Palestinian Christians

Since it is such a wonderful season, Palestinians Christians still insist on having three Christmases every year! As opposed to Jordanian Christians, for instance, who have set 25 December to be Christmas for all Christians in Jordan, here in Palestine, 25 December is only celebrated by members of Western Christian churches; 7 January is Christmas for the Eastern Orthodox churches, and, as if that were not enough, 18 January is celebrated by the Armenian Orthodox Church. Three Christmases, three sets of scouts, three traditional patriarchal processions into Bethlehem, and three midnight masses; what fun! Actually, it is fun, particularly for children who decorate their Christmas trees, go to Christmas parties, and, of course, receive presents from Santa. For adults, here and all over the world, this season means plenty of social and family gatherings, good food, and a lot of shopping!

As we follow the local media these days, we get the impression that there have been more public Christmas celebrations than usual this year; and almost all have been patronised by senior Palestinian Authority officials such as Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. Irrespective of whether this is true or not, Palestinian Christians are, in fact, lucky to be living here since they are, by and large, accepted, respected, and appreciated by the non-Christian majority of society. Numbering less than two percent of the total population, Palestinian Christians celebrate their religious feasts boldly and openly with no fear of persecution or even criticism; this is in stark contrast to the Christians in Kirkuk, Iraq, who have cancelled their Christmas celebrations this year for fear of attacks against them by extremists. Celebrating Christmas openly in Palestine is how it has always been done and how it should always be done not only because...

(Continued on page 98)
Palestinian Handicrafts

By Siham Al-Barghouti

Palestinian handicrafts are an integral part of Palestinian culture and heritage. They reflect the creativity of the Palestinian people who have manifested great skill in using their environment and land over the past 5,000 years. During those years, the Palestinian people acquired the skills of handicraft-making and transmitted them from one generation to another, in spite of the exceptional circumstances that generated and caused a decline in the handicraft industry. The handicraft industry, however, remains a significant part of Palestinian heritage.

In light of the rapid scientific progress that characterised the twentieth century, it becomes extremely important to preserve and develop this heritage. In fact, handicrafts are a visible reflection of the Palestinian national and cultural identity as they are regarded as unique human traces that can never be duplicated.

Due to the high quality of handicrafts produced by Palestinians, the Ministry of Culture regards handicrafts as a significant element in the Palestinian national economy and a source that contributes to the Palestinian GDP. In addition, the handicraft sector contributes to providing work opportunities to skilled labourers, thus enabling them to improve their living situation. The Ministry of Culture is committed to protecting the handicrafts industry, especially in an age when the negative manifestations of globalisation are increasing. The protection of the handicrafts industry also aims to protect the national identity that we have shaped over the years. Our aim is to shield our genuine character from alien models that would influence the uniqueness of the Palestinian heritage.

The Ministry of Culture is looking forward to implementing projects that target all kinds of traditional handicrafts, starting from documentation to providing specialised training opportunities for artists and artisans to produce quality crafts using traditional skills, patterns, and themes in an innovative way, in order to ensure the continuity and sustainability of these traditions and skills and to establish high standards of quality.

Since handicrafts constitute a crucial part of the Palestinian national identity, the Ministry of Culture has dedicated one of its objectives in its strategic plan, as well as the Sector Strategy for Culture and Heritage for the years 2011–2013, to Palestinian Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Ministry has conducted an assessment of the handicrafts industry and has designed programmes, plans, and activities that will contribute to the safeguarding and promotion of Palestinian Intangible Heritage including handicrafts. For this purpose, the Ministry will work in close cooperation with civil society, local communities, and international organisations.

In 2010, on Palestinian Heritage Day, 7 October, the Ministry of Culture launched an ambitious programme that aims to establish the National Inventory of Palestinian Intangible Cultural Heritage. The programme – which is currently being implemented within the framework of the MDG Culture and Development Joint Programme by the ministry in cooperation with a team of Palestinian experts, UNESCO, and FAO – consists of initiating documentation of the traditional agricultural knowledge and fishing culture. It also aims to develop the legal and institutional framework as well as technical requirements for the establishment of the inventory. This builds on the previous efforts of the Ministry and UNESCO to safeguard the Palestinian hikaye (folktale), which was proclaimed by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritages of Humanity in 2005.

Siham Al-Barghouti is the Palestinian Minister of Culture.
An Innovative Approach to Reviving Palestinian Arts and Crafts
The MDG-F Culture and Development Joint Programme Team

If we are planning to spend an issue discussing handicrafts, we should first clearly define what is meant by the term. For the team of the MDG-F Culture and Development Joint Programme, handicrafts are “products which are produced either completely by hand or with the help of tools. Mechanical tools may be used as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. Handicrafts are made from raw materials and can be produced in unlimited numbers. Such products can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic, and significant.”

This definition applies to a number of locally produced items in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). From mother of pearl to olive wood carving to decorative inlays to embroidery to soap and on and on, Palestinians are known the world over for their artisanship. In both the current economy and the economy of the foreseeable future, handicrafts play an important role. Not only are they an expression of heritage, but, as the above definition details, they are a sustainable and limitless resource that needs only the touch and creativity of the artist to give it value. In Palestine, the raw materials are given value by more than the skills of the artisan. The mere fact that the crafts are produced in Palestine, the centuries-old crossroads of civilisations and religions, adds an incalculable value to consumers. It is our hope to enhance and energise this vital sector so that it can contribute to sustainable economic growth.

While safeguarding and preserving Palestinian cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, has always been the cornerstone of the work of the UNESCO Ramallah office and other UN partners, in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Ministry of Culture, in the coming years, within the framework of the Joint Programme on Culture and Development, we will be increasing and diversifying our efforts. Safeguarding cultural heritage means much more than the protection of places of historical and religious significance; it also means preserving the living human elements of culture.

In December 2006, the UNDP and the Government of Spain signed an agreement to establish the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) to accelerate efforts to reach the MDGs and to support UN reform efforts at the country level. The MDG-F intervenes in a number of thematic areas, and one of them is culture and development. Unlike many programmes of the past, the MDG-F Culture and Development Programme in the oPt is a complex, multi-stakeholder effort that brings together four Palestinian Authority ministries (Tourism and Antiquities, Culture, Agriculture, and Women’s Affairs), four different UN agencies (UNESCO, FAO, UNDP, and UNIFEM), the private sector, and civil society organizations. The cooperation and coordination of so many diverse agencies, with so many diverse specialties, promises to make a big impact on the sphere of culture and heritage in all its various manifestations. This coordination has also followed the model set forth in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness that promotes the harmonisation of international aid efforts and the local ownership and development of the initiative.

Over the coming years the programme partners aim to establish policies and practices for the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and to strengthen the capacity of the culture and tourism sector including providing training to current and would-be artisans, and begin to maximise the potential of handicrafts to foster sustainable economic growth.

Our training programmes are designed to encourage innovativeness in crafts design and production while seeking to promote the continuation of traditional skills, patterns, and themes to ensure that handicrafts remain relevant, valuable, and marketable in today’s society. To encourage innovativeness, we are repositioning crafts in arts and encouraging the engagement of young artists and designers. Our current training programme, implemented...
in cooperation with Al Mahatta Gallery, brings together 18 creative professionals (product designers, interior designers, architects, and artists) to work collectively in an open, interactive workshop to enable the exchange of individual experiences and complementarity of creative skills. The workshop is led by Rashid Abdelhamid, a noted Palestinian architect/designer and one of the founders, who also designed the contemporary mud-brick building, of the Arts and Crafts Village and Al Deira Hotel in Gaza in 1999. One of Rashid’s interests and areas of expertise is product design using elements of Palestinian local heritage and traditional craftsmanship. Following the training, our programme will also work to place participants in jobs – with the private sector, cooperatives, or community-based organisations dedicated to handicraft production – and offer them a tailored training course in management and marketing of crafts. For those participants who have existing businesses, or those with an entrepreneurial spirit, not only will a range of services be offered, but also the possibility of becoming eligible for a seed-grant to help start up or expand their handicraft operations.

From training to marketing to job placement as well as business-establishment seed grants (and much more), the programme’s partners are proud to continue safeguarding and promoting the rich culture and heritage of the Palestinian people.

For Questions regarding the MDG-F Culture and Development Programme or how you can become involved, e-mail the Programme Secretariat at h.tibi@unesco.org or s.khoury@unesco.org.

* Adapted from the definition of crafts/artisan products at the UNESCO/ITC International Symposium on “Crafts and the International Market: Trade and Customs Codification,” Manila, Philippines, October 1997.
Traditional but Trendy

By Sawsan Khader

Change is rarely painless. In the field of handicrafts, so dominated by tradition, it summons conflicting feelings and raises many questions in the minds of those involved and those who may be directly or indirectly influenced. Yet the effects of globalisation have thrust even the most established trades into a colossal melting pot. Change at this point is imposing itself, and to many it can be wearisome.

For those working in the modern handcraft business, like myself, we have three choices; we can choose to resist, to go against the trend and eventually risk falling behind the times; we can embrace change and entirely yield and risk falling behind the times; we can go against the trend and eventually resist. To go against the trend and eventually resist, to be distorted and altered something that is symbolic of Palestinian culture is being presented worldwide as *khumus*, then our heritage is under threat. To some extent this can be true but not true enough to daunt our industries from developing. When a certain tradition, craft, or fashion becomes outdated due to various factors, then creativity and talented craftspeople should be capable of merging the old with the new and offering an original creation that suits the new taste.

My association with handicrafts came via a previous specialisation in interior design. I developed a passion for handmade decorative items and, shortly after, started to create my own designs combining fashionable fabric with unconventional colours and patterns of embroidery. My idea was to create something that is symbolic of Palestinian culture yet trendy and certainly capable of attracting modern tastes. Over the course of three years of work, my focus has expanded to consist of various crafts, including hand-painted ceramics, crochet, and jewellery. Encouraged by friends and family and one successful exhibition, I gained further confidence in my project, so I started to work with various suppliers and craftspeople on developing new designs to fit my idea. At this point, I began to face various difficulties; not having access to and from Gaza made it impossible to meet with potential co-workers there. Work was basically done over the phone and through e-mail, resulting in technical misunderstandings concerning significant details. Meeting with other suppliers based in Hebron and Bethlehem and surrounding villages where one can find beautiful blown glass and crafted olive wood meant a hectic trip through Wadi Al-Nar.

As for work with my oriental collection and international suppliers, it is almost a mission impossible. Any shipment from Lebanon or Syria into Israel has to go through Turkey or Jordan where the packages are relabelled and given a new certificate of origin in order to be allowed to enter the country. Any document that suggests the true country of origin means immediate confiscation of the commodities and, of course, a much higher end-cost for the shipment.

Unfortunately, when change is taking place and the local community is not developing in sync, people begin to imitate other models that are completely foreign to our culture. In fashion, for instance, the traditional Palestinian embroidered dress (*thob*), which used to “tell stories” about its wearers and reveal their home village, marital status, and social and economic class, has gradually been transformed into more modern, Western outfits. Subsequently, the frustration caused by the oppressive Arab regimes and their people’s growing hatred towards the West, in general, and its practices against Arabs and Muslims, in particular, have resulted in women looking even more anonymous with their uniform black *jilbab* that is most likely manufactured in China.

Furthermore, change is engulfing the old charming cities that have begun to look more and more identical nowadays. Some Arab cities that were renowned for their local industries, crafts, and fascinating souqs are now offering mass-produced, generic products which can be found everywhere. Some souqs have been either entirely remodelled to become top-niche markets for top brands and American food chains or entirely worn-out, as in the case of Damascus souqs where you can no longer find good-quality Syrian cotton or fabric.

Palestinian cities and markets are no exception. Cheap imported products are flooding the market and making it difficult for local industries to survive. Although in most cases the toughest challenges in business are normally associated with the lack of persistence or insufficient knowledge in the field, sadly, the biggest challenge to the Palestinian economy and local industries is how to survive under the critical conditions attributed to the occupation and the restrictions concerning the circulation
of goods within the country and abroad. In addition, international competition is swallowing up the markets, and there is a lack of government support and the absence of economic protection.

Another factor that contributes to the decline of handicrafts is the lack of means to market the products locally and internationally. In line with related bodies and organisations – and regardless of its limitations – the PNA should start mapping out strategies to enhance competence and assist businesses to overcome some of the obstacles caused by Israeli control of borders and try to benefit from the preferential agreements that the PNA has signed.

In spite of everything, challenges are meant to be defied. But how? The answer is not only perseverance but also creativity and innovation. New ideas need time not only to mature but also to be tested. If artisans stop being inventive then their passion for their work will disappear. True craftspeople should always be encouraged by the knowledge that the truly original will always find a market.

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Al Mirsat for Arts and Crafts

By Amal Nashashibi

On 9 April 2003, the Israeli Registrar of Non Governmental Organisations reluctantly approved a request that was submitted to his office about 11 months earlier to register Al Mirsat in East Jerusalem. A court petition finally hastened the process, which went beyond the legal interval of two months.

But, what a birthday for an organisation to have! Every time I pull out the registration certificate, I remember that fateful day that marked the capitulation of Baghdad.

An ordained turn of events for Al Mirsat, which is dedicated to reviving in Jerusalem what Baghdad stood for before the invasion of the American-led military coalition, namely, art, culture, and respect for human civilisation and religions. The invasion of Iraq purposely obliterated life, history, culture, and civilisation, and planted discord among religions.

The Israeli invasion of Jerusalem in 1967 was the precursor of events in Baghdad. During the first days of the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, Israeli bulldozers destroyed a historic neighbourhood in the Old City, Harret El-Magharibah. And ever since, the Israeli authorities have been on a mission to displace the native past of the city with a foreign narrative. It has controlled archaeological digs and biblical and historical research and publications. It has also controlled all tourism publications and guided tours for tourists in Jerusalem. Unfortunately it has succeeded in turning the tourism trails in the city into tools of the cultural dispossession of a people, and instruments at the service of a venture that seeks to erase the Palestinian identity of the city. Tour-guiding for foreign visitors in the Old City is kept in Jewish hands only. In brief, Israel’s mission has been a cultural cleansing process.

Al Mirsat took on the responsibility to reclaim the cultural heritage of the city through programmes that revive various aspects of the city’s cultural life and traditions, such as social and religious festivals, including that of Nabi Musa and the famous Ramadan children’s celebrations in the Old City, among other cultural events such as sponsoring a major fashion show – Jerusalem Costumes Across the Ages – last year, where 20 young Palestinian artisans from Jerusalem and other areas of Palestine represented the essence of Jerusalem culture: hospitality, peace, and coexistence.

Consequently, a most important part of Al Mirsat work is the revival of the arts and crafts of Jerusalem and Palestine, through research, technical assistance, and training of young Jerusalem artisans. Reclaiming our heritage through research takes precedence over the implementation of the organisation’s various projects. The research that the artisans undertake during their training is rigorous enough to help them take a proactive role in reclaiming this heritage not only through producing creative traditional crafts, but also through repossessing the native meaning of traditional crafts as well as using them to express themselves artistically and intellectually.

