

Everyday Resilience as Resistance: Palestinian Women Practicing *Sumud*

CAITLIN RYAN

University of Limerick

This article contributes a different approach to discussions of resilience and resistance by arguing that within the current literature, there is too little attention to how communities may engage in their own resilience building without outside intervention or interference. Further, this article will argue that the literature which poses resilience as fundamentally different from resistance overlooks the ways in which resilience can be seen as a tactic of resistance through the lens of infrapolitics. The article uses the Palestinian example of *sumud* to illustrate these two points. *Sumud* is a tactic of resistance to the Israeli occupation that relies upon adaptation to the difficulties of life under occupation, staying in the territories despite hardship, and asserting Palestinian culture and identity in response to Zionist claims which posit Israelis as the sole legitimate inhabitants of the land. *Sumud* represents a “resilient resistance”—a tactic of resistance that relies on qualities of resilience such as getting by and adapting to shock. Thinking about *sumud* as a form of resilient resistance challenges the resilience literature to engage with a greater variety of forms of resilience.

Despite the prevalence of resilience in International Relations (IR) literature today, much engagement with it starts from the perspective that resilience is a tactic of neoliberal governance, whether in relation to peacebuilding, enhancing national security, or the provision of development aid. Even within the range of debates over the desirability of taking a “resilience-building” approach to peace, security, and/or development, these debates still stem from a similar logic which positions the concept of resilience firmly within the realm of neoliberal (or post-liberal) projects (Chandler 2012, 2013a; Richmond 2012). There are exceptions to this dominant logic, such as Bourbeau’s (2013:11) argument that resilience must be “context-informed” and is therefore neither inherently positive nor negative. A similar argument by Corry (2014:271) critiques the literature for framing resilience as a distinctly neoliberal practice, arguing that the association of resilience with neoliberalism “appears to owe more to theoretical priming than empirical examination.” Likewise, this article seeks to problematize the association of resilience and neoliberalism.

In their focus on resilience as an imposed tactic of governance, many of the current debates about the nature of resilience dislocate it from the everyday practices of communities. Furthermore, they overlook the ways in which resilience can represent an infrapolitics of resistance. If we look for resilience “from below” as a tactic or strategy employed intuitively by populations, rather than

something imposed from above, we can clearly see that not only is it much more prolific than the current literature implies, but that it can be a practice of resistance rather than simply a practice of coping. Such a view of resilience moves the discussions beyond the scope of projects aimed at building resilience, in two ways.

First, thinking of resilience as primarily a tool used by Western interveners overlooks the obvious, that adaptation to shock and finding ways to cope with adversity are not the intellectual property of the West, to be employed when intervening elsewhere. Second, current debates within the resilience literature fail to account for how resilience itself may be a tactic of resistance employed collectively and strategically. The example of “*sumud*” in Palestine can be used to illustrate these two points and therefore to challenge the logic of framing resilience within the language of neoliberalism.

For decades, Palestinians have been engaged in a wide variety of tactics and approaches to challenging dispossession, exile, and occupation. Much of the international attention given to Palestinian struggles focuses on overt resistance, particularly violent resistance such as suicide bombings/martyrdom operations or the launching of rockets. Less attention has been paid to what Palestinians call *sumud*. *Sumud* translates from Arabic as “steadfastness” or “resilience”—yet it encompasses a broad range of tactics and actions directed at maintaining a Palestinian presence on the land of historic Palestine, including what is now known as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem, as well as practices aimed at coping with daily life under occupation (Halper 2006; Khalili 2007; Richter-Devroe 2011).

Sumud represents a form of resistance that supports other, more overt resistances, such as the organizing of demonstrations or the use of militancy (Singh 2012). Palestinians, especially Palestinian women, frequently speak of *sumud* as a uniquely Palestinian tactic that allows them to maintain dignity, honor, and a physical presence on the land despite adversity and hardship, and as a form of resistance to the occupation that helps them to cope with daily life.

Palestinians challenge the Israeli occupation with an array of tactics and strategies that have been adapted to the flux of the occupation, and *sumud* exists within this range of resistances. In this paper, I argue that *sumud* represents a complex and active tactic of resistance to decades of occupation. The pervasiveness of the occupation means that *sumud* is a form of resistance that is necessarily resilient because it relies on daily-coping—in other words, *sumud* is a resilient resistance (Halper 2006; Khalili 2007). *Sumud* is a form of resilient resistance because it does not reflect living *with* uncertainty but, rather, living *despite* uncertainty. The distinction is critical because it highlights *sumud* as a means of resisting. The tactic of exercising, building, or practicing *sumud* can therefore illustrate that resilience can be a tactic of resistance, thereby providing an alternative way of thinking about what resilience is, where we can find it, and how it can function.

In framing *sumud* as a “resilient resistance,” this article contributes to both the existing resilience literature and the existing *sumud* literature. The empirical example of *sumud* adds to the resilience literature by illustrating that resilience and resistance are not incompatible, especially when resilience is developed from below rather than from outside. In doing so, it establishes the need for further empirical research in the resilience literature at the grassroots level that does not assume, a priori, that resilience is always imposed from outside and is always distinguishable from resistance.

In relation to the existing *sumud* literature, this article is supported by other authors who claim that *sumud* is a form of resistance (Norman 2011; Richter-Devroe 2011; Pearlman 2014). However, as I will demonstrate, discussions of *sumud* which label it as “passive resistance” (Singh 2012) are problematic and

unhelpful, especially from a gender perspective. Framing *sumud* as resilient resistance attributes a more positive framing to those who act with *sumud*, thereby supporting a further empowerment of the concept. In order to understand *sumud*, and therefore how the concept adds to the resilience debate, this article draws from empirical research in the West Bank where I employed a narrative approach to interviews.

