This Week In Palestine

www.thisweekinpalestine.com

Issue 261
January 2020

Palestinian Start-ups
Information technology, IT, is not one of Palestine’s identities. The holy sites, on the other hand, are certainly counted among its identities, and Palestine as the symbol of a human liberation movement can also be considered an identity. Even though IT is not a genuine identity, you will be surprised to know how much this little country is involved in information technology. We’re no Singapore, and we don’t have 5G technology (not even 4G for that matter), but the spirit of entrepreneurship among our youth is simply amazing and makes us Palestinians proud.

Our team at This Week in Palestine has never claimed to have expertise in any topic we publish about, and so, similar to our readers, we learn from just about every issue we put out. In this issue, you will learn the meaning of hub and discover which of them are most prominent in Palestine. You will come across other new terms and learn more about accelerators, incubators, a start-up economy, venture capital, and more. We certainly have not exhausted the theme of this issue – Palestinian Start-ups – but we hope to have managed to shed some light on a sector unfamiliar not only to non-Palestinians but to most of Palestinian society as well. Palestinian digital entrepreneurship is a sector with huge growth potential which, in turn, will benefit the economy. We thank all individuals and institutions that have contributed valuable articles that, collectively, introduce us to the start-up scene in Palestine.

In this month’s limelight section, you will read about an amazing young entrepreneur, Laila Akel, whom we chose as our Personality of the Month. You will get a glimpse into our tri-lingual poetry Book of the Month, In the Time of the Apricots by Carol Sansour. We highly recommend that you visit Vera Tamari’s solo exhibition Warriors Passed by Here exhibited at Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah. Finally, we invite you to visit Hosh al-Syrian in Bethlehem, and if you’re lucky, you will meet Chef Fadi Kattan and dine at his Fawda Restaurant.

We hope that you will enjoy this issue of TWiP as you learn more about Palestine.

The TWiP Collective
PALESTINE

THE ULTIMATE START-UP: THE STATE OF PALESTINE

START-UP CITY... RAWABI!

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR THE LOCAL CONTEXT

MARYAMA CARPENTRY SHOP

PALESTINIAN START-ups

BEYOND ADVANCING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

EAST JERUSALEM'S INNOVATIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

FIKRA

SHOWCASING BETHLEHEM

REALITIES OF THE START-UP ECONOMY IN PALESTINE

SUPPORTING EAST JERUSALEM ENTREPRENEURS

EXPORTING HOPE

62 Personality of the Month
64 Book the Month
66 Exhibition of the Month
68 Where to Go
70 Events
72 Cultural Centers
74 Accommodations
77 Restaurants
80 Attractions
82 Travel Agencies
82 Tour Operators
83 Maps
98 The Last Word
THE ULTIMATE START-UP: THE STATE OF PALESTINE

Not a day goes by without one of us being asked if Palestine has a real economy, given that Palestinians have been living for five decades under an increasingly well-entrenched Israeli military occupation. The question usually comes from people passing through on a short visit: some are Palestinians who live in the diaspora, others are foreigners who come either singly or in groups; and some visitors arrive under a variety of auspices to study our reality in order to advance peace, but we assume that most come to advance their education and careers. More troubling than to hear this question from outsiders is how often we hear it from our recent graduates. To all, our answer is yes – unequivocally.

If you happen to be one of those who question whether an economy, despite aspects that are truly painful, nonetheless survives under Israeli military occupation, we ask for your indulgence. Palestinians are not superheroes who can sustain their prolonged struggle for freedom and independence without putting bread on the table or paying their children’s tuition, let alone loving, marrying, establishing families, buying homes, purchasing cars, eating out, and so forth.

Palestine’s economy is in the iron-fist grip of the State of Israel. Over 40,000 Palestinians are graduating and entering the labor market every year. Only around 10,000 of them are being absorbed into the market, in both the public and private sectors. Palestine’s economic survival, and maybe political survival as well, depends on finding livelihoods for many more Palestinians, and at an unprecedented rate. This is our collective challenge.

We who are writing this article are blessed to have positive people in our respective surroundings. At home and at work, along with our respective circles of loved ones, colleagues, and friends, we refuse to dwell on the negative. Instead, we analyze our bitter reality, look around at our own children and siblings, and always come to the same conclusion: We simply must find ways to create meaningful livelihoods for us and for them, because otherwise we would be reinforcing the long-standing Israeli fantasy that all Palestinians will, eventually, voluntarily emigrate from Palestine – family by family, new graduate by new graduate. Or, worse yet, we would be fueling extremist elements in our society by giving them ready-made fodder to recruit from – a generation of youth in despair.

Our future and our families are at stake, so we engage with our damaged economy as a means of survival, while entertaining no illusions that we can properly develop it under Israeli occupation.

