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The Role of the Arts Toward Healing Trauma and Building Resilience in the Palestinian Community

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THE ROLE OF THE ARTS TOWARD HEALING TRAUMA AND BUILDING
RESILIENCE
IN THE PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY

A DISSERTATION

Submitted by

YOUSEF AL-AJARMA

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Ph.D. in Expressive Therapies Program

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following people:

- The memory of my brother, Ali AlAjarma.
- My parents, who have been my role-model for hard work, persistence and personal sacrifices, and who emphasized the importance of education, and who instilled in me the inspiration to set high goals and the confidence to achieve them.
- My brothers and sisters who have been my emotional anchors through my entire life.
- My wife, Nedaa Taweel, who has been proud and supportive of my work and who has shared the many uncertainties, challenges and sacrifices for completing this dissertation.
- To my daughter, Nour and to my son, Deyah.

The Role of the Arts Toward Healing Trauma and Building Resilience in the Palestinian Community

Yousef Al-Ajarma

This study has investigated the sources of resilience in a sample of Palestinians who experienced the first Intifada and are now studying in the United States. The study found that family and community support, the pursuit of an education, and participation in artistic activities all contribute to individual resilience among Palestinians. In addition, political awareness and activity are another source of resilience, because they help individuals living under the Occupation to find meaning in their life and make sense of their struggles.

Currently, young people in Palestine are at risk of developing psychological trauma from exposure to the violence of the second Intifada. Building resilience in children and youths can prevent them from falling victim to trauma. Expressive arts therapy is an effective tool in treating victims of psychological trauma, and it can help build resilience and protect individuals who may be vulnerable to trauma.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For the past 61 years, the Palestinian and the Israeli people have been living in a contentious environment of unpredictability, instability, and animosity punctuated by periods of sporadic violence against each other. Amid the continuing violence between the two groups, many lives have been ruined, and families have been torn apart by death, deprivation, and incarceration within the Palestinian community. Many schools and educational institutions have been closed or destroyed, affecting the lives of three generations of Palestinians.

Conflict between Zionist settlers and native Palestinians dates back to the 1920s, when Britain administered what was then Palestine, but the roots of the present situation lie in 1947. In that year, the United Nations proposed to replace the British Mandate with a partition plan that would create a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine. The Arabs rejected the plan, and the sporadic fighting between settlers and natives that began in late 1947 turned to open warfare after the Jews founded the State of Israel in May 1948. By 1949 the Israeli army controlled much of Palestine, with the exception of the West Bank, which became under Jordanian control. During the fighting, over 700,000 Palestinians left their homes and fled to neighboring countries, where they settled in refugee camps. Other displaced persons settled in refugee camps within Palestine, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Palestinians remember this defeat and dispersion as an-Nakba, “the catastrophe.”

In 1967, the “Six-Day War” started between the Arab countries and Israel after the Israelis had expanded their territory to include the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank. Now the Arabs who had remained in Palestine were living under Israeli occupation. Over the next two decades, tension between Palestinians and Israelis continued to increase, especially as Israeli settlers began to encroach on West Bank territory. To combat the activity of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Israelis invaded Lebanon in 1982. The simmering tension within Palestine itself erupted in 1987 in the popular uprising known as the first Intifada. The uprising and violence continued until 1993 to end with the Oslo peace process. During that period, the subjects interviewed for this study were youths or adolescents. They grew up in towns or refugee camps in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, or Lebanon, as I did.

The author of this study was born into a very large and poor family in a refugee camp near Bethlehem, Palestine. I have thirteen brothers and sisters; eight of them are older than me and five of them are younger than me. My father used to work as a construction worker inside Israel in order to help his family to survive. I do not remember having any toy or favorite hobby when I was a child. There was no place for imagination and dreams in my childhood. The prevailing idea was that, in order to live, you needed to live a serious life, which meant working and studying all of the time. When I was 6 years old, I started to work in a vegetable market from 4 to 8 p.m. every day. The money I earned—which was very little—I used to give to my father to use to buy food. When I was 13 years old, the first Intifada started, and I became active in fighting the Occupation, as a way of resistance. As a result of that fighting, I was held in an Israeli prison for two years. During that two years the only thing that helped me to survive and

overcome my suffering was using my imagination and making art. I carved stones and olive pits to make art pieces out of them. I also used to write poems as a way of expressing my feelings and emotions. I used to make picture frames from empty toothpaste tubes and then draw and write on them. All of this helped me to survive and to feel that my life had meaning.

When I got out of prison, I decided that I wanted to shape my life in a new way, through education. I wanted to become more resilient in order to survive and continue my education. As a teenager, the arts helped me to transform all of my negative feelings toward the Occupation in a positive way. I decided to learn about and to use higher education to help other teenagers to find a way to express their anger and frustration through the use of the arts. I believe that the arts can help people to feel the pathos and waste of war, and they can also instill a desire and commitment to end war and work towards peace. In 1998, after I received my undergraduate degree, I worked as a therapist with Palestinian prisoners who had spent many years in Israeli prisons. I found that the most effective approach in therapy was the use of the arts. Therapy helped the ex-prisoners to express their emotions as well as to help them think about and plan for their futures. I believe that when you start to imagine, plan, and think about the future, the future becomes manifest.

In 2002, Israeli forces invaded the West Bank. The invasion took place in the cities, villages, and camps of the West Bank and lasted for two weeks, where all of the West Bank was placed under curfew. During the invasion, no one was allowed to leave their houses to buy food or even to get medical help. Children, teenagers, and adults were forced to stay inside their houses. In addition, most houses were attacked and searched by

Israeli soldiers. Much psychological trauma resulted from exposure to shelling, while shootings, and beatings led to injuries, disabilities, and loss of life.

After the Israeli invasion was over, many therapists came together to think about the best ways to help traumatized children and adults. The children suffered from many problems, such as bed-wetting, difficulties in breathing, rapid heart rate, headaches, poor attention span, nightmares, anxiety, fear, and the inability to rest. As therapists, we thought a lot about the best way to work with these children and we found that the expressive arts therapies are the best choice. We started to build two large therapy groups using the arts. We used drawing and creative activities. We observed the behaviors and actions of the children. We found the children to be isolated, depressed, aggressive, and afraid. The goal of our intervention was to release their psychological stress, as well as to provide them with new techniques that would help them to face their traumas and stress. We wanted to help those kids and their families to imagine how they would want to continue living after recovering from their trauma; we also wanted to help them to achieve an inner peace, by allowing them to express all of their feelings.

In 2004 I received a Ph.D. scholarship from the Ford Foundation, which allowed me to travel to Lesley University to complete my Ph.D. studies. My intention in this study is to find ways in which the arts can help Palestinians to heal and to build resiliency. I looked back on the 30 years I lived in Palestine and thought about my own resilience and about the reasons that I want to continue my education. I researched the literature but I did not find much that was written about resilience and the arts in the Palestinian context. On the other hand, I found numerous studies about the resilience of Holocaust survivors, the resilience of Israelis, and the resilience of people in areas of

conflict around the world. It was clear that further studies of resilience among Palestinians were necessary.

In order to learn more about the role of the arts in building resilience among Palestinians, I decided to devote my dissertation to exploring this issue and to contribute to the literature on resilience, trauma, and the arts in the Palestinian context. I conducted seven interviews with seven Palestinian graduate students attending U.S. universities. Their ages range from 30–40 years old. During the interviews I asked the participants to tell their life story.

The aim of this dissertation is to advance the promising field of the relationship between the Expressive Arts and resilience. Specifically, I intend to examine a three question: What are the sources of resilience for Palestinians. What role do the arts play in building resilience for individuals in societies experiencing violent conflict, especially among Palestinians. And what is the role of family, community, and education in building resilience in the Palestinian community

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, including this introduction (chapter 1). Chapter 2 contains the literature review, and it focuses on several topics: the background to the Middle East conflict, with a focus on the second Intifada and its impact on Palestinian society; trauma and PTSD; healing trauma, and the use of the expressive arts; and sources of resilience for Palestinians, education, family and community support, sports, and religion. Chapter 3 describes the methodology that I used, the Interview process, sampling, and analysis of the data. Chapter 4 presents the results of the interviews. Chapter 5 discusses the results of the interviews with respect to the literature

on resilience. The chapter also notes some limitations of this study and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review begins with a background discussion on the Middle East conflict, with a focus on the second Intifada. It also examines the social and family structure of the Palestinian community in the West Bank and the connection between activism, gender roles, and the social structure. The impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian society is explored, and political trauma is explored from both a social and Palestinian context. Lastly, the literature on trauma is reviewed, with an emphasis on using the Expressive Therapies to heal trauma.

Background to the Middle East Conflict, with a Focus on the Second Intifada

Much has been written about the Middle East crisis in the context of history, culture, and the political and religious environment. For the past 61 years, the Palestinian and the Israeli people have been living in a contentious environment of unpredictability, instability, and animosity punctuated by periods of sporadic violence against each other. Amid the continuing violence between the two groups, Ariel Sharon, prior to his election as Israeli Prime Minister, visited the al-Aqsa Mosque in 2000 and declared that the Temple Mount complex, where the mosque is located, would remain under the perpetual control of Israel (Al-Krenawi, Graham, & Sehwal, 2004).

According to Ron (2001), Sharon's visit further stirred up the already volatile situation in the region. Palestinians viewed Sharon's visit as a deliberate attempt to inflame their passions, and it did indeed provoke a violent reaction. For a span of five years, the Palestinians and the Israelis engaged in intermittent violence. As Israel militarily counteracted the second Intifada, a term used to reference the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation, the people of Palestine suffered oppression at the hands of the Israeli state and military (Hammami & Hilal, 2001). The Gaza Strip and the West Bank continue to be occupied and are under strict Israeli military control. Tanks, F-16s, Apache helicopters, and other weapons of the Israeli defense forces (Foreign Report, 2002) were conspicuous by their presence and use. Infrastructure and buildings in the cities of Bethlehem, Jenin, Nablus, and Ramallah were ravaged.

When discussing the ongoing conflict, it is important to relate it to the current political situation in the region and the system of governance in Palestine. In September 1993, Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) signed the Principles on Interim Self-Governance Arrangements (also known as the DOP, Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements), which gave the Palestinians a maximum transition time of five years. In this time period, the Palestinians would be allowed to form a transitional government in Gaza and the West Bank. The new Palestinian authority would be allowed to elect a Palestinian legislation council as part of this government (CIA, 2002). The promises of the DOP to the people of Palestine have yet to be completely fulfilled. More than a decade after the adoption of the DOP agreement, the majority of the people of Palestine remain under the control of the Israeli government and military.

The Social and Family Structure of the Palestinian Community in the West Bank

The West Bank is a small strip of land between Israel and Jordan, inhabited by approximately 2.8 million people—2.4 million Palestinians, over 400,000 Israeli settlers, and several ethnic groups living in and around Nablus. To the southeast of the West Bank lies Gaza, a narrow strip of land on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea with an area of 365 square kilometers. It is one of the most densely populated areas of the world, with a population of over a million people. The West Bank and Gaza together constitute what are understood to be the parts of Palestine.

The social structure of the Palestinians emphasizes the collective over the individual. It is characterized by a slower pace of societal change and a higher sense of social stability, with the family as its most significant element (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). As in other Arab communities, the Palestinian family is patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal, with separate spheres for men and women (Fronk, Huntington, & Chadwick, 1999). The Palestinians' high regard for family breeds strong family bonds, social identity from a familial and community perspective, and a holistic mentality (Abi-Hashem, 1992).

For the Palestinians, family is the most important element of culture and society (Dwairy & Van Sickle, 1996). In fact, family connections play a significant role in determining an individual's influence, power, position, and security. Traditionally, a Palestinian family is headed by the father, with the mother playing a central role in the decision-making process as it applies to all aspects of their married life. A study by Sagy,

Orr, Bar-On, & Awwad (2001) shows that Palestinians have higher in-group collective orientation values in comparison to the Jewish Israelis. This strong bond of closeness and identity sustains the unity and cohesion among the Palestinian people in times of crisis. Their political experiences and struggle for autonomy further strengthen this tie. According to Neumann (1992), the absence of political autonomy interferes with “ordinary processes [that] individuals and societies need to establish a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups, in order to provide members with a positive identity” (p. 221).

Ultimately, the lack of political autonomy reinforces the cohesion among Palestinians, encouraging them to take active participation in their struggle for autonomy. For the Palestinians, the West Bank is considered a part of their sovereign nation, and they view the presence of Israeli military control as a violation of their right to self-determination (Jean-Klein, 2003). According to social scientists, it is the absence of autonomy that makes the Palestinians commit Intifada, or “uprising,” against the Israelis (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). The first Intifada began in 1987 and was ended through the Oslo accords in 1993, which led to the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority. By the turn of the new millennium, the second wave of Intifada started as a result of Sharon’s visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque and his declaration that the site of the mosque would perpetually belong to Israel. The Palestinian people have yet to call off the Intifada, and it may continue as long as the Palestinians are not granted political autonomy by the Israelis (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). As long as the people of Palestine perceive the presence of the Israeli military forces in the West Bank and in Gaza Strip as a violation of their autonomy, Intifada will continue (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004).

The Connection between Activism, Gender Roles, and Social Structure

For the Palestinians, Intifada is necessary to reclaim their freedom. They view the Intifada as an uprising against the Israeli occupation. They believe that it is their duty to protect their people and their nation. Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) note that during the first Intifada (1987–1990), both males and females became more politically active. Moreover, the people involved tended to be mature and had a strong sense of identity and they were involved in the struggle for the freedom of their people and not for antisocial reasons.

More importantly, the first Intifada marked the expansion of women's social movements dedicated to the dual purposes of gaining national liberation and improving their gender status (Hasso, 1995). Among youth, girls expressed more liberal attitudes toward women's roles and participation in society, while at the same time supporting traditional family functions (Fronk et al., 1999). Barber (1999) notes that the Intifada experiences gave rise to increased parental use of psychological control and conflict with daughters, but were unrelated to parental support, monitoring, or conflict with sons.

The Impact of the Israeli Occupation on Palestinian Society

With the continuing violence and the Israeli occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank, the people of Palestine experienced economic deprivation, suppression of political rights, and continuous psychological stress and social dislocation (Al-Krenawi et

al., 2004). Reports from the World Bank and the United Nations show that since September 2000, the Palestinian economy has lost \$5.4 billion in gross income—the equivalent of the region's total income for 1999. Consequently, poverty rose from 25 to 60 percent and unemployment rates from 23 to 45 percent. The report points to the Israeli policies of imposing curfews and closing borders to the movement of Palestinian goods and people as major causal factors in Palestine's economic problems (*Atlantic*, 2003, p. 34; United Nations, Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator, 2002; World Bank, 2003).

Aside from the economic consequences of the ongoing violence on both sides, the social mobility of the Palestinians is affected as curfews imposed by the Israelis restrict their spatial mobility, access to employment, and availability of supplies (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). Gina Ross (2005) considers that the violence in the region, particularly the Shatilla massacre, has dashed the hopes and hurt the pride of the Palestinian people. Ross makes the following seven points to underscore the traumatic experiences of the Palestinians.

First, since Palestinians' livelihood has been at the mercy of a political process over which they have hardly any influence, they feel repressed and oppressed and feel the burden of being dominated and treated as second-class citizens in their own nation. Second, since the Israeli occupation, the people of Palestine have lost their homes and their land. An entire generation has lived in waiting and without hope. Above all, they feel they have done nothing to deserve what has happened to them: they were not responsible for the Jewish Holocaust, and they were not responsible for the exile of the Jews from their land 2,000 years ago. Third, Palestinian economic infrastructural

development has been stunted by the Arab world and neglected by the Israelis and the rest of the international community . Ross's fourth point is that Palestinians feel a sense of betrayal by their own leaders, who sowed the seeds of hope and made impossible promises. Many of their children have been reared in poverty and schooled in revolution and hatred. Fifth, there is mounting anger and frustration among the Palestinians because of the expansion of Jewish settlements, border closures, rough searches by Israeli soldiers at roadblocks, and late-night raids on their homes by Israeli "special units." Sixth, Palestinians have not been encouraged by the United Nations to make concessions, which in turn has failed to assuage the mistrust of the Israelis. Moreover, they have not been supported by the other Arab countries in making the concessions that would help them attain autonomy. Finally, Palestinians have missed many opportunities to embrace peace, which has consequently cost them thousands of lives and caused poverty, bitterness, and hopelessness, while deferring their ultimate objective of independence (Ross, 2005).

According to Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) the impact of the political violence among the Palestinians is all-encompassing, significantly affecting individual, familial, and community functioning. Focusing on the destruction of the home as the result of the political violence, they illustrate the psychological effects of the violence on every individual. Palestinians associate home as a place of refuge that provides a feeling of belonging, and as a source of strength that nurtures personal relationships and approximates family ethos (Despres, 1991; Rybczynski, 1987). With the loss of home, all these feelings of emotional security cultivated by a sense of familiarity and routine (Saunders & Williams, 1991; Sixsmith, 1986) are shattered. Moreover, the destruction of the home and changes in household composition through death and disability resulting

from the political violence represents the destruction of the familial dreams. Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) add that the loss of home implies from the loss of parental protection for the children, compromising their sense of well-being. Similarly, parents feel that their roles as protectors have been impaired. More importantly, Palestinians view the loss of home as the destruction of history, culture, the sense of belonging to a nation, and the political right and freedom to exist as a nation (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004).

Political Trauma in a Social Context

Earlier studies conducted by Abu Sway et al. (2005) studied the trauma caused by political violence in Palestine by examining the use of expressive therapy to heal trauma. Khamis (2004, 2005), Al-Krenawi et al. (2004), Punamäki et al. (2005), and Awwad (2004) examined the effects of trauma related to the Intifada, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Palestinian children, adults, and families; gender-specific trauma exposure and mental health symptoms among Palestinians living in conditions of military violence; and the prevalence of PTSD among Palestinian school-age children. Variables that distinguish PTSD and non-PTSD children were examined, including child characteristics, socioeconomic status, family environment, and parental style of influence; case studies and interviews with traumatized Palestinian people were also utilized.

In their study, Punamäki et al. (2004) find “no gender differences in peritraumatic dissociation during the most severe trauma. Peritraumatic dissociation was positively associated with posttraumatic symptoms.” The results of their study reveal only the

negative function of peritraumatic dissociation among both men and women, indicating that “lifetime trauma was associated with a relatively higher level of hostility if persons reported a high level of peritraumatic dissociation during the most severe trauma.” King (1998) explains the peritraumatic dissociation between males and females as a result of Middle Eastern culture and politics, where male heroism and sacrifice is highly appreciated. Punamäki posits that dissociative responses apparently connote loss of control, shame, weakness, and subsequent low self-esteem, all promoting depressiveness. Among women, dissociative and uncontrollable responses in a trauma scene are more easily accepted, especially in a culture that encourages strong and visual female emotional expression, for example, at funerals and other good-byes (Punamäki et al., 2004).

Other aspects of political violence have also been the subject of various research studies, such as the effects of trauma related to the Palestinian Intifada, including the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among children. Qouta (2001, 1997), Punamäki (2001), Thabet and Vostanis (1999), and Mandour and Hourani (1989) write about working with Palestinian children who suffer depression in reaction to trauma. Other scholars, such as Kanninen et al. (2000) and Soloman (1996), discuss working with adults and families, including looking at attachment patterns and the working alliance in trauma therapy, as well as the implications for communities experiencing trauma. Awwad (1999) and Qouta (1997) examine the experiences of anxiety, depression, and paranoid symptoms associated with house demolition. Thabet (2005), Qouta (2005), and Baker and Kevorkian (1999) write about group crisis intervention for children during ongoing war/conflict, mother-child expression of

psychological distress in war trauma, and the effects of political and military traumas on children, as in the Palestinian case.