Within the Feminist Security Studies literature, there is a great deal of support for the idea of starting from women's daily lived experiences to understand security and insecurity (Stern 2006; Tickner 2006). Stern (2006:179) argues that narratives can be important tools in understanding how women experience and respond to insecurity because they can ground an enquiry in "empirical material that is otherwise silenced or excluded from the authorized subjects of research." Furthermore, narrative accounts of security and insecurity will not necessarily privilege the traditional sovereign state definitions of security and insecurity and will instead demonstrate how different subjects are made insecure by sovereign state practices of security (*ibid.*:195). In turning to women's narrative accounts of how *sumud* is a practice which defies and resists the occupation, it will be possible to demonstrate how *sumud* in Palestine illustrates the possibility of a resilient resistance.

The empirical evidence used in this paper draws from field research conducted in the West Bank of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). While conducting narrative interviews with women about their experiences of, and resistances to, the Israeli occupation, *sumud* emerged as one aspect of Palestinian women's resistance. The women I interviewed represented a spectrum of Palestinian society; they included a range of ages from 20 to 77; a variety of education levels (from no high school to masters level); different occupations, including women who worked in their homes, community activists, businesswomen, civil servants, and lawyers; and also a mix of Christians and Muslims. They also lived in various locations, including very small rural villages, refugee camps, and the cities of Ramallah and Bethlehem. As such, although my sample size was comparatively small (18), the research participants reflected diverse experiences with occupation and resistance.

The first section of this article will engage with some of the existing resilience literature, especially from the fields of Peacebuilding and Security Studies, to demonstrate how this literature benefits from an additional approach to the conceptualization of resilience. Thinking about resilience in the context of the peacebuilding/state-building literature is clearly relevant to the case of Israel/Palestine and *sumud* because efforts to intervene in the conflict have often taken place within the logic of these approaches. Following this, there will be a brief introduction to the situation in the oPt, followed by a review of how *sumud* in the oPt can be seen as a form of resilience. The next section will engage with the relationship between resilience and resistance, using *sumud*, as well as the concept of infrapolitics, to problematize the resilience literature which overlooks the potential connection between resilience and resistance. Finally, the example of *sumud* will be used to argue that the notion of resilient resistance can challenge the assertion that resilience is always "only just coping" (Reid 2012) by showing how coping can also be imbued with resistance.

Resilience

Engaging with some of the current debates within the resilience literature helps to establish how its often pre-given association with neoliberalism is problematic. Throughout his extensive engagement with the concept of resilience, Chandler (2012:17) defines it "as the capacity to positively or successfully adapt to external problems or threats." Chandler argues that this resilience thinking is

characterized by a change in thinking about the relationship between the subject, the state, their environment, and the market. This is evident in policy documents outlining organizational approaches to “building resilience,” as well as in the academic literature (Chandler 2012, 2014).

However, when one examines policies and programs which “build resilience” in detail, it is abundantly clear that resilience is essentially a new way of talking about neoliberalism (DFID 2012; USAID 2013). This is evidenced by the emphasis on the individual as responsible for their own fate, the encouragement not to rely on the state, and the building of state infrastructure and policies that will ultimately make the state less reliant on the outside. All of this is performed from a Western-centric logic about the “best” model for state–society–subject relations.

The USAID “Resilience Capacities Module” survey conducted in Kenya illustrates this. All of the survey questions point to a dichotomy between self-reliant (read: resilient) individuals and individuals who need to “become” resilient because of their reliance on family members or other community members. One question asks respondents: “During the last drought, did you rely/lean on other households for financial or in-kind food support?” (USAID 2013: Appendix 3). The questions in the survey reflect a Western-centric logic that self-reliance is a key quality of a good citizen. It ignores the fact that, in other places, building community support networks and community mutual dependence is the basis for a secure and well-functioning society. These approaches to resilience reflect a disconnect between how the concept is employed by policy actors and how populations engage in building their own resilience out of necessity, not because anyone told them to. The employment of resilience as a strategy of intervention fails to acknowledge the degree to which resilience is already an everyday tactic of individuals and communities.

In a working paper for the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, Milliken (2013) engages with the value of resilience for practitioners engaged in peacebuilding projects and points out that definitions of resilience often frame it as adaptation rather than bouncing back. While she is skeptical of resilience becoming a new buzzword in peacebuilding, she does argue that some characteristics of resilience are compatible with peacebuilding processes. She goes on to define resilience “as systematic self-help” (Milliken 2013:1). This definition is also useful from the perspective of *sumud* and resilient resistance. For the purpose of this paper, and drawing from the approach to resilience coming from peacebuilding as well as from ecology (the first field to engage with the concept of resilience), I define resilience as being composed of three complementary traits: it is adaptive, flexible, and fosters “enduring relationships” (Holling 1973; Chandler 2012; Brassett, Croft and Vaughan-Williams 2013).

In order to demonstrate how this definition of resilience as adaptation, flexibility, and the fostering of enduring relationships contributes to a form of resilience that is compatible with resistance, it is first essential to situate it within existing discourses of resilience. There has been interesting work done on how the West and aid organizations link resilience to security and development. Duffield (2006, 2007) argues that fostering resilience among the underdeveloped has become an aim of development work because of the perception that it will increase the security of the developed world.

Within the various assumptions and practices that constitute “development” it is possible to recognise a biopolitics of life operating at the international level. That is, those varied economic, educational, health and political interventions aimed at improving the resilience and well-being of those whose existence is defined by the contingencies of “underdevelopment.” (Ibid.:18).

