

Institutionalized Separation and Sumud in Jerusalem's Periphery

Survival and Resistance in Shaykh Sa'd

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Before the separation wall, Shaykh Sa'd was Jerusalem. My family is in Jerusalem. Everything for me is in Jerusalem. It's hard for me that I can't go there. For example, my daughters are in Jerusalem. Their weddings were in Jerusalem and I couldn't go to their weddings.

– Hajj Sa'id, Shaykh Sa'd resident¹

Octogenarian and lifelong Shaykh Sa'd resident Hajj Sa'id spoke these words in the late afternoon as he sat at the foot of his bed. I visited him to hear his stories about the changes in his life since the separation wall had cut off access from his village of Shaykh Sa'd to Jerusalem. He spoke freely of the pain he feels as a result of institutionalized separation, no longer being able to go to Jerusalem, and what it is like for him to be separated from his family in the twilight of his life. Hajj Sa'id has a green identity card, indicating that he is a West Bank resident, which severely limits his freedom of movement. His daughters all have blue identity cards that make them permanent residents of Jerusalem, granting them some rights that their father does not possess. As a direct result of this differentiated "citizenship" status,² Hajj Sa'id could not attend his own daughters' weddings. While in many ways Hajj Sa'id's experience is unique, his story is also similar to many others like him in Shaykh Sa'd and other Palestinian neighborhoods and villages in Jerusalem, where institutionalized separation has become a normalized condition of everyday life.³

Shaykh Sa'd is a small Palestinian village in Jerusalem's southeastern periphery, located on the borderlands between the official boundaries of the

Jerusalem municipality and the rest of the West Bank. Jerusalem's municipal boundary cuts through the village, with most of the village located just outside this border. Though technically outside these lines, Shaykh Sa'd is widely considered to be part of Jerusalem due to the village residents' strong historical, religious, social, economic, and kinship ties to the city.⁴ It is precisely the location of the village that led to the construction of the separation wall on the municipal border, institutionalizing separation and imposing isolation by leaving most of the village on the West Bank side of the wall. Shaykh Sa'd can best be described as a no-man's land stuck between the Jerusalem municipality and the West Bank.⁵

Shaykh Sa'd is an example of the politics of exclusion in Jerusalem and provides a space to investigate the impact of institutionalized and physical separation on everyday Palestinian life in Jerusalem. Based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Shaykh Sa'd in 2012–2013, this article examines the village's historical connections to Jerusalem and the contemporary policies that have created a context of isolation and institutionalized separation.⁶ This article uses a brief ethnography of a taxi driver collective in the village to show how Shaykh Sa'd residents use creative strategies of resistance to survive despite difficult conditions of everyday life. The final section of the article focuses on *sumud*, or steadfastness, as a Palestinian cultural practice that Shaykh Sa'd residents use as a response to the institutionalized separation of the village vis-a-vis the separation wall and other Israeli policies of exclusion. Despite the impact of Israeli policies and politics of exclusion in Jerusalem, Palestinian Jerusalemites, including those in Shaykh Sa'd, remain steadfast and stay in Jerusalem, strengthening their identification with the city.

The Isolation of Shaykh Sa'd

Shaykh Sa'd is one of four villages (with Jabal al-Mukabir, Sawahira a-Sharqiyya, and Sawahira al-Gharbiyya) that comprise 'Arab al-Sawahira, a network of Palestinian villages to Jerusalem's southeast, predominantly made up of five hamulas (extended families) who share social and kinship ties.⁷ According to the most recent statistics, 1,757 people live in Shaykh Sa'd.⁸ Shaykh Sa'd residents have the strongest ties with Jabal al-Mukabir and have long considered their village to be part of Jabal al-Mukabir and greater Jerusalem. Beyond the family, social, and economic ties between Shaykh Sa'd and Jabal al-Mukabir, there is an important geographical connection between the two villages. Shaykh Sa'd is located at the peak of a 650-meter mountain and can only be accessed from the west (that is, Jerusalem), where a road leads to the village from Jabal al-Mukabir.⁹ As a result of this topography, the only way in and out of Shaykh Sa'd – except for an unpaved road from the village down to Wadi Nar/Kidron Valley and up a treacherous slope that connects to the West Bank – is through Jabal al-Mukabir, located inside the Jerusalem municipal boundary.¹⁰ Despite the poor conditions of the unpaved road to the West Bank, it is used with relative frequency since it is the only lifeline to

connect the village to other Palestinian areas.