At the same time, Qouta et al. (1997), Punamäki et al. (2001), Thabet and Vostanis (1999), and Mandour and Hourani (1989) have studied the effects of political violence among children and have prescribed ways to work with Palestinian children suffering from depression that results from the conflict. Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) conclude that apart from inflicting wounds, political conflicts inscribe themselves on the memories of individuals, families, and communities long after the occurrence of the traumatic events. As Humphrey (2000, p. 7) says, the damage to property and persons is often used to “substantiate social reality, beliefs, values, knowledge and social identity.” War is not only personal and familial, but also cultural. Clearly, the loss of home and life and the ongoing political violence in the region have deeply affected every individual and the whole community. Every day the Palestinian people face life with the threat of violence, of loss of life or physical disability, loss of property, loss of home, and loss of identity as an individual and as a part of the Palestinian community. Living under this constant threat of violence has affected every single individual in the community. For some, the experience has become traumatic.

Trauma

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines trauma in two ways: (1) an injury or a wound to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent; (2) a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury.

Herman (1997) proposes the same set of definitions: medical and psychiatric. Taken as a medical term, trauma refers to serious or critical bodily injury, wound, or shock.

Psychiatrically, trauma refers to experiences that are emotionally painful, stressful or shocking, and which often result in lasting mental and physical effects (Punamäki et al., 2001).

Researchers assert that trauma occurs because victims are unable to escape from traumatic experiences. According to Herman (1997) traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary coping mechanisms of an individual. Generally, traumatic experiences involve threats to life or a close encounter with violence and death. For children, trauma is a sudden and threatening event, disturbing their basic assumption that the world is a safe and controllable place. For adults, trauma comes in life-threatening situations that result in fear, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness and vulnerability, along with feelings of profound grief, sadness, and anger.

Bradshaw and Thomlison (1999) reports that individuals' reactions to stress and its subsequent psychological effects are multifaceted and diverse; children and adults commonly report symptoms such as depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, dissociation, and global psychological distress. However, studies by Hubbard et al. (1995) and Holtman (2006) stress that trauma has become part of a current shared cultural experience characterized by a general awareness of potential threats brought forth by natural disasters and human activities.

Types of Trauma and PTSD

There are two types of trauma: acute and chronic. Acute trauma refers to short, severe, and isolated incidents caused by natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, fires, tsunamis, and earthquakes, as well as medical trauma such as motor vehicle accidents, physical assaults, falls, burns, and hospitalization (Holtman, 2006). On the other hand, chronic trauma is the effect of repeated, anticipated trauma resulting from persistent exposure to repeated physical and sexual abuse, ongoing neglect, combat, and violence (Holtman, 2006).

Chronic trauma is much more likely to generate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than acute trauma. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2000) defines PTSD as a condition that can occur in individuals after a prolonged exposure to severe trauma, such as experiencing, witnessing, or being confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others. Parry-Jones (1997, cited in Young 2001) says that PTSD is the consequence of an interaction between the stressor (which varies according to the nature of the stressor and the amount of exposure to it), personality (coping styles, preexisting belief systems, attributional style), and the recovery environment, contingent upon the availability of social support.

The APA (2000) identifies the common responses of persons suffering from PTSD as intense fear, helplessness, horror, and reliving of the experience (flashbacks); intense distress when exposed to reminders of the event; feelings of detachment (emotional numbing), amnesia, or restricted affect; active avoidance of thoughts or

activities that may be reminders of the trauma; poor concentration, vigilance, an exaggerated startle response, insomnia, and irritability, among other symptoms.

According to Breslau (2002) PTSD often compels victims to re-experience the traumatic incident through intrusive thoughts and dreams, avoidance of stimuli that symbolize the event, numbing of general responsiveness, and heightened vigilance.

Although not everyone who is exposed to a prolonged severe traumatic incident develops PTSD symptoms, longitudinal research with Palestinian children indicates that most of them are perceived to have general mental health problems (Thabet & Vostanis, 2000). Studies by Miller (1999) and others reported a high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), conduct disorder, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in children in Gaza, relative to children in a region without conflict (1999). Another study (Thabet et al., 2002) reveals that children living in war zones are at high risk of developing post-traumatic stress and other emotional disorders. A study of Vivian Khamis (2005) on “Post-traumatic stress disorder among school age Palestinian children” shows that “A substantial number of children experienced at least one lifetime trauma (54.7%). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was diagnosed in 34.1% of the children, most of whom were refugees, males, and working. Although the expected association between family environment, parental style of influence, and PTSD symptomatology was found in this study, family ambiance (child's experience of anxiety in home environment) was the only predictor in the final model” (p. 81).

Physiological-Somatic Symptoms of PTSD

According to the APA (2000), the impact of trauma on individuals is manifested in physical or somatic symptoms that occur in the absence of organic findings. Van der Kolk (1987) characterized this as the dislocation of unpleasant sensations in the body to control disruptive thoughts and emotions. Researchers say that nausea, sleep deprivation, skin problems, cramps or vomiting, and physical pain can be triggered by the profound physiological and neurochemical changes in the brain caused by prolonged anxiety and stress. Children and adolescents surviving a life-threatening disaster show a wide range of symptoms, which tend to cluster around signs of re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoidance of arising emotions, and a range of signs of increased physiological arousal. Starting almost immediately, most traumatized persons are troubled by repetitive, intrusive thoughts about the accident. In a flashback, the person reports that he or she is re-experiencing the event, as if it were happening all over again (Yule, 2001). Adults also get caught in the vicious cycle of fear and anxiety.

Palestinian children who are constantly exposed to violence report having sleep disturbances, fear of the dark, bad dreams, and waking through the night. Also, they report having difficulties in schoolwork due to difficulties in concentration and memory problems (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). Errante (1997) proposes that the distressing memories and anxiety over the possibility of danger for self and family interfere with the individual's ability to concentrate, thus impeding the individual's learning and development.

Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) report that many of the Palestinian family members from all four cases they have studied demonstrate symptoms of PTSD such as incidences of shock, anxiety, and depression. According to van der Kolk (2002), many individuals experience confusion, withdrawal, or shock when they are faced with an ominous threat. This “shock,” aspect, including such symptoms as shaking and disorientation, has long been recognized by the medical community as related to psychological trauma.

People exposed to traumatic events and experiences develop a sense of detachment, intense emotional reactions, intrusive and repetitive thoughts and images, memory gaps, and heightened startle responses (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). Palestinians who experienced traumas within their family often had difficulty accepting reality, while at the same time they were anxious that traumatic events could happen again

Another symptom of trauma is anxiety. Bradshaw and Thomlison (1999) state that traumatic events perpetuate feelings of anxiety, fear, and helplessness. Perry (1996) explains that the persistence of anxiety stems from the constant state of hyper-arousal of the autonomic nervous system due to an individual’s prolonged fear, characterized by unpredictability and danger. Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) reiterate that although this heightened state of awareness may be beneficial during the time of danger, it does not help when the environment changes. They argue that as children’s brains are developing, they are most susceptible to the development of hyper-vigilance, and become focused on nonverbal cues related to the threat.

Loss and Trauma

In their study, Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) focus on four areas of analysis. The first area is the nature of the loss, which may include the loss of life, family members, economic means, home and property, stability, cohesion, or harmony. Loss is both an individual and community phenomenon where the personal and political intersect. Losses occur as death, as impaired health, and as a loss of people who fulfilled social roles as family and community members. They have direct, experiential impact in these respects. The loss of an individual becomes that of the family. Moving to the immediate and individual level: loss, particularly if it is associated with trauma, may be experienced as a process of negotiation, as people attend to the normal aspects of everyday life and the threatening aspects of trauma (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004).

Losses can result in various emotions and cognitive structuring. For the Palestinians, dealing with and accepting of loss is determined by the family's religious affinity and background. According to Al-Krenawi et al. (2004), "the experience of loss is strongly mediated by Islam." There are several terms that Muslims use when dealing with loss. Some believe that a person has an "Amanat" (deposit) in this world. When God wants to take His deposit, there is no reason to be angered, for Muslims have to accept God's order (Al-Krenawi, 1996). The related concept of "Al-Gadhar," or fate, is also a common theme. Two closely linked expressions are "Hakmat Allah" (God's judgment), and "Maktoub" (it is written). The belief in fate is a core part of Islam: all things that happen to a person, both good and evil, are thought to be the will of God (Wikan, 1988). People are encouraged to accept their fate with strong faith, courage, and great patience (Al-Krenawi, 1996; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1997). Absolute submission to the will of

God has the corollary that all things that happen in one's life must be accepted with fortitude. Also, in grief, as in other parts of life, self-reliance is considered a central Muslim virtue (Wikan, 1988). As one scholar points out, “to express anger and bitterness, like suffering and grief, is regarded as essential” to the grieving process. “Indeed, these feelings are not usually distinguished but all entailed in the concept of ‘za’l.’ ”

“Unhappiness,” many Muslims believe, “must find a way out of the body, or it weighs upon the nafs (soul) to occasional mental illness or chronically tired nerves” (Wikan, 1988, p. 458).

The second area of analysis in the study of Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) is the psychological impact of trauma upon individuals, encompassing somatic symptoms, post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), depression, and other forms of psychological distress. Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) assert that the political violence in the region exposes the people of Palestine to traumatic situations and experiences that result in various psychosomatic behavior and emotions.

The third area is the impact of traumatic experiences upon the function of the family and community in terms of communication, social roles, and functions. One of the consequences of socioeconomic changes within these families is the disruption of daily routines through which individuals and families derive a sense of identity and purpose, satisfaction, and well-being (Errante, 1997). The disruption of these routines may be one way that the perception of self, family, and community shifts (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004). Furthermore, Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) report that the traumatic experiences caused by the political violence among the Israelis and the Palestinians affect not only the individual but the whole community. The loss suffered by the Palestinians affects their families and

communities. Every member of the family is affected by the loss of a home or a member. Consequently, the community is affected as well as social situations change. People are losing their homes, their families, and their jobs. All of these aspects affect the functions of society. One of the functions of the broader community is to provide a sense of coherence and stability that communities communicate in formal and informal ways (Ayalon, 1998). This is important for adults and children alike, but it is especially true for children who rely on a sense of routine and familiarity to develop their unique sense of self (Ayalon, 1998).

Ross (2005) asserts that unless the political crisis in the region is addressed, political violence will continue, and people will remain exposed to life-threatening traumatic experiences. Unresolved trauma becomes mobilized and non-discharged energy exists in the body. This phenomenon is compounded when events occur that rekindle any past unresolved trauma and reopen a flood of memories of every past injury, insult, humiliation, loss, fear, and hatred. There is a hyper-vigilant search for threats and a sense of ongoing danger that sets the stage for violent reenactments, combined with a psychological hope to finally master the deeply wounded and traumatized feelings. There is a polarization of beliefs, principles, and feelings; intolerance and revenge seem the only viable responses (Ross, 2005).

Impact of Political Trauma

Traumatic experiences can have a great impact on relations between family members and the family's interactions with the surrounding community. Researchers

agree that trauma affects people's lives: "there is a high correlation between life stressors and a prevalence of psychological problems in a community" (Abu Sway et al., 2005, p. 157). "It is common knowledge that 30% of any community directly living in a conflict area or war zone is affected psychologically on a long-term basis" (University of Iowa, 2001). Van der Kolk (1987) warns that traumatic life experiences may overwhelm an individual's biological and psychological coping mechanisms, resulting in psychological trauma. As political violence often causes the loss of home and family members, the surviving family member has to endure without the support of other family members. Miller (1999) says that the prevailing animosity and violence in the environment block the emotional nourishment that the family acquires from the community; without the support, stability, and protection of the community, the family may be unable to adequately provide the safety, affection, and education that its members require (Al-Krenawi et al., 2004).

The study of Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) indicates that "parental responsiveness has been impacted in one way or another...as adults have to deal with serious psychological and economic impacts of the traumas experienced." Thus, they tend to spend more time, attention, and energy in addressing their economic predicament. However, the need for support and attention is heightened for the children in the midst of violence and traumatic incidents. Perry (2003) suggests that exposure to violence can lead to serious chronic impairment of brain development, especially among children. This is because when an individual is in danger, the body initiates chemical responses in the brain.

Basically, there are two primary adaptive response patterns to danger: the "flight-fight" (hyper-arousal) and the "freeze-surrender" (dissociation) continuums. Each of

these responses triggers a unique combination of neural systems. Perry (2003) explains that if either response is persistent, alterations in the key neural systems involved in the stress response may take place. As a result, this chronic activation of stress responses may in effect “wear out” parts of the body involved in memory, cognition, attention, impulse control, fine motor control and other functions (Perry, 2003).

Psychologically, traumatic experiences can lead to distrust and aggression, thus preventing the child from becoming a productive citizen. Economically, as armed conflict results in dislocation and unemployment, children may have to adjust to changes in the socioeconomic situation. The study of Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) indicates that changes in socioeconomic environment such as death, disability, loss of home, threatened family stability, and unemployment worsen the psychological effects of traumatic events to children. According to Errante (1997) socioeconomic changes caused by armed conflict disrupt the daily routines through which members of the family and society derive their sense of identity and purpose, satisfaction, and well-being. Routines and familiarity are necessary so that the family and community will be able to provide its members a sense of belonging and of oneness (Ayalon, 1998).

The study by Conway (1992), which deals with the impact of war and other traumatic events on the development of children, proposes that for children to develop “good psychological health,” their basic needs must be met. Also, Conway (1992) reiterates that children who experience war and conflict usually develop the need for understanding, emotional resolution, security, and a sense of belonging and self-worth. Hence, parental and family support play a significant role in mediating the maladaptive and adaptive outcomes in children (Dubrow & Garbarino, 1989; Straker et al., 1992).

According to Rutter (1985), the resilience of children in facing the stress caused by traumatic events depends on protective factors, such as the presence of a well-functioning caregiver who provides effective emotional support (Dawes and Tredoux, 1989). This is supported by the findings of the study of Lifschitz (1977, cited in Jensen and Shaw, 1993) showing that children who have an affectionate relationship with their mothers adjusted better to family loss. Indeed, the impact of war-related traumas is felt not only at the individual level of functioning but within the family as a whole. Whether trauma affects a whole family or a single member, the entire family endures the traumatic aftermath, and often the primary parenting functions of protecting, loving, and teaching become disturbed (Miller, 1999).

Healing Trauma

Treating PTSD

Herman (1997) describes the three steps to healing from PTSD as safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. The first stage of healing involves safety. Rayner (2005) says that “psychological trauma takes away control from the victim—it is the lack of control that leads to someone being unable to escape from a traumatic situation.” When the victims feel security, safety, and stability within the community, then the healing process begins. The second stage involves the remembrance and mourning of the traumatic event. Normally, victims of traumatic events try to cope by banishing the experience from consciousness. The findings of Punamäki et al. (2004) show that “there is ample evidence that trauma victims tend to distort, narrow, and

repress their memories of painful and often shameful scenes.” However, Herman (1997) says that it is necessary that victims share their experiences and tell their stories. By retelling the traumatic incident completely, in depth and in detail, the survivor’s traumatic experience is transformed in a way that can be integrated into the life story of the survivor (Herman, 1997). Finally, the third stage is reconnection. Survivors of trauma must be able to reestablish healthy relationships with other human beings by developing a renewed sense of trust. Herman (1997) says that there is no healing in isolation and that recovery can only take pace within the context of relationships.

Herman’s (1997) three-step healing method, however, may not be applicable to the victims of political violence in Palestine. The present situation in the region shows that security, which is the first step in Herman’s method, is yet to be achieved and experienced by the Palestinian people.

In an interesting study, Levine et al. (2009) set out to clarify the relationship of resilience to post-traumatic growth. Resilience was defined as “the ability to sustain trauma without reporting PTSD,” while posttraumatic growth was defined as “the development of a positive outlook following trauma” (p. 282). In a study of children aged 7–9 and adolescents aged 16, they found that posttraumatic growth and resilience were inversely related; that is, youths who did not develop symptoms of PTSD and were thus presumed to be resilient reported less posttraumatic growth than children who showed signs of PTSD. Levine et al. obtained similar results when studying a sample of civilian and military adults. They observe that “these findings appear to be intriguing, as resilience and posttraumatic growth are both salutogenic outcomes and so intuitively should be positively related” (p. 285). They draw the conclusion that trauma survivors

who show little sign of posttraumatic growth are not, in fact, suffering the ill effects of the trauma; instead, their lack of growth is a sign of their native resilience.

The Use of the Expressive Arts in Healing

According to Ross (2005), healing the political trauma of the Palestinian people is possible. She stresses that the experiences of past generations have shown that healing must first be achieved on the individual level and then on the collective level. There are people around the world trained to heal trauma who can be called upon. Special techniques exist today that can help address individual needs in healing from trauma, such as Somatic Experiencing, Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing, Emotional Freedom Technique, and others. Research has shown that since trauma resides in the body and not in the event, its impact can be reversed by working through the nervous system. Many rituals have been developed to heal trauma at the community level. There are interventions, for example, which can be done with mothers and infants of both groups involved in the political struggle, that will help heal their collective trauma. Just allowing the voices of reason in both communities to rise and declare the intention to heal and to end the violence would be in itself extremely powerful and transformative. It can take time, but the healing process is contagious (Ross, 2005).

Al-Krenawi et al. (2004) report that the Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture in Ramallah, Palestine, provides clinical and community responses to the victims of violence in Palestinian communities. The center has a psychiatrist-director, who is assisted by an interdisciplinary team of a psychologist and social workers. As the

number of referrals has steadily increased since September 2000, the center is not able to meet the needs of all the victims of political violence due to limited personnel and resources. Hence, there is a need for alternative healing methods so that victims of political violence who cannot be accommodated by the hospital can still receive treatment.

One alternative treatment could be expressive arts therapy. Studies by Thompson (2006), Al-Krenawi (2007), Al-Ajarma and Schechter (2007), Abu Sway et al. (2005), and Holtman (2006) indicate that the arts could be a very useful way of healing trauma in general and in the Palestinian community in particular. Expressive arts therapy uses arts such as painting, drawing, and sculpture as a form of therapy. It places emphasis not on the final product but on the process of creation. Expressive therapy adheres to the idea that an individual can best explore and express human feelings, emotions, and thoughts through the use of the imagination (Knill, 1999, 2005; Levine, 1999; McNiff, 1992, 1998, 2003).

A practicing therapist herself, Gregerson (2007) recounts her own success in using expressive arts therapy to heal herself from the trauma of being in Washington, D.C., during the 2001 attack on the Pentagon. She asserts that “resiliency is the most common response to traumatizing events” (p. 597), but she also states that “experiences immediately after the traumatic event may mediate the trajectory into resiliency or into trauma” (p. 598). Thus, there is a narrow window of time after a trauma in which it is possible to guide the victim toward resiliency through the use of the expressive arts.

Through the use of the expressive arts, victims of political violence can have the opportunity to move towards healing. In their article, Abu Sway et al. (2005) support the use of the intermodal expressive arts by stating that “the therapeutic space in expressive arts therapy can provide a haven for the Palestinian people who live under constant trauma and fear, and can contribute to their healing process” (p. 170). According to Abu Sway et al., art is a universal language that allows everyone to share and understand. It is this understanding and affinity that foster change, transformation, and healing of self and society.

In her research on expressive arts as healing method for trauma, Holtman (2006) demonstrates that art therapy can “access the sensory parts of the brain in non-verbal ways [which] are very useful in the natural progression of the trauma memory that is ‘stuck’ [in the brain].” Holtman (2006) further explains that art therapy allows individuals to connect the non-verbal to the verbal so that cognitive therapy process may begin. Through art therapy a victim of traumatic events is able to express the trauma through non-verbal means. Holtman (2006) explains this process thus: “art therapy techniques are engaged, connecting the activated abstract (non-verbal) and concrete sensory memories with the organizing areas of the brain, thereby moving the experience into the brain's cognitive structures for resolution of symptoms.” Moreover, art therapy reintroduces the “visceral sense of safety into the individual’s perception of the trauma experience [through which] a mindful awareness and acceptance may be cultivated to assist the individual in present-orientation and help them develop coping skills” (Holtman 2006).

Julia Byers (2001) explains that “The therapeutic use of art making, within a professional relationship, by people who experience illness, trauma or challenges in living, and by people who seek personal development. Through creating art and reflecting on the art products and processes, people can increase awareness of self and others, cope with symptoms, stress and traumatic experiences; enhance cognitive abilities; and enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of making art” (Byers, 2001).