Among the early projects, and one that I cherish very much, is the training of women artisans in Jerusalem to reproduce the ceremonial dress of Palestinian women from various parts of Palestine, including Jerusalem. These dresses only exist in museums today, and therefore, the young Palestinian generation knows little about them. Jewish ethnographers know a lot about them, though, and have written books on this theme. Inasmuch as they are attractive, glossy, and nicely illustrated, these books have a subterfuge message: namely, that Palestinian women copied the motifs of their dresses uniquely from carpets.

The research undertaken by young women artisans during the project has revealed that these dresses held the Palestinian land and landscape in their folds. The cypress tree, sarweh, is planted in a studded way to demarcate land ownership in Palestinian villages and towns, is also studded on the borders of the chest panel of the dress. In addition, the language used among women to exchange knowledge about dressmaking has references to the land as well. For example, the word maris, which means a rectangular piece of land in Arabic, is also used to refer to the motifs of embroidery in the respective narrow vertical panels at the lower front and sides of the dress. These few examples illustrate well the mission of Al Mirsat.

The goal of the organisation, however, is to provide marginalised youth, who are increasingly facing employment barriers in the city, with an opportunity to gain skills, knowledge, and work experience that match the job-market demands in the Jerusalem environment. Through CRAFT, a programme that combines training in crafts development and information technology, Al Mirsat seeks to help youth cope in a challenging situation.

The programme motivates innovative, disenchanted youth and encourages them to embrace the artistic skills of our ancestors and steer their creative energies into a sustainable livelihood. This is done through research, training, technical assistance in arts and crafts production, and in the related information-technology area. (The number of marginalised youth who drop out of high school is growing, and therefore there is an increasing need for vocational counselling and training, which are among the services provided by Al Mirsat.)

White-collar employment opportunities under occupation in East Jerusalem are very few and far between. Youth and
their families in the city receive signals from the marketplace that discourage them from aspiring to higher education. The Israeli labour market, to which the Palestinians are held hostage, also signals to them that unskilled labour is readily accessible and pays higher than any white-collar entry job in East Jerusalem. This reality is causing youth, mainly males, to drop out of school to seek employment in Israeli concerns. Two years after they do this, however, they are pushed out of the market, as younger and less-demanding fresh Palestinian cohorts are drawn in. Two years after they drop out of school, an increasing number of young Palestinians in East Jerusalem, especially from the Old City, are finding themselves on the streets, more vulnerable than ever to indulging in risky behaviour. Girls also drop out for no other reason than to get married to the "young and upcoming males employed in Israel."

The choice to concentrate services in the area of crafts and IT is a conscious choice and comes from a good knowledge of the Jerusalem employment scene, where business loans are hard to come by and the cost of office space is exorbitant. The engagement in fine handicraft work and IT does not require a big investment or a large office space; in fact, it can be done at home with a small loan.

Marketing, which is a key indicator of the success of craft enterprises, is feasible in the Old City, which constitutes a natural tourism trail and a major outlet for product marketing.

In fact, the Old City of Jerusalem used to be heavily populated by craftspeople, and whole marketplaces and alleyways are named after one craft or another, Souk Al-Qatanine (cotton cleaners), Souk Al-Hussor (straw mat makers), Souk Al-Dabaghah (tanning market), etc. The majority of these crafts and master craftspeople have disappeared. A few small studios for indigenous craft-making owned by master artisans still exist in the Old City. Since 1967, their numbers have been diminishing; however, the products of those who have persevered are still exclusive and in high demand. Production and marketing of traditional crafts are a staple of the tourism economy in Jerusalem. They play an important part in its well-being. These culturally linked production and retail operations are "big business" in the Old City, which, in itself, forms a major tourism trail.

Al Mirsat has embarked on a daunting journey, to say the least, in the midst of the ill winds of racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance that are blowing all around.

Al Mirsat’s future projects call for the establishment of an institute for arts and crafts research and training in the Old City, and the development of master trainers through a combination of academic and skill development. The development of young Palestinian women ethnographers to study Palestinian women’s arts and crafts is another immediate concern for Al Mirsat.

Amal Nashashibi is chair of the board of trustees at Al Mirsat organisation.
Real-World Obstacles to Supernatural Demand: A Classic Tale of Tragedy

By the Team of This Week in Palestine

Writing an informative article about the handicraft industry in Palestine is difficult simply because there is so little quantitative information available. While extensive data exists from the year 2000, only a few, very localised studies are almost new enough to be relevant or at least illustrative of the industry. Part of the UNESCO MDG project, which is discussed in other parts of this issue of This Week in Palestine, will attempt to correct this lack of data through a comprehensive study conducted jointly with UNIFEM. But that is of little use for now, when we can only speculate on the future by using data from the past.

Although older surveys do not tell us much about the current state of the handicraft industry, what they do highlight is how dramatically the political volatility that hampers the whole of the Palestinian economy adversely affects this sector in unique ways. I hope to describe this scenario by using as much available data as possible while also filling in the gaps with a personal reflection on the challenges and promises of the handicraft industry in Palestine.

The relative “calm” of the late 1990s and early part of the new millennium saw a rise in the number of tourists to Palestine’s historical and religious sites. Pilgrims from the world over took advantage of the decrease in violence to come and buy locally produced goods such as olive wood carvings, embroidery, and religious items. In 1998, over 600,000 tourists visited Bethlehem, and by 2000, the number had increased to almost 850,000 – nearly 50 percent more than only two years before.* Had the second Intifada never occurred, it is likely that the numbers would have continued to rise at the same rate.

The unique aspect of the handicraft trade in Palestine is that religious trinkets, such as rosaries, prayer beads, Bibles, and Qurans, can be blessed in the very places where the gods and prophets of old walked and spoke. Interestingly, the place where it is bought is far more important than the actual item sold.

I remember bringing a rosary to my grandmother a few years back – one that I had bought in East Jerusalem and laid upon the stones in and around the tomb of Christ. Of the seemingly endless collection of religious paraphernalia that my grandmother owns (from Lourdes, the Vatican, Notre Dame, etc.), this simple rosary is by far her most treasured possession. She still gets excited when she has a chance to show it off to people, and she is becoming increasingly protective of it. “Don’t touch it so much, you will wear it out!” she says.

This is the magic of Palestine handicrafts; they are imbued with the supernatural. The amazing quality of the work you see and read about in this issue is important, but it takes a backseat to the fact that they are produced in the Holy Land.

Yet while the demand for Palestinian handicrafts could be said to be almost supernatural, the very real world of politics is not easily overcome. The onset of the second Intifada and the incursion of Israeli military forces into Palestinian cities and towns shocked the world and spread fear about the safety and security of further pilgrimages. Between the years 2000 and 2003, the number of tourists to Bethlehem went down from 850,000 to approximately 15,000!

Yet even after the Intifada had slashed the number of tourists visiting Bethlehem’s holy sites by almost 98 percent, the small numbers that continued to come still made up over half of the handicraft consumer market. Only 45 percent of Palestinian handicraft production is sold to markets abroad, with approximately 30 percent going to Western markets and 15 percent going to the Arab world.* People want these goods; that much is clear. But what they seem to want even more is to be here to buy them.

I had originally hoped to provide a snapshot of the handicraft industry in order to ground the rest of the articles in this issue in facts and figures. In truth it was not only the lack of data that made me want to avoid discussing the realities of Palestinian handicrafts. The economic de-development caused by the occupation affects this sector as it does every other. We have heard this story before, and it is never a happy one.

The sad story of the “supply side” of handicrafts in Palestine, however, is
only one side of the coin. Whether it is useful or just fanciful, I find myself wanting to tell the other story as well. The story of my grandmother typifies well the billions of Christians, Muslims, and Jews dying to fill the streets and markets of cities throughout the West Bank and Gaza. She represents the “demand side” of the story; and if I told her that I could bring one more rosary tomorrow, she would ask for ten. If I could peel her away from the images of Palestine that she sees on her television every day and convince her to make the pilgrimage she has always dreamed of, she would buy hundreds.

This Week in Palestine.

* Dr. Basim Makhool, and Dr. Fadi Qattan, 2006. Sector of Unorganized Handicrafts Industries in the Palestinian Territories: Reality and Prospects. Note: these figures were taken from the Chamber of Commerce in the Bethlehem Governorate: Special Study on the Craft Industries in Bethlehem – Olive Wood and Shells, June 2004.
Istanbul the cultural tourist capital, thus Turkish social dramas, such as to make the passion of the Palestinians for civilisation, and contemporary Turkish bond between Palestinians, Ottoman Istanbul yields a new trove and another Cairo. A walk through any bookshop in genius pioneers of architecture, and furniture. The literary from music and cinema to sculpture, aspects of cultural expressions ranging of Western humanism permeated all the novel, short story, and drama, and the introduction of Western art forms such as Turkish novels of writers as diverse as his identity, reverberates in modern which the individual actively shaped transition from a traditional conformist which documented the middle-class that we meet the intellectual heirs of Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak, among others. During the twentieth century, the introduction of Western art forms as such as the novel, short story, and drama, and the reinterpretation of Muslim values in terms of Western humanism permeated all aspects of cultural expressions ranging from music and cinema to sculpture, architecture, and furniture. The literary discourse ended with the death of the genius pioneers of Asr el-Nahdah.

For a long time the cultural capital was Cairo. A walk through any bookshop in Istanbul yields a new trove and another bond between Palestinians, Ottoman civilisation, and contemporary Turkish literature.

Elsewhere I have written about the passion of the Palestinians for Turkish social dramas, such as to make Istanbul the cultural tourist capital, thus supplanting the Cairo of the last century. In literature and in the novels of Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak, on the other hand, we meet the intellectual heirs of the Arab Renaissance. Accessible in English translation, the novel proffers our existential condition in contemporary terms. Pamuk, in his masterpiece, Istanbul, describes a city, a time, and a way of life that has passed away and that parallels the tragic loss of Jerusalem’s historic Muslim character. The huzon (nostalgic melancholy) he evokes and the feelings conjured correspond to the feelings sensed by a Jerusalemite. As one reads Istanbul, one reads Jerusalem. We share a common sensibility and passion, and an overwhelming sense of longing for the lost spirit of the place. The introduction of perspective in the Turkish miniature in nineteenth century, belonged exclusively to Arabic culture. Whereas the influence of Western European culture on Arabic artistic expression is readily visible, the formation of our Arab identity at a point of axis between Muslim culture as shaped by Ottoman sensibility, aesthetics, and values is overlooked. The constitution of our identity as purely Arab or Muslim (and the common use of the terms interchangeably) blocks us from perceiving our indebtedness to the all-pervasive Ottoman civilisation that has structured our cultural identity. The Ottoman influence is acknowledged only in relation to music. Through the mediation of English language in our knowledge of current Turkish literature, or Arabic dubbing of the social dramas, the linguistic barrier between contemporary Arabs and Turks dissolves.

It should not be forgotten that almost all Arabic twentieth-century intellectuals matured in French or British culture and language. In fact Tawfiq el Hakim admits that his novel, Awdet el Roh (Return of the Spirit), was written in French. His sense of patriotism compelled him to translate the first two hundred pages from French into Arabic, and thus he wrote the first twentieth-century Arabic novel. With the exception of Mahfouz, the leading Arab intellectuals of the twentieth-century lived at ease in the West and were fluent with English or French civilisation or both. They wrote in Arabic for a cosmopolitan Arab reader familiar with Western humanist discourses. Modern Turkish writers exhibit the same attitude.

A single paragraph in Elif’s novel, Forty Rules of Love, which describes the longing agitating within Jalal al-Din Rumi and accounting for the significance of Shams al-Tabrizi in his life, caught my attention. The paragraph could have been written by me.

“Bountiful is your life, full and complete. Or so you think, until someone comes along and makes you realise what you have been missing all the time. Like a mirror that reflects what is absent rather than present, he shows you the void in your soul – the void you have resisted seeing. That person can be a lover, a friend, or a spiritual master. Sometimes it can be a child to look after. What matters is to find the soul that completes you … For me that mirror is Shams of Tabriz.”

I had written about longing in the same vein. I leave to the readers the right of judgment.

The sublime longing and intimations of the other may be spurred by the view from afar of a small dust-beaten
The mountain track winding its way towards a remote village lost in the distance that one glimpses momentarily from the car window on the drive between Antalia and KAŞ. The awareness of the rich diversity of humanity surges within the depth of our heart as a deep longing ... I could be other, the possibilities are infinite. The intimations of the other may be provoked by the sight of a cluster of trees on a barren mountaintop, or the sweet fragrance of jasmine floating from behind a high wall on a star-studded summer night ... a haunting melody, a poem, or a painting and, of course, every time we fall in love.

Elif’s cadence, sensibility, and understanding of the underpinnings of human solitude are not discontinuous with traditional Muslim discourse. As in Renaissance Arabic literature her discourse stands at the interstice; neither secular humanist nor orthodox Muslim but at the conjunction of both.

Traditional Sufi metaphors of the love, longing, yearning for, and dissolving of the self in the other as a means of self-discovery reverberate in Elif’s brilliant novel-within-a-novel love story. In Forty Rules of Love, two tantalising parallel narratives, unfold; one contemporary and the other set in the thirteenth century, when Rumi encountered his soul mate, Shams of Tabriz.

Reading Elif Shafak ushers one into a microcosm where feelings are dominated by thoughts, themselves formed by feelings. A dynamic dialectic produced by a culture that empowers the heart over reason and that bespeaks a discursive spiritual heritage in which the Sufi concept of love as a mystic bond plays a key role. Rule number forty in her novel reminds the reader, “A life without love is of no account. Don’t ask yourself what kind of love you should seek, spiritual or material, divine or mundane, Eastern or Western ... Love has no labels, no definitions. It is what it is....”

In fact, love without labels is what Elif sets up as her ambition. Through the narrative Elif liberates the love that binds Jalal al-Deen Rumi and Shams of Tabriz from the controversial sexual innuendos. On the surface, Jalal’s poems to Shams are amorous. Rumi is smitten with the Persian wise man. In Western perspective the relationship is misconstrued and is often viewed diagnostically, the infatuation of a young scholar with the father figure is seen as sexual. The accusation is rebuffed in her depiction of their spiritual bond without labels. But even in Konya of the thirteenth century, their friendship was the cause of anger. Shams, in Elif’s account, is killed in a plot concocted by Rumi’s own jealous son and hostile followers.

The universalisation of love, its secularisation, is the theme of the parallel novel that describes the self-discovery of the heroine as she falls in love. Neither sacred nor profane the heroine’s love affair is at a point of conjuncture of Muslim mysticism and the modern secular quest for self-knowledge. In Forty Rules of Love, Elif presents a Muslim perspective of man/man bonds of friendship but also of mysticism using the Western format of modern novel.

In Turkish literature we find a mirror of ourselves.

In Elif’s book I found an invitation to Konya and a new perspective of Jalal al-Din and Shams al-Tabrizi.

I took the first plane to Konya.

Konya is a dreamland whose fabric is woven with the legends of One Thousand and One Nights. Aladdin must have awoken in such an ancient Muslim city after having been kidnapped from Isfahan, his hometown, by the blue-eyed Moroccan wizard. A feeling that one is walking in the footsteps of Aladdin, to whom the universe opened by the mere rub of the magic lantern, echoes in every step one takes in historic Konya.

Sweet dreams are made of this.

