



To Exist Is To Resist: Sumud, Heroism, and the Everyday

Alexandra Rijke &
Toine van Teeffelen

As a national Palestinian concept, *sumud*, or, literally translated, “steadfastness,” carries the meaning of a strong determination to stay in the country and on the land. In this article,¹ we will sketch the historical development of the concept and then make the case, on the basis of dozens of interviews and discussions with Palestinians in the West Bank, that today’s meanings projected onto the concept have become more plural, “democratic,” and closer to people’s experiences in daily life.

From Militant Struggle to Nonviolent Resistance

It is likely that *sumud*, *avant la lettre*, was part of a collective Palestinian consciousness of struggling for and clinging to the land that goes back at least to the British Mandate time. However, as a national symbol, *sumud* only started to be frequently used in the course of the 1960s.² It became

The Bethlehem Sumud Choir of the Sumud Story House, the members of which were interviewed for this article. *Source: Photo by Fadi Abou Akleh.*

part of the revival of Palestinian national consciousness after the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) resistance movements emerged as the leading organizations in the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. Refugees living in camps were identified as *samadin* (those who are steadfast) almost by definition, as in those communities the struggle for daily life and national rights required a consistently demanding level of *sumud*.³

The symbol was all the more applicable when the Palestinian refugees had to defend the besieged camps such as during the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s and 80s. Exemplary models of *samadin* were those whose willpower was tested to the extreme. Popular heroes included Palestinian martyrs and prisoners associated with the armed struggle of the Palestinian resistance groups. In that context, *sumud* strengthened a militant message of armed struggle dominating the discourse of the Palestinian national movement at the time.

In the course of the 1970s, the discourse of *sumud* became primarily associated with the Palestinians living “inside,” on the Palestinian land. Palestinians who remained in what became Israel in 1948 had already declared their *sumud* if not in political forms, barely allowed in the 1950s and 1960s when they lived under Israeli military occupation, then at least culturally and artistically. The poetry of Tawfiq Zayyad can be seen as an example.⁴ The olive tree with its deep roots in the land, bearing fruits only after several years of growth, became a widely used metaphorical expression of *sumud*.⁵

In the popular awareness of Palestinians in the occupied territories, keeping the *sumud* of families and community had been a matter of existential urgency during the war in 1967, when many once again faced a decision whether to stay or to leave. Remembering the flight in 1948, families chose to cling to their homes and land so as not to become refugees (again), lose everything, and leave the Palestinian land for the Israelis to take over.

During the late 1970s, *sumud* as a national concept became specifically connected to Palestinian life in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. After the setbacks in the Palestinian struggle in Lebanon, the focus of attention shifted to the Palestinians in the occupied territories, whose popular struggle against the occupation gave a much needed focus and drive to the overall Palestinian national movement. With the emergence and visibility of a Palestinian movement inside, characterized by recurrent demonstrations and strikes throughout the West Bank and Gaza, the concept of *sumud* came to signify more meanings. By itself it carried similar meanings as it had in the Lebanese camps, referring to standing one’s ground and staying committed to national rights. “Inside *sumud*” also referred to the reproductive capacity required for the “demographic struggle” – meaning in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza context: keeping a large majority of Palestinians on the land in the face of expanding colonial Jewish settlements.⁶ *Sumud*’s shades of meaning subsequently increased in variety and depth as it became part of a strategic debate on development and non-violent resistance.

Moving beyond the symbolism of the struggle and the land, and becoming more of an articulated ideology, *sumud* turned into a key concept in an intellectual debate among Palestinian scholars about strategic development under colonial conditions, a debate in which both professional workers and activists participated.⁷ Staying on the land could be more than an individual action of perseverance; basic conditions, especially economic conditions, had to be fulfilled for *sumud* to be effective. Psychological hardiness was

by itself insufficient when confronting a coordinated, well-financed Israeli colonization movement. In 1978, the Jordanian-PLO “*Sumud* Aid Funds” of the Jordanian-Palestinian Joint Committee started to channel millions of dinars to the West Bank and Gaza as part of a collective effort to keep people on the land. The money was paid in the form of handouts, followed an elite political agenda, and was devoid of a real development strategy.⁸

As to be expected with the use of such a “gift” model, corruption was rampant. For many, *sumud* at the time was a rhetorical cover for easy money given to the already rich. In the context of these funds, *sumud* became associated with inflated rhetoric, political agendas and corruption; an association which never completely left the concept afterwards. However, *sumud* resonated too much with people’s experiences in daily life to stay locked in this cynical discourse. The grassroots movement in the West Bank and Gaza that at the end of the 1970s and 1980s sprung up through the formation of agricultural, women’s, and health committees, among other groups, which reappropriated the concept and gave it a more bottom-up and activist meaning. For instance, the development of the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees was a reaction against a traditional professional approach of building up and equipping medical institutions within the existing legal frameworks, and promoted a more holistic and activist provision of services.⁹