An important component of these expressive therapeutic modalities is the reintroduction of a visceral sense of safety into the individual's perception of the trauma experience. A mindful awareness and acceptance may be cultivated to assist the individual in coming into a present-orientation and help them develop coping skills. In addition, techniques are engaged which give the individual greater control of their own emotional and physical response. At the same time, the act of making art endows the individual with control of both materials and image formation, supporting an intrapsychic sense of regained power (Holtman, 2006). More importantly, expressive therapies provide intervention opportunities for participants to work through what inhibits and blocks them, such as traumatic experiences and fears (Byers 2001).

Holtman (2006) says that “art therapy can be an essential way to help individuals heal from trauma experiences. The creation of a non-verbal, pictorial recovery of the traumatic experiences is translated to a coherent verbal narrative. Through this process cognitive as well as emotional resolution is made possible.” When individuals go through traumatic experiences, they acquire symptoms of shock, anxiety, loss, and depression. The manifestations and severity of such symptoms depend on the individual and on the degree of trauma. Some even try to erase the whole traumatic experiences within their

consciousness; however, there is always the possibility that a person may re-experience the trauma whether physically or mentally. Art serves as a communication tool for children. It allows them to express their feelings, emotions, and trauma in a positive way. It endows the participants with various techniques that enable them to have control of their own emotions.

Art therapy may indeed be a particularly effective way of communicating with children. Snyder (1997), who includes play and storytelling as well as other forms of visual artistic expression in the expressive arts, states that expressive arts therapy is especially suited to children rather than adults. Art therapy and play therapy alike can help children to verbalize their feelings if they are asked to discuss their artwork. By opening a line of communication, art therapy can serve as an auxiliary to other modes of therapy: “Although expressive art therapy does not resolve profound emotional disturbance by itself . . . it can do much to precipitate catharsis and reduce internal conflict” (Snyder 1997, p. 74). Art therapy can “relieve stress, pressures, and tensions, often changing negative aggression into positive energy” (p. 80).

Through the use of expressive arts, victims of trauma are better able to cope with their feelings. They are able to express, unload, and release some of the emotional scars buried within themselves. More importantly, expressive arts allow the victim to face their trauma in a positive way. Moreover, a sense of control is important in the healing process because it gives the individual the opportunity to reclaim the losses of the self, the loss of identity, the loss of culture. In using the expressive arts, the participant has total control of the material, using it in any way they choose to create an image which will communicate some of the emotions, traumas, and fears hidden within the self. In

addition, by taking control of their work and the choice of materials that they use, individuals who have traumatic experiences can slowly regain the feeling of choice and perhaps some security. By participating in various forms of arts, the individual acquires the freedom to decide what to do, what to share, and what to express. In this way, healing can begin to take place.

The use of expressive arts therapy as a way of healing from the political trauma suffered by the Palestinian people has been recognized by researchers and therapists. Right now, various therapeutic groups and therapists are using the expressive arts, including the visual arts, dance, drama, and music. They are all working together with the common goal of helping the victims of trauma cope with their feelings of fear, anger, and anxiety. International groups such as the International Trauma Foundation are being formed to work with trauma in hospitals and clinics throughout the region (Ross, 2005).

Resilience

Resilience and Trauma

In a review of the literature on trauma, PTSD, and resilience, Agaibi et al. (2005) found that the definition of resilience itself varied from study to study (211). The authors concede the difficulty in formulating an adequate definition of resilience by suggesting that resilience should be defined as a “complex repertoire of behavioral tendencies” (Agaibi et al., 2005, 197). But they also offer as a basic definition of resilience, “the ability to adapt and cope successfully despite threatening or challenging situations” (p. 198). Resilience is associated with intelligence, extraversion, and hardiness; it has

cognitive and emotional components. Resilient people are more likely to use problem-solving skills to handle stressors. The counterpart of resilience is vulnerability.

The human capacity to cope with the horrors of war and other forms of psychological trauma arising out of violence is immense. This was amply proved by the resilience of the Japanese and the Germans following the devastating impact of the Second World War in the two countries. The resilience of Holocaust survivors is another case in point. According to a study on 13 Holocaust survivors by Greene (2002), the respondents displayed positive themes such as a “conscious decision to go on living, to celebrate life, and to think positively about themselves.” Greene’s analysis suggests that despite extreme situations, the actions of Holocaust survivors were marked by “purpose, determination, caring, and often, bravery. Resilience can come about even under extreme circumstances, and ... effective communities can be sustained in the most severe situations” (2002, p. 7). Greene’s work has some merits. For instance, it tries to explore how people who have successfully survived adverse situations perceive their own resilience. It draws on literature to suggest that “children who experience traumas and become resilient adults, often demonstrate personal strengths, empathy, intellectual skills, hope, and faith,” and resilient adults in turn “may also evidence insight, independence, love, initiative, morality, humor, and creativity” (p. 2).

Golub’s thesis (2000) is essentially a critique of Lawrence Langer and William Niederland who, she feels, have portrayed Holocaust survivors as “tortured souls,” “unfortunates,” and “totally miserable” (p. 1). Golub debunks such “negative reports,” stating that they are not always accurate and do not always offer the complete picture. Golub’s subjects—20 of them—were drawn from various nationalities. Eight of them

were originally from Poland; six from Germany; two from Austria; and one each from Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Lithuania. All of them lived in the United States.

Resilience among Palestinians

The literature on resilience in the context of coping with traumatic experiences resulting from war or war-like situations among the global population in general and Palestinians in particular is extremely sparse. The works of Taylor and Wang (2000), Joseph (1994), Goldstein and Brooks (2002), La Greca (1990), Bronson (2000), and Macy (2003) focus on resilience among children. In their study of vulnerability and resilience, Kolk et al. (1996) trace resilience within what they call the “longitudinal course of PTSD,” which comprises three stages: “the acute stress response, the chronic response to the traumatic event, and finally the individual’s adaptation to having to endure the chronic symptomatic state of PTSD” (p. 157). They point out that the individual’s response at each of the three steps is influenced by a complex matrix of biological, social, temperamental, and experiential issues.

But none of these works are related to children’s’ adaptability levels in war-like situations. The body of literature on Palestinians’ resilience is even more miniscule. Studying a sample of Palestinian youths aged 15–18 living in or near Ramallah, Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008) identified as sources of the youths’ resilience the following: their friends; their families; sports activities (for boys); reading, writing, and drawing (for girls); and the pursuit of education (especially for girls). They also found that the normal

social activities of daily life promote resilience: “For Palestinian youth, resiliency is rooted in the capacity to make life as normal as possible” (Gillham et al., 2008, p. 296).

Despite the trauma arising out of the intense political situation in Palestine, a wide cross-section of the Palestinian population is still able to cope with the violence and the resulting traumatic experiences. A key variable that emerges out of the work of scholars is the role of the family and individual family members in overcoming trauma. Resilience is shaped by the interactions that a trauma victim has with his or her immediate family members. In a sample study on 86 Palestinian children, Punamäki et al. (2001) has tried to show that resiliency is a “dynamic” process. She argues that “issues that strengthen or weaken resiliency in traumatic stress relate to the children themselves, to their parental and family responses, and to their social and cultural milieu” (Punamäki et al., 2001, p. 257). On a general level, Herman (1997) highlights the effect of the social support that “traumatized people seek from family, lovers, and close friends.” Such support takes many forms and it changes during the course of resolution of the trauma. In the immediate aftermath of the trauma, rebuilding some minimal form of trust is the primary task, and assurances of safety and protection are of the greatest importance.

The study by Gralinski-Bakker et al. (2004), though not done on Palestinians, can, however, be applicable to some of the trauma-affected people of Palestine at a more general level. According to Gralinski-Bakker et al., “resilience has been inferred on the basis of successful adaptation among individuals who faced challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 294). Such individuals adopted a life-course perspective in which they considered “emotional and motivational self-evaluative processes” that were believed to contribute to psychological well-being and to guide behavior and development over time.

In other words, coping mechanisms and strategies (Mowbray, 1988, p. 198) shape the process of resilience among children. The manner in which children behave and feel in traumatic situations, as well as how they make sense of those situations, is crucial in determining their adjustment. Elsewhere, Qouta et al. (2001) stress the importance of the “mental flexibility” that characterizes resilient children’s “information processing style.” The study by Qouta et al., which is not too different from that of Punamäki et al., concludes that “mental flexibility moderated the negative impact of traumatic events in psychological wellbeing only when hostilities had calmed down, but not in the midst of violence” (Qouta et al., 2001, p. 5).

While the study of children and resilience has been moderately exhaustive, there is little or no literature on how adult Palestinians cope with violence-related trauma. In yet another sample study, Punamäki et al. (2006) have focused on 65 Palestinian families and the individual members’ response to trauma. The central thesis of this study is slightly more complex than the findings of the studies on children. According to Punamäki et al. (2006, p. 9), data analyses revealed complementary dynamics, especially between parents and their children, “indicating that when one member was suffering, others showed no symptoms and when one was resilient and satisfied, others showed weakness, and vice versa.” Such results suggest that, as opposed to the variables that affect children’s degree of resilience, adults and teenagers respond to trauma and cope with traumatic experiences because of their varying life experiences and their coping skills within a given social and cultural setting.

The question of culturally specific ways in which youths develop resilience has also been investigated by Ungar et al. (2007). They stress that resilience is “an outcome

of interactions between individuals and their environments” (288). Given this emphasis on environment, they are interested in identifying the factors that promote resilience in specific cultural environments. They interviewed small groups of youths (aged 12–23) from 14 communities around the world to identify culturally specific sources of resilience. The interviews identified seven recurring “tensions” faced by the respondents: access to material resources, relationships, identity, cohesion, power and control, cultural adherence, and social justice. Interestingly, in a discussion of identity, the authors note that respondents generally talked about issues of identity as they applied to the “I” of the respondent, with the exception of a Palestinian youth who “spoke of identity without any reference to the ‘I,’ and always in recognition of his role as a part of the collective political movement in Palestine” (p. 297).

Indeed, political awareness seems in and of itself to function as a source of resilience for Palestinians. Barber (2001) approached the Intifada as “a unique laboratory to study youth development in an environment fraught with forms of risk, trauma, and strong personal, political, cultural, social, and religious forces not typically associated—at least not to this intensity, duration, and complexity—with child and adolescent experience” (p. 260). He found that, contrary to expectation, participation in the Intifada did not pose a threat to general psychological well-being. Moreover, Intifada involvement was positively related to religiosity and family values. Barber explained that participation in a politically meaningful and culturally esteemed struggle provided a source of meaning in the lives of Palestinian youth. Likewise, Altawil (2008) concluded that “Direct evidence from . . . Palestine . . . shows that active engagement in or ideological commitment to political struggle can increase resilience” (p. 45). Furthermore,

“Ideological support for children living in the West Ban and Gaza Strip may buffer some of the stress of war” (p. 54). On the other hand, allegiance to a political ideology can provoke or prolong conflict that increases stress and trauma.

Summing up the results of their study, Ungar et al. (2007) noted that efforts to promote resilience must always take into account the particular features of the culture in which they are deployed. This attention to cultural context is demonstrated by Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008), who are particularly concerned to distinguish Palestinian resilience from Western ideas of resilience, which are focused on the individual. Pointing to the Palestinian concept of *sumud*, “a determination to exist through being steadfast and rooted to the land,” they argue that “within a Palestinian context, suffering and endurance have to be interpreted at both an individual and collective level. . . . Resilience is (re)constituted as a wider collective and social representation of what it means to endure” (p. 292). Consequently, Nguyen-Gillham et al. question the appropriateness of the Western psychological counseling methods practiced by international relief workers, which treat the individual as a patient to be cured, and advocate strengthening the social and family networks that the youths themselves identified as the sources of their resilience: “A biomedical model of psychiatry that focuses on individual counselling neglects a culturally framed network of community fortitude and support.”

Following a study of only 20 Lebanese students, Oweini (1998) concludes that coping with war stress is dependent on a variety of factors, such as the intermittent nature of the war, campus safety, socioeconomic status, intensity and length of exposure to life-threatening events, adaptive mechanisms and personality traits, the role of religion, and, finally, strong support networks of friends and family (p. 421). These factors were found

to play a critical role in helping students cope more effectively with the war in Lebanon. A major drawback of the study was that it was conducted among students (10 boys and 10 girls) of Lebanese origin who attended the American University at Beirut and, therefore, represented the middle and upper classes of Lebanese society. The sample was not large enough to include a wider cross-section of people, such as Palestinians living in refugee camps or those belonging to the lower middle class.

Rothchild (2007) provides narrative and anecdotal accounts of Jewish and Palestinian cases of trauma and resilience. In the course of the storytelling, she unravels the psychological consequences of living under the occupation, and the role of the family, especially of mothers, whose communicative skills and warmth go a long way in mitigating children's' trauma. She cites the case of one psychologist who was "always amazed by the resilience of his patients, by their ability to cope with such an extreme level of suffering" in Gaza and the West Bank (p. 192).

Sources of Resilience in the Palestinian Community

Education

Education in Palestine is not an individual pursuit. It is a family and societal affair that everyone participates in. For children in particular, school "provides the main support and social network" (Altawil, 2008, p. 37). However, there are scholars who claim that while education is an important theme, it is a "complicated territory" since there are important variations in the manner in which education is "either glorified or demonized" (Chatty & Hundt, 2005, p. 176). The majority of Palestinians believe that

education can improve their living conditions not only by opening doors to employment but also by inoculating people against the attempts to destroy Palestinian identity and the Palestinian culture (Palestinian Right to Education Campaign, 2007).

Indeed, education has long been a fraught topic in the administration of Palestinian territory. The Turkish government, the British Mandate, Jordan and Egypt, and the State of Israel have successively controlled the educational system in Palestine. Writing two years after the beginning of the first Intifada, Mahshi and Bush (1989) describe how Palestinians responded to the Israeli closure of schools in the occupied territories. Palestinians interpreted the school closings as a direct attack on education, which they see as a solution to many of the problems they confront. Thus, in order to minimize the disruption of the school closings, which marked a threat to national identity, Palestinians organized neighborhood schools in almost every town in the West Bank, a movement known as “Popular Education.” As a result of this movement, Palestinian educators were freshly inspired to develop a distinctively Palestinian educational system stripped of the influence of colonial systems. Palestinians, write Mahshi and Bush, “have come to realize that an educational system stemming from their own culture and responding to their particular needs is essential in the foundation of a future state” (482).

In a 2005 interview, Mahshi (2006) reflected on the changes in Palestinian education occurring after 1989, when Mahshi and Bush (1989) described the effect of the first Intifada on the school system. Mahshi noted the formation under the Palestinian Authority of a Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which does not, however, operate with total freedom. Looking back, Mahshi stated that, on the positive side, the Intifada had inculcated in the Palestinians a spirit of resistance, which served as a source

of strength and resilience: “Education creates resistance by clarifying what the harmful effects of occupation are and by reinforcing the sense of community” (1989, p. 71). On the other hand, the closing of the schools had a severe impact on the quality of primary and secondary education. Nevertheless, under the Palestinian Authority, the Ministry of Education was able to arrange for the creation of a genuinely Palestinian curriculum that would strengthen the sense of national identity.

While primary schools and high schools have a formative effect on students’ values, sense of identity, and therefore their personal resilience, higher educational institutions also play a seminal role in the development of community resilience. National institutions of higher learning can contribute immeasurably to the articulation and development of a national consciousness. They can provide training in the development of Palestinian society itself and can strengthen the social and cultural foundations of a society torn asunder by a military occupation imposed by a “settler colonial state” (Abu Lughod, 2000, p. 83). The goals set forth in the mission statements of Palestinian universities and colleges are telling: to impart knowledge to students, to serve the needs of the Palestinian people, to provide the skills necessary for Palestinians to develop their culture and social and economic institutions, and to meet the needs of a developing Palestinian society and economy (Abu Lughod, 2000, p. 84). As Hallaj points out, “the motivation [for higher education] was heightened when the loss of land by a predominantly agrarian society drove it to compensate by searching for more secure ways to earn a living” (Hallaj, 1980, p. 78). This fact helped enhance the survival capabilities of Palestinians in exile as well as under occupation.

Palestine has eight universities and four colleges. There is no doubt that the establishment of these universities in Palestine was a response to the desperate need to meet the increasing demand for national higher education, but it was also qualitatively related to the protection and enhancement of Palestinian culture and cultural values. Hallaj (1980) points to the high value Palestinians place on education, as indicated by the relatively high percentage of Palestinians who are university students, but notes that very many Palestinians must leave the West Bank or Gaza to attend university. Students who obtain their education outside Palestine do not share the same cultural foundation as those who remain in Palestine. Looking forward to an independent Palestinian state, Hallaj describes the role that higher education should play in the nation-building process. One of the tasks of higher education, he argues, is “to develop an effective cultural base for its educational and training programmes designed to foster certain attitudinal tendencies and thought processes” in students (Hallaj, 1980, p. 91). In particular, these attitudes and ways of thinking should “foster attitudes and values supportive of a pluralistic-constitutional polity.” Thus, by promoting social stability, higher education can help build resilience on the societal level.

Family and Social Support

Early studies tended to focus on the individual as the locus of resilience. Recently, however, researches have begun to study how families and communities function to promote resilience in individuals. Mackay (2005) reviewed the research literature on family resilience, as opposed to the resilience of individual children. He adopts a

definition of family resilience as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (p. 99). Mackay found that families that have strong emotional bonds among their members are more resilient: they are better able to cope with stressors. Families with strong belief systems—a strong set of shared values and assumptions that may correspond to a religious or spiritual outlook—also demonstrate resilience, because their members are better prepared to make sense of adversity.

Simon et al. (2005) observed that family resilience is more than the sum of the resiliences of its members; the dynamics within the family unit determine the level of the family’s resilience. Key features that promote family resilience are a belief system shared by family members, organizational acumen, and good communication skills (p. 428). Furthermore, Simon et al. found that families that reach out for help or support to extended family, friends, or community members show improved resilience. Simon et al. propose treatment strategies that recognize and build on the inherent strengths of a family to develop resilience, instead of a traditional psychopathological approach that focuses on eliminating family dysfunction.

“Social support, emotional ties with parents, and trust are considered essential in fostering children’s resiliency against traumatic stress” (Punamäki et al., 2001, p. 257). In addition, Etherington (2003) wrote that “the family, social, and cultural context might also play an important part for those who have been traumatized” (p. 30). Similarly, Altawil (2008) surveyed the factors that may stave off the effects of trauma in children and found that, in general, “a high level of social support, family cohesiveness, and family communication has been found to protect children by mediating the effect of war

trauma” (p. 48). Social support is key, and family is an essential source of support: “Strong ties among Arab families appear to shield family members from incidents that otherwise might be experienced as disastrous” (p. 40). Next to family, friends and the school environment are also a crucial source of support for children and youths. Community support is another source of social support that can mitigate the damage of a traumatic event.

Punamäki et al. state that research among Palestinians pointed to the fact that parental and maternal love, intimacy, and wise disciplining enhanced children’s resiliency through increased creativity and cognitive capacity (Punamäki et al., 1997). Research on Palestinian children has found that parental love, affection, and proper discipline considerably raised a child’s level of resilience by increasing their creative and cognitive capacities (Ayalon, 1993; Punamäki, 1997). Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) concluded that children who faced multiple risks from Intifada-related violence but who lived in a supportive family environment were less likely to develop psychological problems. On the other hand, children who faced multiple Intifada-related risks but did not live in a supportive family environment were deemed to be at a high risk of psychological or developmental problems.

Studies on resilience in children exposed to wartime stresses and trauma found that parental behavior had a strong effect on their children’s resilience (Agaibi et al., 2005). For example, if a mother is unable to control her intrusive PTSD symptoms (e.g., recalling horrible war images) and expresses avoidant coping patterns, her children will be more vulnerable to stresses of war. According to Punamäki et al. (2001), this is evidence that the trauma experienced by the child is dependent on how the parents react.