From the perspective of Western security, the logic is that fostering resilience in underdeveloped populations will decrease the appeal of supporting or joining terrorist organizations (Duffield 2006:26; Duffield 2007:2). Chandler (2012) makes a similar argument—that the human security agenda and policies of intervention aim to make vulnerable populations resilient. There is a further link between fostering resilience through development and neoliberalism (Duffield 2007; Reid 2012; Joseph 2013). In development discourse, resilience is posited as self-sufficiency and the poor are expected to develop strategies for survival that do not rely upon the state (Duffield 2005:153; Reid 2012:69). Joseph (2013:51) argues that in fact, neoliberalism's aim of fostering resilience in development can be seen as disciplining states and removing barriers to free markets.

Chandler (2012, 2013b, 2014) has engaged significantly with what he argues is a turn in state-building/peacebuilding and development practices away from the liberal approach of top-down institution building to the approach of building resilience. He argues that resilience building as an approach arose out of the failure of institution-building approaches to effect change. Citing Paris (2004), Chandler argues that it became obvious that the focus of liberal peace on building state and economic institutions was not altering the way populations behaved in relation to the new institutions. The shift to resilience building moved toward addressing the failure of institution building to resonate with target populations.

Chandler points out that state-building and development discourses frame building resilience as a way to reach target populations from the bottom-up, by addressing cultural practices and values seen as incompatible with liberal institutions. The aim of resilience is still to change the target of intervention, but to do so at the level of the community or the individual rather than the state. Resilience programs target communities in order to make them more adaptable or resistant to shock, or more receptive to neoliberal intervention. This fits clearly with the wider logic of neoliberalism to decrease reliance on the state by increasing individual or community self-reliance.

Yet, as Chandler and Richmond point out, resilience is still essentially a project designed and carried out by external forces, leaving it vulnerable to many of the same critiques as liberal peace, and to resistance from the targeted populations. Without disregarding the compelling evidence that there has been a turn in state-building/development projects, inasmuch as there has clearly been a shift since the institution-building projects of the 1990s, framing resilience as entirely within the logic of neoliberal intervention is not the only way that one can look at it.

Sumud offers a different way of thinking about resilience. *Sumud* reflects resilience in that it encompasses tactics of adaptation, flexibility, and the fostering of enduring relationships. *Sumud* allows Palestinians to adapt to life under occupation; it helps them develop flexible responses and tactics and is inherently flexible in that it encompasses a wide range of practices. It also helps to foster enduring relationships between Palestinians through its cultural intelligibility and focus on community-building practices. In the introduction to a recent special issue on Security and the Politics of Resilience, Brassett et al. advocate for an expansion of how we understand resilience in order to acknowledge its complexity. One research question they propose is “how might the resilience agenda be occupied in different ways to suggest other ways of understanding the problem, for example, through tradition or emotion” (Brassett, Croft and Nick 2013:225).

In contrast to other engagements with resilience, I approach it through the concept of *sumud*, as an indigenous practice fostered from within communities. Rather than something imposed or encouraged from the outside, or from specific resilience-building strategies of intervention where the poor/

underdeveloped/post-conflict is to be made resilient, *sumud* as resilience emerges from within Palestinian society. As such, *sumud* demonstrates the need to separate resilience from a neoliberal perspective.

***Sumud* as a Different Take on Resilience**

In order to effectively demonstrate how *sumud* represents a form of resilience with a potential contribution to the resilience literature, we must first briefly engage with why resilience is necessary in the oPt. If we define resilience as adaptability to external forces, then the enduring nature of the occupation makes resilience essential. Daily life in the occupied territories varies widely, temporally, and geographically. Smith (2011:318) argues that the occupation “is a process, not an event.” An intrinsic element of the process entails an exceptional level of surveillance and control which takes the physical form of an all-encompassing network of elements such as checkpoints, barriers, curfews, closed military zones, settlements, “settler-only” roads, watchtowers, gates, earth mounds, and night raids. The forms of control and surveillance, their operationalization and effect, have been documented extensively (Weizman 2007; Allen 2008; Parsons and Salter 2008; Smith 2011).

These analyses conclude that the occupation is extraordinarily pervasive and embedded in daily life. The occupation stalls, interrupts, and prevents simple tasks such as turning on one’s water, going to the market, visiting friends, or seeking medical treatment. For example, access to water is strictly controlled by Israel, and 80% of the water pumped from aquifers in the West Bank is distributed to Israelis—either in Israel or in settlements (Amnesty International 2009). Palestinians living in Area C¹—particularly Bedouins—are prevented from connecting to a water supply, and as a result, they live on less than 20 liters of water per day, considered by the World Health Organization to be a crisis level (UNOCHAoPt 2012).

The example of access to water demonstrates just one element of how the occupation seeps into daily life, and how it presents Palestinians with pervasive problems. It also demonstrates quite clearly one of the ways in which men and women might experience the occupation differently. Social norms and gender divisions within Palestinian society mean that it is most often women who are responsible for the day-to-day upkeep of the home, cooking, cleaning and looking after children (WCLAC 2010). All of these tasks necessitate water, so water scarcity is one element of the occupation that has a very particular impact on women. The enduring nature of occupation means that water scarcity has become normalized, and women have found ways of adapting to it.

In interviews, several women spoke of how normal the occupation had become, and how they saw this normalization. To understand why the resilience of *sumud* is a type of resistance, it is important to understand how some Palestinians have come to view the occupation as the norm.