Journeys provide the stimulus and pleasure of reflexive self-disengagement. In travel one’s sense of identity is altered. Even if for a transient fugitive moment one becomes sentient of the possibilities agitating within. We achieve otherness.

Konya is a Holy City. Despite modernism and heavy industrialisation, Konya has retained the spiritual allure that has drawn millions of pilgrims who have flocked over the past eight centuries to visit the sanctuary of Jalal al-Din Rumi and, a block away, that of his friend/lover/soul mate Shams al-Din al-Tabrizi.

In Konya the world expands timelessly to conjure the splendour of Muslim civilisation. Innumerable cities rush to my mind’s eye: Isfahan, Tabriz, Balkh, Qum, Nishapor, Bukhara, Samarqand, Tashkent, the Baghdad of the Abbasid’s, Damascus, Cairo, and Umayyad Cordoba and Granada. A world that is long gone. My Arab imagination has been fuelled by the literary discourse of Ibn Battuta,
al-Qazwini, al-Ya'kubi, Evliya Çelebi....

Konya is a place out of time where familiar boundaries dissolve and where modern clichés fade. A centre of pilgrimage for Sufis from all over the world, members from the Baha’i faith from Iran, and hopelessly cosmopolitan romantic sentimentalists, Konya lures its visitors into a web of mosques, bazaars, Turkish baths, and spice markets that enthrall the eye and bring joy to the heart. The whirling dervishes, started eight centuries ago by the great master Jalal al-Din Rumi, thrive as one of the last vestiges of the Muslim ardent desire to love God, to immolate oneself in the One and to glean a glimpse of the Eternal. In this quest for divine knowledge, gnosis, the path is open to all humanity. In Rumi the love of God transports one beyond the confines of religious boundaries.

Rumi says, *Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu Buddhist, Sufi, or Zen. Not any religion or cultural system. I am not from the East or the West, not out of the ocean or up from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not composed of elements at all. I do not exist, am not an entity in this world or in the next, did not descend from Adam and Eve or any origin story. My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless. Neither body or soul. I belong to the beloved, have seen the two worlds as one and that one call to and know, first, last, outer, inner, only that breath breathing human being.*

Konya is a unique city; like a rich tapestry it weaves classical Greek legends, a rich Byzantine past, and Seljuk glory under the dazzling tapestry of Muslim splendour. Perseus, the legendary Greek hero, conquered the city by revealing the unveiled “icon” image of Medusa’s serpentine head. Hence the original Greek name “Ikonion,” a cognate of the word icon. But the name of Prince Ala’ al-Din Kayqubad dominates the landscape of Konya. The minaret, castle, and mosque, whose silhouette looms over the city’s landscape, bespeak its illustrious past.

Konya became a Muslim capital soon after the defeat of the Byzantines in the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. The Seljuk capital reached its golden age in the second half of the twelfth century and lasted through the first decades of the thirteenth century. Early in the thirteenth century the city filled with refugees from the Khwarezmid Empire, from Persia, Afghanistan, and central Asia, fleeing the advance of the Mongol Empire. Sultan Ala’ fortified the city and built a palace on top of the citadel. In 1228 he invited Baha’i al-Din Veled and his son Jalal al-Din to settle and teach in Konya; a monument to humanity at large and a beacon for perplexed souls.

The spiritual charisma of Rumi was visible even in his adolescent years. “Here comes the sea followed by the ocean.” Thus did Ibn al-Arabi, the great Andalusian Sufi philosopher, describe Jalal al-Din as he saw him walk the trail of his father, Baha’i al-Din Veled. The great Persian poet Attar was equally impressed by adolescent Rumi when both father and son, on their flight from Balkh to Baghdad, stopped in Nishapor. Attar whispered to Rumi’s father, “Time will come when the fiery words of this boy will kindle the hearts of lovers all over the world.” Attar presented Rumi with a copy of *Asrar Nameh (The Book of Secrets)* – a book that Attar had composed during his own youth.

That was to be Rumi’s companion throughout his life.

Rumi’s father was his first teacher. As the power of Genghis Khan and the threat of the Mongol army grew and as the supporters of the king and orthodox scholars made life difficult for the mystic preacher Baha’i Veled in Balkh, he decided to take his family and migrate westward. This was around 1219 when Jalal al-Din was barely a teenager.
Sultan Ala’ el Din Kayqubad built a medrassah (theological college) for Bahá’í Veled to hold his classes and sermons. He held this position of authority until he died at the age of 80. Rumi assumed his father’s position. A scholar par excellence, Rumi became a popular orthodox Sunni preacher and teacher in Konya with hundreds of followers.

Following Jalal al-Din’s meeting with Shams al-Tabrizi, Rumi was transformed from the celebrated Sunni theologian (‘alim) to an (‘arif) a mystic, from a preacher to a poet. In their first meeting, Rumi (then 37) and Shams (possibly 60) fell for each other. Through subsequent conversations and retreats (a tradition called Soh’bat among the Sufis) Shams revolutionised Rumi’s lifestyle and perspective. Jalal al-Din withdrew from his social, religious, and family commitments to spend his time exclusively with Shams. In Shams he found his twin soul and they became inseparable. Rumi stopped preaching, and barely read or saw his wife and children. Together with Shams he spent his days on murâghibah (meditation), samâ (music and dancing which were later developed into the tradition of the whirling dervishes), and mushâ’irah (poetry).

Rumi’s disciples resented Shams who, in their opinion, had captivated their master’s heart and mind. Once Shams left Konya for Damascus in protest of the disciples’ hostile attitude, Rumi dispatched his older son to bring him back.

In 1248, Shams disappeared once and for all. It is believed that his younger son and jealous followers concocted a plot to kill Shams. Shams’ disappearance devastated Rumi. He went to Damascus twice in search of Shams, but finally concluded that Shams was within him.

During the past eight centuries Konya has come to be closely associated with Jalal al-Din Rumi. Considered the Turkish Holy City, par excellence, devout Muslims flock to visit Rumi’s shrine. Sufis, mystics, and fans of Rumi visit his sanctuary in droves.

Barely one block away stands the sanctuary of Shams, a modest mosque rarely visited.

In homage to the man who helped bring out the inner light in Rumi’s heart, transforming the orthodox scholar into the most renowned mystic and a beacon for those seeking knowledge of God in the heart, I made my Friday prayers in the mosque of Shams al-Tabrizi.

Dr. Ali Qleibo is an anthropologist, author, and artist. A specialist in the social history of Jerusalem and Palestinian peasant culture, he is the author of Before the Mountains Disappear, Jerusalem in the Heart, and the recently published Surviving the Wall, an ethnographic chronicle of contemporary Palestinians and their roots in ancient Semitic civilisations. His filmic documentary about French cultural identity, Le Regard de L’Autre was shown at the Jerusalem International Film Festival. Dr. Qleibo lectures at Al-Quds University. He can be reached at aqleibo@yahoo.com.
Who is this princess standing in her palace with her hand on her hip? The Jordanian riddle evokes the distinctive shape of the shisha, the hookah, the narghile. Known by a thousand names to a thousand cultures, the water pipe has a special place in all of them. Palestine is no exception.

The simple pastime of smoking flavoured tobacco filtered through water has spawned numerous debates over the centuries through which it has been practised. Is it elitist or model socialism? Is it sexist or liberating (perhaps even to the point of debauchery)? Where did it come from? And are they 200 times worse than cigarettes?

The narghile’s provenance is almost as contentious as that of hummus. Most experts agree that coconut pipes could be found in northern India around the turn of the millennium, but Turkey and Iran have claims to its creation in the form we now recognise. In the sixteenth century, Iranian Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great introduced ornately designed pipes to the mainstream. Shortly after, with the mass export of blown glass from India, they were popularised in Ottoman high society. Sultan Murat the Fifth was renowned for smoking one during diplomatic meetings.

During these formative stages, moral suspicion surrounded the new craze. In China, specially designed pipes became de rigueur in opium dens, and the Turkish aristocracy enjoyed lacing their tobacco with hashish. The classic orientalist paintings typically juxtaposed the narghile with scenes of Bacchanalian excess: drugs, exotic dancers, and even Roman-style orgies. Concerns over the narghile’s corrupting influence grew so great in Turkey that during the early years of the seventeenth century, smoking it was punishable by the death penalty. By then it was too late, the habit had been enthusiastically adopted, and the authorities were forced to reverse the ruling.

The narghile’s association with forbidden pleasure is common in popular culture. Movies about the famous Egyptian gang-leader Hagg Fahmi ‘el-Fishawy normally place him in a seedy café among thick clouds of smoke. In Lewis Carroll’s provocative classic, Alice in Wonderland, the heroine’s plummet through the rabbit-hole is preceded by an encounter with a pipe-smoking caterpillar on top of a presumably hallucinogenic mushroom.

The primary consumers of narghile vary between eras and countries. During British occupation of the Raj in India, it was a preserve of the upper class, emphasised by the elaborate decorations and ceremonies which accompanied it. The contrast with coffee shops in Hebron and Ramallah, where smoking takes place in a working-class atmosphere of card games and loud swearing, is marked.

A Syrian scholar once wrote:

“The narghile is characterised by a triple egalitarianism: social, sexual and religious. The passing round of the hose represents a symbolic sharing.”

He argued that the innate element of giving, supplemented with an etiquette code governing the manner of giving, makes smoking a more sociable, inclusive activity than say, drinking alcohol in bars. Yet the “sexual egalitarianism” is less convincing, especially in Palestinian cities where women are commonly prohibited from smoking in public.

Neither does smoking provide religious unity. Recent research into the health effects continues to trouble observant Muslims today (although not too much if Ramallah’s thriving coffee shops are anything to go by). The Qur’an does not specify that smoking is haram, but the following verses could be interpreted as applying to its accompanying dangers.

“...And do not kill yourselves. Surely, Allah is Most Merciful to you. And whoever commits that through aggression and injustice, We shall cast him into the Fire and that is easy for Allah.” [Qur’an 4:29]

“And do not throw yourselves into destruction.” [Qur’an 2:195]

A World Health Organization Report from 2005, which claimed that a lengthy session of narghile smoking could result in the user consuming “100–200 times” the tar of a cigarette, has prompted a raft of recent restrictions. Although the report has been pilloried and widely discredited for shoddy research and methodology, governments across the world have begun to treat narghile use in much the same way as cigarettes. Egypt’s second city, Alexandria, has banned public smoking. It follows a wide-ranging ban introduced in Syria last November. Both decisions have proved controversial, with café owners forced to close and significant damage to local economies.

The narghile seems to be a victim of its own success. The WHO report came after an explosion in its popularity in the US and Europe, where it is widely perceived to be exotic and fashionable. I recall my first encounter with a narghile at Nottingham University, through some Iranian students. On a campus renowned for drinking and little else, it was a welcome cultural crossover. The Iranians, for their part, expressed pleasure at being able to introduce an Englishman to an aspect of Middle Eastern culture that contradicted the threatening stereotypes we are force-fed in the UK.
Attempts to suppress its growing popularity in the English-speaking world have had little success. Indeed the narghile has become a must-have accessory for the rich and famous. Pop star Damon Albarn has professed to hosting regular smoking sessions. Cameron Diaz hangs out in narghile bars, and basketball icon Shaquille O’Neal was recently married in a hookah lounge in St. Louis.

Its crossover appeal also bridges the Palestinian/Israeli divide. Via kibbutzim and rural retreats, narghiles have waltzed into the mainstream of Israeli social life. Where playing Arabic music can get you arrested in West Jerusalem, the narghile seems to be an acceptable Arabic influence that Israelis are happy to take (Lord knows they take everything else). It’s a cruel irony that the forest fires which recently claimed 42 lives in Haifa, are believed to have been started by two young Israelis’ negligent use of a narghile.

At its best, the pipe is an innately human institution, one that attaches value to shared time, to interaction, to pleasure. Part of this appeal is aesthetic. The creativity and immaculate crafts that give rise to the breathtaking designs we see every time we take a drag. Beauty cannot be quantified in the same terms as nutrition, but we humans need apprehension of beauty for our quality of life. The pride of Turkish sultans in the appearance of their pipes survives to this day, clearly visible in the work of Palestinian artists on display in every coffee shop here.

This aesthetic creativity has provided a centuries-old link to the arts. In Syria they often provide the backdrop for professional story-tellers (hekwêtiyyê) to regale a relaxed crowd. In the Ottoman palaces, where pleasure was very much for its own sake, revellers would smoke for greater lucidity as they absorbed epic concerts and dance performances.

Not to suggest that governments don’t have a responsibility to make the public aware of health risks, but the traditions and customs of narghile do not belong in the same bracket as cigarettes (which even long-term smokers acknowledge to be a lousy habit). In an increasingly sanitised, risk-free, state-controlled world becoming homogenised through globalisation, the values which underpin narghile smoking have more to teach us than politically motivated reports. In Palestine, where obstacles to pleasure are greater than in most other places, we should not rush to eliminate one of our favourite pastimes. To steal and adjust a line from a classic Henry Davies poem:

A poor life this, if full of care,
We have no time to smoke and stare.

Kieron Monks is a reporter based in Ramallah, now joining the team at This Week in Palestine.
Atfaluna Crafts

Atfaluna crafts have universal appeal. Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children, established in 1992, provides a unique opportunity to discover a group of brilliant deaf trainees who have mastered handicraft work. Visitors to Atfaluna gain a better understanding of the gifts and challenges of deaf people and are able to see this vibrant community in a fascinating new light, in particular through the vocational training programme. Cloth and wood are transformed into beautiful pieces of art by more than 300 deaf and marginalised persons who have never had the opportunity to access formal education. The programme offers holistic vocational training courses that focus on woodwork and painting on wood, sewing, embroidery, pottery, and ceramics.

One of the most important areas of Atfaluna’s crafts and production division is the carpentry department where 17 deaf persons work hard to produce unique arabesque tables in a variety of designs, letter openers in various shapes, wooden trays, small decorative boxes, and much more.

Another team of innovative and well-qualified employees, most of whom are deaf, work in the sewing and embroidery department. Twenty-two deaf women have learnt to sew and embroider beautifully. They produce *jalabiyat* (traditional Palestinian women’s dresses), purses, children’s clothes, bags, corner pillows, and more. The team works hard to create unique designs using a combination of colours that result in a blend of deep-rooted Palestinian traditions with contemporary style.

The wood-painting department employs nine deaf men and women who design all the wooden crafts. They use various patterns and colours to distinguish the numerous items they produce. The arabesque designed tables are beautiful, decorative items that can enhance any home.

Six deaf men and women work in Atfaluna’s pottery-making department to create plates, jugs, and other attractive items. All the products in
this department are hand-decorated in bright colours.

The carpet-weaving department is staffed by five deaf men and women who help keep the Palestinian Majdalawi tradition alive. Production in this department includes Majdalawi cloth garments, Majdalawi cloth bags, purses, tablecloths, and many other items. Atfaluna rug weaving is distinguished by its wide and varied selection of colours and sizes.

As an extension of the carpentry, embroidery, and art departments, two employees produce charming gift items such as embroidery-covered photo albums and trays.

