mapping sumud's meanings

(1) Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum, 2007.

(2) Mustafa Barghouthi, "… and he stood steadfast before Goliath." *This Week in Palestine*, February 2009.

(3) Jean Zaru, Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2008.

(4) Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment. Pluto, London, 2011.

(5) Rima Hammami, Sustaining Life in a Geography of Adversity, *Prince Claus Fund Journal*, no. 13, The Hague, 2006.

(6) Mitri Raheb, Culture as the Art to Breathe, August 17, 2006, www.mitriraheb.org

(7) Mary C. Grey, The Advent of Peace: A Gospel Journey to Christmas, SPCK, 2010. "Taking the long breath of sumud means sharing God's own steadfastness, compassion and vulnerability… " (87).

(8) Emile Habibi, The Secret Life of Saeed: The pessoptimist. St Martin's Press, 1985.

(9) In: Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917-1961 edited by Carlos Baker, Scribner Classics, 2003, 199-201.

(10) Tao Te Ching, "One of courage, with audacity, will die. One of courage, but gentle, spares death. From these two kinds of courage arise harm and benefit." See: Wikipedia, under "courage."

(11) Mustafa Barghouthi, What we Palestinians need, 14 August 2009, weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/960/op13.htm

(12) Viet Nguyen-Gillham , Rita Giacaman, Ghada Naser and Will Boyce, "Normalising the abnormal: Palestinian youth and the contradictions of resilience in protracted conflict." *Health & Social Care in the Community*, Vol. 16, No. 3. (May 2008), pp. 291-298.

(13) Basem L. Ra'ad, Hidden Histories: Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean. Pluto Press, London, 2010.

(14) See for the connection between the mental health concept of resilience and sumud: Toine van Teeffelen, Hania Bitar and Saleem Habash, "Resilience in the Palestinian Occupied Territories," in Michael Ungar (ed.) Handbook for Working with Children and Youth: Pathways to Resilience Across Cultures and Contexts, Sage 2005. In a leaflet of the Resilience Project, Michael Unger, a leading Canadian researcher on resilience and founder of the Resilience Research Centre states: "Most commonly, the term resilience has come to mean an individual's ability to overcome adversity and continue his or her normal development. A more comprehensive and progressive definition of resilience has emerged from our work internationally. 'Resilience is both an individual's capacity to navigate to health resources and a condition of the individual's family, community and culture to provide those resources in culturally meaningful ways.' This

definition shifts our understanding of resilience from an individual concept, popular with western-trained researchers and human services providers, to a more relational understanding of well-being."

(15) In 2004, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman's book, Character Strengths and Virtues (American Psychological Foundation), proposed a classification of positive traits. The Virtues in Action (VIA) Institute classifies human strengths in six categories: Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. Courage is broken down into four main subcategories: Bravery, Perseverance, Honesty, and Zest. Zest or vitality is defined as, "feeling alive, being full of zest, and displaying enthusiasm for any and all activities". Zest is a character strength in the midst of trying circumstances. Grit is perseverance and passion toward long-term goals.

(16) In: The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works is Dead (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), liberation theologian Elsa Tamez says that James calls the poor to a very militant kind of patience, by employing the Greek military terms for patience, hypomone and makrothymia. Some meanings of sumud are close to such understandings of patience.

(17) For "relentless persistence," see Phil McManus and Gerald Schlabach, eds, Relentless Persistence: Nonviolent Action in Latin America. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Pub., 1991.

(18) Mario Hendricks from South Africa, an ecumenical accompanier for "peace in Palestine and Israel", a project of the World Council of Churches, compares the strong communal identity of the village of Yanoun in the West

Bank, to ubuntu (EAPPI, 27-6, 2005). For huzun, see Orhan Pamuk, Istanbul: Memories and the City, Faber and Faber, London, 2005.

7. Home and hospitality

(1) Nora Carmi, March 2010, see http://www.spiritofsumud.ps/gal-NoraCarmi.shtml

(2) Claire Anastas: Hanging out laundry during the second Intifada, see www.palestine-family.net under the history/letters and diaries section." Karen Armstrong speaks about the motherly role in Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life (Knopf, 2010): "Maternal love can be heartbreaking as well as fulfilling; it requires stamina, fortitude and a strong degree of selflessness." (16).

(3) Toine van Teeffelen, Bethlehem Diary, Living under siege and occupation 2000-2002, Bethlehem 2002

(4) See www.palestine-family.net, under "people/life stories," "Antoinette: Listen to the children's song."