Just to make sure that we are clear about how bitter our reality is, we share with you an excerpt from the introduction of the latest report submitted by the UN Secretary-General to the UN General Assembly titled, “Economic costs of the Israeli occupation for the Palestinian people: fiscal aspects” (August 2, 2019). It speaks volumes.

Since 1967, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip have been under Israeli military occupation and the Palestinian people have endured adverse policies that have affected their economy and all aspects of life. The signing of the Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in Paris in 1994, was expected to improve the Palestinian economic situation. However, Palestinian economic development remains elusive and characterized by poor growth performance, chronic fiscal and trade deficits and high dependency on the economy of the occupying Power. Following decades of denying the Palestinian people the right to freely access their natural resources or to make optimal use of their financial resources, the issue of economic losses incurred due to the occupation has been drawing increased attention.
The report concludes with this shocking finding:

[...] the estimated fiscal costs of the occupation resulting only from the sources surveyed in the present report amounts to $47.7 billion during the period 2000–2017. That equals more than three times of what the Palestinians produced in 2017.

That’s the bad news.

And the good news?

Nearly five million Palestinians wake up every morning under military occupation with a stubborn determination to survive. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 729,971 are infants (0–4 years of age), about 142,000 are in kindergarten, over 1.2 million are primary and secondary school students being served by 55,000 teachers, over 207,000 are enrolled in universities and colleges, over 128,000 Palestinian workers work in Israel and Israeli settlements, and approximately 229,133 are 60 years old and over. About 3 million residents are of working age (15 years and above), and over 1.5 million people are either working or seeking work.

With skyrocketing unemployment rates that now exceed 30 percent in the West Bank and nearly double that in Gaza for youth, to wish or hope that Palestinians remain steadfast without livelihoods is the equivalent of praying that your car will run without gasoline or electricity.

Enter the real Palestine

Palestine’s economy did not drop fully formed from the sky with the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993 and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Historically, in addition to consumer trading, the economy has revolved around agriculture, tourism, and laborers who work in Israel. Since 1994, a new service sector has been added, mainly communications and financial services, as well as a mini army of professionals within civil society and civil servants who serve the government bureaucracy.

Sustained Israeli actions have nearly paralyzed two of our most promising sectors, agriculture and tourism. The World Bank has stated that our agriculture sector has experienced structural damage. This is not surprising, given that agriculture is about land and water, two fronts in this conflict. In addition, the World Bank notes that, in general, the "...continued existence of a system of [Israeli] closures and restrictions is creating lasting damage to economic competitiveness [sic] in the Palestinian Territories." ii

Tourism is a sensitive sector by nature, and the illegal separation Wall as well as the volatile security situation have suffocated our tourism sector, but not to the point where it has disappeared. Instead of buckling under to Israeli-invoked actions aimed at our de-development, our tourism sector has turned to the domestic tourism market and to alternative tourism products, including political, rural, and experiential tourism, to keep going.

Our laborers who work in Israel are the untold saga of the five-decade-old economic reality. These are the nameless and faceless who put their health, their family relations, and even their lives at risk to cross Israeli checkpoints in the early morning hours, day after day, returning home long after nightfall and after a back-breaking workday to find their children sound asleep. These Palestinian workers, if given the opportunity for decent livelihoods in their own communities, would be the first to benefit from fuller employment opportunities in Palestine.

Looking forward

Together with colleagues, as a group of Palestinian private-sector stakeholders, we are seeking new, creative, and sustainable ways to

Palestinian Start-ups
more significantly challenge our reality. We are exploring how to put our capital, know-how, and efforts into business opportunities that would employ a critical mass of Palestinians. Yes – we are aiming for a critical mass of jobs under military occupation. That is our challenge because this is our reality.

We fully respect and would never belittle, under any circumstances, the many small-scale projects that hire a few persons here and there. In fact, we work in that domain every day and will continue to do so. However, we see that the scale of these projects that involve a low number of employment opportunities will only keep us behind the curve, despite the fanfare they typically receive.

We have set for ourselves a goal: to come up with three to five new business opportunities – structured either for-profit or as social enterprises – to research, each of which will have the potential to hire 100 or more persons located in one or more areas in Palestine. Our hope is that those who read this article will come forward with new ideas, market connections, actual business opportunities, and the like. We stand ready to invest where needed, train where needed, and manage where qualified to do so.

So, addressing all of you who yearn to assist Palestinians in their nonviolent struggle for freedom and independence: We are placing this challenge in front of you, too. Help us conceptualize real business opportunities that will serve real markets, that will employ real Palestinians, and that will place real bread on the table. Send your ideas via www.aim.ps/contact_us.html.

Sam Bahour is the managing partner of Applied Information Management in Ramallah and chair of the board of Americans for a Vibrant Palestinian Economy. He blogs at epalestine.com. Follow Sam Bahour @SamBahour.

Nisreen Musleh is the managing director of Ritaj Managerial Solutions in Ramallah and vice chairwoman of the Palestinian Trainers’ Association. Follow Nisreen Musleh @nisreen_musleh.