The *sumud* strategy focused on developing self-sufficiency structures and a decrease in dependency on the Israeli economy, especially in the strategically important countryside with Israeli settlements emerging everywhere and a Palestinian agriculture struggling to survive. This strategy reached its apex during the first intifada from 1987 on, which among other things encouraged a movement of small cooperatives that aimed (ultimately unsuccessfully) to establish a measure of economic self-sufficiency designed to protect people against the collective and economic punishment imposed by the Israeli army.

This development discussion tied in to a broader strategic discussion that emerged in the course of the 1980s around the relationship between *sumud*, as a protective and defensive strategy, and resistance, as an offensive strategy challenging occupation and colonialism. Was *sumud* not too reactive and did it not aim only at surviving the odds? One answer was that making economic and social structures more independent from the occupation had in fact a challenging and resisting effect insofar as the price Israel had to pay for continuing the occupation would increase. Out of dissatisfaction with the meanings brought to *sumud* by the Jordanian-Palestinian Joint Committee, an uneasy distinction was created between “active” or “resisting” and “passive” *sumud* (in which the question of the purpose or value of passive *sumud* was left unanswered).¹⁰ Some activists did not want the concept of resistance to become “tainted” by *sumud*. Resistance in its core meaning and appeal was said to become weakened when survival on the land was allowed to fall under that concept.¹¹ However, under the influence of the first intifada and the widespread application of techniques of nonviolent resistance, *sumud* acquired more active and challenging meanings, such as active noncooperation with the occupier.¹²

New prototypical examples of *sumud* entered popular consciousness: the peasant whose olive trees were uprooted by the Israeli army or settlers, but who replanted them; the family who rebuilt their house each time after it was demolished, the community surrounded by settlements but still hanging on, and in the different but also demanding

context of Palestinians living in Israel, fighting for equality while keeping the link to the land, or rebuilding destroyed residential areas of the Bedouins in the Negev – all actions that reminded of another concept often associated with Palestinians and close to *sumud* in its meanings: resilience.¹³

Living *Sumud*

In a unique individual intervention, Ramallah lawyer Raja Shehadeh introduced the Arabic word *sumud* in an English-language diary in the beginning of the 1980s.¹⁴ His diary possibly aimed to add to the Palestinian debate about the value of non-violent or popular resistance as translated to a personal level. The book, however, primarily addressed an international audience influenced by stereotypes of Palestinians and not informed of their human reality. It focused on the daily life of Palestinians living in their homeland under occupation who tried to keep their heads high in spite of humiliating and continuously stagnating or deteriorating circumstances.

Here *sumud* was not so much a tool to strengthen the symbolic national unity or to think of community strategies, but a conceptual window to communicate Palestinian humanity to non-Palestinians. In the book, *sumud* helped to give Palestinians a voice and a story. For foreign readers, Shehadeh's *sumud* resonated with nonviolent approaches in general – which are sometimes called the “third way” (between submission and violence), as in the title of the UK edition of the book. *Sumud* was narrated here as a form of standing up to the challenges of the “normal-abnormal” daily life under occupation. Shehadeh's book was influential in two major ways. First, it prefigured the meaning of *sumud* as a way of life, a meaning which nowadays has become more widespread. Second, his literary approach reappeared not only in his own later diaries and histories, but also in other Palestinian narratives written for an international audience.

During the Oslo years in the 1990s, the symbol of *sumud* went somewhat out of focus with public attention directed at the brokering of a peace deal rather than the ongoing realities on the ground. During the second intifada from 2000 on, a great many Palestinian families and civilians again showed remarkable *sumud* in surviving the circumstances, and some accounts of their daily life experiences were published later on.¹⁵ Typical ingredients of personal Palestinian diaries of the time were an eye for the “small” issues of daily life, a wry humorous sense of the absurdity of life under occupation, and the attempt to cling to basic human values under extremely testing circumstances.

During the last ten years, *sumud* as a mobilizing call has come back in the popular resistance struggles against the Wall, settlements, land confiscations, and house demolitions. Yet once again it also came under critical popular scrutiny as prime minister Salam Fayyad used the term to refer to a strategy of “strengthening institutions” under occupation, while at the same time promoting a neoliberal economic agenda that, in the eyes of many, would leave the weak and unprotected economy under occupation vulnerable to global market forces, enlarge the gap between the poor and the rich, and take energy away from the struggle against the colonial occupation.¹⁶

In sum, over the years of shifting fortunes and shapes of the Palestinian national movement, we notice different complexes of meanings attributed to *sumud*, dependent on the communicative situations in which *sumud* discourses circulated as well as the larger needs and contexts of the time. It is not possible to distinguish neat, consecutive stages in the development of the concept. Rather, there have been multiple and overlapping uses in which internal and external audiences were addressed.