In fact, Massad et al. (2009) found a positive correlation between the mental health of mothers and the resilience of their children, and concluded that “maternal mental health may buffer the impact of adversity on small children; their functioning might be a powerful risk factor for the children’s well-being” (p. 94).

Family support, however, may sometimes have a counterintuitive effect on children. Theorizing that a child’s social support network and personal sense of hope might protect against PTSD, Kasler et al. (2008) studied a sample of Israeli children aged 9–11 years whose hometown had suffered intense rocket attacks during the 2006 war with Lebanon. They found that a higher level of hope meant that a child was less likely to develop PTSD. On the other hand, they found a positive correlation between family support and PTSD symptoms. This correlation appears to contradict that claim that family support protects children from trauma. The researchers concluded, however, that children who displayed the symptoms of PTSD were more likely to discuss their traumatic experience with family members or teachers, thus leading to opportunities for healing.

When considering the role of family support and social support in promoting resilience among Palestinian children, however, it is necessary to keep in mind the effect of the Intifada itself on families and society. Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) noted that the arrest and imprisonment of family members deprived many boys of their role models, putting them at a higher risk of developing psychological trauma than girls. School closings, too, were more likely to affect boys by depriving daily life of its structure. The authors also noted that changes in Palestinian society had led to more freedom and

responsibilities for women and girls, and that increased independence and responsibility are associated with resiliency in girls.

Sports and Physical Activities

There is not much literature that deals with sport as a way of overcoming trauma. According to the International Platform on Sport & Development (2008), “the use of sport as a means to provide psychosocial support to people affected by disaster is a relatively new area of sport and development. A small number of research efforts and project evaluations have begun to help us understand the link between participation in sport and physical activity and trauma relief” (International Council of Sport, 2007). Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008), who studied resilience in a sample of Palestinian youths aged 15–18, found that sports activities were a source of resilience for boys, though not for girls.

In many places in the world, the aim of sports and play programs is to restore children’s social well-being and psychological health within their community (Henley et al., 2007). In addition, “Sports and physical activity can have an important function in assisting victims of trauma to cope with physical and emotional trauma” (International Council of Sport, 2007). According to Henley et al. (2007) “Play has long been understood to provide children with the experiences they need in order to learn social skills and values. Through play, children become sensitive to other children’s needs and values, learn to handle exclusion and dominance, manage their emotions, learn self-control, plus to share power, space, and ideas with others.... Sport and play activities

provide children with the opportunity to negotiate and resolve conflict” (Erikson, 1977; McArdle, 2001; Piaget, 1959; Winnicott, 1968; cited in Henley et al., 2007).

Religion

A large body of work has demonstrated the very crucial role of religion in the lives of many Palestinians. As Teeffelen writes: “a factor relevant to the cultural *sumud*—Steadfastness—of Palestinians is the importance of religion as a source of faith, spiritual commitment, guidance and consolation.... During uncertain and seemingly hopeless times, many persons and families consider faith as a beacon for spiritual orientation” (Teeffelen 2005, p. 422). Likewise, Schuster et al. state that their survey indicated that Americans responded to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in various ways. Most of them turned to religion and also to one another for social support (Schuster et al., 2001, p. 1511).

Religious belief is not simply a source of comfort or consolation, however. There is an important cognitive element at work. Like Teeffelen (2005) and Schuster et al. (2001), Peres et al. (2007) note that many people respond to traumatic events on the basis of their religious beliefs and argue that religious belief may foster resilience. Pointing to Antonovsk’s concept of a “sense of coherence,” they suggest that “A decisive factor in developing resilience may be the way individuals perceive and process an experience” (Peres 2007, p. 346). Addressing a specifically Palestinian context, Altawil (2008) concluded that spirituality or religious belief can provide a framework of meaning that lessens trauma by locating adversity in a larger context: “Muslims believe that one should

endure life's burdens without complaint, and that only God, not humans, can help people" (p. 40). Because religious or spiritual beliefs can provide a narrative or cognitive framework that allows one to make sense of suffering and find purpose or meaning in life, Peres et al. (2007) call for further study of the connection between religion or spirituality and resilience. This connection should also be compared to the link between political ideology and resilience, since a political ideology also provides a framework in which to perceive and process experience.

The social aspects of religion also promote resilience. Carter (2007) describes an ethnographic study of devotion to Catholic saints among Catholics and Voodoo practitioners in New Orleans, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Rather than investigating the connection between individual religious belief and resilience, the study focuses on the social dimensions of religious belief and practice as a way of constructing resilience on the community level. Shared religious belief fosters resilience by encouraging the construction of social networks and promoting the revitalization of communities. Altawil (2008), studying Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, also noted that receiving support from other members of a religious community promotes resilience. But Carter notes one problem that can thwart the development of solidarity: "religious groups do not necessarily share the same vision of recovery and revitalization" (2007, p. 7). Thus, religious differences can undermine community resilience if they lead to conflict among community members.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The goal of this study is to understand the impact of the arts on the development of resilience among Palestinians who are now studying in the U.S. Thus, at the core of this study are the interviews conducted with seven Palestinian graduate students attending American universities. An analysis of these interviews, presented in chapter 4, yielded the participants' observations on many themes, such as the relationship between the arts and resilience, the negative effects of trauma, and the role of family, education, and community in building resilience among Palestinians.

This study employs qualitative methods to answer the research questions it poses. Qualitative research has the unique ability to provide insight into the underlying issues that are most pertinent to the population under study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) wrote:

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives. (pp. 2–3)

In the following sections I describe the methodology of the interview process, and the procedures for gathering data and analyzing it.

Narrative Inquiry and the Interview Process

Narrative Inquiry

One qualitative approach to research that seeks to reveal a wide range of human thoughts, emotions, and experiences is that of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define narrative inquiry this way:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as a phenomenon under study. (p. 477)

Similar to phenomenology, narrative inquiry seeks to understand lived experience and how individuals describe and perceive their experiences (Patton, 2004). Moreover, observation during interviews is a fundamental and highly important component of the process. Narrative inquiry is an interactive and dynamic process of telling stories and listening to the stories of others. Reissman (1993) indicated that the foremost way for human beings “to make sense of their experience is by casting it in narrative form” (p. 4).

Narrative inquiry is guided by the belief that people are social beings, and consequently that telling stories is primary to relating to others (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; McLeod, 2004). In addition, personal stories of lived realities help transfer extremely complex concepts and the effects of highly embedded traditions in society to more understandable, humane, and personal levels (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). McLeod

(2004) indicated that storytelling is central to being known by oneself and by others, and that it promotes social inclusion. Sharing life stories brings the unknown into the known, and it allows individuals to view lived realities through the lens of another, opening their eyes to a new way of seeing and being in the world. Further, empathy may be gained across varying social contexts through storytelling and listening to others share about their lives (Gamson, 2002). Moreover, in narrative inquiry, the core of the interpretation and analysis is understanding what people value, how they think, and how they have found meaning in or made sense of events in their lives (Riley & Hawe, 2005). Riley & Hawe (2005) indicate that “narrative inquiry seeks themes and analyzes them and studies the world through the eyes of one storyteller” (p. 229).

According to Patton (2004), the narrative focus of qualitative research honors people’s stories as data that can stand on their own as pure descriptions of experience worthy of narrative documentary, or can be analyzed for connections between the psychological, sociological, cultural, political, and dramatic dimensions of human experience (p. 116). Patton (2004) adds that

It [the interview] is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings. Even in in-depth interview studies, observation plays an important role as a researcher notes the interviewee’s body language and affects in addition to her/his words. (p. 107)

The Interview Process

In order to explore my questions, I used the case study approach, which focuses on the individual narratives of the interviewees. Using the interviewees’ “life story” as a narrative form is part of the broader qualitative research method that relies on gathering

information on the subjective essence of the interviewees' lives. I chose to collect data by conducting face-to-face interviews.

There are many types of interviews with many styles of questions, and each is appropriate in different circumstances. In this study, I used the semi-structured approach. Semi-structured interviews can be defined as “conversations with a purpose” (Mason 2002); the interviewer starts with a number of predetermined questions or topics, but then adopt a flexible approach for discussion with the interviewee. As Leech (2002, p. 665) points out, “In an interview, what you already know is as important as what you want to know. What you want to know determines which questions you will ask. What you already know will determine how you ask them.” Reinharz (1992) notes, “Multiple interviews are likely to be more accurate than single interviews because of the opportunity to ask additional questions and to get corrective feedback on previously obtained information” (p. 37). I chose to conduct lengthy single interviews, which allowed me to follow up on points made by the interviewees. During the interviews I asked the interviewees an open-ended question: “Can you tell me about your personal story?”

Sampling

My study sample can be described as a purposeful sample. Michael Patton identified 16 different kinds of purposeful sampling categories (1990); snowball or chain sampling is one of them. This particular purposeful sampling technique identifies cases of interest from people who know people who are good candidates for interview subjects—

people whose cases are information rich and are thus good examples for study. By using chain sampling, I was able to identify seven interviewees whose life histories were relevant to the present study and whose cases were information rich.

Interview procedures

Interviews were scheduled with the participants after they signed a Written Consent Letter (see Appendix 1). The Consent Letter describes the purpose of the study and the way the data will be gathered, and guarantees confidentiality of the data. The interviews took place in a familiar setting, since “Creating the setting that helps the person feel comfortable is fundamental to a good interview” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 30). The same amount of time, 90–120 minutes, was allocated for each of the subjects. Also, structuring the interviews helped to eliminate or minimize problems of reactivity. These measures helped to ensure that the observations were systematic, thereby facilitating the recording of what was seen and heard and making it easier to identify indicators of the key concepts defined above.

The life-story approach begins with the recorded interviews, which are then transcribed and transformed into flowing narratives. I tape-recorded the interviews, which were conducted in Arabic; then I transcribed the tapes and translated the interviews into English. In a preliminary stage of analysis, I compiled the results of the interviews in narrative form. Then, I identified recurring themes in the narratives. I used those themes to analyze the results of the interviews and reorganize them in thematic form; the reorganized interview data is presented in the following chapter (chapter 4).

Translation

Most of the interview data was in Arabic and the research report was to be written in English. The nature of the story I was writing needed holistic rather than piecemeal data, so I needed to translate each complete interview from Arabic into English. Reading hundreds of pages of data in two languages, English written from left to right and Arabic from right to left, was in itself a great challenge. Translation required a knowledge of subject-specific terminology, and an awareness of style, grammar, and idiomatic expressions. Most of the time, my own knowledge of Arabic was sufficient to obtain acceptable translations, but I often referred to Arabic-English and English-Arabic dictionaries.

Analysis of Data

Qualitative modes of data analysis provide ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful patterns or themes. Moreover, qualitative data consist of words and observations. As with all data, analysis and interpretation are required to bring order and understanding to the phenomena. Data analysis involves arranging and organizing the information gathered, and data interpretation seeks to create meaning and make sense of the shared information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Data analysis requires creativity, discipline, and a systematic approach. In order to make the best use of the data collected in the interviews, I used typical analytic procedures, which include, as Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 152) suggest:

- 1) Organizing the data.
- 2) Generating categories, themes, and patterns.
- 3) Coding the data.
- 4) Testing the emergent understandings.
- 5) Searching for alternative explorations.
- 6) Writing the report.

The collected data of this study consisted of audiotaped recordings of the Palestinian students' interviews and discussions. Once the data were gathered, I devoted a good amount of time and attention to repeatedly listening to the recordings and rereading transcriptions of the recordings for the purposes of analyzing "narrative threads and themes" that developed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2005, p. 113); and then interpreting the information and constructing the meaning of what was recorded and shared. In order to analyze and interpret the described experiences of the interviewees in this study, I listened and re-listened to the participants' voices within each interview and sought to understand how each of them appeared to make sense of their experiences and create meaning from them (Chase, 2005). As I studied the data from the interviews, I was guided by my research questions:

Question # 1: What are the sources of resilience for Palestinians?

Question # 2: What is the role of family, community, and education in building resilience in the Palestinian community?

Question # 3: What role do the arts play in building resilience for individuals in societies experiencing violent conflict, especially among Palestinians?

As mentioned above, the first step in organizing the data was to compile the results of the interviews in narrative form. Then, by keeping my research questions in mind as I studied the data, I was able to identify themes, subthemes, and patterns that appeared and reappeared in the interviews. The themes and subthemes fell into three broad categories that reflect my research questions: education, family and community, and the arts. Once I had developed a comprehensive list of themes that appeared throughout the interviews, I studied the interviews again and coded them according to the themes I had generated. Next, I constructed a set of tables, each row of which contained a theme and the statements of each participant that were relevant to that theme. It is important to note that each participant did not address each theme; in the analysis chapter I have indicated which participants spoke about each theme. Finally, I used the data in the tables to write an account of the participants' responses, organized according to theme. The following chapter presents the themes that emerged from the individual interviews I conducted with the Palestinian students.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I present the evidence collected from the interviews on three themes. I extracted the participants' comments on the three major themes as follows: the importance in their lives of (1) education; (2) family and community support; and (3) the arts. The participants' comments are arranged according to various subthemes, which are described at the beginning of each section. This arrangement makes it easier to compare and contrast the participants' views on each issue. In the following chapter, I will discuss the significance of the patterns of agreement and disagreement that I identified in the seven interviews.

Before turning to the thematic presentation of the interview results, however, I must introduce the seven participants, who are all Palestinians pursuing graduate studies in the U.S. In the following paragraphs, I identify each participant by a name—which is a pseudonym—and present some basic biographical information on each.

Ghadeer

Ghadeer is a 35-year-old woman. She came to the U.S. on a scholarship to pursue a Ph.D. She is the youngest child in a large family; she has 10 brothers and sisters.

Ghadeer learned many lessons from the stories that she used to hear from her parents, especially the story of how they were forced to leave their village. Ghadeer's two uncles were killed in the 1948 massacre. One of her brothers was imprisoned by the Israelis for a

long time. Ghadeer said that her family has helped her to survive and given her the strength to endure her own struggles.

Nael

Nael is a 33-year-old man. He was trained in the maintenance field and worked in that field for several years, but due to an injury he had to find another occupation. He began working with children in a community center run by an NGO, and later he received a scholarship to continue his graduate studies in the U.S.

Nael was born in a refugee camp near Bethlehem, where he grew up in a large family: he is the youngest among eleven brothers and three sisters. He received much support from his sisters and from his nieces and nephews, who were close to him in age. Nael's family taught him how to live with pain, and to love education and his land.

Nael was raised in a political atmosphere, and two of his brothers were imprisoned for a long time. When his family's house was demolished by Israeli soldiers in 1983, community support helped them to find temporary shelter and rebuild their house.

Abed

Abed is a 33-year-old man. He graduated from the Jordanian University in the mid-nineties and then worked with the police department under the Palestinian Authority. Subsequently he worked in the human rights field with the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights and the United Nations. Later, Abed had the

opportunity to finish his master's degree in the U.S. In addition, he received a scholarship to obtain his Ph.D. and returned to the U.S.

Abed was born in the southern part of the West Bank, where he and his older brother grew up in a loving family. He lost his father when he was in the sixth grade. Consequently, Abed's mother played an important role in his life. Today he is married and has three children.

Ahmed

Ahmed is a 30-year-old man. He came to the U.S. to study music and filmmaking, and is interested in integrating the two fields.

Ahmed's ancestors lived in northern Palestine where they had beautiful fields full of orange trees, until they were forced to leave in 1948. Many of Ahmed's relatives moved to the Gaza Strip, Egypt, or Jordan. Only a few of them, including Ahmed's father, settled in the northern part of the West Bank where Ahmed was born, and where his older brother and younger sister live.

Ahmed's father was a teacher of Arabic, religion, and history. He played a central role in developing many of his children's values. Ahmed was raised to love his country and never to forget the importance of his land and family.

Rania

Rania, the youngest of the participants, is a 28-year-old woman. She lives in a small Palestinian refugee camp. Rania was born in a big family. She graduated from Bethlehem University. She received a scholarship to travel to the U.S. to continue her studies.

Rania was the youngest child in her family; she has nine brothers and sisters. Her family lived in a small house in a refugee camp near Bethlehem, and she said that her parents raised her with good values. Many of her siblings were imprisoned during the first Intifada.

Mohammed

Mohammed, the oldest of the participants, is a 44-year-old man. He earned a bachelor's degree from Birzeit University in Ramallah, and a master's degree from Al-Quds University in Jerusalem. Mohammed came to the U.S. with his family after he received a scholarship to continue his doctoral studies.

Mohammed was born in a refugee camp near the city of Hebron. He was the youngest of 10 children. His parents were poor refugees. Mohammed's family taught him many values, including to be kind, gentle, and helpful. He said that his mother is the most important person in his life.

Aseel

Aseel is a 35-year-old woman. She has a master's degree from Birzeit University in Palestine. In 2005 she received a scholarship to continue her Ph.D. studies in the U.S.

Aseel's father was a dentist and her mother was a teacher. Her parents fled to Lebanon after the 1967 Six Day War between Israel and the Arabs. Aseel and her younger sister were born in Lebanon; her family was forced to move to Syria in 1982 after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Aseel lived as a refugee in Lebanon and Syria for the first 20 years of her life, coming to Palestine with her family in 1994.

Education

The seven participants agreed on the importance of education in their own lives and in the lives of their fellow Palestinians. Their comments in the interviews touched on many topics, in addition to their own experiences in primary and secondary schools and at university. The participants emphasized the role of their families in encouraging and aiding them to complete their education. They also reflected on education as a value they had themselves adopted, in part because it contributed to their sense of identity and their overall self-improvement. Finally, the participants drew connections between education and political activity as well as education and the arts, and several participants indicated how education served to increase their own resilience as well as the resilience of others.

I will begin by summarizing the participants' comments on the role their families played in their education. Then I will review their accounts of their experiences at school.

In the remainder of this section, I will present the participants' views on education as a personal value, and their views on the broader relationship between education and politics, education and the arts, and education and resilience.

Family Contexts

Although all of the participants were pursuing postgraduate education, they were not all the children of educated parents. Aseel was born into an educated family: "My father worked as a dentist and my mother was a kindergarten teacher." Ahmed's father was a teacher of history and religion. Abed's grandfather had been a private teacher at the king's palace. Ghadeer, however, said, "My father was a farmer. He could not finish his education because he had to help my grandfather in the fields." Rania's parents finished primary school, but they were unable to continue their education.

Regardless of their parents' educational status, however, the participants agreed that their parents had recognized the importance of education. Rania stated, "Even though my parents were not able to continue their education, they believed in the importance of education as the only way to secure one's future. They knew that knowledge is the way to a better future." Ghadeer said, "My father believed that education was the only path one should follow in life." Indeed, the parents of Rania and Ghadeer ensured that all of their children received the full education that they themselves had been unable to obtain. Rania explained that "My family encouraged and helped me and all of my brothers and sisters to finish our college education." Ghadeer likewise reported that all of her brothers and sisters are educated: "All my brothers and sisters managed to finish their higher education: one of my brothers has a Ph.D. degree and another has a master's degree."

Indeed, most of the participants seemed to take pride in the fact that many of their siblings and other relatives were educated. Mohammed talked about his family members' educations and said proudly, "My father lived 110 years. He died in 1996. I have five sisters and four brothers, seven of whom have a university degree." Aseel, whose parents had been educated, noted that "My sister finished her Ph.D. from Germany." Ghadeer was very happy that she, along with her relatives, had been educated: "My father sent one of my uncles and one of my aunties to study in Egypt and sent me to study in Ramallah." Abed in particular spoke in detail about his family's education:

My extended family is considered to be one of the most educated families. My grandfather received a Bachelor of Arts degree in physics from the American University in Egypt. My grandfather used to speak Turkish, English, and Arabic. He was a school principal, and since that time education has been important in my family...I grew up in a loving family. My family has always believed in the importance of education."

Abed's family history differed from that of the other participants, in that Abed's father died when he was very young. But his father's death only strengthened his resolve to pursue his education:

I lost my father at an early age. In a community where the father plays a central role, the son should represent his father even after he passes away. My father passed away when I was very young, when I was in the sixth grade and my oldest brother was in the ninth grade. That made us concentrate more on education.

