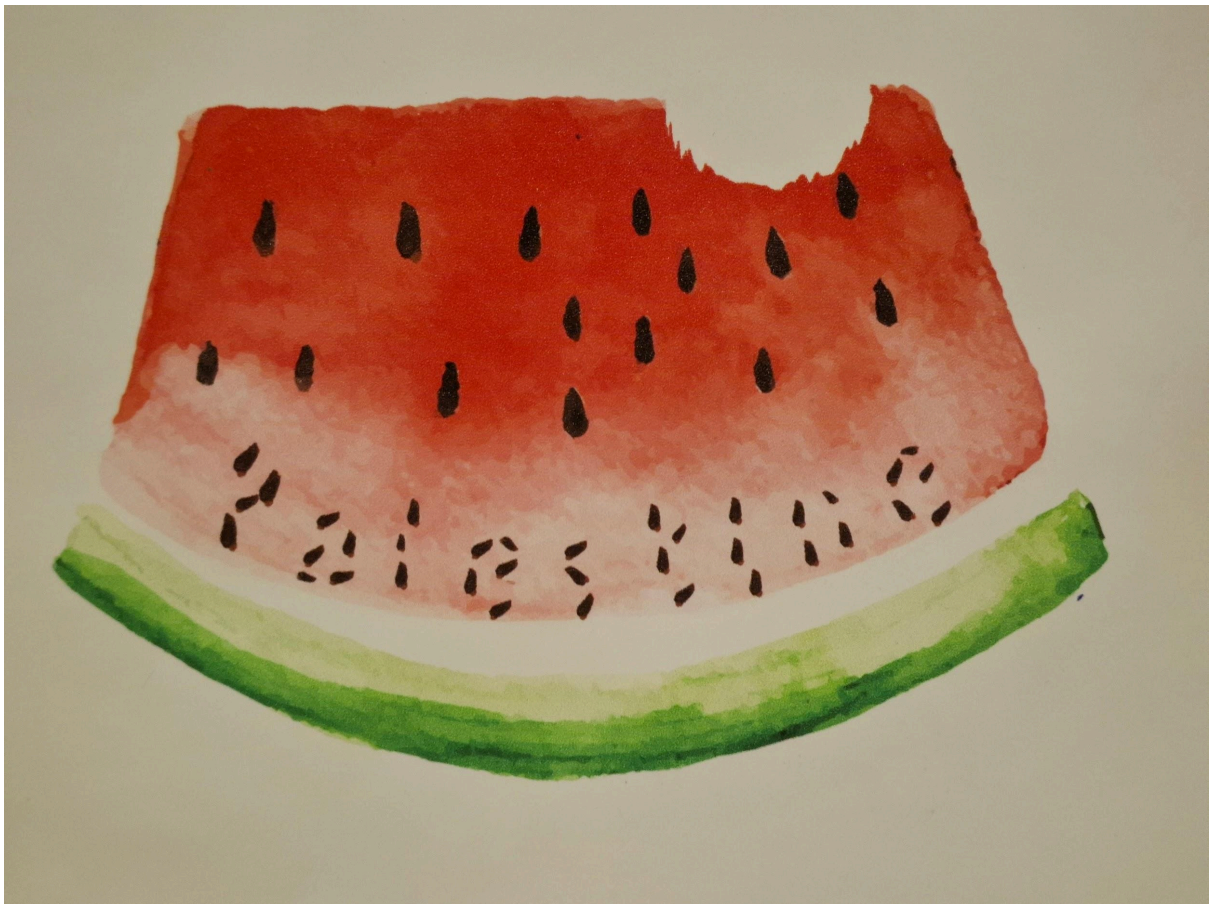


The occupation is everywhere. Geographically, structurally and mentally. And the resistance is everywhere too.

On my way to Palestine I had a day in Amman

Walking to the Roman Theatre I was ushered into an art gallery by a woman with a mauve hijab. She started talking to me about the art. Some good to look at, and some not. I stopped her and apologised saying I only came in to buy a postcard. I then noticed the Palestinian goods and commented on Handala and the keys.

There then followed a lovely conversation about her family who had left in 48 , how they had lived in tents and yearned to go back. 'We will one day', she said. "We are the seeds, we are seeds' in her fluent English and pointed to a watercolour on paper of a watermelon and patterned seeds spelling Palestine. I said how many people around the world and especially in Sheffield supported her. I will not forget how that made her smile. She gave me this painting. I had not even got to Palestine!



I was met in Palestine and taken on a drive to Al Quds. On the way we went to Beit Hanina split in two by the Apartheid Wall. It is such a violent structure. Brutal concrete scything the earth and carving up villages. The wall stretches in the distance pleading to be an epic achievement but instead the graffiti shows its true purpose. I have known about the wall for many years of course but there is no substitute for seeing it in its poisonous and shocking presence.



The next day was Eid and we went on a picnic. Climbing up the beautiful hills north of Ramallah on the road to Salfit is a small village called Farkha. It is a communist village and has some graffiti dotted around showing its political heritage.

We walked down the hill taking in the spring colours and sat by a pipe with a tap. This was a water outlet from the village's aquifer. It was a thin stream and one of the group related how they were allowed to dig only two metres these days and how Israeli settlements took most of the water anyway. He turned round and pointed out an industrial settlement on a hill southeast of us and another, an agricultural settlement just to the south. He pointed then at his olive trees just down the hill and said he could not harvest in 2023 because of settler harassment but that last year a group of 15 went together and gathered them as quickly as they could.





This conversation you understand is interwoven with amazing food, gossip and jokes and serves as a constant background noise to Palestinian people's lives. The day grew longer and the wonderful hospitality continued unabated but it soon became time to go. It would be dark soon. And said, one of the group, the road is not safe. Meaning the army or settlers could stop us at any point. It is a mosquito of anxiety that threatens the type of activity we take for granted.

The next day I am closer to the place where I am to take part in protective presence. This is where internationals stand with farmers or home owners where there is a threat from settlers, army or demolition. We are preparing by having a legal briefing.

It is given by a tall man with a kind face and the gravelly voice of a long term smoker. He has come from a refugee camp to be with us. He is calm in spite of a frustrating journey.

In the briefing we are told how the army can hold us for three hours then they must hand us over to the Police at the nearest police station. It is different for Palestinians, he says. They can take you anywhere for up to two years. Except now they're hiding people for two years, not two days. We look shocked and outraged. He has such a kind and gentle manner - 'it is OK' he reassures us, 'we will manage.'

And then he relates a story, about how long some people have been in prison and his first time in prison before the first intifada. He was sentenced for six years. He was angry and

lashing out. His cellmates said 'why are you sad and angry'. He replies 'I have been given 6 years!' 'Ah' they said. 'That's nice - you are leaving soon!'

Shockingly some of these comrades are still in prison. From this story I knew that, in spite of the daily difficulties and the constant reminders of the occupation, neither he nor the people he spent time with in prison, nor my picnic companions nor the art seller in Amman, were occupied in their minds and never would be.