As an internal national symbol, *sumud* activated a sense of national destination even though different Palestinians have, of course, been differently tested. During crucial moments in the national history, the discourse of *sumud* functioned for individual families as an encouragement to stay on the land and not to leave. In the strategic development field, *sumud* discourses emphasized the need to create economically and socially sound conditions for staying on the land. In popular discourse, *sumud* struck an ambiguous note as it referred sometimes to a context of corruption rather than reflecting values of courage and rights. In the context of nonviolent resistance, *sumud* emphasized the “small” contributions of people’s resistance to occupation in daily life. Addressing an international audience, the concept served to present a human image of Palestinians in a stereotyped global media discourse. In this context of divergent, overlapping and shifting meanings, we will analyse how present-day Palestinians understand the meanings of *sumud*.

Present-day Meanings of *Sumud*

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

– Abdel Fatah Abu Srour, director of the cultural NGO al-Ruwad in ‘Aida refugee camp¹⁷

In this section of the article, we focus on the current uses of and meanings attached to *sumud*. They have moved from nationalist symbolism and strategic discussions towards a way of life associated with *sumud*, which is identified with a diverse set of actions. To be able to analyse this development of the concept of *sumud*, we interviewed Palestinian NGO leaders and scholars as well as women involved in the Sumud Story House of the Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem. Toine van Teeffelen conducted one-on-one interviews with eight NGO leaders and scholars, and sixteen women were interviewed by Alexandra Rijke, who also held three focus group discussions with thirty-three women in total, all from Bethlehem and the surrounding towns and villages and of all ages.¹⁸

Living on Palestinian Soil Is Not Enough

For many Palestinians living “inside,” *sumud* is intrinsically linked to Palestine as a place to live, as, for instance, in Raja Shehadeh’s diary and in the interviews with the women at the Sumud Story House. However, a Palestinian’s place of residence does not exhaust the meaning of *sumud*. As explained by Zoughbi Zoughbi, director of the Bethlehem-based NGO Wi’am: “There are two perceptions of *sumud*: to stay on your land, the national land, and also to stay steadfast in the diaspora, when you yearn and struggle to come back and keep the connection with your people – by supporting, or being ambassadors, or working in advocacy, or investing in your country, sending delegations.”¹⁹ A strong connection to nation, culture, and history, as well as to other Palestinians, is also expressive of *sumud*. A Palestinian can be *samida* or *samid* (steadfast) when she or he does not live on Palestinian soil but still works toward keeping Palestinian identity alive. While the meaning of *sumud* has opened up to include more Palestinians, such as those who do not live on Palestinian soil, the concept has also become more demanding (perhaps also in response to the corruption charge).

Being *samida* or *samid* requires that one does not allow oneself as a Palestinian to be written out of history. As became clear during the focus group discussions with the women of the Sumud Story House, it requires that Palestinians work against the overt or tacit assumption that there is no Palestine and there are no Palestinians. Abu Srour describes this importance given to the Palestinian identity as follows: “To reclaim that I am Palestinian, wherever I am, is *sumud*. *Sumud* is preserving the identity, the memories, the customs and habits, the popular arts, the attachment to the land, the values that make us into human beings, across generations.”²⁰

Moving Beyond the Survival-Resistance Dichotomy

The debate often associated with *sumud* is whether or not it can be viewed as resistance. In response to the first intifada in particular it has been debated whether *sumud* should be regarded as passive or active. However, this debate is clearly disconnected from the experiences of the Palestinians we interviewed. For them, the traditional opposition between resistance in its meaning of a direct confrontation with the occupier, and survival as going on with life, does not hold. Many activities that have traditionally been viewed as expressing *sumud* entail direct forms of resistance, such as going to demonstrations: “Yesterday I heard about a small town south of Bethlehem, called al-Masara. Like in Bil’in, they display steadfastness. They have marches, they prove that they are here.”²¹ However, the interviews we conducted showed that *samidin* are not only freedom fighters or those engaged in “direct” resistance such as weekly demonstrations. For contemporary Palestinians to stay actively present in Palestine with all its pressures (as a graffiti slogan reads, “to exist is to resist”) or to keep a Palestinian identity within the diaspora, is expressive of *sumud* as well. Such activities associated with *sumud* show it is a form of resistance against the politics of erasure exercised by Israel, even though it would perhaps

traditionally be classified as compliance or survival.