Abed's motivation for getting an education was thus deeply rooted in his particular family experience, and he himself stated that he wants to teach his children to

love education. But other participants drew similar connections between their family life and their pursuit of an education.

Rania recounted that her family always believed in the importance of education: “My parents used to focus on education.” Ghadeer stated that education and family were among the most important elements in her life: “My education, family and country are the most important things in my life.” As for Mohammed, he and his wife both decided to continue their educational studies, with the result that schooling became an important part of their marriage. “During that time,” Mohammed said, “I worked, managed the store, the ‘house,’ and studied, all together. Thank God that all these things motivated me to continue my studies, which I finished with honors, and I also acquired an advance certificate.”

Aseel’s parents, however, who were both educated, drew a distinction between education and family life: they believed that education was more important than getting married. Aseel said, “My father’s views were extremely progressive. Before our return to Palestine, he would often be told by his fellow Palestinian refugee friends that it was time for me to get married. My father would reply that Aseel’s education was primary and the rest would follow later.” She also recalled how, “In my early childhood, my parents would teach me the importance of education and how one could achieve almost anything if one was sufficiently educated.” Aseel’s parents’ insistence that their daughter make education and not marriage her priority points to another issue, namely, the challenge faced by women who want to complete their education, pursue a career, and raise a family.

Only one participant spoke of the family as a source of conflict in the context of getting an education. Abed explained, “I left Palestine to study in Jordan. I was enrolled as an engineering student for one year. Later, I decided to study a different field. That was my own decision, which my family did not like at the beginning.” It is significant that the conflict came not from Abed’s decision to abandon his education, but simply to change his field of study.

Schooling

Primary and secondary education.

All of the participants, with the exception of Ahmed, described their experience in elementary school and high school. Ahmed did recall that as a youth, he had to give up his music lessons: “I started to learn how to play the violin when I was twelve years old but I could not continue learning it because of my family financial situation. Violin classes were very expensive and my family could not afford it at that time.”

The eldest participant, Mohammed (age 44), spoke positively of his years at an elementary school in a refugee camp: “I was doing well in school. Our school was very small. We used to play, study, and spend all day time there.” The only hardship that Mohammed recounted was due to economic circumstances. After the ninth grade, Mohammed had to change his primary school to another school which was in another camp: “I had to walk from my house in to another school in another camp which was 6–8 miles away. That was simply because I could not pay for transportation and because I was determined to get my education.”

Ghadeer, Nael, Rania, and Aseel all attended schools in refugee camps. Ghadeer studied at a local school in Gaza during the first Intifada. Nael was in primary school during the first Intifada: “The first Intifada took place when I was at the primary school. I studied until the third grade in the camp. Later, I went to another school for the fourth grade called the shelter school, and the UNRWA’s (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) school. When I was in the fourth grade, the school was outside the camp.” Rania also studied in a UNRWA school for girls. And Aseel attended camp schools while she was living in a refugee camp in Lebanon.

Some of the difficulty of studying in the camp schools was due to overcrowding. Rania remarked, “It was not easy to study when you have to stay in a small crowded room for many hours. Each class room had around forty students.” But the most disruptive circumstance for the younger participants was the Intifada. “School was not easy,” said Ghadeer. “Students used to study a few weeks every semester. . . . The school would be closed most of the time because of the political situation.” Nael also remembered that many schools were closed during the first Intifada.

When Abed was a high school student, “The situation was difficult and in a city like Hebron it was not easy to go to school. The schools were closed for long periods of times and the main reason for that was the Occupation.” Indeed, Abed left his school to find a job: “As a result of the school closings many Palestinian students left their schools to work and make money.” Ghadeer also noted that “Many people have to leave school to work because of the financial situation in Palestine.” Later, however, Abed returned to school and continued his education: “I was lucky and could return to school to continue my higher education.” Aseel also spoke of interruptions to the curriculum when she was

in Syria: “For the first few months I could not attend school. Around the camp, there was talk among the Palestinians of the martyrdom of our countrymen in Palestine. The death of every Palestinian would be observed as martyr’s day in the camp.”

The violence of the Intifada extended to the schools themselves. Nael explained that while many schools were closed, others were a stage to many clashes between the Palestinian students and the Israeli soldiers. “I remember that when we used to go to school, we threw stones and as a result the Israeli soldiers would close the school. I remember that our school bags were full of stones rather than textbooks.” Nael added, “In high school, my was a school where all the clashes happened. It was not a school! It was a daily demonstration.”

According to Rania, “School was not easy. The windows of the crowded classrooms would be shut almost all of the time so that we would not smell tear gas. Demonstrations used to take place near the school, so the boys would come and ask us to join them in the demonstration. My school was bombed and occupied twice by occupation forces.” Even in Damascus, Aseel said, “We learned to deal with the effects of the war between Lebanon and Israel. When we would return home after school, we would make sure that the duct supplying cooking gas was shut, and that the windows would be left open to ensure protection from flying glass shards in the event of aircraft bombings by Israeli fighter planes.”

As a result of the fighting and disruptions, many students lost interest in school. Rania said that many students “did not want to study because they were already frustrated by the difficult Palestinian situation.” But, she added, the hardships spurred other

students to work harder: “Many others wanted to know as much as possible because they believed in the importance of what they were doing and the importance of education.”

Nael spoke from a different perspective, seeing the hardships themselves as educational:

“In our school, we learned how to throw stones, how to struggle, how to resist, how to refuse the Occupation and we learned politics rather than ordinary subjects. That’s how my friends and I studied.” In other words, Nael saw his schooling as an alternative education in political struggle.

Postsecondary education.

Just as the political situation interfered with the education of young students, so too did it affect the choices of university-age students. Rania explained that she chose to attend her University “mainly because it was the nearest University to the camp.”

Reaching the Palestinian universities, especially the ones that were outside of Bethlehem, was very hard:

I did not want to go through what my sister went through when she was studying at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, where she had to leave home at sunrise to reach the university at 8 a.m. . . . On the way to university, journeys of short distances stretch into hours because of the checkpoints and the Occupation.

Rania added, “I wanted first to study medical science, but I couldn’t study this field in Palestine, so I decided to study English Language and Literature at Bethlehem University.”

Abed, on the other hand, was able to go abroad to study: “I left Palestine to study in Jordan. I believe traveling outside Palestine to Jordan and Egypt has a positive effect in

building my personality.” After Rania graduated from Bethlehem University, however, she received a scholarship to continue her studies in the U.S., giving her the opportunity to broaden her horizons: “I am happy to be able to continue my studies. It is a great opportunity for me to discover a new place, new people and a new culture.”

It was not necessary to leave Palestine, however, for students to gain a new sense of independence. Mohammed said, “I believe that Birzeit University was one of the things that helped me to discover my individuality away from my family. It was a new experience, a different environment outside the refugee camp. At the university, I had the chance to meet new people and discover various ways of thinking.” Mohammed had to change his major field of study after an accident damaged one of his arms. He eventually had the opportunity to travel to the U.S. and earn his Ph.D.

While most of the participants went on to university after completing high school, Nael followed a different path. “I studied until the tenth grade. After that, I moved to an occupational school.” As was true for many Palestinians, Nael was studying and working at the same time. “In the morning, I used to go to school, then to work in Israel, and to school again, then another job again, to work instead of my brother who was imprisoned. He used to work as a night guard. This situation lasted more than a year; work in the morning, school in the afternoon and work in the evening.” During the invasion to the Bethlehem area in 2002, Nael was injured and was not able to continue to work in his field of study. But a local NGO offered him a position as manager of the computer lab in its educational center. As a result of his experiences working with children at the center, Nael decided to go back to school and become a teacher.

Education as a Personal Value.

As discussed above, all of the participants acknowledged that their families had instilled in them an enduring respect for education. The participants also indicated some of the ways in which they had come to value education in their own lives. Mohammed, Abed, and Rania all stated that the act of reading itself was important to them. Mohammed said, "I always read books about the importance of education, and I knew that knowledge was the way for development." Abed noted that academic reading was a source of pleasure: "I always enjoyed reading schoolbooks." And Rania explained how reading improved the quality of her life: "I always liked reading. In some stages of my life, I think that reading helped me escape the hard reality of the Palestinian situation and problems especially the Occupation."

In addition, several participants spoke of education as a value that they wished to transmit to the next generation. Abed mentioned, as noted above, that he wants to teach his children to love education, thus passing on to them the respect for education that he inherited from his parents. Nael testified that his experience at the NGO center had shown him how important education was for the kids there: "Three months after working in the center; I started to realize the benefits that little children can get from the center." In fact, this experience led him to study to become a teacher himself. Indirectly, Rania expressed her gratitude to the older adults who had tutored her in workshops at her camp: "It was so inspiring to talk to old people and learn from their experiences during those workshops."

Some participants cited the practical advantages of an education, namely income and mobility. Nael's training in electricity maintenance enable him to work in Israel: "I finished school and worked for a long time in Israel, nearly from the early nineties until the beginning of the 'second Intifada.'" Abed considered education to be the key to a better future: "Education was my only reinforcement and support for me and many other Palestinians who wanted to guarantee their future." He left Palestine to find a better opportunity for education and to live independently: "I believe in living an independent life. I left Palestine to study in Jordan." Aseel noted that her father, a dentist, and her mother, a kindergarten teacher, moved frequently before settling in Damascus, and that afterwards her mother returned to Lebanon to work as teacher and a writer of children's stories. Still, Aseel's father pointed out that the family's real wealth lay in education: "My father would tell us that since the family did not have enough money and did not own a house, the only thing that we had was our education." She added, "When I asked my parents to buy me something, they would say that I would get it only when I completed school." Mohammed's family attained a greater degree of prosperity on the basis of their education. When Mohammed's wife graduated and began working at Al-Quds University, her own income combined with her husband's to improve the family's financial situation. In turn, four years later, Mohammed and his wife decided to continue their schooling.

Several participants linked their education to their sense of identity. Among the men, Abed drew a connection between focusing on his education after his father died and achieving "self-actualization." Mohammed said, "I believe that Birzeit University was one of the things that helped me to discover my individuality away from my family."

Among the women, Aseel said, “My parents played a huge role in shaping my identity. In fact, it was my mother who became a University professor was my role model. . . . My inspiration was my mother who obtained a master’s degree during the Israel-Lebanon war.” Rania linked her educational goals to a larger sense of purpose and destiny: “My childhood dream was to study Medical Science so that I could help ill people and cures of their diseases. . . . I always dreamed of becoming a great woman who will participate in changing the world and making it a better place for people to live.”

Finally, Rania pointed out that education is a continual process: “The more I learn, the more I realize how much I still need to learn and how much I do not know. That’s why I want to work and continue further studies to help my country and my family.” Indeed, all of the participants are likewise committed to continuing their education.

Education as a Communal Force.

Repeatedly, the participants spoke about education in a political context. This is not surprising, since most of them experienced disruptions in their education due to political conflict. Indeed, Abed asserted that “One of the goals of the occupation is to make kids leave their schools and to make Palestinians an uneducated population.” And Ghadeer expressed a view held by many Palestinians when she claimed that the Nakba, “the catastrophe,” happened because most Palestinians were not educated in 1948.

Consequently, several participants stressed the importance of education in the struggle against the Occupation. Ahmed said, “Education was a very important element

in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I believe that education will help Palestinians build their country and show their identities; with our education we can build our country and fight the Occupation.” Abed agreed: “I accept education as a truth that can be used to fight the Occupation.” Ghadeer stated more forcefully that “Knowledge and education are our only weapons against the Occupation. . . . I want every Palestinian kid to know everything about their homeland and to protect it with their education and with their lives.”

The participants spoke of education not only as a means of resistance, but also as a way to build their own nation. Ahmed said, “I believe that education will help Palestinians build their country and show their identities.” Both Aseel and Abed spoke of education as an investment in their country’s future. Aseel’s father told her that “The only thing that we had was our education, which we could invest in to free Palestine.” Similarly, Abed said that “Education will be our only investment for the future.” And as mentioned above, Rania explained that she wanted to “continue further studies to help my country and my family.”

Some of the participants indicated another way that education could have a political function: Palestinians could take steps to educate people from other nations about their situation. Rania recounted how, during her university time, “I worked as a volunteer in peace groups. I worked with internationals visiting Palestine and I participated in developing two photography books about Palestine and human rights.” Photography had a huge influence on Rania’s life: “It was great to be able to show people what you think without having to say a single word. A good picture could reflect one’s feelings and thoughts.” Likewise, she spoke of filmmaking as a way to represent her

people's experience: "It was amazing to see people's reactions when they saw the films we produced. The short films reflected the Palestinian reality in a very simple and interesting way." Ahmed expressed a desire to communicate Palestinian culture to a global audience: "I always try to spread awareness about Palestinian culture through films and music. I believe we should fight to protect our culture and to show it to the whole world." Ahmed said that he is studying music and filmmaking now because "I want to connect music and film together in order to provide evidence of the heritage and culture of the Palestinian people."

Finally, some participants spoke of the ways in which education could foster resilience among their people. Aseel said that her mother encouraged her not only "to pursue higher education but also to develop resilience." She added that "Education played a major role in shaping my personality and in dealing with ways to overcome trauma." As noted above, Rania associated reading with being able to "escape the harsh reality of the Palestinian situation and problems especially the Occupation. I used to write about the things that I liked and I used to write poetry." Rania's words suggest that education combined with the arts may contribute to resilience, and Nael made a similar point when speaking about his work with children at the NGO center. He explained:

I was a child during the first Intifada and I knew how much these children needed to be looked after and how much they were suffering; the same way I suffered in the past when I was a child. I remembered the things I used to like and the things I used to do as a child which gave me the opportunity to work with those children.

In his work, Nael found that drama was a particularly good educational tool that encouraged resilience through creativity: "Drama was an educational tool that children liked. In drama sessions, children had the opportunity to be creative through art, drawing,

dancing and acting. The goal of the drama sessions was to keep the children safe and protected from the Occupation and to have a good life.” Rania, however, used a form of therapy to aid children. She recounted how, as a teenager in the camp, she assisted a group of much older men whose aim was “to help children who were affected by the hard situation and the daily life in the camp to overcome trauma. We used to help children in speaking about their problems and trying to find solutions for those problems.”

Family and Community

The theme of family and community support also emerged in the interviews. This is in keeping with the observation that “Social support, emotional ties with parents, and trust are considered essential in fostering children’s resiliency against traumatic stress” (Punamaki et al., 2001, p. 257). Indeed, family has remained important to the participants, and even though they are all in the U.S. now, they keep in touch with their families and frequently call home. Ghadeer said that after she left Palestine to study in the U.S., she watched the news all the time in order to stay connected to her family and her community: “I listened to news every hour of the day; I listened to news more often because I wanted to stay connected with my family and my community.”

The participants’ comments have been arranged in two main sections; family support and community support. Within the family section, subsections examine the composition of participants’ families and their economic circumstances. Other subsections focus on the family as a site of political resistance, as a source of personal identity and values, and as an incubator of resilience. The section on community opens

with the participants' observations on the difficulties of everyday life, followed by subsections on the community as a site of political resistance and as an incubator of resilience.

Family Support

Family composition.

Of the seven participants, three came from small families: Ahmed has two sisters, one older and one younger; Abed has an older brother; and Aseel has an older sister. All four of the participants who came from large families were the youngest child in their family: Ghadeer, Nael, Rania, and Mohammed. Ghadeer referred to her ten older siblings as the most important people in her life. Nael described himself as “the youngest among eleven brothers and three sisters,” while Rania has nine brothers and sisters. Being the youngest in a large family was a special status. Nael explained that “Because I was the youngest in the family, I was close to my nieces and nephews. They were closer to my age, and that played a major role in family unity for me, especially with my nieces and nephews.” Rania said that one of her sisters always thought that Rania must be happy because she was the youngest: “It was partly true; being the youngest meant that I could learn from the experiences of others.” Yet Rania added, “Thank God I did not have younger brothers; not because it was so good to be the youngest, but because of the fear people in the camp felt for their children.” As the youngest in the family, Rania was spared the experience of worrying over any younger siblings of her own.

The participants all commented on the role that their parents played in their lives. Mohammed described the legacy that his father left for his family: “My father represented ‘the folklore’ because he was very old. He passed away in 1996 when he was 110 years old. We—our family—did not inherit anything from my father. Our father died and left us the love we feel toward each other.” Mohammed believes that his mother is the most important person in his life, and he spoke fondly of her: “She loves me so much. I kiss her hands and legs, and I trim her nails.”

Rania spoke of how her parents encouraged her to study. “My father became a refugee when he was 15 years old. He was the oldest in his family so he had to leave the school and work in order to help my grandfather in raising his children. . . . My father is a great father. He helped all of us to get our education, he showed us how to be helpful to our brothers and sisters.” Her mother also encouraged Rania and her siblings to continue their education.

Ghadeer believes that her father was the one who helped her to get her education: “My father tried his best to make us attend school and get a college education, and he sent me to study in Ramallah.” She credited her mother with maintaining the family after her father died. “My mother took all the responsibility of taking care of us, especially after my father passed away. She planted the seeds of loving our country in all of us.” Abed’s father died when he was in the sixth grade, and he observed that “Losing a father at a very young age was not easy, especially in a community where the father plays a central role.” But the loss of his father provided Abed with an opportunity for growth. Abed explained that “The son should represent his father even after he passes away. . . . I used to go to social occasions to represent the family even though I was very young; that had a

positive effect on my life because I was able to carry those responsibilities.” Abed also noted that his mother played an important role in his life: “My mother played a central role and we also depended on ourselves in order to survive without a father.”

Ahmed recalled that his father, who was a teacher of Arabic, religion, and history, had a specific purpose in raising his children: “His goal was to keep his children’s eyes open on their history and their occupied lands.” Similarly, Nael described his mother as “a political activist,” and he said that “My mother was very supportive of all of us. She suffered a lot, especially when she was trying to visit my brother and sister in the Israeli prison.” By contrast, Nael’s father, whom he described as a very strong and opinionated man, was against any political work.

Among the participants, Aseel grew up in the least traditional family. Both of her parents were educated; her father was a dentist and her mother was a schoolteacher. After Aseel’s family moved to Syria, her mother returned to Lebanon to work as a schoolteacher and a writer of children’s stories. As a result, Aseel’s father took on the duties traditionally associated with motherhood: “My father would take care of the daily necessities for me and my sister. My father would perform the roles of father and mother and he would cook and clean the house. This left a deep impression in the minds of both me and my sister. My father set a great example for us and he changed the way we looked at and experienced life.” She added “My mother was my role model for surviving and coping. . . . We would miss our mother a great deal, so we would visit her in Lebanon in the weekends.”

In addition, participants who now have families of their own acknowledged the support of their spouses. Nael's wife helped him and encouraged him to study in the U.S. Likewise, Abed, who is raising three children with his wife, said, "My wife supports me in everything in our lives especially in continuing my graduate studies." And Mohammed and his wife, both of whom pursued graduate studies, provided each other with mutual support: "After I was married, I received emotional support from my wife. And I also supported her."

Economic circumstances.

All of the participants grew up in challenging environments. Abed alone did not grow up as a refugee, but in the crowded city of Hebron. He remembered that "compared to many families in Hebron we were a poor family, especially because we lost my father, who was our source of financial support. After my father passed away, my uncles took care of us by giving us some money for our basic needs."

Ahmed grew up in a refugee camp, as did Rania. Her parents became refugees after the 1948 war, and years later their status was threatened as a result of the Palestinian uprising. "My father was a construction worker who worked many years inside Israel, but after the first Intifada started he lost his job." Her family lived in a small house near the main street. "All of us lived in a three-room house, every two or three of us shared the same mattress. The camp was very crowded and houses were very close to each other." Rania remembered the family's diet, too: "We ate the basics, we had chicken once every two weeks and beef once every few months. We used to eat a lot of rice and bread and beans."

Mohammed also commented on his family's diet: "I remember that we were very poor and we had meat once every two months. I remember that our lunch was 'hard bread' and an onion. I lived a little time in poverty and hunger, but my older brothers and sisters suffered more." His family endured inadequate housing:

My family lived a few months in Jericho and then moved to live in a Refugee Camp between Bethlehem and Hebron, where the United Nations Relief and Workers Agency (UNRWA) provided them with tents. People had to live in tents during the hot summer and the freezing winter. Later, the UNRWA built small apartments for them. Each apartment . . . consisted of two rooms (2.5 x 3 meters each).