The seeds of Shaykh Sa'd's isolation were planted in 1967, though the full impact of that cataclysmic year would only become clear decades later. After the war in June 1967, Israel seized seventy square kilometers of territory from the West Bank, added it to the municipality of Jerusalem, and proclaimed the area subject to Israeli law.¹¹ Jerusalem's new municipal border cut through 'Arab al-Sawahira, thus creating both arbitrary distinction in the legal statuses of the residents in the area and an artificial boundary of separation. Jabal al-Mukabir and Sawahira al-Gharbiyya were included in Jerusalem's new municipal borders; Shaykh Sa'd and Sawahira al-Sharqiyya fell outside the Jerusalem municipality, though their residents remained intimately connected to Jerusalem and retained access to many of the social privileges available to those living in Jerusalem's official border.¹²

For nearly forty years, this distinction was not an issue for Shaykh Sa'd residents. Then, in September 2002, the Israeli military blocked the only road connecting Shaykh Sa'd to Jabal al-Mukabir, initiating a process of isolation that has since become further entrenched. In August 2003, the political-security cabinet of the Israeli military forces approved construction of a seventeen-kilometer section of the separation wall stretching from Bayt Sahur in the south to al-'Ayzariyya in the north.¹³ The proposed route cut through Shaykh Sa'd, putting the entire village on the east side of the wall and separating it from Jabal al-Mukabir, making it and the city of Jerusalem inaccessible. In the summer of 2006, the Israeli military posted border guards to patrol the blockade around the clock and eventually built a permanent checkpoint to monitor everyone entering Jerusalem from the village. A few yards from the checkpoint is a panoptic military tower equipped with surveillance technology to monitor the area.

The exclusion of Shaykh Sa'd from Jerusalem has had drastic impact on everyday life for its residents. Shaykh Sa'd had been dependent on Jerusalem for its municipal services and since 1967 the Jerusalem municipality provided the village's infrastructure – water, electricity, telephone lines, and garbage collection – and social services such as education, unemployment benefits, health care, and social security. The people of Shaykh Sa'd worked in Jerusalem, many in the construction industry, as well as in Israeli and Palestinian schools, businesses, and organizations. Children from the village went to high schools in Jerusalem, usually in Jabal al-Mukabir, and later studied in colleges and universities in Jerusalem.

Since there is little farmable land in the village due to its small size and the steep terrain, Shaykh Sa'd residents purchased food from Jerusalem markets. Also due to lack of space, there is no cemetery in Shaykh Sa'd. The villagers buried their dead in Jabal al-Mukabir's cemetery. Today when someone dies in Shaykh Sa'd, the grieving family must coordinate the funeral with Israeli officials in the District Coordination Office (DCO), which controls the movement of Palestinians in and out of the West Bank. The family must apply not only for a permit to bring the body across the checkpoint into Jabal al-Mukabir, but also for permits for family and community members attending the funeral. The DCO generally only grants permits for a maximum of fifty people from Shaykh Sa'd, effectively excluding scores of family and friends from attending funerals.

Ibrahim, who is involved in local politics, explained that Shaykh Sa‘d cannot be understood as a village unto itself, separate from Jerusalem. “It is Jerusalem. Our lives are in Jerusalem . . . We need everything from Jerusalem: buy, sell, walk, pray, therapy, everything. Jerusalem is our city.”¹⁴ Ibrahim points out that Shaykh Sa‘d’s connection to Jerusalem goes beyond the obvious religious and cultural connections that are important for Palestinians in general, and extends to daily economic reasons linked to survival, a sentiment reiterated by dozens of people in the village with whom I spoke. While residents rely on access to the city for these resources and services, they have been increasingly denied access to them because of their residency status. As a result Shaykh Sa‘d residents face tremendous hardships.¹⁵

Internal Divisions and Colored Identities

To understand the impact of Shaykh Sa‘d’s institutionalized separation from Jerusalem, it is necessary to examine the differentiated “citizenship” categories of those in Shaykh Sa‘d. Approximately half of the villagers in Shaykh Sa‘d are permanent residents of Jerusalem and possess blue IDs, while the other half have green IDs that signify their different legal status as West Bank residents.¹⁶ (Though “permanent residents” of Jerusalem have certain conditioned rights, they do not have the status of citizens, which is a further differentiated legal status with different rights.)¹⁷ Thus a West Bank individual’s “residency” status – whether or not they are considered by Israel to be “permanent residents” of Jerusalem – is reflected in their identity card, either blue or green. Residency status depends in large part on where individuals or their relatives were when the Israeli census was conducted after the war in 1967. Those who were in Jerusalem (including Shaykh Sa‘d), and were counted in the Israeli census, were given the status of permanent residents and received blue IDs; if they were elsewhere in the West Bank, having temporarily fled to avoid the fighting, they did not become permanent residents of Jerusalem and were issued green IDs.

Palestinians in Shaykh Sa‘d who were born after the census were registered according to the official residency status of their parents. Most parents and their children had the same status. But in some instances, if the parents did not share the same residency status, and depending on the physical location of the birth and when the child was born, some families may have one or more children with Jerusalem IDs and other children with West Bank IDs. Sometimes, as in Hajj Sa‘id’s family, siblings or parents have different residency status, which affords them different privileges and access to varying resources. This process has trickled down over generations since the 1967 census, so not just siblings, but also uncles and aunts, grandparents, and cousins have different residency status. There are numerous cases of “mixed” marriages where one spouse is a Jerusalem resident and the other is not, which complicates where families live and raise their children.

Until Israel built the separation wall, the differences in the rights and privileges of residency status between Jerusalem and West Bank were considered minimal by Shaykh Sa‘d residents. Before the wall, everyone had the ability to move freely from Shaykh

Sa'd into Jabal al-Mukabir and other parts of Jerusalem, whether to work, shop, pray, or visit family in the city. No one suspected that one day their identity card would determine and severely impact the course of their lives.