The resistance expressed through *sumud* represents a way of believing in a better and more human future, and a rejection of the unjust relationship between occupier and occupied that Israel after many decades of occupation has posed as natural. As expressed by Hala, a woman involved in the Sumud Story House: “Even though we are occupied, we want to stay on our land. By staying on our land, we are resisting this occupation. This means that by being steadfast, by being *samid*, you are resisting.”²² Nur, another woman of the Sumud Story House, added that “this is something they [Israel] don’t want, they want us to be dead, not to enjoy life.”²³

Acts of resistance such as openly celebrating dignity, identity and life have been categorized by scholars like James Scott and Lori Allen as essential, though ignored, ways of dealing with structures of dominance like occupation.²⁴ Seemingly small acts mentioned by our interviewees, such as standing up to a soldier at a checkpoint when asked to undress or keeping a smile on one’s face while standing in line in the early morning to get to work, express a strong sense of agency. As explained by Allen: “In these conditions where the routine and assumptions of daily life are physically disrupted, purposefully and as part of the political program of Israeli colonialism, everyday life in Palestine—in its everydayness—is itself partly the result of concerted, *collective production*.”²⁵ *Sumud* is explained by Allen as the agency of the everyday acts that prevent Israel’s successful subordination of Palestinians.

What can be seen here is that *sumud* represents a more inclusive notion of resistance. Resisting the occupation is not exclusively the job of the men and women who engage in oppositional activities such as demonstrating. Resisting the occupation is also part of life for people focused on going forward and keeping their hope in a more just and human future alive.

Relationship Building

The interviewees also associated *sumud* with the preserving and building of social relationships and the act of keeping the community and environment alive and healthy. As explained by Zoughbi Zoughbi: “*Sumud* is not a single, demonstrative action. It is not just planting a tree and saying, ‘This is *sumud*.’ It is about how to nourish the tree, how to trim it, how to harvest it, how to create a healthier atmosphere for all ... *Sumud* is an art of living ... and building relationships between people.”²⁶ *Sumud* refers to the personal responsibility of building social relations. For the women of the Sumud Story House this was an important aspect of being *samidin*. Family and societal ties were experienced as representing keeping alive the Palestinian way of life. Being *samidin* entailed for them a certain way of life in which care for the community is important.

An example of staying alive and keeping *sumud* through mutual solidarity is explained by a former political and military leader, Salah Ta’amari, when speaking about his stay in the notorious Ansar prison camp in South Lebanon during the 1980s. Preserving solidarity and keeping the community alive was described by Ta’amari as a way of keeping hope

alive in testing times:

To be steadfast, you need to maintain unity – I taught the prisoners to sing. We had four songs. I would wake them up in the middle of the night, stand in front of the barbed wires, and sing. Imagine, thousands would sing. All the villages around us woke up. The Israelis were bothered. When a group sings, they feel closer to one another. They feel stronger.²⁷

In a very different context, the women of the Sumud Story House also expressed this community aspect of *sumud* through the act of sharing daily life stories. By doing so they symbolically shared each other's burdens and created a narrative community based on solidarity and caring. Their stories are happy as well as sad and illustrate the potentiality and fragility of human life. By sharing the stories, the women in a way reclaimed their place within society and within history. The stories are put on the Wall in Bethlehem and together constitute the "Wall Museum."²⁸ The knowledge that other people visiting Bethlehem will read their stories and share them helps to keep the women's hope and social relations alive.

Sumud is thus also expressed through the building of community. By keeping human relationships alive and trying to prevent the occupation and the Separation Wall from further fragmenting and destroying existing communities, *sumud* reclaims the humanity of Palestinians despite ongoing violence and oppression.

Joy

It may seem surprising to associate joy and aesthetics with *sumud*. However, while suffering has always been regarded a part of *sumud* and while courageous people who face a lot of suffering because of the political circumstances are identified as prototypical *samidin*, many of our interviewees mentioned enjoying life as an intrinsic part of *sumud*. They do not oppose suffering to joy, but regard a sense of joy despite and because of (the overcoming of) suffering as a form of *sumud*. The beautiful moments in life and the joy found in those moments gain in meaning through the sacrifices made. Not letting the occupation kill joy of life and appreciating beauty are tools in resisting Israeli oppression.²⁹ This was also expressed by Adnan Musallam: "Part of showing your presence is keeping your ability to laugh. Laughing is a defensive mechanism. You are laughing, chatting, joking, so that you can continue to be like a human being. When you become totally pessimistic you are really saying, 'I am ready to die, I don't want to live anymore.' You dehumanize yourself. Humor is essential to be able to stand up and stay steadfast. It's part of saying: 'I am here and nobody can deny my presence here'."³⁰