(5) Interview with Mounir Fasheh by Toine van Teeffelen in: Al-Mawrid, Palestine and Education 1997, Ramallah.

(6) Hend, from al-Wallaja, interview by Jane Toby, 2008. See www.palestine-family.net, under people/life stories.

(7) Julia Dabdoub, 2006, interviewed by Toine van Teeffelen, *Jerusalem Times,* 17 October, 1997.

(8) Hania Bitar, interviewed by Toine van Teeffelen, December 2004, see: http://electronicintifada.net/content/writing-wall-hania-batar/5390#.TsFV2FZCrcM

(9) Jizelle Salman, interviewed by Toine van Teeffelen, December 2004, in http://electronicintifada.net/content/

writing-wall-jizelle-salman/5363#.TsFWdFZCrcM

(10) Makram al Arja, interviewed by Rania Murra and Sytske van Bruggen, July 2009, see www.palestine-family.net, under history/oral history.

(11) Greg Wilkinson, If you did not destroy my home: Palestinians respond to Israeli occupation. Arab Educational Institute, Culture and Palestine series, Bethlehem, 2011.

(12) Toine van Teeffelen, "Communicating Palestine via Tourism: The Strategic Role of the Palestinian Family," in: Sharif Kanaana (ed) The Role and the Future of the Palestinian Family. Papers Presented at the Fourth International Conference Held at the Centre for the Study of Palestinian Society and Heritage, Society of Inash al-Usra, El-Bireh, 20-22/3/2009.

8. The land and the heritage

(1) In: Amedee Brunot, "Mariam the Little Arab, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified." Oregon, 1990.

(2) From: Tania Tamari Nasir and Mary Jabaji Tamari, Spring is Here, Embroidered Flowers of the Palestinian Spring published by Turbo Design and the Institute for Jerusalem Studies, 2002.

(3) Aida Kattan, Nuzha, the Summer Picnic. See www.palestine-family.net, under Culture/Customs and Remedies.

(4) Mitri Raheb, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, *The Jerusalem Times*, October 17, 1997.

(5) See the entry Hilma Granqvist in Wikipedia for a list of her monographies.

(6) Stephan H. Stephan, "Modern Palestinian Parallels to the Song of Songs," *Journal of Palestine Oriental Society*, Vol. 2 (1922) 199-278.

(7) Mahmoud Darwich, La Palestine comme Metaphore, Editions Actes Sud, Sindbad, 1997.

(8) See the *Guardian* interview with Rima Kilani in: 'My narrative is that I exist', September 19 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk:80/music/2008/sep/19/reemkelani.ramadannights

(9) Idem.

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(2) Fayza Al Ayan, October 2009, see www.palestine-family.net, under history/letters and diaries.

(3) Sandra Nasser, September 2009, see www.palestine-family.net, under people/life stories.

(4) Odette Sleiby, September 2009, see www.palestine-family.net, under people/life stories.

(5) Personal observation of play at UNRWA school for girls in Battir, May 14-21, 2001.

(6) Jizelle Salman, interviewed by Toine van Teeffelen, December 2004, in http://electronicintifada.net/content/writing-wall-jizelle-salman/5363#.TsFWdFZCrcM

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(10) Sylvana Giacaman, September 2009, see www.palestine-family.net, under history/letters and diaries.

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(6) The Sharing Stories project between IKV Pax Christi (formerly IKV) and the Arab Educational Institute. The Dutch side was educationally supported by educator-theologian Thom Geurts, who worked together with AEI over the years to brainstorm about sumud, especially as a key term for inter-religious education in Palestine. See his website: www.thomgeurts.nl

(7) IamPalestine.com.

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(9) Paolo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum, 2007.

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Victoria Biggs is a British writer. She volunteered at the Sumud Story House for six months in 2011, absorbing the women's stories as part of her research for a book. In the United Kingdom she works extensively with people with mental health problems and teenagers with profound intellectual disabilities. She now draws on her understanding of sumud to help her in this work. She is currently completing a MA degree in Jewish Studies and planning her return to Palestine.

The Sumud Story House near the Wall around Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem is a project of AEI to support Palestinian women's groups and create life in an area deadened by the Wall. The women groups convening there are trained and involved in communication, cultural, leadership and advocacy activities. For information: *rmurra@aeicenter.org*

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