

## **Giving meaning to national symbols: A pedagogical perspective**

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How can young Palestinians become interested in and actively contribute to the development of their national identity?

I will argue that from a pedagogical perspective national symbols should not remain 'holy', frozen in an eternal past, static and general, to be admired but not to be engaged with. While in an educational context it is important to know the original and central meanings of concepts of national identity, and its main traditional modes of expression, it is also a task for educators to engage students in further giving meaning to those symbols, and especially to make them relevant in the concrete context of one's daily life and environment. A brief discussion will follow of home/land metaphors such as 'home'-'house', 'family', 'land', 'tree', 'Jerusalem' and the connecting concept of *sumud* [steadfastness]. It will be shown how these concepts communicate traditional Palestinian values such as connectedness to the home and community, hospitality, good inter-religious relations and a balanced life in harmony with land and nature. The paper will then look more closely at educational strategies for students to actively inscribe meaning to such national concepts and related values even in times of crisis and community fragmentation such as now. The pedagogical strategies, it is argued, should encourage students to actively 'story' the home and the land using a variety and mixture of 'old' and 'new' media and genres so as to make those strategies attractive, relevant and therefore interesting to young students.

A few pedagogical examples of giving new life to national identity symbols will be relayed on the basis of the author's own experience as an educationalist working in Palestine and Bethlehem. Moments of actively creating meaning to the Palestinian identity often happen in times of acute crisis and despair: the writing of diaries and the conducting of oral histories during siege and curfew, the organization of symbolic actions against the Wall, and the building of Internet sites in which Palestinians all over the

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world contribute their stories, photos and questions as an assertion of their existence despite international double standards and negligence of the Palestinian past, present and future ([www.palestine-family.net](http://www.palestine-family.net)).