He further explained, "The houses of the Camp used to be on one floor, in the past. But today, they are two and three floors. People build on top of the same houses because there is no more space in the camp."

Nael and Ghadeer both recalled growing up in poverty. Nael said, "Like most of the refugees, my family lost everything after the Nakba. We were poor and lived in a tent for many years." Ghadeer's family became refugees after the 1948 war. She lived in a camp in Gaza, and her family remained poor for years. But education helped them raise their standard of living. In particular, one of her brothers, who finished his graduate studies and now works in Dubai, is helping them financially.

Yet education does not always translate into wealth. Aseel's parents, a dentist and a schoolteacher, fled Palestine for Lebanon and then Syria. She remembered that "Both our father and mother worked hard under trying circumstances to earn enough money to keep the family going."

Family and political resistance.

I mentioned above that Ahmed's father and Nael's mother had strong political opinions. In fact, all the participants except Abed commented on the impact of Palestinian politics on their families. Rania said, "Like all Palestinian refugees, most of the stories that I used to hear as a child were the stories of 'al-Nakba.' My father and my grand mother always talked about it. They told us about their lives before the Nakba—how they used to have a big house and much land. They were farmers and they enjoyed every day there." Mohammed's parents told him about the Nakba: "When my family left their village in 1948, they thought they would return in a few days. This is what Palestinian Refugees were told in 1948, and the reason why the 1948 Nakba happened was because Palestinians were not educated." Likewise, Nael said, "I grew up listening to the Nakba stories from my parents." Ahmed stated, "In their minds and hearts, my family carried Palestinian values, nationalism, and the pain of their 1948 catastrophe." For Ghadeer, stories of the Nakba included the story of how her parents became refugees and how they walked many miles when they were forced to leave their village: "My family left their village after the war of 1948 and walked, which was not easy. Two of my uncles were killed in the 1948 massacre."

Consequently, the participants, many of whose educations were disrupted by the violence of the first Intifada, grew up with an acute awareness of the historical background to the politicization of their everyday lives. Ahmed's father ensured that his son did not forget his history: "My father wanted me to be connected with my land, language, and identity; those three things the Israelis tried to wipe out from Palestinian's

minds.” Likewise, Ghadeer said, “My family taught me to fight the struggles and the Occupation to survive.”

In addition, Ghadeer, Nael, Rania, and Mohammed, each the youngest in his or her family, had elder siblings who were politically active. Mohammed said, “Two of my brothers are political activists they did a lot of community work in our camp.” Ghadeer, Nael, and Rania recounted the arrest of their siblings, and the consequences of that arrest for other members of their families. Ghadeer said, “One of my brothers was imprisoned by the Israelis for a long time, and we were not allowed to travel or get a travel permit to the West Bank or Israel.” Many members of Rania’s family were imprisoned: “As a child, I did not remember my brothers. They were older than me, but [I did not get to know them] mostly because they were imprisoned. . . . Three of them were imprisoned for several years.” Rania also mentioned that “One of the three rooms in our house was ‘closed’ by the occupation after my brothers were imprisoned; we were not allow to open that room because the Israeli solders put concrete bricks on its windows and door.” Nael described a harsher retaliation: “My family faced a difficult period of time when my brother and sister were imprisoned in 1983 because they were involved in political activities, so the occupation demolished our house.”

Family, identity, and values.

All of the participants mentioned that they had grown up in a loving family environment. Abed said, “I grew up in a loving family,” as did Rania: “I was lucky to live in a loving family.” Several participants also spoke of the close ties among members of

their families, and of the ways in which their families contributed to their growth as individuals and the formation of their identity. Nael remarked, “I always had a strong relationship with my sisters. My sisters had strong personalities because they were active in the political struggle. This stage of my life built my personality and taught me lots of things.” Rania described a similar experience: “I have a very close relationship with my brothers, especially with my older brother who helped me in my education and helped me to be who I am today.” Aseel said, “My parents played a huge role in shaping my identity.” And the death of Abed’s father played a key role in his individuation: “The son should represent his father even after he passes away,” Abed explained, and thus Abed forged his own identity by taking on the role of his father.

Participants also spoke of the values they learned from their families. “For me, family is the source of my values and dreams,” said Mohammed. Rania was grateful to her parents for her upbringing: “I am always proud of my parents, who did their best to raise their children with good values.” Ahmed said, “I was raised to love my country, to love myself for being Palestinian, to know my history and culture, and not to forget the importance of my land and family.” Indeed, given the acute political awareness of the participants, it is not surprising that all of them reported that patriotism was a value espoused by their families. Mohammed recalled, “My father taught us to respect the older brother and to help people in need. He was a religious person. He taught us the ethics of religion: Do not steal! Help others and be nice to others!”

Among the values he learned from his family, Nael included “respecting the elderly, obedience, ethics, and the value of education, whether at home or in school.”

Indeed, the participants frequently noted the value of education as a value transmitted to them by their families. I have discussed the role of education in detail in the first part of this chapter (Education, 1. Family contexts). Here it is important to note that parents sought to make sure that their children went to university, even if they themselves had not managed to do so. Thus, although Ghadeer's and Rania's parents had not been able to complete their own education, they ensured that each of their many children attained a university degree. In Aseel's nontraditional family, she and her sister were taught that education was more important than getting married: "My father's views were extremely progressive. Before we returned to Palestine, he would often be told by his fellow Palestinian refugee friends that it was time for me to get married. My father would reply that Aseel's education was primary and the rest would follow later."

Family as an incubator of resilience.

It was Aseel who had the most to say about the family as a source of personal resilience. She explained that her mother, who eventually became a University professor, was the role model who "not only encouraged me to pursue higher education but also to develop resilience." She added, "The hardship faced by my parents had prepared them to handle any adversity, and I think both my sister and I were able to cope with the trauma of being uprooted from our place of birth because of the difficult conditions that we lived in as refugees." In detail, Aseel described the difficulties of daily life:

In Lebanon, we moved from one location to another, before settling down in Ash-Sham (Damascus) in Syria, my sister and I attended school. We learned to deal with the effects of the war between Lebanon and Israel. When we would return home after school, we would make sure that the duct supplying cooking gas was shut and that the windows would be left open to ensure protection from flying

glass shards in the event of aircraft bombings by Israeli fighter planes. For days on end, my family would go without basic necessities like electricity and water. Food was scarce and we had to resort to rationing.

Aseel recounted another experience that reveals the dangers to which children were exposed:

When I was ten years old, I had a Jordanian passport. On one occasion, my sister and I crossed over to the nearest Jordanian town across the Lebanese border to renew our passports. We were seized by Jordanian border guards, and our passports were confiscated and we were tortured. The Jordanians believed we were allied with the PLO and wanted to extract information on our suspected links with the organization. This was a very horrifying experience that led to the fear that I and my sister would never be able to see our parents ever again. My sister and I were detained by the Jordanians for three months, with minimal contact with our parents.

Nevertheless, Aseel was strengthened by her ordeal: “The experience was horrifying, but I learned to cope with the circumstances, as my expectation and that of my parents was that regardless of the situation I had to stay strong and not display any weakness. I had begun to harden emotionally, to the extent that I did not allow myself to cry.” Later, while serving with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society’s emergency team in Ramallah, Aseel came to appreciate the ways in which she had been tested: “The toughness and strength of conviction that I had developed early in my childhood stood me in good stead to deal with crises and situations where I was in the midst of violent conflict.”

Aseel was not the only participant who learned to tolerate pain and suffering. Nael recalled,

When we were children, we were told that we had to live with pain. You were in danger of being imprisoned or shot anytime. You had to learn how to live and survive because at any minute you could be killed. You had to depend on yourself

because your family would not stay for you. So you should be independent and live with pain. These were the lessons we learned from life.

Mohammed too stated that he learned from his father how to survive and live with the pain and never complain.

As for Rania, she explained that she learned to be resilient from the example of her father who left school an early age in order to support his family. She also learned from her brothers and sisters how to work hard in order to achieve her dreams. Although she did not speak of pain and horrifying experiences, as did Mohammed and Nael, she echoed their sense of the world as a dangerous place. “The only feeling of safety I felt was when I was with my family,” she said. “My parents tried their best to make me feel secure and loved.” All the other participants agreed that their family provided them with a sense of safety in an environment full of hazards.

Community Support

Difficulties of everyday life.

The challenge of living in a refugee camp or in a West Bank city like Hebron affected entire communities, not just individuals or families. The community provided a larger social context that could sustain and support its members; at the same time, the community also demonstrated its power through mechanism like peer pressure or the exclusion of those perceived to be outsiders. I begin this section by recounting some of the risks that confronted all members of each community.

Mohammed stated a fact that was true for all the participants who had grown up in refugee camps: “The life in the camp is very difficult, the camp is very crowded and its streets are narrow, and people in the refugee camps lack the basic things they need for living.” In addition to the everyday poverty of the camps, the participants recounted individual episodes of violence that they had been exposed to. Mohammed himself was arrested during the second Intifada, and his house was attacked and searched by the Israeli soldiers during the West Bank invasion in 2002. Nael’s house was demolished and he was injured, and as a result of his injury he had to change his occupation. Aseel was forced out of her house in the middle of the night by Israeli soldiers who searched her house and destroyed many things in it. And Ghadeer told of how her school became a target for Israeli soldiers and one of her friends was killed. I discussed other ways in which the political situation interfered with the participants’ schooling in the section on education, above (2. Schooling, Primary and secondary education).

Rania thought that all the people who lived in the camps lacked a sense of safety in their community. “No place was safe. . . . During the nighttime, soldiers would be around the camp. One could hear their footsteps and the noise made by their dogs.” Rania used to see children running through the narrow streets of the camp, looking for a refuge from these soldiers: “Children were in danger of being killed or imprisoned at any time. When a child left his/her house to go to school, his/her parents were never sure whether he/she would come back or not. . . My parents tried to their best to make me feel secure and loved,” she said, but home was not a safe place either: “These soldiers with their huge guns would bang on the door of the house at any time to kill or imprison whomever they found. Everyone was in danger: men, women, children, and old people.”

Community and political resistance.

Just as the participants learned certain values like patriotism from their parents and other family members, so did they also learn values from their fellow community members. All the participants indicated that they absorbed their values both from their families and from the community at large. Nael learned from his political fellows that he had to live so as to maintain his dignity as a human being: “There were other political values we learned and believed as refugees; you should return to your original village. As a human being, you should live in freedom and dignity and learn and dress well.” Thus, even taking care of one’s clothing and appearance was an act with political consequences, because it reflected an attitude of dignity in the face of the Occupation.

The community’s resistance to the Occupation found open expression in the violence of the first Intifada. The participants, who with the exception of Mohammed, were schoolchildren at that time, were encouraged to participate in stone throwing. Ghadeer said that she received community support through her participation in the first Intifada, which made her feel that she belonged to her community: “During the first Intifada, I and my friends, neighbors, and every kid I knew, used to throw stones at the Israeli soldiers, which made us feel satisfied with ourselves.” Rania remembered that “Demonstrations against Israeli Occupation used to take place everyday, and young people were the ones who led these demonstrations.” Young people took a lead in the violence, too: “Whenever we children saw [the Israeli soldiers], we would start throwing stones; the soldiers would then start to throw teargas, and then start shooting.” Thus, by

encouraging its children to provoke the Israeli soldiers, the community exposed them to tremendous risk. At the same time, however, the children were learning how to defend their community against the Occupation. For Abed, stone throwing became a personal form of resistance: “I was so angry because of the Occupation, because of what they did to my school and community and their bad reactions of shooting and killing, and for me throwing stones was part of expressing my anger.”

In the course of the fighting, many Palestinians were captured by the Israelis and imprisoned. Rather than breaking down the solidarity of the community, however, this action strengthened it, for the community greatly respected the people who were taken prisoner. Abed recalled, “When I was a child, I remember being envious and jealous of the people who had been arrested because the community saw them as heroes. I wanted to be like those heroes. The most important motivation for those prisoners to overcome their trauma was the community support.”

Nael’s family received a dramatic expression of community support after his brother and sister were imprisoned for their political activities in 1983. Israeli soldiers demolished the family’s house, but the community provided them with temporary shelter and then helped the family rebuild their house. Nael was a young child at the time, but he remembered the traumatic event:

The occupation demolished our house with their bulldozers and people were screaming and cursing the soldiers. The people came and put up lights and there was a normal movement; people were going and coming, others were screaming, talking, and crying. It was like war—without order. It was a huge chaos and I was in the middle watching and did not know what was going on. I slept in the neighbor’s house and the people of the camp came and built us a tent to live in, and the people of the camp volunteered to rebuild our house.

Nael's new house was built in less than six months because of the community help:

“Because of the help from the people of the camp, our new house was built in six months and was ready for furniture.” Other participants offered further examples of community support for those who were made to suffer by the Occupation forces.

Just as the community provided support for those who fell victim to the Occupation, however, so too did it exert a form of peer pressure on schoolchildren to participate in violence. As Abed explained,

Throwing stones when I was teenager was part of the social pressure. Everybody was doing it and you had to be like them. If you did not throw stones your friends would consider you to be scared and anxious, and you were not a “man.” It was part of being recognized by the group. I threw stones for two reasons, the social pressure and to fight the repression of the Occupation.

Rania and Ghadeer also recalled throwing stones with friends. Ghadeer said, “I and my friends, neighbors, and every kid I knew, used to throw stones at the Israeli soldiers.”

Aseel experienced another dimension of community behavior. When her family returned to the West Bank after twenty years in Lebanon and Syria, she thought that they would be received into the Palestinian community:

I was under the impression that my country would be free and that the returning Palestinians would be welcomed as heroes. But I was so disappointed that in the summer of 1998—four years after my return to Palestine—I wanted to return to the familiar surroundings of the Lebanese town of Beirut. I also wanted to go back to Lebanon because of the deep-seated feeling that I was unwanted by my fellow Palestinians. I could sense a distance between them and me. Perhaps it was because of their perception that I was a foreigner with a Lebanese accent and way of life.”

Whereas the community's tight-knit nature led it to treat its prisoners as heroes, Aseel was treated as an outsider and received no hero's welcome. The four years that Aseel spent in Palestine after her return were difficult, not only because of the Palestinian people's coldness toward her, but also because of the Israeli presence in the Palestinian territories. She was especially lonely in the beginning: "The first few months after my return to Palestine were very difficult. I would look at my friends' [from Lebanon] photographs and weep, and I felt that I did not belong to this place." Aseel's initial sadness is all the more striking, given her description of the resilience that her family and her experiences in Syria and Lebanon fostered in her.

Community as an incubator of resilience.

Although Aseel found it hard to live in Palestine after her return, the experience nevertheless contributed to her resilience, especially when she was serving as a volunteer with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. Abed pointed out that being part of the community tended to strengthen everyone's resilience: "The whole community was under the same siege. Everybody was supportive and empathized with anybody that was arrested or killed. The community played a central role in building resilience because of their support. Sometimes the social support was a motive for people to fight the Occupation." Abed's words suggest that there was a complicated relationship between the community as a source of peer pressure and as a source of resilience. Ahmed too drew a connection between fighting and resilience: "It was very important for me to fight the Occupation, which wanted Palestinians to feel helpless and hopeless, but I think

Palestinians are the opposite.” Other participants indicated other social structures within the community that strengthened their resilience. Ghadeer pointed to her friends and her school; Nael also mentioned his friends, as well as the community centers, like the one he worked at. He added that “the community helped me find a job after I was injured.”

The Arts

Not all of the participants were equally interested in discussing the role of art and creativity in their lives. Those participants whose careers were directly involved with the arts had more to say on the subject: Nael uses art therapy in his work as a teacher, while Ahmed is studying music and filmmaking. Rania and Aseel each had a lifelong interest in various types of artistic expression, including music and drama. Ghadeer and Mohammed, however, spoke little about the role of the arts or creativity in their lives. And Abed distanced himself from the topic: “I am not an artist. Actually, I never used the arts. I prefer to live a ‘serious’ life.”

I begin by looking briefly at the place of the arts in Palestinian education, especially the education of children. Since Palestinian schools do not have the resources to devote to arts education in the classroom, children are not guaranteed exposure to the arts. In the second section, I consider how exposure to arts can play a role in encouraging children’s creativity and resilience. In this section I rely heavily on Nael’s observations, since his work as a schoolteacher has given him the opportunity to reflect on the place of art in the lives of children. Then I turn to the participants’ accounts of their own experience with different forms of artistic expression, and finally, in two shorter sections,

I summarize the participants' statements about the role of the arts in their own lives and in the national identity of the Palestinian people.

The Place of the Arts in Palestinian Education

Abed, who said that he was not an artist and that he preferred to live a “serious” life, did not have much exposure to the arts when growing up in Hebron. In general, he said, “The people of Hebron do not believe in arts or music: we did not have a Dabka [the national Palestinian folk dance] group or dance groups.” Growing up in a refugee camp, Rania had a similar experience: “In general, people in the camp would not pay any attention to the importance of the arts, people had more responsibilities and duties to worry about.” Both Abed and Rania noted that art was not a subject of instruction at their schools. Abed said, “In fact, there were no art classes in my school. People were not interested in the arts in the past.” Rania’s school had art classes on the schedule, but not in practice:

Back at the time when I studied at the primary school, art class which was one hour a week was nothing more than a waste of time. . . . When I was a young student at the UNRWA school in the Aida Refugee Camp, we did not have any art teachers. . . . The art teacher used to be the Arabic or history teacher who will tell us to do whatever we wanted instead of art. . . . Students used to study during the art class, which was one hour a week.

Nael summed up the situation of the children he worked with at the center: “There were no [artistic] activities in their schools or in their houses. In their houses, children faced social problems, and the streets were full of politics, and the school only cared about academic education. That led the children not to have any opportunity to be creative.”

Several participants pointed out that economic concerns also limited their access to the arts. Rania liked to draw and to paint, but she resorted to drawing more frequently: “Drawing was more accessible to me than painting because it was cheaper. I could draw with my pencil on my notebook, any time I wanted.” Ahmed and Aseel had similar stories of disappointment related to their musical training. Ahmed explained, “When I was twelve years old, I started to play the violin, but I could not continue learning the violin because of my family’s financial situation, because violin classes were very expensive and my family could not afford it at that time.” Similarly, Aseel said, “When I was fourteen years old, I started taking piano lessons, but my family could not pay the fees because of their poor financial condition.”

Nael explained how the center he worked at provided the children with opportunities to experience the arts that they did not receive at school. Volunteers at his center served as the children’s art teachers: “In the center were many international volunteers who worked with children on art, drawing, singing, and dancing. One of them was a French or British volunteer artist and painter who came to the center and asked how he could help the children. I suggested drawing the camp and the issues of the refugees on the walls of the camp.” Nael himself found that theater activities were particularly effective in engaging the children at the center, and he started a drama group. “Drama was an educational tool that children liked. In drama sessions, children had the opportunity to be creative through art, drawing, dancing, and acting. The goal of the drama sessions was to keep the children safe and protected from the Occupation and to have a good life.”

Children and the Arts

Nael's interest in using drama to improve the lives of his students may have its roots in his own childhood. He spoke in detail about the imaginative games that he played with other children:

As children, our favorite game was "Israeli soldiers and Arabs." There were other games which we used to play; but we liked this one and preferred to play it. This was not just a game; it was more serious than a game. Whoever played as a soldier was an "Israeli soldier" and the Arabs were the "Palestinians" and it was like a demonstration. The children who played "soldiers" were very serious. If they captured an "Arab" during the game, they would take it so seriously that they would put the "Arabs" in a "pretend prison," beat them, and interrogate them. If an "Arab" caught a soldier, it was a big victory because the soldier would be in a bad situation. So even though it was just a game, we took it very seriously. We used to play this game and throw stones. We played it in the streets. We used sticks as guns that would be used by "the soldiers." If you were an "Arab" in the game you . . . would use stones and little things. We used to spend most of our time in the street. I used to play as an "Arab" because the game was very serious and it was a challenge as if we were playing in a championship, where at the end you would get a trophy or medal.