Beyond marking an individual's status in society vis-a-vis the state and the occupation, residency status has served to produce socio-economic stratification within Shaykh Sa'd. Those with Jerusalem residency are permitted to cross the checkpoint and enter Jabal al-Mukabir and Jerusalem. They enjoy not only greater freedom of movement, but access to some rights and resources in Israel such as national health insurance and social security. Residents of Shaykh Sa'd with green West Bank IDs cannot share in these services and face significant challenges in their everyday lives. Since they can only enter Jerusalem with a permit, and since the most feasible and safe way to access the permit offices is through Jerusalem, they are stuck in a paradoxical situation. Either they enter Jerusalem illegally and risk serious reprisal, or they must travel the arduous dirt road to the West Bank and go from there by public transportation or taxi to the Civil Administration office to obtain the permit. Even if they make it to the office, they may be denied a permit or told to return the following day or week.

Divisions between those with green and blue IDs in Shaykh Sa'd are simultaneously stark and invisible.¹⁸ The village is a small community where residents care for and look after each other, without regard to residency status. Most people I spoke with told me that there are no problems among village residents and that the only problems people have are with Israeli authorities and policies. However, some are envious of friends and family who have blue IDs.

Sami and Walid discussed this one morning as we sat together near the checkpoint in Shaykh Sa'd. "In Shaykh Sa'd there are high people and low people," Sami explained. "The high people are the ones with lots of money and blue IDs and the ones who work in Jerusalem." He did not explain who the "low people" are, his silence affirming that it was obvious. I asked Sami if there are tensions between the "high" and "low" people in the village, to which he quickly responded, "No. God bless them, the rich. God bless everyone and their chances. Between us, we don't discriminate."¹⁹ Walid, who listened intently to the conversation, disagreed with Sami, and accused him of being ignorant and blind to the way others in the village treat them. "People with the blue ID look at us [people with the green ID] as though we're garbage," he said, opening the floodgates of discussion between them.²⁰ Over the course of the conversation more people joined in to listen or participate, adding their views on the subject in a lively and animated argument.

In another conversation, Rashid, a 23-year-old taxi driver with a green ID, succinctly summed up the feeling of having fewer freedoms than friends and relatives. "People who can cross the checkpoint are happier than we are," he said. "They have it good. They have freedom. They live a good life in comparison. But if your friends and cousins are happy then you don't get jealous. We are family and neighbors. We are happy for them. We want them to be happy."²¹ Rashid makes the tensions feel real. He expresses genuine desire that his family to be happy; and he, too, desperately wants to be happy, but believes this to be impossible unless he has the same freedom of movement that others have.

On the surface, Rashid appears to be one of the happiest people in Shaykh Sa‘d. He is always smiling, laughing, and joking with his friends. Every day he works from early in the morning to late in the evening to save the little money he earns driving a taxi in the village. He plans to marry soon and needs the money to support his new family. But though Rashid may appear happy, at other times he expresses deep sadness as a result of the world in which he came of age, in which the color of his identity card prevents him from accessing Jerusalem and its resources. His wishes are simple: “I would just like freedom. If I could go anywhere I want, I’d see my friends and family in Jabal al-Mukabir.”²²

Freedom of movement is a major issue for people in Shaykh Sa‘d, as it is throughout Palestine. On a daily basis, those with green West Bank IDs watch the people with blue Jerusalem IDs cross the checkpoint to enter Jerusalem. The latter are able to work in Jerusalem for higher wages, pray at al-Aqsa Mosque, visit their friends and family in Jabal al-Mukabir, and more easily access health care resources. More importantly, they are not confined to existence in an enclosed space. They can travel throughout Jerusalem, Israel, and the West Bank due to their permanent residency status. While the blue ID represents freedom and opportunity, the green ID reflects a morose daily situation with little hope of improvement; it symbolizes a life of poverty with little chance of accessing enough resources for daily survival. Of course, permanent residency and the blue ID represent discrimination and exclusion in Israel and greater Jerusalem as compared to Israeli citizenship. But in Shaykh Sa‘d, when juxtaposed with the green West Bank ID, the blue ID takes on a different meaning and representation. In effect, this reinforces the relationship among Shaykh Sa‘d residents to Jerusalem, as access to the city becomes more important than access to the West Bank and the rest of Palestine.²³

A New Checkpoint Economy: The Taxi Drivers’ Collective

After the separation wall was constructed, many young men with green West Bank IDs were unable to find jobs, could not obtain the necessary permits to work in Jerusalem, and were to sit at home with nothing to do. Their daily struggles led a small group of young men to devise a creative idea that would both employ them and help improve an aspect of daily village life, a struggle that only existed as a direct result of the separation and isolation of Shaykh Sa‘d: they formed a taxi drivers’ collective. The group that started the collective noticed that once the checkpoint blocked the road leading from Shaykh Sa‘d to Jabal al-Mukabir and people could no longer drive their own cars into Shaykh Sa‘d, some of the people crossing the checkpoint on foot needed a ride to their homes or other places. As a result, they decided to start driving people from the checkpoint to their destination in the village or, via the unpaved road, to nearby West Bank villages.