Atfaluna believes in the importance of training and preparing deaf persons to become productive and independent persons, and supporting them to secure a permanent income. Its vocational training programme includes 54 full-time employees, most of whom are deaf. Approximately 250 more deaf and/or marginalised women work in their homes through the Work-from-Home Programme. Through its multi-faceted services, Atfaluna has provided an opportunity for numerous deaf individuals to discover, utilise, and improve their hidden artistic talents.

Unfortunately, as other civic societies in the Gaza Strip, Atfaluna's vocational training programme suffers from the blockade that was imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip. The programme has faced many difficulties in obtaining raw materials such as cloth, thread, and glass. In spite of this, however, the vocational training programme remains vibrant and creative, thanks to our loyal supporters and friends who lend a hand when needed.

For more information, please contact:
Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children
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Courtesy of Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children.
Articles

Beauty and Identity for the Next Generation

By Rimah Rabayah

In any project that involves teaching arts and crafts to children, the teacher has certain goals. The teacher will choose the project according to the opportunities it provides to introduce new concepts and terms and to encourage the children to open themselves up to artistic expression. Such concepts and expressions are often entirely new for children; they are not found in everyday life. As a child begins to discover her talents through learning the basics of art, she begins to relish her own imagination and to develop a desire to master artistic production.

Children in Nablus now have the opportunity to experience choosing from an array of tools and materials which they can use to create. They choose their colours; they choose the nature of their work: we have seen children who learn the artistic process begin to develop artistic taste and, most importantly, we have seen them strengthen their capacity to choose.

“Triple Exposure” is an initiative of Tomorrow’s Youth Organization (TYO), through which children from refugee camps and the Old City of Nablus and its marginal neighbourhoods are given the opportunity to engage in artistic projects around the city. Our focus is public art, for it is through witnessing a community’s reaction to their productions that these young artists experience how their artwork can “make our city more beautiful,” as Rihana, an 11-year-old from Khallet al-Amood and one of our most talented young artists, proudly claims.

The young artists participating in Triple Exposure develop their skills for colour, arrangement, planning, and representation through painted mural projects, but it is their mosaic murals that they take particular pride in. Using stone and glass tiles acquired from Nablus, Ramallah, and Hebron, the children develop their ability to use materials from the environment in order to beautify a public space. With an image in mind, they learn to use the resources at hand in order to find solutions for how to bring their visions to reality. To an inexperienced eye, a yet-to-be-realised mosaic would appear to be simply a pile of broken tiles on the ground, but these young child artists have learned how to see the potential for expression and creation in the refuse of everyday life. As they work on their mosaics, my colleagues at TYO and I see the children strengthen their sense of initiative, build confidence and patience, develop a capacity for positive interaction with others, and become increasingly aware of their own potential, their own heritage, and the importance of linking the two.

Mosaic is a key element of traditional Palestinian art. While we begin with the simpler tasks and projects of drawn sketches and painted murals, our aim is to develop the patience and skills in these young artists in order for them to reach the level of creating the detailed mosaic artwork that characterises traditional art in Palestine.

Our mosaic project’s goals stem from the fact that awareness of Palestinian culture among Palestinians is not at its highest. Children can be initially unaware and uninterested, for their families and the general society far too often neglect to educate themselves about these Palestinian traditions and their own artistic heritage. Many of the great artistic families who in decades and centuries past specialised in the development of this traditional craft have left Palestine. Hence much expertise was lost and the practice has been relatively neglected. The continuous cycle of changing authority over centuries in the region has led to inconsistent support for the mosaic trade. With time, practice, and the continued engagement of children, the latest generation will be raised with a much greater appreciation for this aspect of their identity.

The outputs of TYO’s Triple Exposure project are aimed not only at Palestinians living within the region, but crucially also to those living around the world. We seek to develop worldwide awareness – be it Arab or foreign – of the traditional and modern elements of Palestinian life, to transform the negative narrative about the Palestinian people into an updated and accurate one based on popular expression and historical experience.

First in Nablus, and then insha’allah in other cities, TYO’s children’s mosaics will enhance the cultural heritage of Palestine, for mosaic is a part of our heritage and our history. Through these mosaics we affirm that we are a people: we have a tradition and a history, contrary to the claims of those who would seek to deny our existence. The continued and increasing presence of Palestinian art and expression in the very streets and walls of our cities will fortify the popular assertion that this land will not be relinquished to those who would seek to erase it all traces of Palestinian life.

Triple Exposure’s path to Palestinian awakening, therefore, is fivefold. First, and of utmost importance, the children who experience art education build confidence, initiative, the power to make choices, a strong sense of personal and
historical identity, vocational alternatives for those whose passions do not lie in formal education, and the capacity to improvise from their surroundings to create beauty and value. Second, the communities that witness the children’s public art realise a greater sense of heritage and pride in the potential of Palestine’s people and cities. Third, a neglected traditional Palestinian craft is revived via the education and engagement of the new generation. Fourth, an international audience is provided with unique insight into the lives of Nabulsis and Palestinians, via TYO’s distribution of the children’s artwork on the Internet based on the visions of the children who call Palestine home. Fifth, the physical presence of Palestinian art in public spaces – personal expressions manifested through a traditional medium – seizes that space for the coming generations.

Rimah Rabayah teaches mural and mosaic art at Tomorrow’s Youth Organisation (TYO) in Nablus.
To learn more about Triple Exposure and Tomorrow’s Youth Organization (TYO), please visit www.TripleExposure.net and www.TomorrowsYouth.org, or contact doris@tomorrowsyouth.org. Article photos by Doris Carrion / TYO.
The Dark Side of Beautiful Things

By Joe DeVoir

While a large number of handicraft enterprises are part of the formal economy, this article aims to remind readers that the vast majority of them are not – and that the consequences of this fact on workers are not nearly as beautiful as the products they create.

Informal sector jobs are those in which “the employment relationship (...) is not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits.” Informal also refers to “work that lacks some or all of the following: a specified minimum wage, health insurance, a pension scheme, paid holidays, job security, end of work compensation, paid maternity leave, paid sick leave, family allowances, unemployment benefits, and insurance against sudden loss of income. Other features linked to working conditions are long hours and an unhealthy and unsafe work environment.”

If informal labour still sounds appealing, one should remember that it is also highly gendered. Under the definition used above, the informal workforce accounts for almost 60 percent of women workers and only 16 percent of the male workforce. In addition, informal employment by men decreases with age, while the opposite trend is found among women. The various socio-economic and cultural barriers encountered by women trying to enter the formal economy often prove insurmountable – forcing women into the unprotected sphere.

Besides lacking benefits and protections, earning a decent and guaranteed income in the informal sector is difficult. According to a 2004 study by MAS (Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute), only “two-thirds of the informal workers surveyed said that their work guaranteed them a sufficient income to cover basic household needs.” The reader would do well to remember that, despite the beauty of Palestinian informally produced handicrafts and their being sought the world over, the artisans themselves may not have managed to earn meals for themselves and their families.

I apologise for contributing a depressing article to an issue that celebrates beauty. I also apologise for sounding like an idealist who imagines that a Palestine under occupation can ever fully enter into formalised economics. The negative consequences of the informal sector cannot be generalised in a context that is so rife with political and economic instability. Informal enterprises allow for a “high degree of flexibility in response to changes in the demand for products and services” while also serving as a “shock absorber component of the formal sector.” They give people, especially women, the capacity to work from home and continue to earn an income that bypasses the checkpoints and movement restrictions around them.

Yet, this “functionalist rationalisation of the role of unprotected work deliberately ignores that such work is not sought out of choice, but rather out of necessity (often desperate need), and that while it may protect the worker and his/her family against starvation, it does not, in most cases, protect against poverty and deprivation.” In other words, the need and suitability of informal enterprises in the context of occupied Palestine should not encourage us to gloss over the consequences and difficulties the face the artisans whom we celebrate in this issue. Celebrating these workers means aiming to formalise the informal sectors in Palestine, or working to understand and support those who are unable to escape it.

Joseph DeVoir is a Rotary International Peace Fellow working on Palestinian Workers’ Rights.
Rotary Has Arrived

By Dr. Samir Abdullah

Not many Palestinians have ever heard of the Rotary or remember the various times when there were active clubs in the occupied Palestinian territory. This article aims to re-introduce readers to Rotary International and one of its newest members: The Rotary Club of Ramallah.

Rotary International was founded in 1905 in Chicago by a man named Paul Harris. He envisioned a civil society initiative that would bring together business professionals and community leaders to collectively discuss and work to improve their communities. Rotary is a secular, liberal institution that promotes democracy and peace. Its members believe that, despite our differences around the world, deep down we are all the same. As such, the work of Rotary, through individuals or institutions, is based on only four simple principles known as the Four-Way Test. The test, which has been translated into more than 100 languages, asks the following questions about the things that we think, say, or do:

1. Is it the TRUTH?
2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

Since its founding Rotary has grown dramatically. Currently there are more than 34,000 clubs located in over 200 countries (or non-countries) with a grand total of more than 1.3 million members worldwide. Rotary International’s foundation is one of the largest in the world and funds projects at the community, regional, national, and international levels.

One of Rotary’s most familiar projects has been the effort to eradicate polio worldwide. Rotarians have worked to penetrate almost every community on the planet to place three drops of vaccine in the mouths of tens of millions of children worldwide. Thanks to Rotary, what was once a plague is now nearly completely eradicated. Another important effort of Rotary is education. Rotary is the largest provider of scholarships in the world, sending students abroad to focus on peace and conflict resolution.

The new club in Ramallah is joining this global network to help spread its resources and ideals throughout Palestine. We are also proud to be able to tell the “Palestinian story” in one of the largest and most influential organisations on the planet.

On 18 May 2010, our club was chartered. Since then we have grown to nearly 40 members. We aim to add twenty more before launching a second club in another West Bank city. The reasons for this are simple. First, because Rotary’s makeup and procedures are democratic and participatory, small membership allows for increased member involvement, camaraderie, and ownership. Second, our goal is to grow into a network of community-based clubs that can band together for ever-larger development and humanitarian projects. Ramallah Rotary is ready to implement projects on the ground. Our club’s focus now is the construction of playgrounds and parks for children and youth. We are planning to implement these projects in poor and needy areas, and we are confident that our Palestinian communities will begin to see the effects of our club and Rotary International support on the ground. Our club meets weekly and has already hosted a number of distinguished speakers. To know more about the Ramallah Rotary Club and Rotary International, please visit: www.Rotary.ps.

Dr. Samir Abdullah is the former minister of planning, the former director of the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), and the current president of the Ramallah Rotary Club.
On Narrating Gaza...  
By Guy Mannes-Abbott

When it comes to sieges, precision is required to argue precedence. Besiegers appear all over the place and all over time. The besieged are always the same; rendered animal as time ceases and place becomes that time. The air is stifling, the end is collective yet still bespoke; you are abysmally alone. The military siege belongs to earlier ages but is too cruelly effective to be left there, hence “Gaza.” Gaza, where one and a half million people – mostly refugees – have been besieged since June 2007 for their audacity to want to live in their own time and place. Where on 27 December 2008 their besiegers began celebrating the New Year early, culminating in the gift of white phosphorous shells for surviving school children. Witnessed by a never more seeing world.

Two years ago, then. I was at home reading a novel that morning which I finished eventually with helpless determination while the state of Israel stepped up its “campaign” of what, as Mourid Barghouti said at the time, is simply called murder. Yet another paradigmatic massacre and further dispossession of the disposessed. Yet more uniquely compounded atrocity. It went on and on and the world remained silent, as it had been while the siege was laid and maintained to punish an election result. Silence. Nothing. Barely a word of criticism. Nothing consequential. So it has been for two years. Years since the densely populated coastal strip, blockaded by Egypt at one end and the state of Israel at all other points – emptied of settlers so that when the killing began no Israelis would be hurt – was remoulded into a single word: “Gaza.”

“Gaza” signifies this latest assault on Palestinians ethnically cleansed from the plains of Palestine, confined and besieged in the port city and so-called “strip.” If this single word were fully unpacked, its story would detail a uniquely chronic violence extending over six decades, recurring images of homes furnished with dead bodies, grandmothers mown down as they venture across rubble, children hurled at history’s wall. Repetitions that spiral upwards in scale with ever more extremity, ever less cause. This conventional job of historical archiving will come to fill walls in libraries far into the future – as our humanity insists.

Narrating Gaza ([http://www.narratinggaza.net/](http://www.narratinggaza.net/)) is an attempt at a different form of narrating, closer to the insurgent anecdote. At its core the people of the word “Gaza” are speaking, showing, proving their existence. It’s essential that their story be heard, and this is what Narrating Gaza is designed to begin; inviting voices and visions to join in an act of resistance by telling. The entire world saw what happened in those weeks that extended from December into a more mortifying January. They saw, watched, knew, and still the word “Gaza” silenced them. Seeing made no difference.

In fact, “Sad Song [Five Days under Attack]” is the name of a story or poem by Najah Awadallah that exquisitely renders the “First” to the “Fifth day in Gaza.” It begins with the rehearsal of Tchaikovsky’s “Sad Song” by violin
beneath raining murder, with Najah saying goodbye to her teacher “before the lesson is over.” As the “metal birds play their music from the score of Gaza’s remains” she joins the resistance offered by grammar on the page of a sheltering book. Days of silence, hiding behind curtains, delighting in the way that the truth of this Gaza is impossible to hide. On the fifth day her foreign teacher has been evacuated, the music surrendered, tears now rain on “my violin’s aloneness.” This resistant narrative, translated expertly by Fady Joudah, made it to the horizon for me.

Elsewhere, there’s evidence of collective support for this important project. John Berger – recent memorialiser and translator of Mahmoud Darwish – reads Ghassan Kanafani’s “Letter from Gaza” with a humble whisper. There are news reports, survivor diaries, photographs by Raed Issa of a destroyed gallery with its resistant art, others of ash rising to meet the silvery flock from hell, bodies in fridges afloat in blood, a portrait of Darwish surviving the rape of its owner’s homely quarters, that big boot print on the back of a savaged canvas, that red-sleeved hand of a dead child reaching towards the same horizon that this insistent act of narrating makes more concrete.

Most striking of the images at launch are those taken by Shareef Sarhan of the murderers in flight. One shows from below bombs being released over the same dense cityscape seen from above on Narrating Gaza’s homepage. Another image condenses “Gaza” for me; to the right is a military helicopter – kept in the air by spare parts from a supportive Britain perhaps – while four squiggling cloud trails ejaculate left across the image. I don’t know what they represent but am more intrigued by what letter or word is being written on the stolen sky. “Restraint,” or more probably “ethics,” that war cry of the Israeli army wherever it indulges its monstrous violence. Death or hate is what it means, of course, but viewed from a different angle here, with comradely imagery and active narrating, it’s been re-narrated and reframed with its opposite.

Narrating Gaza represents resistance in the love evinced by and between words and images and where they take us. A love of what is promised just over the horizon and a means of foreshortening the process today. It is a way to join eyes together, to hear stories being told, read the testimonial truth, see the horror and the process of it becoming a new art. Of course the only light over our horizon is universal, one that all eyes and minds actually share and in the name of which we must act, by narrating with any and every means possible.