Besides laughing, the experiencing of the joy and beauty of life is also found in the aesthetics of architecture and traditional crafts such as embroidery. By building beautiful houses and rebuilding houses after they have been demolished, Palestinians do not accept the grim prison created for them. It is an investment in the future. As Musallam notes:

“Building a home, especially a traditional home, in traditional architecture, is an assertion. If people were so desperate, they would ask themselves, why should I build a home?”³¹

Sumud has thus developed from a nationalist symbol emphasizing the shared goals and values of Palestinians to a way of life lived by individuals and communities. The concept of *sumud* has become more inclusive: more actions are regarded to be expressive of *sumud* and more people are identified as *samidin*. At the same time, *sumud* has become more demanding. Living on Palestinian soil is not considered by any of our interviewees as sufficient for being identified as *samida* or *samid*. And, to make the picture even more nuanced, *sumud* has also become more joyful. Although our interviews and focus group discussions showed that the type of activities representing *sumud* are diverse and sometimes contested, all agreed that *sumud* should work towards retaining one’s status as human, via the celebration of culture and the practice of human care. In this manner, *sumud* is identified as a way of moving forward to a future in which Palestinians live in freedom, justice, mutual care, and joy.

Discussion and Questions

As is the case with all concepts that have a broad meaning, and certainly those used in a contested political context, the applications of *sumud* have changed dependent on time and place, and have been shaped by communicative situations including various purposes and audiences involved. In its core meaning, *sumud* expresses strength and commitment in defense of the Palestinian land and of Palestinian communities, including struggling communities outside the land.

In most understandings of *sumud*, presence on the Palestinian land in its purely demographic aspect is not sufficient. Explaining *sumud* as “Palestinians staying on the Palestinian land” does not cover the commonly shared psychological and social dimensions of the concept; especially the element of human struggle. Rather than only staying on the land, *sumud* is more about a lengthy, patient perseverance to preserve (or not to give up on) Palestinian identity and rights in a colonial context. This includes perseverance in socio-spatial circumstances associated with an especially demanding struggle, like Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, Palestinians living in refugee camps or close to the Wall, communities and families surrounded by settlements, communities repeatedly threatened by destruction (as among the Palestinian Bedouins), or in general those unable to develop any normal type of life due to the political context in which they live.

In a broader sense, according to the interviews we conducted, *sumud* has come to represent the struggle to preserve a certain “Palestinian” way of life, with its own rhythms and customs, its discourses and lifestyles, and also its joys. Keeping to this Palestinian way of life expresses the will to preserve human dignity, and challenges forms of oppression that trample dignity in overt and subtle ways. The added dimension of daily life has democratized the concept of *sumud*. The interviewees suggested that *sumud* is relevant to the daily life of all Palestinians who actively wish to maintain their identity and dignity

through small acts of what is sometimes called “everyday heroism.” In other words, the concept is not only reserved for groups and communities that are tested in physical and extreme ways, and it also does not in all cases depend on whether or not the *samid* or *samida* lives inside or outside the Palestinian land. Whether or not someone is identified as *samid* or *samida* is in the end determined by actions and attitudes in daily life.

The democratic nature of this evolving understanding of *sumud* became clear during the interviews, as most interviewees conceptualized *sumud* more as an action than a state.³² This also comes across in the translation of the concept as “standing fast.”³³ Given the tendency to keep *sumud* relevant to daily life, the concept can be given expression in a great many different types of individual behavior, depending on somebody’s particular circumstances of life. While pain and struggle are universally present in Palestinian experiences, *sumud* also allows for other experiences and expressions, including a deep-felt joy and appreciation of Palestinian culture, as well as a joyful, bittersweet, or even dark but transformative humor over and across the pain. Pain and sacrifice do not determine the lives of the *samidin*; the horizon of *sumud*’s meaning is, rather, humanity. *Sumud* is not about sacrificing for the sake of sacrificing, but in the service of the human values freedom, justice and caring.³⁴

With the use of this more democratic conceptualization of *sumud*, with its focus on daily life, interviewees rejected a static and rhetorical “politicized” use of *sumud*. The forms of corruption that have been associated with the term, especially as a result of dealings with the *Sumud* Aid Funds in the 1970s and 1980s, contradict our interviewees’ understandings of *sumud*.

We notice a similar movement toward an increase in the relevancy of daily life experiences with respect to that other central “Palestinian” concept expressing universal values vis-à-vis colonial dispossession: the right of return. Here, too, there seems to be a new tendency to move away from frozen, rhetorical, or cynical understandings as a result of overwhelming obstructions in realizing this right and the problems of strategy and leadership.³⁵ In present-day understandings, the right of return has more meanings than the literal meaning of “the right to go back to the place where one or one’s ancestors come from.” Like *sumud*, it engages various global, metaphorical, or associative meanings that render the concept more action-oriented and allow it to become applicable to ongoing Palestinian daily life.