The collective began with just a few drivers who sat at the checkpoint and waited for people to come and request a ride.²⁴ Every day they made a list of the drivers’ names in pencil on the back of a cardboard box. When a driver picked up a fare, the collective

crossed off his name and added it to the bottom of the list so that each driver would be given equal access to work. A relative's arrival is the only occasion when drivers drive out of order, to give their relative a lift. Over time, as more young men graduated from high school, had no other future prospects, and did not want (or could not afford) to attend university, they joined the collective and become village taxi drivers. Eventually the daily list expanded to approximately thirty men, most of whom were in their twenties, who drive taxis in the village to make a living. There is no official leader in the collective, which operates along a horizontal model, although there are unofficial leaders whom the younger drivers address with questions or concerns.

The condition of drivers' cars is critical to their work, and thus to their livelihood, but most drivers cannot afford expensive maintenance. One driver explained: "My car is broken . . . but I can't fix it because I have no money."²⁵ He then opened the ashtray in his car, where most drivers keep their money and wages for the day, and told me he only made fifty shekels that day, and it was already late in the afternoon. Every driver dreads his car breaking down, and especially needing to buy a new car, because it is so difficult to find the sum needed for such a purchase. Many will have to borrow money from relatives if they need to buy a new car.

To feel more legitimate, many of the taxi drivers place stickers and decals on their cars with their names and phone numbers, creating a pseudo-official "taxi company" named after themselves. One driver has a red sign with white writing that he places on his dashboard with the word "taxi" written on it, visible for all to see, while other drivers put large decals on their back windshield with their names, "taxi service," and cell phone numbers on it. As numerous drivers told me, the perceived legitimacy that they feel, and that others see when viewing these decals, is important to the drivers' sense of self-worth and accomplishment. These stickers are one way to represent their work as more professional.

While the checkpoint decimated Shaykh Sa'd's economy in most ways, the drivers developed a new economy that emerged as a direct result of it. In this regard, the Shaykh Sa'd checkpoint has become what Helga Tawil-Souri calls a contradictory space – a place of unequal power relations that asphyxiates the community, but which is also a center of economic and social relations.²⁶ The taxi drivers' collective exemplifies the ways in which the Shaykh Sa'd checkpoint has become an important center of life, despite the fact that it chokes the village. These young men transformed the checkpoint into a local business opportunity, and helped make the checkpoint into a public social and communal space where men gather to smoke cigarettes, drink coffee, and simply converse. The drivers turned the checkpoint into a place where people share experiences with others and where they themselves have been able to find direction, meaning, and purpose in their complicated lives.

In the myriad hours I spent with drivers inside the checkpoint and in their cars, I came to understand the importance of the reconfiguration of space and power at the checkpoint, or the unofficial "taxi stand." The drivers often interlace their hard work and temper their frustrations with humor and personal interactions. They constantly joke around

with one another, injecting energy into the monotonous hours of waiting for passengers. Though to many in the village it seems like a humdrum job, the drivers have learned how to have fun as they pass the time. They constantly shift positions – from sitting in the car to a rock nearby, then on top of the cars. They smoke, drink coffee, talk on the phone to friends or family, and engage in playful banter. One of the first times I hung out with the drivers at the checkpoint, as they made the list and cemented their driving rotations, they joked and argued, with much laughter and yelling, over who would drive when – an interaction indicative of the social and economic contradictions found in such a “contradictory space.”

But the drivers’ mood was not always light. Over time it became apparent that many are deeply unhappy with their work, alienated by a situation that prevents their freedom of movement and access to a different, and perhaps better, life. Despite having made the checkpoint a hub of economic and social relations, drivers struggle to make a living wage, nearly undermining the purpose of forming the collective in the first place. They express deep feelings of alienation and isolation due to the low wages and long hours of difficult work. Many drivers show up to the checkpoint by 6:00 a.m. when it first becomes busy with school children and day laborers, and do not go home until 8:00 p.m. It is not unusual for a driver to work fourteen hours a day, including hours waiting at the checkpoint for passengers. Despite the long hours, most drivers report making only fifty to one hundred shekels in a day, far below what they need to subsist, let alone save any money.

One driver, Ziyad, compares his work to begging for money. “I don’t like my work as a driver because it’s like you’re begging for money in reverse,” he told me one cold winter day waiting at the checkpoint. He made a gesture turning his hand around from the driver’s seat to the back seat asking for money from the non-existent passenger, inverting the typical gesture of begging for money, hand stretched out in front of you. “If the world isn’t going your way, you go its way,” he then said reluctantly.²⁷ Even though he did not want to become a driver, and even though he feels like he is begging for money as he works, Ziyad is a driver out of necessity.

Many drivers detest their job, but they feel it is their only opportunity to make money in a dignified way that does not subject them to Israeli control or the corruption of Palestinian bosses. Jamal explains the complex position in which many drivers find themselves. With deep sadness and worry, he says, “I have a wife and a young kid and another one on the way. I can’t pay for anything. It’s terrible.”²⁸ He said that sometimes his wife wants something but he cannot buy it for her because he does not have enough money. Before Israel constructed the separation wall and isolated Shaykh Sa’d, Jamal worked in construction in Jerusalem, making between 150 to 300 shekels in a day. Now he makes one-third as much as a driver. Most of the day Jamal sits around at the checkpoint with nothing to do until it is his turn to drive; he makes a bit of money, but he finds it boring and deeply unsatisfying.