Guy Mannes-Abbott is the author of “e.things”; singular texts often shown in visual art contexts. He is also a widely published critic and essayist on literary and visual cultures, based in London.
Sunbula is a Palestinian fair trade organisation that supports the economic self-help efforts of marginalised persons through the promotion of traditional handicrafts. Sunbula provides market access to 20 producer groups across Palestine (the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the 1948 areas) and helps them to develop their production and capacity. Hundreds of women, refugees, people with disabilities, members of minority groups, and small-scale farmers are provided with income-generation opportunities through Sunbula and benefit from its development activities.

Sunbula – Arabic for spike of wheat – is the flower that makes bread. As its name symbolises, Sunbula helps people provide themselves with a gift of a more dignified life.

Sunbula’s producer groups are made up of artisans who create a wide array of Palestinian handicrafts. Beautiful items emerge from the harsh, challenging conditions of refugee camps, rural villages, and Wall-affected communities. We bring embroidery, Bedouin rugs, handmade olive oil soap, ceramics, olivewood carvings, paper and felt crafts, and jewellery to the Jerusalem market through our fair trade stores and online shop. We strive to ensure that these works of art have access to markets beyond the barriers and checkpoints, and that the producers’ vital source of livelihood is protected.

Sunbula endeavours to preserve the diminishing artisan heritage and to revitalise it in today’s handicraft production. We work with Palestinian designers who train women to create marketable, modern products while utilising traditional designs and techniques. We also work with local experts to document aspects of Palestinian embroidery that are beginning to disappear, and we plan to publish an instruction book this year for use by local women’s groups.

We mark our 15th anniversary this year by renewing our commitment to the development of Palestinian handicrafts and by celebrating the resilience and creativity of the Palestinian artisans who keep alive the cultural heritage of this beautiful land.

SUNBULA FAIR TRADE SHOPS IN JERUSALEM

House of Palestinian Crafts
7 Nablus Road, Sheikh Jarrah
(across from the Mt. Scopus Hotel and a one-minute walk downhill from the Ambassador Hotel)
Open Mon – Sat, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Craft Shop at St. Andrew’s
Inside St. Andrew’s Scottish Guesthouse (across from the footbridge of the Jerusalem Cinematheque)
Open Tue – Thu, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Sun, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Contact us for more information or to arrange appointments and group visits.
Tel.: 02-672-1707, info@sunbula.org

SUNBULA Online Craft Market: www.sunbula.org
Hamdi Natsheh
By Cecile Gault

Together with his brother, Mr. Hamdi Natsheh is the proud owner and manager of one of the two remaining glassblowing factories in Hebron, the Hebron Glass & Ceramics Factory. Although he cannot say exactly how long his family has been in the glassblowing business, he knows that it has been for many centuries.

He himself started learning from a very young age as he watched his father and his grandfather at work. Glassblowing is a difficult and delicate art that requires years of practice. It is passed down from generation to generation. “You have to learn as a child if you want to have a chance at becoming a skilled worker,” Mr. Natsheh says. “And once you know the techniques, it takes a lifetime to hone your skills. The learning process never ends.”

In 1967, at the age of 17, his training was complete and he began working in earnest as a full-fledged glassblower. The glass business went through hard times over the years, he remembers. After the first Intifada, for instance, tourists had deserted the area and the economic situation was quite bad. Many shops had to close, but his factory managed to remain open by diversifying its production to include ceramics in the second half of the 1990s.

Mr. Natsheh does not blow glass anymore. Nowadays, he takes care of the administrative part of the business. But he remains a glass artist at heart, and he follows his workers’ production attentively. One look at a piece and he can tell which one of them did it. Indeed, even if the techniques they learned are the same, each glassblower has a personal touch that makes his work immediately identifiable to the expert eye. Mr. Natsheh is proud that his son Tawfiq is an excellent glassblower. “I have to confess that he is even more skilled than I am. He really loves what he does and has true talent.”

Business is “neither good nor bad these days,” Mr. Natsheh says. To him, the key to keeping the factory afloat can be summed up in one word, which he repeats over and over again: “diversity.” New shapes, textures, colours. He encourages his workers to be creative and let their artistic sensitivity take over. With the market overflowing with cheap Chinese products, offering unique handmade pieces to customers is the best marketing technique Mr. Natsheh can think of to stay true to the spirit of his family business. It is also what got him to participate in arts and crafts exhibitions across Europe to present his and his employees’ art. These travels are important as 50 percent of the factory’s glass production is exported to Europe and North America.

Providing customers with a quality yet competitive offer, however, is not Mr. Natsheh’s only worry. Unfortunately, it has become harder in recent years to find apprentices in order to pass down the techniques inherited from former generations. Young people are sadly not that interested anymore. Without dedicated practitioners to educate the next generation, it is a tradition that could be lost forever.
Abdel Raouf Al-Ajouri

By Mohammad Al-Hawajri

Abdel Raouf Al-Ajouri was born in 1977 in Jabalia Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip. He began his career as a painter in 1993 and produced tens of oil paintings. But in 2001, Al-Ajouri made several sculptures utilising limestone and other material. In 2002, he held his first exhibit at Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah. The exhibit displayed 20 different shapes of the feminine body in various postures as seen from the personal perspective and vision of the artist.

In 2005, Al-Ajouri experimented with compound sculpture created by the amalgamation of metal and plants such as cactus. His exhibit titled “Cactus,” which was held in Gaza in the same year, was regarded by art critics as a unique example of contemporary art.

In his works, Al-Ajouri demonstrates a deep understanding of the concept of mass and space. His sculptures, characterised by a smooth flow of lines and colourful shapes, provide spectators with a spectacular visionary appearance. One can sense that nature is his teacher and its elements are his tools. In addition, Al-Ajouri’s works are simple, vivid, and full of life just like the works of Henry Moore, the renowned English sculptor who is known for his abstract bronze sculptures and whom Al-Ajouri regards as one of the best teachers of sculpture, one who has had a great impact on him.

Al-Ajouri has recently shown interest in drawing portraits. He maintains that portraits are very personal and are the mirror of the inner soul. Al-Ajouri translates the feelings and passions into colourful facial features – eyes wide-open to contemplate the unknown and perhaps mysterious future. Of special concern for Al-Ajouri are the faces of children which reflect fear, sorrow, innocence, or escape from the reality in which they live. But at the same time he expresses the human desire to stay alive and to live life to the full in spite of the ups and downs that are part and parcel of every human life.

Abdel Raouf Al-Ajouri is a co-founder and a member of the Gaza-based Iltiqa Gallery for Contemporary Art (2002). He also contributed to founding the Drawing Hall at the Red Crescent Society in the city of Gaza, where he supervises training courses and workshops on art and drawing. Moreover, Al-Ajouri was responsible for equipping the Prisoners’ Museum in Gaza with designs and carvings. The museum was completely destroyed, however, during the Israel military assault on the Gaza Strip in early 2009.
I recorded information about the materials and methods of making the costumes during my research, however, in this book I felt it was more important to focus on the stories told by the women who wore the costumes, therefore highlighting their skill and creativity and the hard conditions of life they had to endure. Each life history in these pages exhibits a strong sense of social identity and personal achievement. The reader can look back at Palestinian history through a special lens, focusing on women’s potential for ensuring the continuity of the collective heritage and identity. Only by understanding life in Palestine before the diaspora can one begin to grasp how the thob and embroidery symbolise the courage and determination to renew Palestinian lives and culture. The costumes have evolved from markers of regional or tribal identity into expressions of an all-Palestinian identity, invested with multiple meanings.

My collection contains more than 3,000 pieces of costumes, jewellery, and other personal and household artefacts. As well as collecting Palestinian costumes to preserve a part of my culture after losing my homeland, I have become equally concerned with preserving the textile heritage of Jordan, Syria, and other Arab countries. There were few who shared my appreciation of our Arab textile culture between the 1960s and 1980s, although today there is increased interest. I hope that, by reading this book, others will be encouraged to learn about Palestinian costumes and their histories.

This collection is universal and a part of world heritage, so it should be accessible to everyone. It is my ultimate ambition to see the collection physically housed in a permanent centre or museum that will promote further learning. In general, the centre will serve to share, with Arabs and non-Arabs, our traditions, and by doing so help shape a future with greater cultural understanding and tolerance.

This will be tying the threads of identity for me.
Jafra for Palestinian Arts and Crafts

By Samah Sultan

Jafra for Palestinian Arts and Crafts (www.jafracrafts.com) is an e-commerce project established by ELIA e-commerce and development Company. The project was incubated at the Palestinian ICT Incubator (PICTI), www.picti.ps, in early 2010.

Jafra’s e-commerce website enables producers of all types of Palestinian handicrafts to sell their products online to the world and allows interested people from all over the world to explore Palestinian heritage markets and buy online gifts and crafts direct from the producers. The site enables customers to make purchases in a secure and easy way, and items are shipped through trusted international shipping companies.

The site, available only in English, is built around a catalogue of over a hundred products arranged in six categories. It also features new items and hot deals on the first page (although it is not possible to select these directly to order them). Jafra uses a US-based checkout service to process customers’ shopping carts. Products are also available in an interactive interface (requires Flash player).

By providing an online selling gateway which reaches global markets, Jafra aims to contribute to solving the marketing problems and difficulties that producers face. Jafra has already begun to implement an online marketing plan and is currently creating networks with importers and companies in many countries to solidify B2B and B2C relationships.

Palestinian heritage handicrafts and arts reflect our identity

Through its comprehensive website, Jafra intends to promote Palestinian heritage and connect local Palestinians with their brothers and sisters in the diaspora. Visitors to the website have access to a wide range of information about Palestinian heritage and can explore various types of traditional and historical handicrafts and folkloric items.

Jafra has managed to establish a network of skilled craftspeople in most cities in Palestine, including Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, and Nazareth – craftspeople who produce a variety of products that are suitable for all seasons and occasions. Jafra’s comprehensive catalogue offers visitors products that are not usually found through websites. Jafra’s products include olive wood, shells (mother-of-pearl), pottery, ceramics, glass, mosaics, Dead Sea products, straw, embroidery, olive oil soap, and wax.

The Jafra project was developed by a professional team who spent a number of years studying the Palestinian heritage sector. Along with two other projects, Jafra was chosen from among 25 projects that were considered by PICTI to be incubated.

Jafra has been part of various PICTI activities, including TeamStart – Palestine, which is a full-service package that provides entrepreneurs with technical consultation, confidence-building, business development training, and practical assistance. This project was designed by PICTI and the University of Warwick Science Park (UWSP), United Kingdom. TeamStart - Palestine brings together innovative and creative entrepreneurial minds to help them create high-growth businesses.

Samah Sultan is manager of Jafra.
Film of the Month

Film of the Month: The Road to Bethlehem

“Open Bethlehem is a nonviolent attempt to save a city that belongs to many in the world. It is unconscionable that Bethlehem should be allowed to die slowly from strangulation.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

When The Road to Bethlehem was premiered in Dubai on 16 December, it marked the culmination of a six-year labour of love and a lifetime’s passion for director Leila Sansour. Marrying her personal journey with a global campaign to liberate the holy city from Israeli oppression, the result is an urgent appeal for humanity amidst destruction.

Sansour left the city as a teenager, studying and working in Paris and Moscow before marrying in London. Her media work with Al Jazeera and MBC brought her success and recognition, which she used as a platform to direct the tragi-comic documentary Jeremy Hardy versus the Israeli Army in 2003. The film, set in Bethlehem during the second Intifada at the time of the Israeli invasion, was made with the intention of “drawing mainstream attention to the issue of Palestine,” which it achieved by becoming one of Time Out’s films of the year, running for three months in over 50 UK cinemas.

“I thought deeply about what should be next for me,” Sansour told us. “My father’s memory still haunted me and I didn’t feel that I had settled my accounts with him.” The Road to Bethlehem was the outcome, as over six years, with just a handheld camera and an antique vehicle, she undertook the epic task of documenting the crisis engulfing her spiritual home.

Halfway through filming, the director discovered the resonance that Bethlehem has with all faiths and cultures around the world, and realised that it could be a powerful weapon in the fight for Palestinian liberation. Out of this realisation came the Open Bethlehem campaign, an appeal to the world to step in and stand up for a city and a cause that affects everyone. The results have already been spectacular, with numerous world leaders and over 100 British MPs endorsing the campaign. Global media have lent their support, and symbolic Open Bethlehem passports are now being issued (including one to the Pope). The initiative has achieved impressive momentum, being supported by every Bethlehem resident “from the mayor to the falafel vendors.”

To Sansour, the campaign has become bigger than the film. She now hosts journalists and diplomats on fact-finding missions to Palestine as part of her PR drive, which is supported by such globally respected figures as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former US President Jimmy Carter.

“The issue of Palestine cannot be settled without a strong push from major international players,” Sansour told us. “We have touched the hearts of many decision makers and led them to change their minds about the situation as well as inspired them to deepen their engagement and commitment to peace in Palestine. I am optimistic because I have started seeing a new energy among Palestinians. I hope that more and more Palestinians and friends of Palestine will join us and act with a more ambitious, strategic vision and confidence to help achieve change.”

Now that the film has had its December premiere in Dubai, Sansour intends to make it the vanguard of her campaign, set for release at international festivals and in US and European cinemas next year.

For Palestinians and internationals alike, the film provides a powerful, human reminder that humanity shares a burden to uphold the values espoused by Bethlehem’s most famous son. The Road to Bethlehem is by turns tragic, inspiring, and magical, a personal love letter that represents millions.

Leila Sansour’s film opens a new chapter in a tale that has been overlooked for too long. With the international momentum developing behind its campaign, let it be hoped that the director’s dedication and optimism will prove infectious. A must-see.
Note: Please make sure to contact the venue to check whether the programme is still running.

**East Jerusalem (02)**
Centre for Jerusalem Studies, tel. 628 7517; Educational Bookshop, tel. 6275858; French Cultural Center, tel. 628 2451

**ART**
Tuesday 4
Art exhibition “Construire / Déconstruire,” photos by Georges Rousse (through 25 January daily, Monday to Thursday and Saturday 10:00 to 18:00), French Cultural Centre Chateaubriand

Wednesday 26
Paris seen by a Palestinian exhibition, photos by Mohamed Elhaj (through 23 February daily, Monday to Thursday and Saturday 10:00 to 18:00), French Cultural Centre Chateaubriand

**FILMS**
Tuesday 11
13:00 Budrus by Julia Bacha. The screening will be followed by a discussion with the film's team (Arabic Dialogs, English subtitles), Al Quds University, Abu Dis

Thursday 27
18:30 "138 Pounds in my Pocket" and "Crystal Grapes," by Sahera Dirbas. The screening will be followed by a discussion with the director (Arabic Dialogs, English subtitles), The Educational Bookshop and French Cultural Centre

**PLAYS**
Wednesday 5
11:00 "The Christmas Present", a new Christmas show directed to children and family. Produced by Al-Harah Theater 2010, Women Children Care Society

**TOURS**
Sunday 9
18:10 Tunnel Tour, meeting Point Centre for Jerusalem Studies, Centre for Jerusalem Studies

Saturday 15
10:00 The Citadel, meeting Point Centre for Jerusalem Studies, Centre for Jerusalem Studies

Saturday 22
10:00 Arab Neighborhoods in West Jerusalem, Centre for Jerusalem Studies

Saturday 29
10:00 Old City settlements, meeting Point Centre For Jerusalem Studies, Centre for Jerusalem Studies

**Bethlehem (02)**
Al Harah Theatre, tel. 276 7758; Dar Annadwa, tel. 277 0047

**FILMS**
Friday 21
18:00 Documentary film screening entitled “Budrus,” Dar Annadwa

Thursday 27
19:00 Egyptian film screening entitled “Bolbol Hayran,” Dar Annadwa

Friday 28
19:00 Egyptian film screening entitled “Bolbol Hayran,” Ad-Dar Hall

**Ramallah and Al-Bireh (02)**
French German Cultural Center tel. 298 1922, PACE tel. 240 7611, Ramallah Cultural Center tel. 298 4704

**ART**
Saturday 1
Manar Zuabi Artist of the month at the virtual gallery at http://virtualgallery.birzeit.edu/exh_artist_of_the_month the virtual gallery at birzeit university

**TOURS**
Saturday 16
19:30 KinoKlub "Tatort," Screening of "Kuscheltiere" (German with English subtitles), followed by a live stream episode of "Tatort" (German), French-German Cultural Center

**CHILDREN’S ACTIVITIES**
Thursday 20
17:00 Puppets show "Lost steps," by the French company Les Détours in French and Arabic, El Amnaari Camp - Youth Club Theater

**FILMS**
Tuesday 4
18:00 “Territories,” documentary by Mary Ellen Davis in the frame of documenteraire French Cultural Centre serie, French German Cultural Center.