We have two problems. It’s a problem to say that it’s (the occupation) normal, because it’s not, and it shouldn’t be. At the same time it’s a problem not to say it’s normal, because if we don’t say it’s normal and try to live it, it will devastate us, and break us. (Interview 13, “Noor,”² Nabi Saleh, 2012)

¹Since 1993, the West Bank has been divided into three areas. Area A includes major Palestinian population centers and is under full control of the Palestinian Authority. Area B is under Palestinian civil control and Israeli military control, and Area C, comprising over 60% of the West Bank, is under full Israeli control. Much of Area C is off-limits to Palestinians.

²All names have been changed.

Another woman spoke of how the occupation results in loss and uncertainty, and how her children also experience that uncertainty.

You just live minute by minute. You don't know what will happen in the next minute, you don't know what will happen in the next hour. All the time you are worried about what will happen. For the children, when they hear something, like a jeep they think that the soldiers will come and throw tear gas or arrest someone.
(Interview 14, "Mariam," Nabi Saleh, 2012)

The response from "Noor" shows the difficulty of thinking about the occupation. It is telling that she expresses the conundrum of acknowledging the normalcy of occupation as opposed to refusing to acknowledge that this is what life should be. This reflects an element of resilient resistance inasmuch as Noor has accepted that she needs to get on with daily life so that the occupation will not "break" her, but at the same time, she refuses the acceptability of the occupation. The response from "Mariam" illustrates how life under occupation is unpredictable, and how she is worried for her children because they are constantly living with this unpredictability. The norm of life under occupation is living with fluctuating abnormality. It is for this reason that the trait of steadfastness—*sumud*—becomes necessary.

Sumud came into use in Palestinian society to explain the enduring resolve of the Palestinian people regarding the right of self-determination. *Sumud* has been included in a number of wider studies of Palestinian resistance, specifically in studies of nonviolent resistance (Peteet 1991; Hallward and Norman 2011; Pearlman 2014). Pearlman argues that the concept of *sumud* emerged after the 1967 war, and gained more popular traction during the First Intifada as a result of the population's disaffection with the PLO and the stalled peace process (Pearlman 2014:96). Norman (2011:8) argues that *sumud* represents an act of everyday resistance. Richter-Devroe (2011) echoes this claim by framing it as infrapolitics. Peteet sees *sumud* as a form of resistance that women have had a part in defining, particularly in refugee camps. "Women took the concept of *sumud* and carved a niche for themselves within its bounds of meaning" (Peteet 1991:153). The purpose of engaging the concept of *sumud* in this paper is not so much to argue that it is a tactic of resistance, as others have clearly made this argument. Instead, it is to use *sumud* to demonstrate that resilience can be a form of resistance.

To illustrate how *sumud* represents resilience, I will engage with two manifestations of it—staying in Palestine and making life under occupation more liveable. *Sumud* can represent a way of living that insists upon the rights of the Palestinian people to stay or return to their land, to maintain Palestinian culture, and to nurture Palestinian society. *Sumud* also contributes to a contrasting subject formation of Palestinian women. Whereas the occupation actively negates the dignity of Palestinian women, embedded within *sumud* is the reaffirmation of that dignity and the quest to find ways of living one's daily life which demonstrate it. These two manifestations of *sumud* are intertwined.

Perseverance in Palestinian rights to the land is a direct challenge to Zionist discourse which posits the Jewish people as the only rightful inhabitants. A project carried out by the Arab Education Institute (AEI), a Bethlehem-based non-profit, examines how Palestinians reflect upon, and conceptualize, *sumud*. Through asking the open-ended question of "share a story of *sumud*," the *Sumud* Project illustrates how diverse *sumud* is. For some women who shared their stories, the act of "simply" staying in one's home is *sumud*. This is because daily life in the occupied territories is anything but simple, so refusing to leave one's community for better opportunities outside of Palestine becomes an act of steadfastness.

What could be more normal than living in one's own home and land in an everyday setting, a setting characterized by family and friends and the taste of the olives plucked from that one tree in the back garden? But when the home itself becomes a place of oppression, even a prison, staying does become a choice—an extraordinary choice to preserve an ordinary life. (Van Teeffelen 2011:51)

Staying in one's home is an active decision rather than a passive one, and invoking the language of *sumud* when staying in one's home reflects adaptation to changing circumstances and external forces. This was reflected consistently throughout the narrative interview process, wherein women expressed their understanding of *sumud* as linked to maintaining a presence in the territories by reducing emigration and staying in their homes. One interpretation came from a 77-year-old woman from Bethlehem, a participant in the AEI *Sumud* Project. The construction of the wall destroyed her family's livelihood, as its path prevented customers from reaching their business. While much of her narrative was somber, when she spoke of *sumud* and what it meant to her, she smiled and told me:

Ahhhhh! *Sumud*! . . . *Sumud*, is an authentic Arabic word. You know? It represents the steadfastness of the Palestinian people. And it represents also the will of keeping the community, the Palestinian community, safe. And to reduce emigration. (Interview 7, "Merna," Bethlehem 2011)

A woman from Dheisheh refugee camp also expressed what *sumud* meant to her:

Sumud, or resilience, to me, means defying, and power. It gives me energy to continue. I am not afraid of the Israelis. And I am not afraid of death. My family was forced to leave their village in 1948, near Jerusalem. We took refuge in Beit Sahour, and that's where I was born, but I feel we were deprived of our land. Now, even if they come to destroy my home, we will stay. We will put up a tent and stay. (Interview 6, "Sineen," Dheisheh refugee camp, 2011)

This illustrates the connection between *sumud*, determination, and maintaining a physical presence on the land; the perception is that the occupation is aimed at forcing people to leave (Allen 2008:456). For "Merna" and "Sineen," *sumud* is about refusing to leave, even when threatened. Other women made similar statements relating *sumud* to making a decision to stay. This sentiment also emerged in an interview with a young woman living in a small village in Area C.