I won’t work in construction in the West Bank because the bosses are corrupt and bad people. They say they will pay you tomorrow and when tomorrow comes they don’t pay you and they say tomorrow. And this goes on for days

and weeks and months and they don't pay you. They get rich and we don't get paid for our work. So I won't work there . . . [But as a driver], life is not good. I am not happy. Everything is hard. I work hard as a driver and make 100 shekels a day, but I have to pay 50 shekels for gas. This is not work for a man; this is work for a child.²⁹

Jamal holds his honor dear and finds it humiliating to work as hard as he does without making much money at the age of twenty-seven. He can no longer work in Jerusalem because he has a green ID and he is ineligible for a Jerusalem work permit. He detests his work as a driver but he has no other option. Jamal admits feeling stuck.

Other drivers also admit to hating their work. "We don't like our work as drivers," says one young driver. "It's work. We do it so we can eat. Sometimes we barely make twenty shekels a day. We can only live because we live with our families. No one lives alone. We all group together to buy food. We can't live alone because it's too expensive."³⁰ They are able to survive, despite complicated and compromising circumstances, by adopting a communal lifestyle, supporting each other so that all can eat.

Many do not want to be drivers, but see no other choice. Since the wall was constructed, they cannot go to Jerusalem, nor do they have connections in the West Bank. Hussam's frustration was palpable one rainy winter morning when I spent a few hours with him near the checkpoint.

I don't like my work as a driver, but I have no other choice. It isn't work. If you pay for gas you have only five shekels left or if you get a flat tire you have to pay more. And there are thirty drivers. Some people give up and go home to sleep or get a permit. It gets boring but you have to do it because you need to support your family. My age group, we manage to go out and make money. But the younger people have no chance. If you put them on Jaffa Street [in downtown] Jerusalem they have no chance to survive. The reason we have it hard here is because our families were always working in Jerusalem and in Israel or in this area and we never had a connection to Sawahira or Abu Dis or other West Bank areas. Our fathers worked [in Jerusalem] and we worked there. Suddenly, I'm twenty-four and there is this fence and I have to start over but I have no connections anywhere in the West Bank. All of our connections . . . are in Jerusalem. What am I going to do to start a business? It happened so fast that we found ourselves on this side of the wall. I have no future to look forward to. The kids' future here is gone.³¹

For Hussam, like others in Shaykh Sa'd, a future is in Jerusalem, and without Jerusalem and the connections there – cultural, economic, and family – he sees no future. Hussam was one of the founders of the taxi drivers' collective and has gained respect from others in the village, including many younger drivers who look up to him for advice. For this reason, he has refused to give up on providing for his family and making his community better, on whatever small level he can. Though he doesn't like what he does on a daily

basis, he knows what it takes to survive, which is why at the end of our interview he gazed at me with a deep seriousness in his eyes and said that he continues to work because “there is no choice but to live.”³²

There are external factors that determine whether or not the drivers will find work on any given day, the most common being interactions with soldiers and student strikes. One day there was a strike at al-Quds University, which negatively impacted the drivers. When I arrived in Shaykh Sa‘d, the checkpoint area was abnormally quiet for that time of day. Only two drivers were there and even the shop immediately next to the checkpoint, almost always open in the early afternoon, was closed. I visited a friend in the village and returned a few hours later and found only a few more drivers at the eerily quiet checkpoint. The drivers complained that there was no work because of the strike at the university, meaning that no students needed a ride that day. Unfortunately for the drivers, student or teacher strikes at the university are relatively regular occurrences.

Soldiers can also impact drivers’ ability to work, especially because drivers park their cars just inside the checkpoint in full view of the soldiers stationed there. ‘Ali recounted an experience one morning that demonstrates the struggle:

Yesterday, I sat at the checkpoint in the morning when it was very crowded. All the people who drive from al-Sawahira come and park their cars there, so there was no room for me. So I parked in front of the checkpoint gate. I was going to give a few girls a ride to Abu Dis, but the soldiers told me to move my car. But I couldn’t move it, there was no room to move it anywhere. The soldier told me again that I had to move the car and then he asked for my ID and the keys and told me to come back in an hour. He came back and gave me my ID, but kept the keys and told me to come back again in an hour. So I did and got my keys back. I could have gone home to get an extra key, but I didn’t. I lost 50 shekels wages because I couldn’t work during that busy time. And I don’t argue with the soldiers because I don’t want any problems. I could have argued, but the last thing I want is to cause problems. I told the soldier, “You know me. I sit here every day and I just try to make 5 or 10 shekels.”³³