Sunday 9
18:00 "A night with Maud," the new cycle with Eric Rohmer in the frame of CinéMémoire French Cultural Center programme, French German Cultural Center.

Tuesday 11
18:00 “La graine et le mulet” by Abdellatif Khechiche (English subtitles) in the frame of the French Cultural Center Cinémois programme, French German Cultural Center.

Friday 21
15:00 Hikikomori II, Young Hassan returns to Palestine after 13 years in Germany. How is his life in a Refugee Camp? Adaptation of a theatre piece by Holger Schober organised by “The world of stories” together with the Goethe-Institut Ramallah, YES Theatre Hebron

**TOURS**
Sunday 2
9:00 PACE Tour to Hebron, A tour to the city of Hebron, PACE Office

**Jericho (02)**
PACE tel. 240 7611

**TOURS**
Sunday 23
9:00 A tour to the city of Jericho, Pace Office.

**Jenin (04), Qalqilia & Tulkarem (09)**
The Freedom Theatre, tel. 250 3345; PACE, tel. 02 240 7611

**ART**
Saturday 15
14:00 Alice in Wonderland, The Freedom Theatre

**TOURS**
Sunday 16
9:00 PACE Tour to Qalqilia, A tour to the city of Qalqilia, PACE Office

**Nablus (09)**
PACE, tel 02 240 7611

**TOURS**
Sunday 9
9:00 A tour to the city of Nablus, PACE Office

Sunday 30
9:00 A tour to the city of Nablus, PACE Office

**SPECIAL EVENTS**
Saturday:1,8,15,22,29
Sharaka - Eat locally, seasonally, and Palestinian.
14:00 weekly farmers market, Kaykab Garden
Sareyyet Ramallah - First Ramallah Group (FRG)
Tel: 295 2690 - 295 2706, Fax: 298 0583
sareyyet@sareyyet.ps, www.sareyyet.ps

Franco-German Cultural Centre Ramallah
Tel: 298 1922 / 7727, Fax: 298 1932
info@ccf-goethe.org, www.ccf-goethe-ramallah.org

Greek Cultural Centre - “Macedonia”
Telefax: 298 1736/ 298 0546, makdonia@palnet.com

In’ash Al-Usra Society- Center for Heritage & Folklore Studies
Tel: 240 1123 / 240 2876, Telefax: 240 1544
usra@palnet.com, www.inash.org

Khali Sakakini Cultural Center
Tel: 298 7374, Fax: 296 6820
sakakini@sakakini.org, www.sakakini.org

Manar Cultural Center
Tel: 295 7937, Fax: 298 7958

Mazra’a Qibliyeh Heritage and Tourism Centre
Telefax: 261 5825, mazraaheritage@yahoo.com
www.geocities.com/mazraaheritage/

Palestinian Association for Contemporary Art (PACA)
Tel: 296 7601, fax: 295 1849
paca@pal-paca.org, www.pal-paca.org

Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE)
Tel: 240 7611, Telefax: 240 7610
pace@p-ol.com, www.pace.ps

Popular Art Center
Tel: 240 3891, Fax: 240 2851
info@popularartcentre.org, www.popularartcentre.org

Ramallah Cultural Palace
Tel: 298 4704 / 295 2105, Fax: 295 2107
rcpevents@ramallah-city.org
www.ramallahculturalpalace.org

RIWAQ: Centre for Architectural Conservation
Tel: 240 6887, Fax: 240 6986
riwaq@palnet.com, www.riwaq.org

Sandoq Elajab Theatre
Tel: 296 5638, 295 3206, sandouqelajab@yahoo.com

Shashat
Tel: 297 3336, Fax: 297 3338
info@shashat.org, www.shashat.org

Sharek Youth Forum
Tel: 296 7741, Fax: 296 7742
info@sharek.ps, www.sharek.ps

Tamer Institute for Community Education
Tel: 296 6121 / 2, Fax: 296 8160
tamer@palnet.com, www.tamerinst.org

The Danish House in Palestine (DHIP)
TeleFax: 298 8467, info@dhip.ps, www.dhip.ps

The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music
Tel: 295 9070, Fax: 295 9071
info@ncm.birzeit.edu, www.birzeit.edu/music

The Palestinian Circus School
Tel: 0545 - 671 911, 0599 - 926 107
www.palcircus.ps, info@palcircus.ps

The Palestinian Network of Art Centres
Tel: 298 0036, 296 4348/9, Fax: 296 0326
iman_acou@yahoo.com

The Spanish Cultural Center
Tel: 295 0893, chp@panoramacenter.org

Young Artist Forum
Telefax: 296 7654, yaf@palnet.com

Gaza Strip (08)

Al-Qattan Centre for the Child
Tel: 283 9929, Fax: 283 9949
reem@qcc.qattanfoundation.org
www.qattanfoundation.org/qcc

Arts & Crafts Village
Telefax: 284 6405
artvlg@palnet.com, www.gazavillage.org

Ashtar for Culture & Arts
Telefax: 283 3565, atlas9@palnet.com

Fawanees Theatre Group
Telefax: 288 4403

Culture & Light Centre
Telefax: 286 5896, ifarah@palnet.com

French Cultural Centre
Tel: 286 7883, Fax: 282 8811
ccfgaza@consulfrance-jerusalem.org

Gaza Theatre
Tel: 282 4860, Fax: 282 4870

Global Production and Distribution
Telefax: 288 4399, art.global@yahoo.com

Dialogpunkt Deutsch Gaza (Goethe-Insitut)
Tel: 282 0203, Fax: 282 1602

Holst Cultural Centre
Tel: 281 0476, Fax: 280 8896, mncrg@palnet.com

Theatre Day Productions
Telefax: 283 6766, tdp@palnet.com

Windows from Gaza For Contemporary Art
Mob. 0599 781 227 - 0599 415 045, info@artwfg.ps
Accommodation

East Jerusalem (02)

Addar Hotel (30 suites; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 626 3111, Fax: 626 0791, www.addar-hotel.com

Alcazar Hotel (38 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 628 1111, Fax: 628 7360
admin@jrscazar.com, www.jrscazar.com

Ambassador Hotel (122 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 541 2222, Fax: 582 8202
reservation@jerusalemambassador.com
www.jerusalemambassador.com

American Colony Hotel (84 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 627 9777, Fax: 627 9779
reserv@amcol.co.il, www.americancolony.com

Austrian Hospice
Tel: 626 5800, Fax: 627 4172
office@austrianhospice.com
www.austrianhospice.com

Azzahra Hotel (15 rooms, res)
Tel: 628 2447, Fax: 628 3960
azzahrahotel@shabaka.net, www.azzahrahotel.com

Capitol Hotel (54 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 628 25612, Fax: 626 4352

Christmas Hotel
Tel: 628 2588, Fax: 626 4417
christmashotel@bezeqint.net, www.christmas-hotel.com

Commodore Hotel (45 rooms; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 627 1414, Fax: 628 4701

Gloria Hotel (94 rooms; mr; res)
Tel: 628 2431, Fax: 628 2401, glorial@netvision.net.il

Golden Walls Hotel (112 rooms)
Tel: 627 2416, Fax: 626 4658
info@goldenwalls.com, www.goldenwalls.com

Holy Land Hotel (105 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 627 2888, Fax: 628 0265
info@holylandhotel.com, www.holylandhotel.com

Jerusalem Hotel (14 rooms; bf; mr; res; live music)
Tel: 628 3282, Fax: 628 3282
raed@jrshotel.com, www.jrshotel.com

Jerusalem Claridge Hotel (30 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 656 4393, Fax: 656 4394
claridge@palnet.com, www.jerusalemclaridge.com

Jerusalem Meridian Hotel
(74 rooms, bf; mr; res)
Tel: 628 5212, Fax: 628 5214
www.jerusalem-meridian.com

Jerusalem Panorama Hotel
(74 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 628 4887, Fax: 627 3699
panorama@alqudsnet.com
www.jerusalempanoramahotel.com

Hashimi Hotel
Tel: 628 4410, Fax: 628 4667, info@hashimihotel.com

Knights Palace Guesthouse (50 rooms)
Tel: 626 2537, Fax: 626 2401, kp@actcom.co.il

Legacy Hotel
Tel: 627 0800, Fax: 627 7739
reserv@jerusalemlegacy.com
www.jerusalemlegacy.com

American Colony Hotel
Tel: 627 9777, Fax: 627 9779
reserv@amcol.co.il, www.americancolony.com

Austrian Hospice
Tel: 626 5800, Fax: 627 4172
office@austrianhospice.com
www.austrianhospice.com

Azzahra Hotel (15 rooms, res)
Tel: 628 2447, Fax: 628 3960
azzahrahotel@shabaka.net, www.azzahrahotel.com

Capitol Hotel (54 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 628 25612, Fax: 626 4352

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Tel: 627 2416, Fax: 626 4658
info@goldenwalls.com, www.goldenwalls.com

Holy Land Hotel (105 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 627 2888, Fax: 628 0265
info@holylandhotel.com, www.holylandhotel.com

Jerusalem Hotel (14 rooms; bf; mr; res; live music)
Tel: 628 3282, Fax: 628 3282
raed@jrshotel.com, www.jrshotel.com

Jerusalem Claridge Hotel (30 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 656 4393, Fax: 656 4394
claridge@palnet.com, www.jerusalemclaridge.com

Jerusalem Meridian Hotel
(74 rooms, bf; mr; res)
Tel: 628 5212, Fax: 628 5214
www.jerusalem-meridian.com

Jerusalem Panorama Hotel
(74 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 628 4887, Fax: 627 3699
panorama@alqudsnet.com
www.jerusalempanoramahotel.com

Hashimi Hotel
Tel: 628 4410, Fax: 628 4667, info@hashimihotel.com

Knights Palace Guesthouse (50 rooms)
Tel: 626 2537, Fax: 626 2401, kp@actcom.co.il

Legacy Hotel
Tel: 627 0800, Fax: 627 7739
reserv@jerusalemlegacy.com
www.jerusalemlegacy.com

Metropol Hotel
Tel: 628 2507, Fax: 628 5134

Mount of Olives Hotel (61 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 628 4877, Fax: 626 4427
info@mtolives.com
www.mtolives.com

Mount Scopus Hotel (65 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 582 8891, Fax: 582 8825, mtscopus@netvision.net.il
Casanova Palace Hotel (25 rooms; bf; res)
Tel: 274 2798, Fax: 274 1562
Elbet guest house (beit sahour) (15 rooms)
TeleFax: 277 5857, www.elbet.org, info@elbeit.org
Everest Hotel (19 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 2604, Fax: 274 1278
Grand Hotel (107 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 1602 - 274 1440, Fax: 274 1604
grandhotel_beth@hotmail.com
Golden Park Resort & Hotel (Beit Sahour)
(54 rooms; res, bar, pool)
Tel: 277 4414
House of Hope Guesthouse
Tel: 274 2325, Fax: 274 0928
House of Peace Hostel
Tel: 276 4739
http://www.houseofpeace.hostel.com/
Inter-Continental Hotel
(Jacir Palace)
(250 rooms; su; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6770
Lutheran Guesthouse “Abu Gubran”
Tel: 277 0047
Murad Tourist Resort
Tel: 275 9880, Fax: 275 9881, www.murad.ps
Nativity BELLs Hotel (65 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 6880, Fax: 274 8870
nativitybells@pom.net, www.nativitybellshotel.ps
Nativity Hotel (89 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 277 0650, Fax: 276 4063
nativity@nativity-hotel.com, www.nativityhotel.com
Paradise Hotel (166 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res; su; pf)
Tel: 274 4542/3 - 274 4544, paradise@p-ol.com
St. Antonio Hotel (36 rooms; cf; res; pf)
Tel: 276 6221, Fax: 276 6220
Santa Maria Hotel (83 rooms; mr; res)
Tel: 276 7374/5/6, Fax: 276 7377, smaria@p-ol.com
Shepherd Hotel
Tel: 274 0656, Fax: 274 4888
info@shepherdhotel.com, www.shepherdhotel.com
St. Nicholas Hotel (25 rooms; res; mr)
Tel: 274 3040/1/2, Fax: 274 3043
Saint Vincent Guest House (36 rooms)
Tel: 276 0967/8, Fax: 276 0970
svincent@p-ol.com, www.saintvincentguesthouse.net
Talita Kumi Guest House (22 rooms; mr; res)
Tel: 274 1247, Fax: 274 1847
Zaituna Tourist Village
Tel: 275 0655

Jericho (02)

Al-Zaytouna Guest House (7 rooms; bf; res)
Tel: 274 2015 Deir Hijleh Monastery
Tel: 994 3038, 0505 348 892
Inter-Continental Jericho
(181 rooms; su; bf; cf; mr; res; ter; tb)
Tel: 231 1200, Fax: 231 1222
Jericho Resort Village
(60 rooms; 46 studios; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 232 1225, Fax: 232 2189
reservation@jericoresorts.com, www.jericoresorts.com
Jerusalem Hotel (22 rooms)
Tel: 232 2444, Fax: 992 3109
Telepherique & Sultan Tourist Center
(55 rooms)
Tel: 232 1590, Fax: 232 1598
info@jericho-cablecar.com

Hebron (02)

Hebron Hotel
Tel: 225 4240 / 222 9385, Fax: 222 6760
hebron_hotel@hotmail.com

Nablus (09)

Al-Qaser Hotel (46 rooms; 7 regular suites, 1 royal suite; bf; cf; mr; ter)
Tel: 2341 444, Fax: 2341 944
alqaser@alqaserhotel.com, www.alqaserhotel.com

Al-Yasmeen Hotel & Souq
(30 rooms; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 233 3555 Fax: 233 3666
yasmeen@palnet.com, www.alyasmeen.com