The important thing is to stay in our house, in front of the Israeli soldiers and the occupation, if we stay in our house it says 'we are not afraid of your guns' We stay in our house, we live a normal life, and ah, this is the patience under occupation, this is the important thing. (Interview 15, "Zania," Nabi Saleh 2012)

In particular, this statement from "Zania," a young mother, is quite interesting. She frames staying in her home as a means of demonstrating that she is patient and not scared. In the context of the situation in Nabi Saleh, this is a very powerful statement.

Since 2009, Nabi Saleh has been the site of weekly demonstrations against Israeli settler expropriation of village land and a village spring. The demonstrations have been met with fierce and often violent repression by the Israeli Army (al-Haq 2011). In 2010, during one of the village's weekly demonstrations, "Zania" was inside her home with her two-year-old daughter, "Ayat." The army fired a tear gas canister through the second floor window into the room where "Zania" and her daughter were, and the high concentration of gas trapped them there. "Zania" had to drop her daughter out of a second floor window into the arms of a villager because no one could find a ladder tall enough to reach the window. "Zania" reported that this was a traumatic experience for her daughter,

who could not understand why her mother was “throwing” her out the window (Interview 15, Nabi Saleh 2012; al-Haq 2011:17). For “Zania” to state that she would stay in her home to show that she is not scared demonstrates her resilience inasmuch as it demonstrates a form of mentally adapting to an external threat.

Women also mentioned how they try to encourage their children to stay. Given the hardships of living under occupation, it is understandable that many young Palestinians leave the territories if they can. However, women may exercise *sumud* by trying to convince their children to stay, even if it means living with hardships. One woman mentioned how she and her husband were trying to help her son to stay by building a small dental practice for him on the family’s property. She expressed how this relates to *sumud*.

Few women are in politics, but we resist in our way of living let’s say. In our resilience. In our being here, refusing to emigrate, this one thing. Encouraging our children to stay here, and study here and work here, like I encouraged my son to study at the Arab American University in Jenin, and encouraging him to work here in spite of the difficulty and the little amount of money he gets. Staying in Palestine also, enduring all the difficulties, that we mention, the lack of freedom, the restrictions placed upon us, The Wall, not going to Jerusalem, this is resilience, this is *sumud*, what we call *sumud*. (Interview 2, “Jana,” Beit Sahour, 2011)

Another woman encouraged her children to stay with reference to her link to the land, and her identity as coming from Bethlehem.

That we should, even if it is difficult, stay. This is our land. Where to go? We don’t know America or Australia. This is my land. I know that I am from Bethlehem. I am Bethlehemian people. And my roots are here, my parents, my grandparents, so I should stay. I keep telling my children the same. Even with all these difficulties we can. (Interview 4, “Lara,” Bethlehem, 2011)

These two narratives reiterate the connection between *sumud* and resilience inasmuch as the women discuss *sumud* as adapting to adverse conditions by maintaining a Palestinian presence on the land, despite the difficulties of the occupation.

In relation to the resilience needed to stay in the territories, there is another important aspect of *sumud*, linked to what Palestinians refer to as “the right of return” to homes and villages they fled in 1948 or 1967. This exercise of *sumud* represents a cultural strategy of memorialization, intended to assert the historical Palestinian right to land. After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, an estimated 800,000 Palestinians were exiled and displaced from 418 villages that came under Israeli control (Abufarha 2009:41). Of these 418 villages, by 1987, 190 were “reconfigured” as Jewish and given Jewish names (*ibid.*; PASSIA 2002:30–31). In 1969, Israeli Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, said of these reconfigurations:

Jewish villages were built in place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist; not only do the books no longer exist, the Arab villages are not there either. Nahal arose in the place of Mahul; Kibbutz Sarid in the place of Huneifs; and Kefer Yeheshu’a in the place of Tal al-Shuman. (Said 1980:14)

The names of Palestinian villages that were “reconfigured” as Jewish after 1948 may not show up in Israeli maps or geography books, but they have not been erased from the collective memories of the Palestinians living as refugees. Within refugee camps throughout the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, remembering and memorializing the names of the villages from which

refugees or their families were displaced in 1948 can be seen as an exercise of *sumud* that is related to maintaining a presence on the land.

Those displaced in 1948 may memorialize the villages they came from in several ways, such as teaching their children and grandchildren about the village, displaying maps with the names of villages in Arabic, or keeping the keys to the houses they were displaced from. These private memorializations are replicated in the public realm by displaying maps or the names of villages within refugee camps or in other public places throughout the territories. They reflect a strategy of adapting to the circumstances of occupation (in this case, physical displacement), while simultaneously asserting that they have not forgotten where they came from. Figure 1 is a photo of a mural in the village of Nabi Saleh. The key is central to the mural, representing that the villagers have not forgotten the displacement in 1948. Also central to the mural is the olive tree, another symbol used to represent the rootedness of Palestinians on the land.

The second element of *sumud* that represents resilience is the way Palestinians work to normalize daily life under occupation, either through trying to adapt to changing circumstances, or through reproducing Palestinian identity and culture in a way that asserts the normality of a Palestinian presence on the land. *Sumud* is not merely represented in the decision to stay, but it is also represented in how Palestinian women try to make life under occupation liveable for themselves and their families. As such, *sumud* represents the resilience of getting by, or coping, by actively trying to deal with the difficulties brought about by occupation. This is also reflected in Richter-Devroe's interpretation of *sumud* when she



FIG 1. Mural in Nabi Saleh, Author's Photo

argues that finding “joy” in one’s daily life can be seen as *sumud*, arguing that in this sense, *sumud* can be seen as “ideational resistance, by, for example, maintaining hope and a sense of normality” (Richter-Devroe 2011:33).