While many of the drivers truly do not like their work, the collective is a critically important project in Shaykh Sa‘d that enables both individual and communal survival. Members of the collective have managed to transform the checkpoint into an active, if limited, public space, organize collectively despite state policies that seek to prevent collective action, inspire youth to participate in the everyday life and decisions of the community, and develop new forms of economy in a situation badly damaged by the occupation and isolation of the village. The collective is a strategic intervention that asserts the agency of individuals and the community, a form of resistance that refuses to acquiesce to the status of victimhood and suffering. As a collective, the drivers assert that Shaykh Sa‘d is home and not a place where they can be reduced to bare life.³⁴

The village youth exhibit creativity and the power to live and to survive via the collective. Although the strategies of occupation that the Israeli authorities employ in Shaykh Sa‘d (as elsewhere in Jerusalem and Palestine) are intended to make life so hard for Palestinians that they will leave their homes, the collective shows that Palestinians will continue to creatively devise strategies of survival, carving out counter-hegemonic spaces of resistance to occupation and isolation in order to remain in place.³⁵

***Sumud* and Everyday Resistance in Shaykh Sa‘d**

Sumud refers to the resilience, perseverance, and steadfastness that Palestinians employ in their daily struggle against Israeli policies of occupation.³⁶ A popular Palestinian slogan that symbolizes *sumud*, “to exist is to resist,” is exemplified in profound ways in Shaykh Sa‘d, where everyday life serves as a response to institutionalized separation and state policies of exclusion.³⁷ It is the single most important method of popular nonviolent resistance used by Palestinians in Jerusalem and, as a tactic of resistance, *sumud* is a pivotal aspect of Palestinian culture and self-identity.³⁸ Palestinians in Jerusalem refuse to leave the city because land, village, and family are quintessential elements of their Palestinian identity. By remaining steadfast in the face of tremendous oppression and refusing to leave Jerusalem (and Palestine), the Palestinian community is staking its own powerful claim to the land. *Sumud* is a Palestinian way of refusing to acquiesce to the impact of state power. To survive on one’s ancestral land is an act of defiance against the policies of the occupation.

In Shaykh Sa‘d, survival is a daily struggle that requires negotiations with economic, familial, social, geographical, and political factors. Yet, as Hussam said, “there is no choice but to live.” Put another way, “merely surviving is sometimes the best resistance possible.”³⁹ One recently adopted method that residents of Shaykh Sa‘d use as a distinct method to survive in everyday life is compliance to the orders of the soldiers and border police. While compliance can indicate despair and submission, for many village residents it is integral to their strategy of survival and is a strategic intervention in their increasingly dire circumstances. In this context, since survival is a powerful method of resistance and compliance is sometimes necessary for survival, compliance could also be interpreted as part of the resistance strategy for Shaykh Sa‘d residents. Compliance in Shaykh Sa‘d therefore functions in three key ways. First, it enables village residents to grapple with the ways in which they both create and are shaped by the society they inhabit. Second, it allows residents to express free will, giving them the opportunity to make choices that will impact their lives. The conditions of occupation do not always afford Shaykh Sa‘d residents the opportunity to make choices about their everyday lives, but by acting with compliance they are not meekly acquiescing to the soldiers demands but rather making the choice to do so, not out of despair or submission but out of the necessity of survival. Finally, compliance is a response to conditions of occupation that may open up other opportunities for disrupting Israeli control in Shaykh Sa‘d and beyond.

Shaykh Sa'd's residents practice compliance every day at the checkpoint. Nadia, a community leader, explained the strategy used in Shaykh Sa'd since the wall was constructed. She said:

Recently, what I have told the people to do – we actually started following this approach for a year – the people at the checkpoints are humans, they are doing their work, so we have to be nice to them. We just say, good morning, how are you, how is your day, and so many people are following that approach. We come to the checkpoint: *sabah al-khayr* [good morning, in Arabic], *boker tov* [good morning, in Hebrew], how are you today? “You are going to your work today?” That is what they usually say. “Ok,” and sometimes they don't even see the IDs, “*khalas* [enough, in Arabic], we know you.” This is the new approach that we are following now. They [the soldiers] are human and they are doing their work and they have kids like you do, they have families like you have, so let's not give them a hard time and they won't give us a hard time. This makes it easier not only for me, but for others as well. Even for the kids. Wow! It's a very successful approach.⁴⁰

Nadia boasts that both the villagers and the soldiers have felt the success of this approach. Tensions are no longer consistently high at the checkpoint and village residents feel little hostility when crossing the checkpoint. Those in the village with freedom of movement are starting to feel as though crossing the checkpoint is a slightly less complicated task, though it still requires them to come into contact with the apparatus of the state.

According to Nadia, this approach is successful because the people are confident that it will help shift their everyday realities and because they renounced the use of violence from the beginning of their struggle.