The nature of this game indicates just how deeply children's lives were permeated by the violence of the first Intifada. In their play, the children were dramatically reenacting the activities of their older siblings. Ahmed and Rania had similar recollections.

Aseel explicitly traced her interest in drama back to her childhood, and like Nael, her imaginary world was colored by the contemporary political situation:

My interest in plays and theatre started when I was eight years old. I would often dream of the story, "Little Red Riding Hood," in which I visualized myself in the role of Little Red Riding Hood without the scary presence of the animal. This was no simple dream that an 8-year-old child would dream. The story itself had its own significance in the context of the occupation and subjugation of Palestinians (Little Red Riding Hood) by the Israelis (wolves).

The games that Nael recalled reproduced the real-life conflict in the streets. In Aseel's case, she rewrote the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" as a way of imagining a peaceful solution to the violence of everyday life. The stories told by Nael and Aseel indicate that children exposed to conflict will reproduce that conflict in their imaginations, but that they can also use their creative powers to imagine a world in which the conflict does not exist.

Nael reported that at first it was difficult for the children to express themselves at all: "The children of the camp were far from art and art subjects were very difficult for them to study. Children had huge energy and this energy needed to be arranged so that they could use it in the best way they could." Furthermore, said Nael, "It took us some time until children's parents felt safe and trusted the center. The parents then started to send their children to the center to break the obstacle of shyness and mistrust that they felt." He added,

At the beginning, it was difficult for children because they were not used to expressing their feelings through painting and drawing. So, we explained to them the importance of using drawing to express themselves. It took the children sometime to get used to art and to enjoy it. That was by challenging their feelings of shyness to enjoy art.

Eventually, the children responded positively to Nael's encouragement. He discovered that "The children liked art and drama. At the beginning, they were shy. But a few weeks later, they started to realize the importance of these subjects. They were waiting for the day of art or the day of drama in the center."

In his work at the center, however, Nael discovered that it was not easy to lead the children to express themselves in ways that did not allude to the ongoing violence.

Children's drawings and stories were full of stones, soldiers or fighters, which was a challenge for us, because we wanted them to draw other things rather than shooting, blood, and guns, because we believed that there are other good things in life. . . . Sometimes we made the children draw a flower, a house, or any other thing rather than a gun or a bulldozer. But that was very difficult. Some children used to draw a flower, a sun, or a tree, but they used to draw all other things as well.

The art therapists who came to work at the center experienced the same difficulty:

They worked with the children to make them draw other things rather than political images. But they could not do it. They tried to ask the children to draw something to symbolize happiness. The question was, "Why did the children draw these pictures?" The answer was that this is what happens and this is what they see in their daily lives. All that those children saw was soldiers and blood and all what they heard was shooting and attacks. Occupation was in their lives every day. So if a child made a drawing without a soldier, his/her drawing "would not be real."

Thus, the children preferred to make the hazards of daily life part of their creative expression.

As it turned out, the children were eager to talk about their real-life experiences as well as draw them. The volunteer artist mentioned above proposed a form of collaborative storytelling: "He suggested that we could make children tell their stories and the stories of their lives and then draw them. The children started telling their stories, what they had heard from their parents about their lives in the camp and how they became refugees." In a similar project, some older children produced an illustrated book on the basis of their experience. Nael recounted, "One of the art activities that we did with the children was to create a storybook called 'The Boy and the Wall.' It was made by children aged between twelve and sixteen. It was painted using collage techniques. The children were excited to write a story because it represented their lives and their

daily situation.” Rania also had success in using narrative-based art to encourage children to express themselves. She said, “I taught young children to write about their lives and to create short films. . . . I felt that children expressed themselves better through art and that they enjoyed it. . . . The children were also proud of their achievements.”

Nael and the volunteers were aided in their efforts by other artists and art therapists who came to work at the center: “Many artists, social workers, and psychologists, especially from the Arab Society Hospital, came to the center and used the arts as a way for therapy. They used storytelling and free activities to make children express their feelings.” Overall, the results were positive. “We always noticed that art left a positive impact on the educational and social lives of these children,” said Nael. “That led the parents of these children to encourage them to participate in the activities of the center also, because of the political situation and the psychological stress that these children faced. This gave many psychological organizations the opportunity to work in the camp on psychological issues, especially through art. Art became part of these children’s lives.”

In the long run, Nael noticed that the children’s’ exposure to the arts helped facilitate creativity:

The most notable change was the children’s involvement and love for the arts. Before that it was difficult for them to express themselves. But later, they became braver and they started to ask questions of “why” and “how”! The arts and drama were reasons to create creativity in these children. Children translated their ideas into art, which gave them the opportunity to express themselves.

As a result of their activities at the center, children learned new ways to express their thoughts and feelings about their lives and their personal experiences.

Forms of Artistic Expression

The adult participants discussed their involvement in several forms of artistic expression. Aseel was the only one to mention needlework: “I involved myself in learning vocational activities like sewing and embroidery.” Rania had the most experience with visual arts, such as drawing, painting, and photography. Several participants had practiced various forms of narrative-based art, including writing and storytelling, filmmaking, and drama. And all of the participants were familiar with music, folksongs, and dance.

Drawing, painting, and photography.

As I mentioned above, Rania liked to draw and to paint, but usually she drew, “because it was cheaper.” “I and my friends used to draw beautiful pictures which impressed the teachers all the time,” she said. In her drawings she imagined a peaceful environment: “I used to draw my dreams of a beautiful country, huge streets, green trees, and a bright full moon.” Rania also recounted how, at work camps, “I and my friends used to make wall murals around the camp. A number of these murals represented the villages which the people of the camp were originally from. People were very happy to see their villages being remembered by younger generations, even though they were not able to reach these villages.” Thus, Rania and her friends were supplying the illustrations for people’s memories of their home villages. This recalls Nael’s stories about the visiting artist who drew pictures to illustrate the stories that the children told at the center,

as well as the illustrated book they produced, “The Boy and the Wall.” Aseel was also interested in drawing and painting.

Both Nael and Aseel were interested in photography, too. Rania said that photography had a huge influence on her life: “It was great to be able to show people what you think without having to say a single word; a good picture could reflect one’s feelings and thoughts.” She had the opportunity to participate in four photography workshops. “I took photos that reflected Palestinian lives. In addition, I helped in translating and preparing the final photos which were exhibited in many countries all around the world. In the fourth photography project, I took photos about my dream and nightmare. Using two images, I could tell the world what my hopes for the future were and what my fears were.”

Writing and storytelling.

Many of the participants practiced some form of writing. Mohammed kept a journal, as did Ghadeer, who also wrote poetry. Rania wrote poems as well, and so did Abed, who had stated in his interview, “I am not an artist.” On the whole, though, the participants did not speak in detail about their own writing projects—Rania simply said, “I used to write about the things that I liked.”

Both Rania and Nael, however, as mentioned above, were interested in encouraging children to practice writing and storytelling. Rania said, “I taught young children to write about their lives and to create short films.” In his work at the center,

Nael led activities in which children told their stories and they or someone else illustrated them.

Filmmaking.

Nael and Rania also shared an interest in film, along with Ahmed, who came to the U.S. to study filmmaking. Nael enjoyed going to the cinema, while Ahmed practiced digital storytelling and Rania made her own films. Rania described the first short film she made: “[It] was about my experience with Israeli checkpoints. It was a combination of music, images, and sound. I was very proud to be able to create a whole film out of nothing. I also had the chance to know many people and make many friends. When the films were first screened, I felt that the people we knew were very proud of us.” Her film reached a wider audience as well: “My film was shown in many countries all around the world. . . . When internationals watched my film, they said that it was very creative and that I could express the Palestinian's suffering through it.” Rania also taught children how to make their own films.

Drama.

In addition to the cinema, Nael liked the theater “very much.” Although he did not make films, he began acting and found that it was a good way to relieve stress. He started a drama group at the center. He explained, “I liked acting. So I started training a group of children to do a political play called ‘The Birds.’”

As noted above, Aseel was eight when she first took an interest in plays and theatre, imagining herself as Little Red Riding Hood. She assigned a political significance to her rewriting of the traditional story without its villain, the wolf, which she associated with the Israelis. Two years later she made her acting debut:

By the time I was ten, I had taken part in a political play [*Sarhan, Ya Sarhan, Let's Go to the Mountains*, by Tawfiq Ziad]. That play played a big part in my life and some of the lines of the dialogues still resonate with me. In this play the mountains may signify the refuge for young Palestinian freedom fighters, who would escape to the mountains as a gesture toward joining forces with rebel groups in their hideouts. I was Salman's sister, who suffered torture and abuse in the hands of the Israeli soldiers during a late-night raid. I still remember a scene in which the Israeli soldiers dragged me by my hair, assaulted me, and then left me hanging from the ceiling.

Whereas Aseel took care to omit the violence from her version of "Little Red Riding Hood," in this play she took on the role of someone who was tortured by the Israelis.

Rania also started acting when she was very young. "At school, we used to write short plays and act all the time. Later, in high school, students formed a drama group. We used to practice all the time." Rania and her friends continued to write plays. "We wrote two plays, one in Arabic and the other in English. There was a drama competition that was held by the Palestinian Ministry of Education in 2003. There, we won the prize for best theater work in English and third place in Arabic drama. We were very proud of our achievement."

When Rania studied at Bethlehem University, she joined the drama club, where she used to practice once a week. Later, she performed at Bethlehem University and Al-Quds University, and in the cities of Bethlehem and Ad-Duha. She said, "I enjoyed playing the role of the strong Palestinian man who cared for his family, the young man

who learned difficult lessons through life, and the young girl who strongly faced old culture, the university system, and the Occupation.”

Music, folk songs, and dance.

All of the participants enjoyed listening to music. Abed started to listen to music, especially English music, when he was a teenager: “I could remember that I started listening to foreign music—especially Madonna—for a short period of time, and then it stopped because of the Intifada.” The participants all mentioned the traditional Palestinian folk songs that they learned in their youth. “At a tender age,” said Aseel, “my way of thinking had been transformed to the point where I would listen and memorize Palestinian national songs.” Nael, Aseel, and Ahmed used to listen to tradition folk songs, and Abed mentioned the part that folk songs played in “raising the Palestinians’ spirits and self-confidence.”

Folk songs were often a featured part of performances of the traditional Palestinian dance, the Dabka. Abed said that there was no Dabka group in Hebron, in keeping with that city’s general disinterest in the arts. But other participants had participated in Dabka troupes. While living in Lebanon, Aseel belonged to such a group:

As a child, I participated in a variety of cultural group experiences. I was a member of a Dabka group whose members were comprised of Palestinians of all ages who staged performances in parts of Lebanon. The troupe members would organize the performances of ballads and other songs and traditional folkdances whose themes would often be about the Palestinian nation and its liberation from the Israeli yoke.

Rania knew the dance, too, which was one of her favorites. “I can dance the Dabka,” she said, “but I have never performed in front of people. People say that girls should not dance in public. This is cultural. However, young girls do. But it is difficult for them to continue doing so when they get older. That's because it is shameful for people here, for boys and girls to dance together.” Nael encountered this attitude toward gender roles when he began working at the center: “It was difficult to find girls to participate in the Dabka [traditional Palestinian dance] or other art subjects. That was because of the social situation. It took us some time until children’s parents felt safe and trusted the center.”

Several participants learned to play musical instruments, either as a child or as an adult. Ahmed’s family supported his interest in performing. He said, “When I was a young child, my family encouraged me to learn music. When I was seven years old, I learned how to play the drum. I used to play Arabic music and listen to traditional Palestinian songs.” Ahmed’s favorite musical instrument was the oud, the Middle Eastern ancestor of the Western lute. When he was twelve years old, he started to play the violin, “but I could not continue learning the violin because of my family’s financial situation, because violin classes were very expensive and my family could not afford it at that time.” Aseel had a similar experience: she started to study the piano when she was fourteen, but her family could not afford lessons. When Aseel grew up, however, she began taking flute lessons:

I could finally fulfill my desires to learn an instrument after I returned to Palestine in 1994. I visited the local conservatory or a school for the performing arts in Ramallah. I saw some of the pupils rehearsing “Swan Lake,” for which one of the accompanists was playing the flute. I told the instructor that I was interested in learning to play the flute. That was the beginning of my initiation in learning to play the flute.

Rania, too, began taking music lessons as an adult. “I enjoyed the feeling of music and wanted to continue learning music. Recently I started to learn to play violin.”

Personal Identity and the Arts

Several of the participants discussed how their interest in the arts was linked to their development as individuals. They also frequently described how their own artistic activity could serve as a safety valve or a relief from stress. Thus, artistic expression became a way of developing resilience.

Nael described his first encounter with playacting as a transformative moment in his life. He was able to overcome his fear of public speaking: “I started acting in a play and I was the main character. I broke through my fear. I could stand and speak in front of an audience. The first time I spoke in front of an audience was during the play of ‘Abu al-Sukkar.’ It was a huge step. It moved me from fear to standing and acting in front of people.” For Rania, theater activity and filmmaking helped to build her self-esteem. She spoke of the pride she took in winning playwriting competitions, and likewise, after she finished her first film, she “was very proud to be able to create a whole film out of nothing.” Aseel also said that the arts had provided her with opportunities for personal growth.

For some participants, the role of the arts in personal growth continued into adulthood. Nael’s decision to become a teacher allowed him to put his interest in drama and other forms of artistic expression to work in a new context. Abed, who for many

years had led a “serious” life, reading only books on education, history, and politics, said that he recently “started to read stories, especially the famous Arab and Palestinian novels.” Rania had written plays, made films, and taught children to write stories, and she decided to study music intensively; as mentioned above, she chose to study the violin. And Aseel seized the opportunity to study the flute.

All of the participants identified some way in which they were able to escape from the stresses of daily life and build or renew their resilience. Mohammed used meditation as a technique for calming himself: “I used to spend time in Mother Nature or alone in my room to find solutions to my problems.” But the others cited artistic expression as a particularly effective method of dealing with stress. Rania said that “My friends and I used to act just for fun. We enjoyed it and we thought it was a great relief.” She also stated, “I always liked reading. In some stages of my life, I think that reading helped me escape the hard reality of the Palestinian situation and problems especially the Occupation.” Nael explained that acting in the theatre was “a way to unload the stress.” He added that “Before I started to use drama, I used to smoke or create trouble with my family, especially when I got angry. I had a problem in unloading this negative energy. But after I started using drama, things changed and my energy became positive.” Aseel likewise said that “Acting in theaters and plays was an excellent means to give vent to pent-up emotions.” For Ghadeer, writing was her preferred way to relieve tension: “Writing was the way that I used to control my anger and frustration.” She wrote frequently when under stress, keeping a journal and composing poetry.

Ahmed and Aseel found consolation in music. “When I am angry or sad,” said Ahmed, “I always play music, which always helps me to feel better. It helps me to

deepen my resistance.” For Aseel, studying the flute “helped me to calm myself down in moments of crisis. In such situations, I would enjoy being with myself and playing the flute, rather than talking to people. I developed skills for improvising to express my state of mind.” She added that “For me, music was a relief. I would feel relaxed even when I blew into the flute without actually playing it or when holding the flute in my hand. It had become an inseparable companion. It was the only thing people never complained about.”

Aseel spoke more graphically about how music helped her to overcome her trauma:

I would often go without sleep, the nightmares of “the haunting eyes of scared children” returning to me night after night. I felt so helpless that I could do nothing at all for the traumatized children. Often times, I would find myself weeping uncontrollably. I gradually overcame the trauma, but in the process detached myself from the daily incidents of violence and abuse. I would sooth myself by playing the flute.

For Aseel, music provided the necessary pathway toward resilience.

Palestinian Identity and the Arts

All of the participants agreed that the arts played an important role in shaping and maintaining Palestinian cultural identity. The murals that Rania and her friends prepared in the work camps reminded the camp residents of the villages where they had previously resided, thus preserving the memory of Palestinian life and culture before the Occupation. Ahmed said that he plays music that reflects his feelings, identity, and culture: “I always play music that reflects what I feel, and through that I show others who the Palestinians are and how beautiful our music is. . . . For me, the music of the oud reflects the Arab’s musical and cultural history.” More generally, he said, “The goal of any composer is to

reflect the life of people, their culture and identity.” Thus, Ahmed saw the dissemination of Palestinian culture as an imperative: “I tried to spread awareness about Palestinian culture through films and music. I believe that we [Palestinians] should fight to protect our culture and to show it to the whole world.” Rania took pride in the fact that her film about her experiences at Israeli checkpoints was shown around the world: “When internationals watched my film, they said that it was very creative and that I could express the Palestinian's suffering through it.” For Rania, filmmaking was a way to cultivate awareness of Palestinian culture, but also of the political situation in Palestine.

Other participants made a similar connection between cultural expression and political identity. Abed stated that “The arts are a way of resistance. . . . Writing on the walls, listening to the national songs, and poetry [help in] raising the Palestinians’ spirits and self-confidence.” Aseel recalled that at the Dabka performance in which she participated, “The troupe members would organize the performances of ballads and other songs and traditional folkdances whose themes would often be about the Palestinian nation and its liberation from the Israeli yoke.” For Ahmed, music did not need words to express a political message: “When I play Palestinian and Arabic music, I feel myself fighting the Occupation.”

Summary

The interviews indicate that the participants identified several sources of resilience in their lives. Those sources include education, as well as family and community support; the participants’ families invariably stressed the value of education.

Several of the participants described in detail how their artistic activities—visual arts, music, or theater—were another important source of resilience, but they did not indicate that their families promoted the arts as a value. The following chapter discusses the results in light of the literature on resilience, noting some patterns and general trends that emerge when the results of this study are placed in the broader context of research on resilience.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study is the first to examine the role of the arts in building resilience in the Palestinian community. Other studies have looked at the use of expressive arts therapy as a treatment for trauma in Palestine (Abu Sway et al., 2005; Al-Ajarma and Schechter, 2007; Al-Krenawi, 2007), but they have not considered whether participation in the arts can build the resilience of Palestinian youths. There has been little or no consideration of the role of the arts in strengthening the coping mechanisms of Palestinians experiencing trauma arising out of war and other forms of violence. Indeed, there is little literature on the use of the arts in building resilience in general (cf. Gregerson, 2007). Thus, the broader question this study addresses is whether artistic activity in general, as well as expressive arts therapy in particular, may serve as a form of preventative medicine that increases resilience, and not just as a treatment for trauma. The study also contributes to the study of culturally specific aspects of resilience by its focus on Palestinians (cf. Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Ungar et al., 2007). Overall, the study provides a glimpse into the relationship between war and violence-related trauma and the coping mechanisms that subjects employ to deal with it.

The literature on resilience identifies several factors that contribute to resilience. Altawil (2008) summarized the factors that may protect children from trauma or help them recover from a traumatic experience. Primary among those factors are social support systems, which include family (cf. Mackay, 2005; Simon et al., 2005), friends, the larger community, and, for children and youths, the school system. In addition, Altawil (2008) identified cultural belief systems, either political or religious, as sources

of resilience. In particular, “active engagement in or ideological commitment to political struggle can increase resilience” (Altawil, 2008, p. 45). Peres et al. (2007) also noted the importance of religious beliefs in promoting resilience, and suggested that such beliefs helped to create a sense of coherence in the believer’s understanding of traumatic events. Many of these factors emerged explicitly or implicitly in the course of the interviews. In addition, the respondents cited their involvement in artistic activities as sources of strength and resilience.

In the sections that follow, I will present the results of the study as a whole by first reviewing and answering the three research questions identified at the beginning of the study. Then I discuss some of the implications of the study for the use of the arts in fostering resilience. In the third section I note some limitations of the present study, and in the last section I describe a few ways that future research on the topic of resilience and the arts in Palestine may proceed.

Review of Research Questions

This study began by posing three specific questions:

Question #1: What are the sources of resilience for Palestinians?

Question #2: What is the role of family, community, and education in building resilience in the Palestinian community?

Question #3: What role do the arts play in building resilience for individuals in societies experiencing violent conflict, especially among Palestinians?