In addition to talking about staying in Bethlehem despite hardship, “Merna” from Interview 7 reflected upon how *sumud* involves taking joy and pride in Palestinian culture. This reflects an adaptation to the threat of Palestinian culture being extinguished or subsumed. “Merna” takes part in the Arab Education Institute *Sumud* Project mentioned earlier, which focuses on relating stories of positive action and community building, not just on telling stories of hardship and oppression. Of the project, “Merna” said:

The AEI *Sumud* programs support educational values and organizes non-violent actions, and the most important, culture and identity. So, in this *Sumud* House women like me write stories and ah, I have written many stories. We write stories, and we paint ceramics, and we work in embroidery, so we are involved in many activities here that are related to our Palestinian heritage. (Interview 7, “Merna,” Bethlehem, 2011)

This relates to the position that *sumud* is also about rejoicing in Palestinian culture and focusing on how this culture can be transmitted throughout the community, even during times of hardship. Acting with *sumud* is also about engaging in cultural practices which reproduce Palestinian identity. This is reflected in Richter-Devroe’s (2011:33) account of *sumud* when she argues that it can be enacted “through cultural resistance, by upholding traditions, folkloric songs or dresses and other customs.” In *sumud*, there is a definite link between the preserving of one’s home and family and preserving the ties and the culture of the community. This clearly fits with how resilience is conceptualized as a positive adaptation to threat, or change, which is rooted in both the individual and the local community.

However, *sumud* also illustrates that the resilience literature in IR overlooks the ways in which resilience can be fostered from the bottom-up, without external intervention and outside the logic of neoliberal peacebuilding/state-building. Discussions of resilience building as a tactic employed by external projects fail to take into account the ways in which communities engage in building resilience of their own accord, and risk over-simplifying practices of resilience. Furthermore, whether it is intentional or not, much of the current resilience discussion makes it appear as though resilience somehow belongs to the West. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the current debates about resilience also make it seem as though the relationship between resilience and resistance is limited to instances where the local resists resilience-building projects imposed on them. *Sumud* demonstrates that resilience is not inherently incompatible with resistance.

Resistance through Being Resilient

Associating resilience with resistance is problematic from the perspective of much of the resilience literature, but I argue that this is in large part a result of the resilience literature defining resistance within the logic of the sovereign state. Considering resistance from a different perspective allows for a “resilient resistance” to emerge, as I will demonstrate. Reid’s (2012:76) argument that the resilient subject cannot possibly be a resisting subject because the resilient subject is forced to put all its effort into mere survival and thus cannot give any energy or resources to “resist the conditions of its suffering in the world,” is problematic in two ways.

First, he does not give adequate attention to the possibility that adaptation and coping can in fact be a form of resistance. Second, this characterization of resilience as incompatible with resistance seems to reflect just one limited

perception of what resilience entails. The resilient subject to whom Reid refers is a subject where building resilience has been the explicit aim of development and aid policy. Rather than being externally imposed, *sumud* as resilience in Palestine comes from a grassroots level and is a means of empowering Palestinians. I argue that such a conception of resilience is not in conflict with resistance and in fact that resilience can be a form of resistance.

Reid's argument that a resilient subject cannot resist seems to deny the subject agency—its implication is that subjects of neoliberal development policy are only acted upon. There are undoubtedly situations where resilience is the only means of survival and resistance appears impossible. However, I argue that resilience does not entirely preclude resistance, as illustrated by the case of *sumud* in Palestine. Hass (2002) has argued that *sumud* is a unique form of Palestinian resilience, but she also differentiates between *sumud* and resistance because "it is not organised" (Hass 2002:12). Hass argues that the collective but not centralized or calculated nature of *sumud* means that it is not resistance, but I challenge this assertion based on a different approach to what resistance entails.

The notion that resistance has to be centralized, organized, or calculated reflects a state-centric, Western, liberal understanding of resistance. I draw from Scott to argue that resistance can in fact be much more free-form and every day. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Scott argues that everyday resistances are far more significant than they get credit for. He argues that the resistance tactics of the subordinate group may not seem like resistances to the dominant group, but this may be precisely the aim. "Spontaneity, anonymity and lack of formal organization then become the enabling modes of protest rather than a reflection of the slender political tactics of the popular classes" (Scott 1990:151). The range of everyday resistances employed by the subordinate group may not fit into state-centric notions of resistance, but that does not mean that they are not engaging in resistance. Scott introduces the term "infrapolitics" to refer to these resistances:

For a social science attuned to the relatively open politics of liberal democracies and to loud, headline-grabbing protests, demonstrations, and rebellions, the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups is, like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum. That it should be invisible, as we have seen, is in large part by design—a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power. (Scott 1990:183)

Furthermore, for Scott (1990:118), the enactment of infrapolitics by the subordinate group results in these actions being politicized so that they are culturally identifiable to the subordinate group as acts of resistance. The communication of *sumud* as a recognizable Palestinian practice serves to support its regeneration and is what makes *sumud* more than just surviving, but an act of resistance.

Richter-Devroe (2011:36) engages with Palestinian women's everyday resistances, arguing that in the context of Israeli occupation and Palestinian patriarchy, Palestinian women who engage in acts of everyday struggle are engaging in political acts. She defines *sumud* as "a form of infrapolitics or everyday (nonviolent) resistance" (*ibid.*:33). As such, she is associating the trait of steadfastness with resistance. She also associates *sumud* with "carrying on with life" (*ibid.*), as well as with seeking to enjoy life despite hardships. *Sumud* entails coping with the circumstances of the occupation, but also refusing or resisting the elements of the occupation that aim to break the spirit of Palestinians.