We don't like violence. Keeping quiet . . . was our agreement. That was how we began, that was our approach from the beginning. Let's prove our point that peace can prevail, that we can do things with peace. And this is what we did at the beginning when we started bringing foreigners and Israelis to protest the wall. If we didn't do all this stuff, I think that . . . they would have closed the checkpoint. But just because we are following this approach and being peaceful, being quiet, not following violent acts, we have this checkpoint, which I think is a very peaceful checkpoint. [If we did things differently] they would treat us differently. . . Now we have a different approach. [The soldiers] are standing at the checkpoint because they are doing their work. They are humans just like we are humans. They have families. We have to be very nice with them. If we are nice with them they treat us nice reciprocally.⁴¹

Most residents believe that if they are quiet and cooperative, then perhaps Israel will decide

to move the wall to reunite Shaykh Sa‘d with Jabal al-Mukabir and the rest of Jerusalem. “This is a quiet and peaceful village and we have quiet and peaceful resistance here,” Salim said one morning, while we sat together near the checkpoint. He was making a case for the value of the Shaykh Sa‘d residents’ decision to not engage in violent or popular resistance. Like many others, Salim believes that since the villagers never engaged in violence against the soldiers and do not demonstrate weekly, like other villages do, they may be rewarded for being quiet. Salim still believes that Shaykh Sa‘d residents engage in both *sumud* and *sabr* (patience). For him, *sabr* is short-term patience while *sumud* is a long-term project. Initially, the people in Shaykh Sa‘d exhibited *sabr*, but it has transformed into community-wide *sumud* because they keep waiting patiently for the wall to be moved while continuing to live their everyday lives in its shadow. They believe that their strategy of *sumud* is paying off. Salim explains the quiet form of daily resistance:

We don’t want any problems here. Maybe, because we have been quiet for so long, one day they will open the wall. We don’t make problems here. We just want to work in Jerusalem. We would take blue IDs and even Israeli citizenship, but none of that matters to us. We just want to be able to work in Jerusalem.⁴²

One Jewish Israeli activist from Jerusalem who is intimately connected to the city’s official political process confirmed that these tactics might have a positive and long-lasting impact in the near future. He agreed with Nadia and Salim that compliance could open the possibility that one day Israel will move the wall to include the village in Jerusalem again. He said this method gives Shaykh Sa‘d the possibility of inclusion, which is denied to villages such as Bil’in because of their methods of weekly demonstrations and resistance against the wall.⁴³ Demonstrations in Bil’in, which is a strategic area for Israel that has experienced extensive land confiscations, and other villages like it, have garnered widespread international attention, which Shaykh Sa‘d residents believe make it less likely that the wall will be completely removed from their village.

Though separation and isolation has dire physical and psychological impacts on those who live in Shaykh Sa‘d, the residents are nonetheless resilient in their quiet resistance, another embodiment of *sumud*. They truly believe that in the future things will change and they will be reunited with their families and the city that once sustained them. In fact, a rumor persists in the village that the state is planning to change the route of the wall to the east of Shaykh Sa‘d in order to include the village within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. Rumors are often a profound coping mechanism used by oppressed and marginalized groups that enable them to hold on to some sort of hope for a better future while simultaneously improving the present.⁴⁴ Countless times in Shaykh Sa‘d people told me that they heard that the Israeli army was planning to move the route of the wall. But not everyone who hears the rumor believes it to be true, as evidenced by the response of one woman who lives in Shaykh Sa‘d. When I asked her about the rumor she responded, *bukra fil mishmish*, an Arabic idiom that essentially means “in your dreams.” Regardless of

the truth to this rumor, the fact that it circulates prominently enables villagers to maintain hope that their strategy of quiescence is successfully working towards their ultimate goal to be reunited with the rest of Jerusalem.

As in other Jerusalem locations, and throughout Palestine, sumud is an integral aspect of everyday life in Shaykh Sa‘d and is a creative strategy of resistance used by the village residents. When I asked an old man that lives in Shaykh Sa‘d if there is sumud in the village he smiled and replied, “of course there is sumud here. Where else would we go?”⁴⁵ The nonchalance with which he replied, and the fact that nearly every person with whom I spoke in Shaykh Sa‘d also said that village residents practice sumud, exemplifies that while sumud exists, it emerges as a quiet, subdued, and patient resistance that is present every day. While other West Bank towns and villages forced to confront the imposing separation wall on their land demonstrate against the wall every Friday, in Shaykh Sa‘d there are never demonstrations, nor have there ever been. The people do not want to demonstrate and they do not often discuss politics. According to Hussam, “you’ll see that the people here don’t talk politics because they are busy surviving.”⁴⁶ Widespread community resistance is barely possible for people in Shaykh Sa‘d. Life and survival under occupation requires such incredible energy that resistance, in a sense, becomes a privilege. And in Shaykh Sa‘d this is a privilege that cannot always be afforded.

The simple act of remaining “in place” is an oft-practiced but little acknowledged Palestinian strategy under Israeli rule.⁴⁷ Remaining in Shaykh Sa‘d in the face of tremendous hardship and pressure is an important part of everyday life for village residents; refusing to leave is refusing to capitulate to the strategies of occupation that seek to exclude, separate, control, and ultimately displace and expel. Approximately half of the homes in the village are empty because people have left the village, but those who remained are deeply committed to maintaining an active presence in the village. A key strategy of occupation, and the separation wall in particular, is to sever the Palestinian connection to Jerusalem. But the residents of Shaykh Sa‘d know Jerusalem as the city that sustains their lives and the place where their families live. One Israeli report on the impacts of the separation wall in Jerusalem claims, “No efforts to prevent the entrance of Palestinians lacking Israeli identity cards will succeed in weakening their attachment to the city.”⁴⁸ This could not be more evident than in Shaykh Sa‘d, where the attachment to Jerusalem is only being strengthened as a result of their separation and exclusion from the city.