Both *sumud* and the right of return, in all their daily life applications, may in fact function as generative concepts for sharing countless but unique stories of daily struggle across the many borders imposed on Palestinians. In this way these concepts may contribute to a value-based educational program for Palestinians that is bottom-up and inclusive of the different “sections” of the Palestinian people.³⁶

The parallel with the right of return raises broader questions about the relation between the discourse of *sumud* and national discourse in general. It is likely a global development that national discourses increasingly penetrate the everyday domain and more directly answer to personal and community needs rather than general collective needs.³⁷ In the everyday experience it is also more difficult to distinguish between various national as well as non-national discourses. How, for instance, is the concept of *sumud* influenced by

trends in popular psychology that increasingly stress “positive” mental health concepts like resilience?³⁸ How do people experience *sumud* within their religious communities such as Islam and Christianity, in relation to the *sumud* for the national cause? To what extent is the *sumud* expressed in the extraordinary effort by many Palestinians to attain a personal education and find achievements in life part of the national *sumud*? Other struggles of liberation have in the past and present applied concepts of steadfastness (“relentless persistence” in South America, for instance)³⁹ or community coherence and strength (*ubuntu* in South Africa and other African countries).

Sumud's meanings will likely resonate with experiences from those other contexts of steadfast community struggle. The Internet, the communication industry, and new mobility patterns have allowed concepts and their associated experiences increasingly to “travel.” As the women interviewed mentioned, with *sumud*'s diversity of meanings it has become almost impossible to develop a strong common definition – even though the concept has a “feel” that is directly recognizable to Palestinians.

While *sumud* is not an easy concept to grapple with intellectually, it resonates within deep layers of Palestinian experience that are worthy of study and education, which may lead others to understand better the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice, community, and care.

Alexandra Rijke is a recent graduate from the studies International Development Studies (MSc) and Gender and Ethnicity (MA). She stayed in Bethlehem, Palestine, for three months at the end of 2013 to collect data for her masters thesis about sumud, the Wall and the effect of sharing stories.

Dr. Toine van Teeffelen is head of education at the Arab Educational Institute (in Bethlehem), a guide and an anthropologist, with specialization in critical discourse studies. He presently researches narratives and metaphors on Palestine/Israel.

Endnotes

- 1 The authors would like to thank Penny Johnson for helpful editorial remarks. Of course, the authors alone are responsible for the final text.
- 2 An estimate given by Adnan Musallam, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 3 September 2009.
- 3 See Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003). In the context of Palestinian camp life in Lebanon, Julie Peteet notices that the “qualities that comprise *sumud* are also those that are characteristic for femininity – silent endurance and sacrifice for others (family and community) ... The prominent place accorded *sumud* in popular Palestinian discourse paved the way for
- 4 many ordinary women to see, and for others to see, their actions as politically significant.” Julie M. Peteet, *Gender and Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press: 1991), 153.