When discussing the infrapolitics of resistance in the rice-growing village of Sedeka, Scott points out that the village poor direct their discourses of resistance at the shift in the village symbiosis that resulted from the Green Revolution—

particularly the change that resulted when the large land-owning class no longer needed to rely on the labor of the landless and land-poor because of the advent of combine harvesters. The combine harvester disrupted how the poor experienced symbiosis in the village, and they had to find ways to adapt to the change, but at the same time, they resisted the legitimacy of the change (Scott 1985:163). Scott discusses “The war of the words” in Sedeka—the poor’s refusal to accept discourse from above. For example, poor villagers talk about the rich as being in the wrong for altering social relations in the village. For the village poor, the negative changes they experienced as a result of the Green Revolution are not just a matter of limited subsistence but also a loss of dignity and status in the community. It is, in part, this that they are resisting in the war of the words—in a sense, the poor villagers reclaim some dignity by framing their actions as morally superior (Scott 1985:240).

This is a form of resistance that is also resilient. Because the village poor still have to rely on the landowners for casual labor and assistance, they cannot make their revolt too overt. It is necessary for the village poor to adapt to a new way of life in the village by adopting different strategies for survival, but Scott is quick to point out that the poor find ways to challenge the legitimacy of their new positions in the village. This is important in that it illustrates how a population may develop resilience to change or shock while refusing to accept the explanation for their plight. This resistance establishes a foundation to support other resistance.

It is also clear that we should not judge resistance merely on whether or not it brings widespread social change. In a study of how mothers on welfare in rural Ohio subvert systems of government welfare surveillance, Gilliom (2002:99) argues that, in the case of these women’s resistance to the right of the state to surveil their lives, “it is not necessary to see everyday resistance as a substitute for organized politics to recognise its existence, its importance, and its impact on the lives of these people.” In other words, thinking about the infrapolitics of everyday resistance should not start from the premise that every enactment of everyday resistance will fundamentally alter the conditions in which people live. However, as Gilliom points out, that does not mean that everyday resistance achieves nothing.

The necessity of seeing everyday practices as resistance rather than “just” coping is a direct challenge to the power of the dominant class (Scott 1985:299). Referring to everyday resistances as just coping denigrates the opposition to domination implicit in the practices and reflects a clearly patronizing and domineering approach. When “we” declare that everyday practices of resistance are not political enough to count, we support the continued subjugation of people engaging in these everyday resistances. Both Scott and Gilliom argue that the inability to see the resistance reflects our refusal, or inability, to recognize that individuals can engage in collective resistance that may not be formally organized, but that is still reflective of collective goals and experiences. It is for this reason that Gilliom (2002:106) states that “everyday resistance is not individualistic.” Welfare mothers in rural Ohio may be acting individually, but they are still part of a wider collective engaging in similar tactics, with similar aims, and a similar impact of resisting the power of the state. What this demonstrates is that if we claim that everyday resistance is not “organized enough,” we rely on a state-centric and bureaucratic notion of organization (Scott 1985:300). Instead, what makes everyday resistance collective is that it is based on the shared experiences of subordinate groups (*ibid.*:296).

Further, if we insist that resistance has to be organized to “count,” we fail to see how “symbolic and material opposition” (Gilliom 2002:100)—even when practiced individually—represents a refusal to accept the legitimacy of one’s oppression. Recognizing everyday resistances as a type of resistance challenges

the dominant discourses which seek to explain it as anything but. For example, Scott (1985:301) claims that the rich in Sedka refer to the everyday resistances of the poor as “deceit” or “shirking.” While there are, of course, other forms of resistance which are organized more formally, or which take the form of open revolt, there are also moments when everyday resistances are the only possibility for subordinate groups. “If we allow ourselves to call only the former ‘resistance’ we simply allow the structure of domination to define for us what is resistance and what is not” (*ibid.*:299). We can easily relate this back to *sumud*. Starting with Scott’s concept of the “war of the words,” we can see how *sumud*, as a tactic of resilient resistance, allows for adaptation to the conditions of the occupation while refusing its legitimacy. When thinking about the effectiveness of *sumud* as a tactic of resistance, although it does not/cannot thwart the occupation alone, it does have an impact on everyday lives.

Others who have engaged with the concept of *sumud* as resistance include Khalili (2007) and Singh (2012). Khalili investigates *sumud* from within Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, and she frames it within the wider array of mnemonic practices that Palestinians use to socially memorialize “events, persons, places, and symbols” (Khalili 2007:732). Within this wider array of social practices of invoking memories, *sumud* functions as a means to refuse that the stronger side (Israel) determines one’s fate. One former fighter, interviewed by Khalili, differentiated between “siege” and “*sumud*,” arguing that the former entailed the weaker side waiting for their fate to be determined by the stronger side, whereas the latter entails that even in conditions of defeat, there can be victory in refusing to give up—clearly associating *sumud* with resistance (*ibid.*).

Like Khalili, Singh (2012) engages with *sumud* as a trait of great significance to Palestinians; nevertheless, in framing *sumud* as passive resistance, he does *sumud* and Palestinian women a disservice. His analysis of *sumud* as a concept that has roots in Islam is useful because it allows us to see how *sumud* is a value that is culturally identifiable and has historical significance. He traces the genealogy of *sumud* from its use in Islam to its adoption by civil resistance movements and wider Palestinian civil society during the First Intifada, and beyond to Hamas discourses of resistance. He places *sumud* within the context of occupation, arguing that it represents an attribute of “Palestinian-ness” and an act of resistance “through the sheer fact of continued Palestinian political, social and cultural presence and existence on the land” (Singh 2012:538). While he therefore acknowledges the agency of *sumud* and frames it as a strategy, he also refers to it as a “signifier of passive resistance” (*ibid.*).