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Endnotes

- 1 Author interview, February 2013.
- 2 James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 3 Kufr 'Aqab is a Palestinian village in Jerusalem that is often compared with Shaykh Sa'd because it was also excluded from the city by the route of the Separation Wall. See Doaa Hammoudeh, Layaly Hamayel, and Lynn Welchman, "Beyond the Physicality of Space: East Jerusalem, Kufr 'Aqab, and the Politics of Everyday Suffering," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 65 (2016): 35–50; Noura Alkhalili, Muna Dajani, and Daniela De Leo, "Shifting Realities: Dislocating Palestinian Jerusalemites from the Capital to the Edge," *International Journal of Housing Policy* 13, no. 3 (2014): 257–267.
- 4 B'Tselem, *Facing the Abyss: The Isolation of Shaykh Sa'd Village Before and After the Separation Barrier* (Jerusalem: B'Tselem, 2004), online at www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/2/200402_facing_the_abyss_eng.pdf (accessed 18 March 2018); Mohamad Aqel Halaseh, *Sawahirat al-wad fi Bayt al-Maqdis wa aknafih* (Jerusalem: self-published, 2010).
- 5 Noam Leshem and Alasdair Pinkerton, "Re-Inhabiting No-Man's Land: Genealogies, Political Life, and Critical Agendas," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, no. 1 (2016): 41–53.
- 6 The key methodologies used for data collection for this study were participant observation and semi-structured interviews with village residents with oral consent of participants according to the Human Research and Review Committee at the University of San Francisco. Identities of participants were kept confidential; pseudonyms have been used here.
- 7 B'Tselem, *Facing the Abyss*; Ir Amim, *Shaykh Sa'd and the Separation Barrier: Trends in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Ir Amim, 2004) online at sawahreh.wordpress.com/2009/11/12/sheikh-saad-and-the-separation-barrier-trends-in-jerusalem/ (accessed 18 March 2018); Halaseh, *Sawahirat al-wad*.
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- 10 Ir Amim, *Shaykh Sa'd and the Separation Barrier*.
- 11 Yael Stein, *The Quiet Deportation: Revocation of Residency of East Jerusalem Palestinians* (Jerusalem: HaMoked and B'Tselem, April 1997), online at www.hamoked.org/items/10200_eng.pdf (accessed 16 June 2016).
- 12 B'Tselem, *Facing the Abyss*; Ir Amim, *Shaykh Sa'd and the Separation Barrier*.
- 13 B'Tselem, *Facing the Abyss*.
- 14 Author interview, November 2012.
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- 16 Danielle C. Jefferis, "Institutionalizing Statelessness: The Revocation of Residency Rights of Palestinians in East Jerusalem," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 24, no. 2 (2012): 202–230.
- 17 Oren Kroll-Zeldin, "Separate, Excluded, Unequal: Struggle and Resistance for Palestinian Permanent Residents in East Jerusalem," in *Citizenship and Place*, ed. Allison Goebel and Cherstin Lyon (London: Rowman and Littlefield, forthcoming).
- 18 Helga Tawil-Souri, "Colored Identity: The Politics and Materiality of ID Cards in Palestine/Israel," *Social Text* 107 29, no. 2 (2011): 67–97; Helga Tawil-Souri, "Uneven Borders, Coloured (Im)Mobilities: ID Cards in Palestine/Israel," *Geopolitics* 17, no. 1 (2012): 153–176.
- 19 Author interview, January 2013.
- 20 Author interview, January 2013.
- 21 Author interview, January 2013.
- 22 Author interview, January 2013.
- 23 See Anne B. Shlay and Gillad Rosen, *Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
- 24 All of the drivers in the collective are men, as driving is a role traditionally held by men in Palestinian communities. In Jerusalem, many Palestinian women drive cars, but in Shaykh Sa'd, where traditional gender roles are prominent, women are rarely seen driving cars.
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- 26 Helga Tawil-Souri, "New Palestinian Centers: An Ethnography of the 'Checkpoint Economy,'" *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 217–35.
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- 31 Author interview, January 2013.
- 32 Author interview, January 2013.
- 33 Author interview, November 2012.
- 34 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign*

- Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 35 Shortly before this manuscript was submitted, I learned from a Shaykh Sa'd resident that on 7 August 2016 the Palestinian police entered the village and destroyed most of the drivers' cars because they were determined to be illegal and not properly registered. The Israeli authorities gave the Palestinian police permission to enter the village and they destroyed almost all of the cars. The Palestinian police also beat many of the drivers. Though it is apparent that the collective is no longer able to operate and the drivers lost their source of income, it remains unclear exactly what the impact will be on the drivers specifically and on Shaykh Sa'd residents generally.
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- 47 Thomas Abowd, *Colonial Jerusalem: The Spatial Construction of Identity and Difference in a City of Myth, 1948–2012* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014).
- 48 *The Security Fence around Jerusalem: Implications for the City and Its Residents*, ed. Israel Kimhi (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2006), 21.