Al-A’in Hotel
(24 rooms and suites; mr; cf)
Tel: 240 5925 - 240 4353 Fax: 240 4332
alainhotel@hotmail.com

Aladdin Hotel
Tel: 283 8100/200/300, Fax: 283 8400
ADEIRA@P-I-S.com

Al-Quds International Hotel
(44 rooms; 2 suites; bf; mr; res)
Telefax: 282 5181 - 282 6223 - 286 3481 - 282 2269

Al-Bireh Tourist Hotel
(50 rooms; cf; res)
Telefax: 240 0803

Al-Hambra Palace
(Hotel Suites and Resort)
Tel: 283 6226 - 283 0001, Fax: 283 0032
alhambrapalace-hotel.com

Al-Murouj Pension
(Jifna village) (8 rooms; res)
Telefax: 281 0881

Ramallah and Al-Bireh (02)

Al-A’inh Hotel (24 rooms and suites; mr; cf)
Tel: 240 5925 - 240 4353 Fax: 240 4332
alainhotel@hotmail.com

Aladdin Hotel
Tel: 240 7698, 240 7921, Fax: 240 7687
aladdinhotel1@gmail.com

Al-Bajel Hotel (22 rooms; bf)
Telefax: 298 7858

Al Hambra Palace
(Hotel Suites and Resort)
Tel: 283 6226 - 283 0001, Fax: 283 0032
alhambrapalace-hotel.com

Al-Murouj Pension
(Jifna village) (8 rooms; res)
Telefax: 281 0881

Al-Wihdah Hotel
Telefax: 298 0412

Ankers Suites and Hotel (30 suites)
Tel: 295 2602, Fax: 295 2603
info@ankerssuiteshotel.ps

Best Eastern Hotel (81 rooms; cf; res)
Tel: 296 0450, Fax: 295 8452, besteastern@jrol.com

Caesar Hotel (46 rooms & su, 2 mr, cr, res, cf)
Tel: 296 4228, Fax: 296 4229

City Inn Palace Hotel (47 rooms; cf; res)
Tel: 240 8080, Fax: 240 8091
cityinnpalace@gmail.com, www.cityinnpalace.com

Grand Park Hotel & Resorts
(64 rooms; 12 grand suites; cf; mr; res; sp; cf)
Tel: 296 6194, Fax: 295 6590, info@grandpark.com

Gemzo Suites
(90 executive suites; cs; mr; pf; gm; res)
Tel: 240 9729, Fax: 240 9532
gemzo@pailnet.com, www.gemzosuites.net

Manarah Hotel
Tel: 295 2122, Telefax: 285 3274
manarah@hotmail.com, www.manarahhotel.com.ps

Merryland Hotel (25 rooms)
Tel: 288 7176, Telefax: 288 7074

Rocky Hotel (22 rooms; cf; res; ter)
Tel: 296 4470, Telefax: 296 1871

Pension Miami (12 rooms)
Telefax: 295 6808

Ramallah Hotel (22 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 295 3544, Fax: 295 5029

Retno Hotel (15 rooms & su; cf; mr; gm; sp)
Telefax: 293 0022, retrohotel@yahoo.com

Royal Court Suite Hotel (34 suites; res; ter; cf; pf; i)
Tel: 296 4040, Fax: 296 4047

Star Mountain Guesthouse (10 rooms; wifi; pf)
Tel: 296 2705, Telefax: 296 2715

Gaza Strip (08)

Adam Hotel (76 rooms; cf; mr; res)
Telefax: 282 3521/9

Al-Deira (11 suites; cf; mr; res; ter)
Tel: 283 8100/200/300, Fax: 283 8400
ADEIRA@P-I-S.com

Al-Quds International Hotel
(44 rooms; 2 suites; bf; mr; res)
Telefax: 282 5181 - 282 6223 - 286 3481 - 282 2269

Al-Waha Hotel
Tel: 287 0880, Fax: 287 0889

Beach Hotel (25 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Telefax: 282 5492 - 284 8433

Cliff Hotel (24 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 282 3450, Fax: 282 0742

Commodore Gaza Hotel (120 rooms; su; bf)
Tel: 283 4400, Fax: 282 2623
hotel@commodorgaza.com

Gaza International Hotel
(30 rooms; bf; cf; res; sp)
Tel: 283 0010/12/34/ Fax: 283 0005

Grand Palace Hotel
(20 rooms; cr; mr; cf; res; internet)
Tel: 284 9498/6468, Fax: 284 9497
gand_palace@p-i-s.com

Hotel Sea Breeze
Tel: 283 0277 - 284 2654, Fax: 282 4231

Mona House (17 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 282 2624, Fax: 282 3322

Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah (171 rooms and Su; bf; mr; cr; res; ter; cf; gm; pf; sp)
Tel: 298 5888, Fax: 298 533
hotel.ramallah@moevenpick.com
hotel.ramallah.reservation@moevenpick.com
www.moevenpick-ramallah.com

Palestine Hotel (54 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 282 3355, Fax: 286 0056

Jenin (04)

Cinema Jenin Guesthouse (7 rooms; 2 su)
Tel: 250 2455
guesthouse@cinemajenin.org, www.cinemajenin.org

Haddad Hotel & Resort
Tel: 241 7010/12, Fax: 241 7013
haddadbooking@gmail.com
www.haddadtourismvillage.com

Key: su = suites, bf = business facilities; mr = meeting rooms, cr = conference facilities; res = restaurant, ter = terrace bar, tb = turkish bath, cf = coffee shop; gm = gym; pf = parking facilities, sp = swimming pool
East Jerusalem (02)

Al-Diwan (Ambassador Hotel)
Middle Eastern, French, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 541 2213, Fax: 582 8202

Al-Shuleh Grill
Shawarma and Barbecues
Tel: 627 3768

Amigo Emil
Middle Eastern, American, Indian, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 628 8090, Fax: 626 1457

Antonio’s (Ambassador Hotel)
Middle Eastern, French, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 541 2213

Arabesque, Poolside, and Patio Restaurants (American Colony Hotel)
Western and Middle Eastern Menu
Tel: 627 9777, Fax: 627 9779

Armenian Tavern
Armenian and Middle Eastern Food
Tel: 627 3854

Askidinya
Italian and French Cuisine
Tel: 532 4590

Az-Zahra
Oriental food and Pizza
Tel: 628 2447

Borderline Restaurant Café
Italian and Oriental Menu
Tel: 532 8342

Café Europe
Drinks and Fast Food
Tel: 629 4313

Cardo Restaurant
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 627 0827

Chinese Restaurant
Chinese Cuisine
Tel: 626 3465, Fax: 626 3471

Coffee Bean Café
Sandwiches and Sushi
Tel: 627 0820

Educational Bookshop
Books and Coffee
Books and Coffee
Tel: 627 5858

El Dorada Coffee Shop and Internet Café
Chocolates, Coffee, and Internet
Tel: 626 0993

Flavours Grill
Continental Cuisine with Mediterranean Flavour
Tel: 627 4626

Four Seasons Restaurants and Coffee Shop
Barbecues and Shawarma
Tel: 628 6061, Fax: 628 6097

Goodies
Fast Food
Tel: 585 3223

Kan Zaman (Jerusalem Hotel)
Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 627 1356

Lotus and Olive Garden
(Jerusalem Meridian Hotel)
Middle Eastern and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 628 5212

Nafoura
Middle Eastern Menu
Tel: 628 0034

Nakashian Gallery Café
Tel: 627 8077

La Rotisserie (Notre Dame Hotel)
Gourmet Restaurant, European and Mediterranean Menu
Tel: 627 9114, Fax: 627 1995

Dina Café
Coffee and Pastry
Tel: 626 3344

Papa Andreas
Barbecues
Tel: 628 4433, Fax: 627 5224

Pasha’s
Oriental Food
Tel: 582 5162, 532 8342

Patisserie Suisse
Fast Food and Breakfast
Tel: 628 4377

Petra Restaurant
Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 627 7799

Pizza House
Pizza and Oriental Pastry
Tel: 627 3970, 628 8135

RIO Grill and Subs
Italian and French Cuisine
Tel: 583 5480

Rossini’s Restaurant Bar
French and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 628 2964

Shababek Restaurant
Mediterranean Menu
Tel: 532 2626, Fax: 532 2636

Shalizar Restaurant
Middle Eastern, Mexican, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 582 9061

The Gate Café
Fresh Juices, Coffee, and Tea
Tel: 627 4282

The Patio (Christmas Hotel)
Oriental and European Menu
Tel: 628 2598, 628 4418

Versavee Bistro (Bar and Café)
Oriental and Western Food
Tel: 627 6160

Bethlehem (02)

Abu El Restaurant
Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 274 1897

Abu Shanab Restaurant
Barbecues
Tel: 274 2985

Afteem Restaurant
Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 274 7940

Al-Areeshah Palace
(Majid Palace – InterContinental Bethlehem)
Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6154

Al-Hakura Restaurant
Middle Eastern and Fast Food
Tel: 277 3335

Al-Khaymeh
(Majid Palace – InterContinental Bethlehem)
Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6154

Akkawi Café
Western Menu
Tel: 274 8447

Al Makan Bar
(Majid Palace – InterContinental Bethlehem)
Snack Bar
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6770

Balloons
Coffee Shop and Pizza
Tel: 275 0221, Fax: 277 7115

Beit Sahour Citadel
Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 277 7771

Bonjour Restaurant and Café
Coffee Shop and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 0406

Chinese Restaurant
Chinese Cuisine
Tel: 627 5858

Coffee Bean Café
Sandwiches and Sushi
Tel: 627 0820

Educational Bookshop
Books and Coffee
Books and Coffee
Tel: 627 5858

El Dorada Coffee Shop and Internet Café
Chocolates, Coffee, and Internet
Tel: 626 0993

Flavours Grill
Continental Cuisine with Mediterranean Flavour
Tel: 627 4626

Four Seasons Restaurants and Coffee Shop
Barbecues and Shawarma
Tel: 628 6061, Fax: 628 6097

Goodies
Fast Food
Tel: 585 3223

Kan Zaman (Jerusalem Hotel)
Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 627 1356

Lotus and Olive Garden
(Jerusalem Meridian Hotel)
Middle Eastern and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 628 5212

Nafoura
Middle Eastern Menu
Tel: 628 0034

Nakashian Gallery Café
Tel: 627 8077

La Rotisserie (Notre Dame Hotel)
Gourmet Restaurant, European and Mediterranean Menu
Tel: 627 9114, Fax: 627 1995

Dina Café
Coffee and Pastry
Tel: 626 3344

Papa Andreas
Barbecues
Tel: 628 4433, Fax: 627 5224

Pasha’s
Oriental Food
Tel: 582 5162, 532 8342

Patisserie Suisse
Fast Food and Breakfast
Tel: 628 4377

Petra Restaurant
Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 627 7799

Pizza House
Pizza and Oriental Pastry
Tel: 627 3970, 628 8135

RIO Grill and Subs
Italian and French Cuisine
Tel: 583 5480

Rossini’s Restaurant Bar
French and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 628 2964

Shababek Restaurant
Mediterranean Menu
Tel: 532 2626, Fax: 532 2636

Shalizar Restaurant
Middle Eastern, Mexican, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 582 9061

The Gate Café
Fresh Juices, Coffee, and Tea
Tel: 627 4282

The Patio (Christmas Hotel)
Oriental and European Menu
Tel: 628 2598, 628 4418

Versavee Bistro (Bar and Café)
Oriental and Western Food
Tel: 627 6160

Abu El Restaurant
Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 274 1897

Abu Shanab Restaurant
Barbecues
Tel: 274 2985

Afteem Restaurant
Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 274 7940

Al-Areeshah Palace
(Majid Palace – InterContinental Bethlehem)
Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6154

Al-Hakura Restaurant
Middle Eastern and Fast Food
Tel: 277 3335

Al-Khaymeh
(Majid Palace – InterContinental Bethlehem)
Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6154

Akkawi Café
Western Menu
Tel: 274 8447

Al Makan Bar
(Majid Palace – InterContinental Bethlehem)
Snack Bar
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6770

Balloons
Coffee Shop and Pizza
Tel: 275 0221, Fax: 277 7115

Beit Sahour Citadel
Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 277 7771

Bonjour Restaurant and Café
Coffee Shop and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 0406

Dar al-Balad
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 9073

Grotto Restaurant
Barbecues and Taboon
Tel: 274 8844, Fax: 274 8889

Golden Roof
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 3224

Il’iliyeh Restaurant
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 277 0047

La Terrasse
Middle Eastern and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 275 3678

Layal Lounge
Snack Bar
Tel: 275 0655

Mariachi
Seafood and Mexican Cuisine
Tel: 274 1440, 274 1602/3
Fax: 274 1604
**Jericho (02)**

**Al-Nafoura Restaurant (Jericho Resort Village)**
Arabic Cuisine and Barbecues
Tel: 232 1255, Fax: 232 2189

**Al-Rawda**
Barbecues
Tel: 232 2555

**Green Valley Park**
Oriental Cuisine and Barbecues
Tel: 232 2349

**Jabal Quruntul**
Continental Cuisine (Open Buffet)
Tel: 232 2614, Fax: 232 2659

**Seven Trees**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 232 2781

**Nablus (09)**

**Salim Afandi**
Barbecues and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 237 1332

**Zeit Ou Zaater (Al-Yasmeen Hotel)**
Continental Cuisine and Pastries
Tel: 238 3164, Fax: 233 3666

**Ramallah and Al-Bireh (02)**

**Al Falaha**
Miskhan and Taboun
Tel: 290 5124

**Allegro Italian Restaurant**
Movenpick Hotel Ramallah
Italian fine cuisine
Tel: 298 5888

**Al-Riwaq All-day-dining restaurant**
Movenpick Hotel Ramallah
International, Swiss and Oriental cuisine
Tel: 298 5888

**Awjan**
Seafood, Breakfast, and Pizza, Coffee Shop, Lebanese and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 1776