Through exploring both passive and active resistance, Singh argues that active resistances such as marching in demonstrations or engaging in militancy rely upon the foundations of passive resistances, such as *sumud*. It is indeed quite useful to think of *sumud* as a foundation for other resistances inasmuch as it is a tactic or set of practices that encourages Palestinians to remain rooted in their culture and on their land, thereby supporting the foundations of overt resistance. However, it is problematic—particularly from a gender perspective—to use the adjective passive. Passivity is a trait traditionally associated with women, in contrast to active men. Passivity can be seen as an undesirable characteristic, one that is linked to weakness and relegation to the private realm (Tickner 2006). Even if Singh acknowledges that *sumud* provides a foundation for other resistances, linking it to passivity associates it as a secondary or lesser means of resistance, and associates it with femininity. Singh asserts that it is essential for other resistances to function, but framing *sumud* as passive is fundamentally unhelpful. I suggest that the remedy is to frame *sumud* as a resilient resistance rather than as a passive resistance.

Conclusion

The framing of *sumud* as both resilience and resistance may seem at odds with existing analyses of resilience (Hass 2002; Reid 2012). However, I am not contending that the two concepts are always compatible. Instead, I am arguing for a more positive reading of resilience from a grassroots, indigenous perspective. In the case of Palestine, resilience is one element on a broad spectrum of resistances to Israeli occupation. Resistance in Palestine would have been utterly unsustainable for six decades were it to rely solely on obvious and organized resistances. The nature of the occupation has necessitated that Palestinians develop the steadfastness of *sumud* in order to sustain their determination to stay in the occupied territories and to get on with daily life.

More importantly, in the context of protracted conflicts, being resilient or steadfast is not “just coping”—prefacing coping or adapting with “just” diminishes how much effort is needed to cope or survive. A resilient resistance, such as *sumud*, represents living despite the occupation, or even living *to spite* the occupation, rather than living with occupation. Living despite occupation demonstrates that *sumud* is not just coping, but is also a means of resistance to one’s circumstances. I surmise that this is the case for numerous situations where populations have developed their own resilience. More empirical studies investigating resilience may uncover how populations framed as “just coping” are in fact engaging in an adaptable, flexible resistance rooted in everyday practices aimed at fostering enduring relationships within the community. Engaging, in other words, in resilient resistance.

I argue that for resilience to be resistance, it has to fulfill two criteria: First, it must entail a concerted effort to provide a means of adaptation, making do, getting on, or working with what is at hand. Second, it must challenge the conditions that are experienced. Resilient resistance communicates a message that denies the legitimacy of the conditions experienced. Enacting a resilient resistance means finding a way to get on with daily life without acquiescing to the prevailing political, economic, or social situation. It also means relating your resilient resistance to other members of your community, making it a collective practice.

One cannot think of, or frame, a resilient resistance within the logic of state-centric, liberal discourses of resistance or resilience. *Sumud* represents a very different way of conceiving of resilience. There is little doubt that *sumud* is a form of resilience—it is a means of adapting to circumstances that change on a daily basis, such as the closure of checkpoints or the arrest of a family member. *Sumud* is a means of flexibility, as evidenced by women’s claim to be acting with *sumud* when they find ways to keep their houses spotless, despite having insufficient access to water. *Sumud* also reflects resilience as fostering enduring relationships. The transmission of *sumud* to one’s children, as well as framing one’s daily activities as *sumud*, helps to support relationships among Palestinians. If a woman frames her ability to keep a clean house with insufficient water as *sumud*, her actions are recognizable and culturally and politically significant to every other Palestinian woman who does the same.

There can also be little doubt that *sumud* is a form of resistance because of its cultural significance and use across Palestinian society, and the perception among Palestinians that continuing to live one’s life is a means of resisting the Israeli occupation. Existing literature on *sumud*, as well as the narratives from my field research, undoubtedly supports the assertion that *sumud* is an instrumental and foundational element of Palestinian resistance (Halper 2006; Khalili 2007; Richter-Devroe 2011; Singh 2012).

The question, then, is what is the value of the notion of resilient resistance, especially as applied to *sumud*? The response is that it adds empirical evidence

to the resilience literature by illustrating how communities acting with adaptability and flexibility to unpredictable and unstable conditions can frame their own actions as more than “just” coping, as a means of refusing to let a stronger party decide their fates and refusing to give in. Women acting with *sumud* are determined to adapt to the conditions of daily life to make that life as normal as possible for their families, but they are also refusing to accept the legitimacy of the occupation. The space that *sumud* creates between outright revolt and total compliance demonstrates the importance of looking at other grassroots, indigenous practices of resilience. In particular, it is important to determine what practices they engage in, how those practices are made culturally identifiable, and how they represent more than just coping. This has the potential to expand our current perceptions of resilience, and supporting such positive examples of resilience will help foster enduring relationships and community-based practices.

Finally, framing *sumud* as a resilient resistance benefits the understanding of *sumud* by acknowledging Singh’s claim that it is foundational to other resistances, but also challenges the gendered problems of calling *sumud* passive resistance. Undoubtedly, women are central to *sumud* in Palestinian society, but framing it as a passive resistance does not give *sumud* sufficient acknowledgment as a practice that requires incredible dedication and hard work. Framing *sumud* as resilient rather than passive imbues it with much greater positivity.

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