I will answer each of these questions in turn by drawing on the evidence of the seven open-ended interviews, in which the respondents discussed several sources of strength

and support that had sustained them while growing up in the West Bank or in refugee camps. Then, I will discuss some sources of Palestinian resilience that have been mentioned in the research literature but did not come up in the interviews, namely sports activities and religion.

Sources of Resilience for Palestinians

The chief sources of resilience named by the respondents were (1) family and community support; (2) education; and (3) artistic activity. These are discussed in more detail in the following two subsections. In this subsection I discuss a source of resilience that was mentioned by several researchers and whose influence is evident in the participants' discussions of family/community support, education, and the arts: namely, political activity and participation in the Intifada itself.

It is certain that the Intifada causes psychological trauma. Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) identified the violence of the Intifada as a direct source of psychological harm to children and adolescents. They noted also that the arrest and imprisonment of family members accused of participating in the uprising had adverse effects on children and youths, and in particular boys, who were deprived of contact with role models. A peaceful resolution to the struggle would greatly reduce the risk of psychological trauma for young Palestinians.

At the same time, however, researchers have recognized that cultural belief systems, whether political or religious, are a source of resilience, and the Intifada itself may be thought of as the violent expression of a political ideology. Altawil (2008) wrote that "Direct evidence from . . . Palestine . . . shows that active engagement in or

ideological commitment to political struggle can increase resilience” (p. 45). Altawil also suggested that “Ideological support for children living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip may buffer some of the stress of war” (p. 54). Similarly, Barber (2001) found that participation in the Intifada did not, in fact, pose a threat to general psychological well-being; instead, “Intifada involvement was positively related to religiosity and family values” (p. 276). Barber explained that participation in a politically meaningful and culturally esteemed struggle provided a source of meaning in the lives of Palestinian youth.

As the participants in this study spoke about their families, their experience in school, and their artistic activity, they frequently made comments that reflected a high degree of political commitment in their family members, in their peers at school, and in their own artistic activity. Thus, none of these sources of resilience can be detached from the larger political context of Palestinian identity and the ongoing struggle against the Occupation. In the following paragraphs I will point out how political ideology permeates and reinforces the other sources of resilience.

Family, Community, and Education as Sources of Resilience

Family and community.

Despite the trauma arising out of the intense political situation in Palestine, a wide cross section of the Palestinian population is still able to cope with the violence and the resulting traumatic experiences. A key variable that researchers have identified is the role of the family and individual family members in overcoming trauma. Surveying the factors that may prevent or alleviate trauma in children, Altawil (2008) stated that social

support is key, and that family is an essential source of support: “Strong ties among Arab families appear to shield family members from incidents that otherwise might be experienced as disastrous” (p. 40). In their study of Palestinian refugee children living in Lebanon, Serhan and Tabari (2005, p. 47) remarked that “Palestinian refugees have strong family ties. Children and adolescents feel that they can depend on their families, both nuclear and extended.... [They] are especially confident of their parents’ love and care, and appreciate what they do for them even when they cannot afford most of their children’s demands.” Punamaki et al. (1997) reported that research among Palestinians pointed to the fact that parental and maternal love, intimacy, and wise disciplining enhanced children’s resiliency through increased creativity and cognitive capacity.

All of the participants spoke of their families as a constant source of support. In every case, the participants noted that their families had instilled in them the value of education, and so there is an organic connection between the resilience gained from family support and the resilience gained from education. At the same time, parents schooled their children in the recent history of the Palestinian people, forming their political consciousness. Rania, Mohammed, Nael, Ahmed, and Ghadeer all referred to the stories of the Nakba they heard from their elders. Ahmed recalled that his father, who was a teacher of Arabic, religion, and history, had a specific purpose in raising his children: “His goal was to keep his children’s eyes open on their history and their occupied lands.” Nael described his mother as “a political activist.”

The participants also absorbed political values from their older siblings. Ghadeer, Nael, Rania, and Mohammed had elder brothers and sisters who were politically active, and several of them spent time in prison. Thus, all of the normal channels of support that

operate within a family—including the support that parents provide for their children, and the support that siblings provide for one another—were transmitting and reinforcing a sense of history and an ideological resistance to the Opposition. The newer research that concentrates on family resilience, as opposed to individual resilience, indicates that families that share value systems have an increased level of resilience (Mackay, 2005). Mackay (2005) referred to value systems that may correspond to a religious or spiritual outlook, but the interviews indicate that family resilience may also be fostered by a common set of political or ideological beliefs.

Community support is another source of social support that can mitigate the damage of a traumatic event. Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008) found that “within a Palestinian context, suffering and endurance have to be interpreted at both an individual and collective level.... Resilience is (re)constituted as a wider collective and social representation of what it means to endure” (p. 292). For children, school offers a particularly important network of social support (Altawil, 2008). The interviews showed that just as familial resilience was colored by political beliefs, so too was the resilience communicated by the community grounded in collective resistance to the Occupation.

The community’s treatment of political prisoners is a good example of the reinforcement of community-based resilience by political values. Instead of breaking down the solidarity of the community, the capture and imprisonment of Palestinians strengthened it, for the community greatly respected the people who were taken prisoner. As a child, Abed envied the prisoners “because the community saw them as heroes. I wanted to be like those heroes. The most important motivation for those prisoners to overcome their trauma was the community support.” Abed’s statement draws a precise

connection between the community's politics and the resilience they inspired in prisoners. The community also offered material support to the families of prisoners, as shown by Nael's account of how neighbors sheltered his family and helped rebuild their house after it was demolished by the Israelis.

Just as the community provided support for those who fell victim to the Occupation, however, it also encouraged schoolchildren to participate in violence, thus putting them at risk for psychological trauma. Abed said that he threw stones "for two reasons, the social pressure and to fight the repression of the Occupation." He further explained, "The community played a central role in building resilience because of their support. Sometimes the social support was a motive for people to fight the Occupation." Thus, at the same time that the community built resilience, it helped to perpetuate the fighting. This illustrates Altawil's (2008) observation that the same sort of shared political commitment that fosters resilience can also increase stress and trauma within the community by prolonging the violence.

Education.

All of the respondents valued education, and moreover had learned to value education from their families, regardless of whether they were born into an educated family. Aseel recalled how, "In my early childhood, my parents would teach me the importance of education and how one could achieve almost anything if one was sufficiently educated." At the same time, the respondents never spoke of education solely as an end in itself. Rather, it was "the only way to secure one's future," as Rania said.

Indeed, as Hallaj (1980) observed, the importance of education for contemporary Palestinians is a direct consequence of political events that occurred in the middle of the 20th century. The confiscation of Palestinian land in 1948 meant that education, not propertyholding and farming, would become the key to survival and advancement for both individuals and the Palestinian people. Ghadeer expressed a view held by many Palestinians when she claimed that the Nakba, “the catastrophe,” happened because most Palestinians were not educated in 1948. Similarly, Abed asserted that “One of the goals of the occupation is to make kids leave their schools and to make Palestinians an uneducated population.” Thus, pursuing an education is in and of itself an activity with political overtones and a demonstration of resistance.

Recalling their years in primary school and high school, participants stressed how the political situation overlapped with or interfered with their educational experience during the first Intifada. When the fighting flared up, schools were closed, causing lengthy interruptions in their schooling. On the other hand, some participants emphasized that school itself became the setting for a political rather than a strictly academic education. Nael said, “In our school, we learned how to throw stones, how to struggle, how to resist, how to refuse the Occupation and we learned politics rather than ordinary subjects. That’s how my friends and I studied.”

Looking back on the effects of the Intifada on the Palestinian educational system, Mahshi (2006) stated that “Education creates resistance by clarifying what the harmful effects of occupation are and by reinforcing the sense of community” (71). This sense that education is fundamental to political struggle was echoed by several of the participants. Ahmed and Abed both spoke of education as a tool that could be used to

“fight the Occupation.” Ghadeer added that “Knowledge and education are our only weapons against the Occupation.”

The arts as a source of resilience.

The performing arts—music, paintings, dance, plays, poetry—are not among the favored topics for researchers in the field of trauma and resilience, at least not in the case of Palestine. The interviews, however, demonstrated that for those individuals who displayed a strong personal interest in the arts—Nael, Ahmed, Rania, and Aseel—they provided an invaluable source of support, comfort, and resilience. Just as the ideology of resistance and liberation infused the participants’ views on family, community, and education, political concerns are woven throughout their artistic activities.

In her photography, Rania sought to document contemporary life in the West Bank: “I took photos that reflected Palestinian lives.” When she turned to filmmaking, she made a short film about her experience at Israeli checkpoints. She was proud that her photos and film were exhibited around the world, because they helped educate others about the situation in her homeland. She said, “When internationals watched my film, they said that it was very creative and that I could express the Palestinian’s suffering through it.”

Music was another medium that could carry an ideological message. Aseel described how Dabka groups performed songs and dances about “the Palestinian nation and its liberation from the Israeli yoke.” As a composer and a musician, Ahmed “tried to spread awareness about Palestinian culture through films and music. I believe that we

[Palestinians] should fight to protect our culture and to show it to the whole world.” Like Rania, Ahmed saw his art as a way of educating outsiders about the Palestinian situation.

The roleplaying of theater also lent itself to political expression. Nael recalled how, as a child, he and his neighbors played “Israeli soldiers and Arabs,” dramatically reenacting the activities of their older siblings. As they grew up, some of the participants began playing roles on stage. Nael himself acted in several plays, and later started a theater group at the community center, where he cast children in a “political play.” Rania and her friends wrote and acted in several plays with political content.

In sum, part of the success of the arts in generating resilience seems to lie in the fact that artistic expression allowed the participants to express political ideas as well as feelings. The participants were able to use their media as a way of reflecting on Palestinian identity and the crisis of the Occupation. Making art gave them the opportunity to interpret their experiences and place them in a larger framework. By performing music or plays or exhibiting photography or films, the participants could share their political beliefs with a wider audience, thus building community even as they nurtured their own resilience.

Possible sources of resilience unmentioned by participants.

In reviewing what the participants said about their personal sources of strength and resilience, it is also necessary to consider some possible sources of resilience that they did not name: team sports and religion. Sports activities offer young people opportunities to socialize, develop physical skills and strengths, demonstrate leadership and cooperation, and compete in a friendly and non-hostile manner. Playing sports is an

opportunity for personal growth in several areas, and thus a potential pathway to building resilience. Meanwhile, researchers have argued that religious belief serves as a source of resilience because it gives believers a way to interpret and make sense of adverse events and traumatic experiences (Peres et al., 2007). Religion also brings people together in communities, creating social support networks that can foster resilience. The participants in this study, however, had little to say about either sports or religion.

In a study of Palestinian youth aged 15–18, Nguyen-Gillham (2008) found that in addition to family and friends, sports activities were a source of resilience for boys, though not for girls; on the other hand, girls were more likely to develop resilience from artistic activities—reading, writing, or drawing—or from their education. Only one participant in the present study, Abed, referred to sports, and only in passing: he mentioned that the violence of the Intifada led to the cancellation of soccer games. None of the participants spoke explicitly about participating in team sports as a source of strength or resilience.

Religion is a source of strength and comfort to many Palestinian refugees of all generations. According to Teeffelen (2005: 422), “a factor relevant to the cultural *sumud*—Steadfastness—of Palestinians is the importance of religion as a source of faith, spiritual commitment, guidance and consolation.... During uncertain and seemingly hopeless times, many persons and families consider faith as a beacon for spiritual orientation.” Praying, going to the mosque, or attending religious classes are activities that provide people with comfort, hope, and the opportunity to socialize. Some Islamic organizations also offer material support and services (Farah, 2005, p. 116). Teeffelen et al. (2005) found in their study of Palestinian youth that several Christian and Muslim

girls mentioned “as their inner source of strength the inspiring example of religious personalities” and, in this sense, “religion may well contribute to an inner, spiritual resilience” (p. 422).

Despite the fact that religion plays a large role in the Palestinian community and that researchers have identified religious belief and practice as a source of resilience for Palestinians, the participants in this study barely mentioned religion. Two of the female participants Rania and Ghadeer practice Islam and wear a headscarf, but they did not discuss the place of religion in their lives. Two of the male participants Abed and Ahmed mentioned that they pray and have a good connection with religion, but they did not refer to religion as one of the resources they drew on for support. Mohammed mentioned that his father was a religious man: “He taught us the ethics of religion: Do not steal! Help others and be nice to others!” Thus, Mohammed spoke about religion as a source of values and ethical standards, but not as a source of personal strength.

Implications of the Study

There are currently many places on the planet where armed conflict disrupts daily life. The resources of centers for healing war victims are often overwhelmed. In order to reduce the strain on providers of psychological care, it makes sense to look for ways of preventing trauma by building resilience. The use of expressive arts therapy, along with promoting artistic activity in general, is one resource that has the capacity not only to heal but also to transform individuals, families, communities, and education systems. If artistic expression promotes resilience in individuals, as the interviews suggest, then using expressive arts therapy or encouraging children and youths to engage in activities

like drawing, storytelling, or theater may build resilience in those who are at a high risk of suffering trauma from war-related violence. The role of the arts in developing resilience thus deserves more attention from researchers as well as educators.

Increasing children's exposure to the arts, however, may require a committed institutional effort. Several of the respondents noted that their communities and schools did not encourage artistic activity. Abed said bluntly, "The people of Hebron do not believe in arts or music," while Rania related that people in the refugee camp where she grew up "would not pay any attention to the importance of the arts [because] people had more important responsibilities and duties to worry about." Art was not taught at Abed's school, while Rania said that art classes were on the schedule, but the school had no art teachers. Speaking about the children he worked with at the community center, Nael said, "There were no [artistic] activities in their schools or in their houses. In their houses, children faced social problems, and the streets were full of politics, and the school only cared about academic education. That led the children not to have any opportunity to be creative."

Increasing the role of the arts in primary and secondary school curricula may be a relatively low-cost and efficient way to inculcate resilience in children and adolescents. As the interviews make clear, Palestinians in general place a high value on education as a means of betterment and a source of strength and resilience. By integrating artistic activity into school curricula and reinforcing the connection between academic and artistic pursuits, it may be possible to alter the sentiment that artistic expression is not an important or essential part of life. Another venue for promoting artistic activity is the network of community centers in cities, towns, and refugee camps. Nael's experience at

his community center suggests that the centers are an effective setting in which to encourage children and youths to express themselves.

Studies suggest that the process of finding meaning in one's life and experiences promotes resilience (Altawil, 2008; Peres et al., 2007). Individuals who have an established belief system are better able to cope with adverse events or trauma because they have a framework in which to interpret it. Religion and political ideology are two types of belief systems that offer frameworks for interpreting and making sense of the events of one's life. Artistic expression is another process whereby individuals may reflect on, process, and interpret their experiences. Thus, encouraging artistic activity may promote the sort of meaning-making that is associated with belief systems, and thus help to develop resilience. Researchers point to the utility of expressive arts therapy as a way of encouraging children to verbalize their feelings, making it easier for a therapist to address the issues a child is facing (e.g., Synder 2007). This approach overlooks the possibility of a more direct relationship between artistic activity and resilience.

Combining artistic activity with other sources of resilience may be particularly effective. Forms of artistic expression that involve social contact may be even more likely to promote resilience, because social support systems have also been found to promote resilience (e.g., Altawil, 2008). Thus, participating in a Dabka group may be a more effective way to build resilience than drawing or painting in isolation. In addition, the political overtones of preserving Palestinian cultural traditions may further contribute toward an individual's resilience.

Participating in theater productions may be an especially effective way to promote resilience, because it combines artistic expression, social contact, and explicit political

content. Aseel recalled that “By the time I was ten, I had taken part in a political play [*Sarhan, Ya Sarhan, Let’s Go to the Mountains*, by Tawfiq Ziad]. That play played a big part in my life and some of the lines of the dialogues still resonate with me.” Rania and her friends wrote and performed their own dramas. Describing her acting experience, Rania said, “I enjoyed playing the role of the strong Palestinian man who cared for his family, the young man who learned difficult lessons through life, and the young girl who strongly faced old culture, the university system, and the Occupation.” By playing strong, resilient characters, individuals may develop similar traits in themselves, thus increasing their resilience.

Limitations of the Present Study

The present study drew on a small sample of participants, all of whom were adult Palestinians who had come to the U.S. to pursue graduate study. Thus, each participant was a highly educated individual who could be expected to place a high value on education as a source of personal strength. A wider variety of participants might have named different sources of strength and resilience. For example, a different group of participants may have been more likely to describe sports activities or religious belief as a source of support.

Because the interviews took place in the U.S., cultural dislocation may have affected the participants’ responses. It is possible that those respondents who mentioned religion, or whose manner of dress and headscarf indicated that they practiced Islam, would have spoken more directly about their religious experience in a different environment.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study indicates that the connection between the arts and resilience in general deserves further research. One of the research projects I hope to complete in the future is a comparable study of the role of the arts in promoting resilience among children, adolescents and adults, a study that will be both quantitative and qualitative. In addition, as a way of taking stock of the resources currently available in Palestine for art education and art therapy, I hope to survey Palestinian schools to learn what kind of arts experiences they offer, and to determine what kind of skills Palestinian therapists have in using the arts in therapy, or as therapy.

The participants in this study were relatively silent about their experiences with two expected sources of resilience, namely sports activities and religion. Thus, if this study were to be repeated, it might be useful to include some more specific interview questions to explore whether sources of resilience identified by researchers studying non-Palestinian populations are also present to the same degree among Palestinians.

Another area to investigate is the relationship between gender and participation in the arts. Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) discussed some general differences between the ways boys and girls responded to the stresses of the first Intifada. Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008) found that sports activities were a source of resilience for boys, though not for girls. Sources of resilience for girls tended to include reading, writing, and drawing; also, the pursuit of education was overall a greater source of resilience for girls. Determining how gender is related to participation in the arts may help educators in redesigning school curricula.

Finally, because this study focused on the arts and resilience in the Palestinian population, and because sources of resilience may be culturally specific (Ungar et al., 2007), it would be advantageous to conduct similar studies in other locations where children and youths are at risk of war-related trauma. Art education and art therapy may be effective ways of cultivating resilience among vulnerable children in populations around the world.

Conclusion

There are currently many places on the planet where armed conflict disrupts daily life. In order to reduce the strain on providers of psychological care, it makes sense to look for ways of preventing trauma by building resilience. The use of art therapy in treating victims of trauma is well established, however, the role of artistic activity in building resilience to trauma has not been investigated. Based on interviews with seven Palestinian graduate students currently residing in the U.S., this study identifies some of the sources of resilience that the participants drew on while growing up in the Palestinian territories during the first Intifada (1987–1993), including family support and community support, education, and the role of the arts. The implication of this study indicate that the use of the expressive arts, along with promoting artistic activity in general, is one resource that has the capacity not only to help with healing but also to transform individuals, families, communities, and educational systems. Using expressive arts therapy and encouraging children and youths to engage in activities like drawing, storytelling, or theater can help build resilience in those who are at a high risk of suffering trauma from war-related violence.

Appendix: Consent Form

Consent Form

The Role of the Arts in Healing Trauma and Building Resilience
in the Palestinian Community

I am conducting research on The Role of the Arts in Healing Trauma and Building Resilience in the Palestinian Community. I am investigating this because I am interested in knowing / exploring the role of the arts in the Palestinian community to heal trauma and build resilience. If you decide to do this, you will be asked to be interviewed for 90–120 minutes to talk about your life story.

Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. If you take part, you may stop at any time. In addition, you may ask to have your data withdrawn from the study after the research has been conducted.

If you want to know more about this research project, please contact me at (617-642-6890); alajarma@lesley.edu; 220 Elm street, Cambridge, MA, 02139. This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Lesley University. Information on Lesley University policy and procedure for research involving humans can be obtained from the Associate Provost (irb@lesley.edu).

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Yousef AlAjarma
Ph.D. Candidate
Expressive Therapies.
Lesley University

Consent Statement(s)

I agree to audio taping at _____ on _____.

Signature

Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audiotapes before they are used.

I have decided that I:

_____ want to hear the tapes

_____ do not want to hear the tapes

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