**Andre’s Restaurant**
French and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 296 6778

**Angelo’s**
Western Menu and Pizza
Tel: 295 6408, 298 1455

**Azure Restaurant and Coffee Shop**
Continental Cuisine
Fax: 295 7850

**Baladna Ice Cream**
Ice Cream and Soft Drinks
Telefax: 295 6721

**Birth Café**
Barbecues and Fast Food
Tel: 297 6614

**Caesar’s (Grand Park Hotel)**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 298 6080

**Café De La Paix**
French Cuisine
Tel: 298 6081

**Chinese House Restaurant**
Chinese Cuisine
Tel: 296 4081

**Crissy**
Fried Chicken and Hamburgers
Tel: 295 6661

**Darna**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 0590/1

**Diwan Art Coffee Shop**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 296 6483

**Do Re Mi Café (Royal Court)**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 296 4040

**Elite Coffee House**
Italian and Arabic Cuisine
Tel: 296 4041

**European Coffee Shop**
Coffee and Sweets
Tel: 295 7031, 296 6505

**Express Pizza**
American Pizza
Tel: 296 6586

**Fawanees**
Pastries and Fast Food
Tel: 298 7046

**Zaki Taki**
Sandwiches
Tel: 296 3643

**K5M - Caterers**
Cake and Sweets
Tel: 295 6813

**Khuzama**
Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 295 0806

**La Vista Café and Restaurant**
Oriental and Western Cuisine
Tel: 296 3271

**Cann Espresso**
Arabic and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 2125

**Mac Simon**
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 297 2088

**Mr. Donuts Café**
Donuts and Coffee Shop
Tel: 240 7196

**Mr. Fish**
Seafood
Tel: 295 9555

**Mr. Pizza**
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 290 3016, 290 8182

**Muntaza Restaurant and Garden**
Barbecues and Sandwiches
Tel: 296 6835

**Na3Na3 Café**
Italian and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 296 4006

**Newz Bar**
Lounge and “Le Gourmet” pastries’ corner
Movenpick Hotel Ramallah
Tel: 298 5888

**Osama’s Pizza**
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 295 3270

**Orjuwan Lounge**
Palestinian-Italian Fusion
Tel: 297 6870

**Pesto Café and Restaurant**
Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 0705, 297 0706

**Pizza Inn**
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 298 1181/2/3

**Philadelphia Restaurant**
Middle Eastern Menu
Tel: 295 6767, 296 4480

**Pizza and Fast Food**
Tel: 290 3016, 290 8182

**Shawerma and Barbecues**
Tel: 288 3100

**Tel El-Qamar Roof**
Middle Eastern and Western Menu
Tel: 298 7605/6

**The Vine Restaurant**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 7727

**Samer**
Middle Eastern Food
Tel: 240 5338 - 240 3088

**Sangria’s**
French, Italian, and Mexican Cuisine
Tel: 295 6808

**Shukeirah Restaurant**
Middle Eastern and Western Cuisine
Tel: 297 5233

**Sinatra Café and Cheese Cake**
Italian and American Cuisine
Tel: 297 1028

**Sky Bar (Ankars Suites and Hotel)**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 2602

**Sparkles Bar**
Cigar bar
Movenpick Hotel Ramallah
Tel: 298 5888

**Stones**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 296 6038

**Tabash (Jifna Village)**
Barbecues
Tel: 291 0932

**Tal El-Qamar Roof**
Middle Eastern and Western Menu
Tel: 298 7605

**The Vine Restaurant**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 7727

**THE Q GARDEN**
Rooftop garden - International Cuisine
Tel: 295 7727

**Tomasso’s**
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 240 9991/2

**Tropicana**
Mexican Cuisine, Oriental Menu, and Zarb
Tel: 297 5661

**UpTown (Ankars Suites and Hotel)**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 2602

**Vatche’s Garden Restaurant**
European Style
Tel: 296 5996, 296 5988

**Zam’n Premium Coffee**
Coffee Shop Style
Tel: 295 0800

**Zam’n Premium Coffee**
Masyoun
Coffee Shop Style
Tel: 298 1033

**Zarour Bar BQ**
Barbecues and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 295 6767, 296 4480

**Zeit ou Zaater**
Pastries and Snacks
Tel: 295 4455

**Ziryab**
Barbecues, Italian, and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 295 9093

**Al-Andalus**
Middle Eastern and Western Cuisine
Tel: 295 1272, 283 3769

**Al-Deira**
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 283 8100/200300

**Al-Marsa**
Seafood and Desserts
Tel: 288 3599

**Al-Molouke**
Shawerma and Barbecues
Tel: 286 8397

**Al-Salamin**
Seafood
Tel: 285 4214, Telefax: 283 3188

**Al-Sammak**
Seafood
Tel: 286 4385

**Al-Sammak Ghornata**
Seafood
Tel: 284 1017

**Avenue Restaurant and Café Shop**
Middle Eastern and Western Menu
Tel: 295 2100 / 288 3100

**La Mirage**
Continental Cuisine and Seafood
Tel: 286 5128

**Roots - The Club**
Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 288 8996, 282 3999, 292 3777

**Saleh Atya Al Shawa Restaurant - Al-Jala**
Barbecues
Tel: 282 5062
Population and Demography
Projected Population (18/12/2010)

Palestinian Territory .................................................. 4,098,592
West Bank (All governates) ........................................... 2,541,151
Gaza Strip ........................................................................ 1,557,444

Jerusalem Governorate ................................................... 385,065

Sex Ratio ........................................................................ 103.1
Population by Sex (12/2/2009)
Male ............................................................................ 1,973,503
Female ......................................................................... 1,916,023

Fertility rate (2007) ......................................................... 4.6%
Average Household Size (1/12/2007)
Palestinian Territory ...................................................... 5.8%
West Bank ..................................................................... 5.5%
Gaza Strip ...................................................................... 6.5%

Land Use and Agriculture
Palestinian Territory (PT) Area (Km²) .......................... 6,020
Area of PT by Type of Use (different reference periods)
• Agricultural Land (2008) ........................................... 25.1%
• Forest and Wooded Land (2007) ............................. 1.6%
• Palestinian Built-up Land (2006) ......................... 6.6%

Area of built-up land in Israeli Settlements of the total area of West Bank (2006) ........................................ 3.3%

Cultivated Area (Km²) - 2007/2008 .............................. 1,854.0

Education (2007/2008)
Illiteracy rate for persons 15 years and over (2009) ...... 5.4%
Illiteracy rate for persons 15-29 years (2009) .............. 0.8%
No. of schools (2010/2011) ........................................... 2,647
No. of school teachers (2010/2011) ......................... 51,010
No. of students (2010/2011) ....................................... 1,128,348
Students per class (2008/2009) ............................... 32.3%
Drop-out rate (schools 2006/2007) ............................. 1.2%
Repetition rate (schools 2006/2007) ......................... 3.0%

ICT (2008)
Number of fix phone subscribers ................................ 360,401
Number of mobile phone subscribers (thousand) ........... 1,500
Number of ADSL internet subscribers ......................... 92,482

Health (2008)
No. of hospitals (2009) .................................................. 74
Doctors per 1000 population (2008) ......................... 1.9
Nurses per 1000 population (2007) ............................ 2.7
Beds per 1000 population (2009) ............................... 1.2

Culture (2006)
No. of mosques (in operation) ..................................... 2,228
No. of churches .......................................................... 160
No. of newspapers (in operation) ............................. 32.0%
No. of theaters (in operation) ...................................... 13
No. of museums (in operation) .................................... 9
No. of cultural centers (in operation) ......................... 8

Information & Communication Technology (2006)
Availability of TV sets ............................................... 95.3%
Availability of satellite dish for households with TV sets ... 80.4%
Availability of computers at home .............................. 32.9%
Availability of Internet at home .................................. 19.9%
Persons (10 years and over) who have access to the Internet .................................................. 18.4%

Persons (10 years and over) who use computers .................. 50.9%
Percentage of households that have a mobile phone .......... 81.0%
Percentage of households that have a telephone .......... 50.8%
Percentage of households that view Palestine TV ......... 29.9%

Living Standards and Humanitarian Aid (2006)
Percentage of Households below poverty line .................. 57.3%
Number of individuals below poverty line .................... 2,203,940
Percentage of households that lost more than half of their income during Al-Aqsa Intifada .......... 51.6%
Percentage of households that indicated their need for assistance (2005) ......................... 67.0%
Average monthly per capita expenditure in the Palestinian Territory (2007) ................... 95.4

Labour Force (3rd quarter of 2010)
Labour force participation rate .................................. 66.4%
Unemployment rate in Palestinian Territory (PT) .............. 25.4%
Unemployment rate in West Bank ................................... 18.9%
Unemployment rate in Gaza Strip ................................. 38.3%
Average net daily wage for employees working in PT (US$) ................ 20.7%

Percentage of working children (10-17 years), (4th quarter of 2009) ........ 5.0 %.

Percentage of graduates of higher education and vocational training of persons aged 15 years and over (End 2005) ..................... 14.5%
Percentage of graduates of high education and vocational training who participated in labour force (End 2005) ..................... 83.4%
Unemployment rate of graduates of high education and vocational training (End 2005) .................... 25.4%

Economics
GDP (2009-million US$) at constant prices (RWB and GS)** .......................... 5,147.2
GDP Per Capita (2009- US$) at constant prices (RWB and GS)** ..................... 1,389.9
CPI and percent change in Palestinian Territory in May 2010 compare with April 2010 (base year 2004=100) 127.60 .................. 0.10%

Number of Establishments in Operation in Private Sector and Non Governmental Organization Sector by Economic Activity (2009)**
• Agriculture (farming of cattle and other animals) .......... 6,976
• Mining and Quarrying ............................................. 286
• Manufacturing .......................................................... 14,988
• Electricity and Water supply .................................... 452
• Construction .............................................................. 521
• Wholesale and Retail and Repairs ......................... 59,117
• Transportation, storage and communication ........... 1,116
• Hotels and Restaurants ........................................... 4,635
• Financial Intermediation .......................................... 846
• Real Estate, Rental and Business Activities .............. 4,203
• Education ................................................................. 2,357
• Health and Social work ......................................... 4,229
• Other Community, Social and Personal Services ....... 8,996

Imports of Goods (2008 million US$) ......................... 3,466.2
Exports of Goods (2008 million US$) .......................... 558.4

Hotels (3rd Quarter, 2010)
Room occupancy rate .................................................. 35.2%
Bed occupancy rate .................................................... 32.1%
Environment
Available quantities of water (2007 - mcm) ................. 308.7

Connected households to wastewater network (2009) .................. 52.1%

Housing Conditions (2009)
Average number of rooms in housing units ..................... 3.6
Average number of persons per room (housing density)** ........ 1.6

(RWB and GS)=Remaining West Bank and Gaza Strip

* Primary Results
** Revised Figures
Prepared by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
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As Palestine continues its struggle for independence, it has already begun to acquire sovereign cyberspace recognition. A difficult three-year international debate resulted in the 'Occupied Palestinian Territory' being officially assigned the two-letter suffix, "ps," in the ISO 3166-1 list for the representation of names of countries or territories. The successful struggle to attain country code 970 led the way for the Internet Corporation for Associated Names and Numbers (ICANN), the international corporation that manages the country code Top-Level Domain (ccTLD) system on the Internet, on 22 March 2000, to assign Palestine its unique country identifier, ".ps," in line with other sovereign nations such as .fr for France and .ca for Canada.

**Arts and Culture:** Ashtar Theater [www.ashtar-theatre.org], Al Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque [www.akasaba.org], Al-Ma mal Foundation for Contemporary Art [www.almamalfoundation.org], Al Mathaf [www.mathaf.ps], ArtSchool Palestine [www.artschoolpalestine.com], Baha Boukhari [www.baha-cortoon.net], Educational Bookshop [www.educationalbookshop.com], Family Net [www.palestine-family.net], Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center (Ramallah) [www.sakakini.org], Patel Virtual Gallery (Birzeit University) [www.virtualgallery.birzeit.edu], Rim Banna [www.rimbanna.com], RIWAQ: Centre for Architectural Conservation [www.riwaq.org], Sunbula (fair trade/crafts) [www.sunbula.org], The International Center of Bethlehem (Dar Annadwa) [www.annadwa.org], The Popular Arts Centre [www.popularartcentre.org], Shammout.com [www.shammout.com], Sumud [www.sumud.net], Palestinian Pottery [www.palestinianpottery.com], A.M. Qattan Foundation [www.qattanfoundation.org], The Musical Intifada [www.docjazz.com], El-funoun [www.el-funoun.org], Sabreen Association for Artistic Development [www.sabreen.org], The Virtual Gallery [www.virtualgallery.birzeit.edu], Al Rowad Theatre Centre [www.alrowad.virtualactivism.net]


**Health and Mental Health:** Augusta Victoria Hospital [www.avh.org], Gaza Community Mental Health Programme [www.gcmhp.net], Ministry of Health [www.moh.gov.ps], Palestinian Counseling Center [www.pcc-jer.org], Red Crescent Society [www.palestineresc.org], Spafford Children’s Clinic [www.spafford-jerusalem.org], UNFPA [www.unfpa.org], Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees [www.upmrc.org], Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation [www.basr.org], Palestine Medical Council [www.pmc.ps]

**Human Rights Organisations:** Al Haq [www.alhaq.org], Defence for Children International Palestine Section [www.dci-pal.org], Human Rights and Good Governance Secretariat in the oPt [www.humanrights.ps], LAW - The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment [www.lawsociety.org], The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights [www.pchr-gaza.org], BADIL [www.badil.org], Women’s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) [www.pali-watc.org], www.pcc-jer.org


**Tourism:** Ministry of Tourism [www.travelpalestine.ps], Arab Hotel Association [www.palestinehotels.com], Holy land Incoming Tour Operators Association [www.holylandoperators.com], DiyaFA Hospitality Management Consultants Group [www.diyaFaps.com], visitpalestine.com [www.visitpalestine.ps]


**Universities:** Birzeit University [www.birzeit.edu], An-Najah University [www.najah.edu], Al-Quds University [www.alquds.edu], Al-Azhar University [www.alazhar-palestine.com], Arabic American University [www.bethlehem.edu], Bethlehem University [www.bethlehem.edu], Hebron University [www.hebron.edu], The Islamic University [www.lich.edu], Palestine Polytechnic [www.pp.edu]

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The Last Word

Palestinian society has always been tolerant, but because Palestinian Christians are, in fact, an integral part of the Palestinian social fabric and, like everyone else, have suffered under the yoke of occupation and injustice. The way we celebrate here should be considered a model for a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic society. While respecting their personal beliefs, I do not believe in segregating Palestinian Christians or rather in Palestinian Christians segregating themselves. Their destiny is to be part of this land, and segregation negates this destiny.

It is no secret that Christian emigration from Palestine is a fact and, indeed, a problem which is mainly caused, as studies have shown, by the Israeli occupation and harsh living conditions. The problem should be addressed seriously through a concerted effort by political and religious leaders from both within and without Palestine. I believe that people in positions of local authority, with their current resources, not only mean well but are actually doing their best to stop this emigration. Enforcing the rule-of-law is, no doubt, a step in the right direction. A public show of support, similar to the visits of Prime Minister Fayyad to predominantly Christian villages and towns, is also commendable. While local religious leaders are doing what they can to curb this negative emigration, local NGOs, such as the Holy Land Ecumenical Foundation in Bethlehem, are doing a lot of good work to improve people’s living conditions (e.g., renovating homes) and thus encouraging Palestinian Christians to remain in Palestine. Contrary to common belief, international support for Palestinian Christians is not up to the magnitude of the problem; paradoxically, however, this may be for the better since I believe that local Palestinians should shoulder the problem of Palestinian Christians emigrating from Palestine. Having said that, though, ending the Israeli occupation would go a long way towards solving the problem and transforming it into one that is similar to that faced by all developing countries.

In a nutshell, Palestinian Christians have it relatively good; although, like all Palestinians, they are stifled by Israeli occupation. For years now, Christians from Ramallah have not been able to attend the funerals of relatives who have died in Jerusalem, unless they have been fortunate enough to possess a very difficult-to-get Israeli permit; neither can Christians from Gaza even hope to gain access to Jerusalem, except in rare circumstances, in order to pray in the Holy Sepulchre.

Palestinian Christians are beyond proving themselves and are, in fact, proud, indigenous Christian Arabs who have been living here since Christianity began. Palestine, after all, is the privileged birthplace of Christianity.

No matter when you celebrate Christmas, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Sani P. Meo
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