- 5 See the entry for *sumud* in Wikipedia for reference and examples. “Sumud,” *Wikipedia*, accessed 3 August 2014, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumud. The olive tree and other symbolisms of *sumud* – especially comparing the Palestinian land with (still images of) Palestinian women – are common in Palestinian visual art. In her overview of this art, Gannit Ankori writes that the well-known Palestinian painter Sliman Mansour communicates “the poetics of *sumud*.” See Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion Books: 2006), chapter 4.
- 6 Oral communication with Fuad Giacaman from Bethlehem, an activist in the 1980s and after. He mentions that especially in the 1980s and 1990s it was common among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to consider having many children an expression of *sumud*.
- 7 For a summary of the debate, see Samih Farsoun and Jean Landis, “The Sociology of an Uprising: The Roots of the Intifada,” in *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*, ed. Jamal Nassar and Roger Heacock (New York: Praeger, 1990), 28.
- 8 See the critique on the uses of the *Sumud* Aid Funds in Helena Schulz, *The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1999), 55, citing Salim Tamari.
- 9 See Laura Wick, “Checkpoints on the Long Road to Palestinian Women’s Health” (Birzeit: Birzeit University Institute of Community and Public Health, n.d.), 11, online at icph.birzeit.edu/uploads/File/IEPALA%20Pal%20WH-laura.pdf.
- 10 See “Sumud,” *Wikipedia*.
- 11 Personal observations of discussions held during demonstrations in the time of the second intifada, Toine van Teeffelen.
- 12 Although an area not yet explored, it is not unlikely that with the emergence of the Islamic movement Hamas during the first intifada, Islamist meanings imputed to the concept of *sumud* have come to stress resistance over survival meanings. Resistance in general has been central to the ideology of Hamas, considering the strong religious associations of the resisting will attributed to the *sumud* concept in Islamic holy texts, as explained by Leonardo Schiocchet, “Palestinian *Sumud*: Steadfastness, Ritual, and Time among Palestinian Refugees,” in *Palestinian Refugees: Different Generations but One Identity* (Birzeit: Birzeit University, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies, 2013). Interestingly, in recent readings of the concept, *sumud* has also become associated with various concepts of steadfastness, perseverance, or patience as used in the Bible. The recent Kairos Palestine document (2009) issued by Palestinian Christian leaders employs steadfastness as one of its key concepts in outlining a Christian Palestinian theology of challenging occupation; see “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering,” (n.p.: Kairos Palestine, 2009), especially paragraphs 3.3.3 and 5.3, accessed 3 August 2014, www.kairospalestine.ps.
- 13 For the concept of resilience applied to the mental health situation of Palestinian youth during the second intifada, see Viet Nguyen-Gillham, Rita Giacaman, Ghada Naser, and Will Boyce, “Normalising the Abnormal: Palestinian Youth and the Contradictions of Resilience in Protracted Conflict,” *Health and Social Care in the Community* 16, no. 3 (May 2008): 291–98. For a comparison of resilience and *sumud*, see: Toine van Teeffelen, Hania Bitar, and Saleem Habash, “Resilience in the Palestinian Occupied Territories,” in *Handbook for Working with Children and Youth: Pathways to Resilience Across Cultures and Contexts*, ed. Michael Ungar (London: Sage 2005). *Sumud* is closer to a cultural rather than a solely individualized understanding of resilience. This reflects recent changes in scholarship about resilience. For instance, the Canadian Resilience Research Centre states: “Most commonly, the term resilience has come to mean an individual’s ability to overcome adversity and continue his or her normal development. A more comprehensive and progressive definition of resilience has emerged from our work internationally. ‘Resilience is both an individual’s capacity to navigate to health resources and a condition of the individual’s family, community and culture to provide those resources in culturally meaningful ways’ ... This definition shifts our understanding of resilience from an individual concept, popular with western-trained researchers and human services providers, to a more relational understanding of well-being.” “What Is Resilience?” *Resilience Research Centre*, accessed 3 August 2014, www.resilienceresearch.org/about-the-ccc/resilience/14-what-is-resilience.
- 14 Raja Shehadeh, *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (London: Quartet Books, 1982).
- 15 See especially: Suad Amiry, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* (London: Granta, 2005); Mitri Raheb, *Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004). See also the other diaries of Raja Shehadeh, including:

- The Sealed Room: Selections from the Diary of a Palestinian Living under Israeli Occupation September 1990–August 1991* (London: Quartet, 1992); *When the Bulbul Stopped Singing: A Diary of Ramallah under Siege* (London: Profile Books, 2003). Diaries and oral histories written by school students in the Bethlehem region include: St. Joseph School/Terra Sancta Bethlehem, *Your Stories Are My Stories: A Palestinian Oral History Project* (Bethlehem: Culture and Palestine Series, 2000); *The Wall Cannot Stop Our Stories: A Palestinian Diary Project* (with teacher manual) (Bethlehem: Terra Sancta/St. Joseph School for Girls, Bethlehem, 2004). The typical humorous strand of writing expressing the absurdities of daily life under heavy oppression, as in Suad Amiry's diaries, may have been influenced by Emile Habibi's novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).
- 16 See Zah Malik, "Staying Human, Informing Resistance: A Study of Contemporary Palestinian Sumud" (MA thesis, University of Exeter, 2013), 13, accessed 3 August 2014, www.academia.edu/2575218/Staying_Human_Informing_Resistance_A_Study_of_Contemporary_Palestinian_Sumud.
 - 17 Abdel Fatah Abu Srour, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 23 February 2010.
 - 18 The women wished to remain anonymous and the names used to refer to the women in this article are consequently not their own.
 - 19 Zoughbi Zoughbi, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 14 November 2009.
 - 20 Abu Srour, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 23 February 2010.
 - 21 Adnan Musallam, a Bethlehem University teacher in oral history, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 3 August 2009.
 - 22 Hala, interview by Alexandra Rijke, 29 October 2013.
 - 23 Nur, interview by Alexandra Rijke, 29 October 2013.
 - 24 See James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Lori Allen, "Getting By the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008): 453–487.
 - 25 Allen, "Getting By," 456 (emphasis added).
 - 26 Zoughbi, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 14 November 2009.
 - 27 Salah Ta'mari, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 13 February 2010.
 - 28 Rania Murra and Toine van Teeffelen, "The 'Wall Museum': Palestinian Stories on the Wall in Bethlehem," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 55 (Autumn 2013): 93–96.
 - 29 A popular example is Amiry, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law*.
 - 30 Musallam, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 3 August 2009.
 - 31 Musallam, interview by Toine van Teeffelen, 3 August 2009.
 - 32 See Rema Hammami, "On the Importance of Thugs: The Moral Economy of a Checkpoint," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 22/23 (Fall/Winter 2005). Hammami, too, notes that the notion of *sumud* has become more active: "While in the 1970s, its meaning emphasized staying on the land and refusing to leave despite the hardships of the occupation, now it has a much more active connotation. In its new form it is about continuing with daily life and movement; the common refrain: '*al hayaat lazim tistamir*' – 'life must go on'. Thus, *sumud* has become about resisting immobility, the locking down of one's community, and refusing the impossibility of reaching one's school or job" (18). The active aspect of *sumud* is also stressed by Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (London: Pluto, 2011), 11.
 - 33 In the program for its November 2013 conference "The Bible and the Palestine-Israel Conflict," Sabeel translated *sumud* as "standing fast." See "Sabeel 9th International Conference: The Bible and the Palestine-Israel Conflict Program," accessed 3 August 2014, www.sabeel.org/datadir/en-events/ev263/files/Program_sabeel-final.pdf.
 - 34 Mustafa Barghouthi, "... And He Stood Steadfast before Goliath," *This Week in Palestine* 130 (February 2009). This issue of *This Week in Palestine* was devoted to *sumud* and Palestinian identity.
 - 35 A comparison between the concepts of *sumud* and the right of return shows parallels on several levels, worthy of more study. For new generations of Palestinian refugees, the return narratives and projects constitute a merging of different local, national, and transnational discourses. Return is not just a national concept but has increasingly become part of global or international rights discourses. See Sophie Richter-Devore, "Return Narratives of Palestin-

- ian Refugees in the West Bank: A Generational Perspective,” in *Palestinian Refugees*, 105. Both *sumud* and the right of return have shifted from a literal understanding of living on/going back to the Palestinian land to the implementation of more abstract value concepts such as equality, freedom, autonomy, or care. Both *sumud* and the right of return are markers of identity boundaries and challenges to social and political opponents worldwide. Both are subject to discussions in which it is said that they should not only, or not necessarily, signify suffering and sacrifice. For a discussion about suffering and joy relative to the return concept, see Nell Gabiam, “Spatializing Identity: The Changing Landscape of Palestinian Refugee Camps,” in *Palestinian Refugees*, 154. This comparison between *sumud* and the right of return points to some possible reasons for the shift in meaning of both concepts from symbolism to the politics of the everyday: (a) the decline of the traditional model of armed liberation struggle with its stress on heroism; (b) the influence of transnational or global discourses on the meaning of national identity and liberation concepts; and (c) the need to keep national concepts alive and relevant for everyday action, especially in contexts of nonviolent struggle.
- 36 Rosemary Sayigh pleads for educational, cultural, history and civics programs for all Palestinians in the diaspora. While there still remains a shared sense of Palestinian identity among Palestinians wherever they live, influences of class, geographical location and region, and individual and political interests have over time created a gap between the rhetorical national identity and the daily life identity. See Rosemary Sayegh, “Palestinian Refugee Identity/ies: Generation, Region, Class,” in *Palestinian Refugees*, 13–14.
- This is especially so when the identity is a kind of “default” identity which is not achieved or produced with a sense of what the mission of national identity is all about, including a clear vision of the kind of state and society foreseen. The daily life stories that express national concepts such as *sumud* and the right of return may contribute to a program that may bridge daily life applications and national levels of identity. For a developed presentation of this argument, see: Toine van Teeffelen with Vicky Biggs and the Sumud Story House, *Sumud: Soul of the Palestinian People* (Bethlehem: Culture and Palestine Series, 2011).
- 37 See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1996).
- 38 The new significance of a mental health concept like resilience reflects a shift in psychology studies during the last fifteen years or so, from focusing on the correction of personal deficits to an emphasis on supporting positive values (“positive psychology”). Christopher Peterson’s and Martin Seligman’s groundbreaking *Character Strengths and Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), though it still treats character traits as strongly individualized and culturally decontextualized, proposes six categories of positive traits: Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. Courage is broken down into four main subcategories: Bravery, Perseverance, Honesty, and Zest. These properties are all relevant to an understanding of *sumud*.
- 39 See Phil McManus and Gerald Schlabach, eds., *Relentless Persistence: Nonviolent Action in Latin America* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1991).