Note: A version of this article was first published in 2017 at HuffPost and in Arabic in Al-Ayyam and Al-Quds newspapers.
START-UP CITY... RAWABI!

Most Palestinians know by now of Rawabi and the opportunities it provides for home ownership, employment, education, and entertainment, including concerts, shopping, dining, and outdoor fun. What people may not know is that Rawabi, from its inception, intended to build itself into the hub of Palestine’s new “knowledge economy.”

Palestine today lacks most of the traditional building blocks of economic prosperity: natural resources, border access, a strong manufacturing base, an enabling political environment. Deciding to create change rather than wait for it, Rawabi’s developers took a hard look at Palestine’s strengths – a young workforce, educated and mostly English-speaking, several universities with excellent STEM curricula, and a gradually strengthening IT sector. The answer was obvious: Rawabi would position itself to become the nucleus of Palestine’s high-tech sector and, ultimately, a hub for the entire region.

Rawabi’s world-class fiber-optic utilities network and security infrastructure are a great benefit for its new homeowners. But they serve a larger purpose as well: a foundation from which Palestinian enterprise will connect with the global technology market. Software development, fintech, cloud solutions, database management, mobile technologies, outsourcing… the information technology sector is adding new specializations every year.

To harness this growing potential, the Rawabi Foundation was created. A registered 501 (c) (3) nonprofit, its mission is to generate sustainable employment opportunities for Palestinians by attracting start-ups, local companies, and multinational corporations to base operations in Rawabi. The foundation works proactively with other thought leaders such as CLUJ IT Cluster in Romania and the DMZ at Ryerson University in Canada, forming mutually beneficial partnerships to help foster growth and build bridges to the international IT community.

The foundation helped form COnnect, a unique co-working space designed to inspire innovation, cultivate creativity, and promote productivity. Its state-of-the-art shared workspace facility offers private offices, open desks, meeting rooms, phone booths, and a full range of business equipment and technical support. COnnect hosts enterprise events for Google for Startups, SAP, SLUSH, Forbes 30 Under 30, and Microsoft, and holds lectures, competitions, hackathons, and workshops open to the public.

As an expert in small-business growth, COnnect provides mentorship, access to capital and financing, and a range of technical resources to help bring to life great ideas, such as Imagry, working in the driverless car space; AD3, specializing in architectural visualization; and CYKEEP, a cybersecurity firm.

Imagry is building the world’s first “mapless” autonomous driving platform. Its approach fundamentally transforms autonomous mobility from research to commercialization by pushing the limits of computer vision and AI. The customary way to fully operate autonomous vehicles is to use HD mapping that requires a strong connection to satellite GPS and continuous effort to update the map. Imagry’s mapless autonomous driving platform eliminates the need for this costly and time-consuming technology.

By Jack Nassar

“Building your Entrepreneurial Community,” a workshop by Amrit Dhir, Venture Socialist, head of Start-up Connections, Google for Start-ups, who discussed the best practices for start-up communities, how GPS can help your start-up, Google entrepreneurship, and success stories.
Another foundation program is Bader, a technology fund and ICT incubator, which offers value-added services in a business-enabling environment to drive innovation and promote productivity. With a significant capital endowment for seed funding, Bader is well-positioned to help promising Palestinian tech enterprises chart a path to sustainable profitability. Bader experts assist entrepreneurs with business-model development, building professional networks, and global market outreach.

The foundation is working on a training institute that offers internationally accredited programs in addition to other sponsored programs by tech giants such as Google and Microsoft to certify Palestinian engineers and programmers for careers in the global high-tech industry. Furthermore, business management and operations courses will be available to supplement technical training, such as the mini-MBA course by Dartmouth College’s Tuck School of Business (United States), offered in Rawabi, Palestine.

Professional partnerships and strong networks take time to build. Working through the foundation, Rawabi hopes to make significant contributions to the infrastructure of Palestine’s new knowledge economy.

Jack Nassar is the executive director of the Rawabi Foundation and has 11 years of multi-sectoral experience building partnerships, leading projects, and managing operations in the public and private sectors as well as in nonprofit, financial services, and academic arenas. He holds a BA in business administration from Birzeit University and an MA in political communications from Goldsmiths, University of London.

AD3 is an architectural services firm that provides architectural design, supervision, 3-D visualization and animation services. In addition, AD3 provides architectural lighting design, including projection mapping.

Cykeep is on mission to redefine cyber security by developing the next generation of anti-malware solutions, network-security solutions, and cloud-security solutions using deep learning to ensure better protection and more effective solutions than those currently available.

A lecture about the Rawabi Fellowship program for current and emerging leaders from Palestine by Reem Jafari to learn about Rawabi’s relationship with various US universities, especially Harvard Kennedy School.
CREATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Established in 2017 with the support of the European Union, the B-Hub at Birzeit University applies an integrated approach to addressing the most critical problems that face the local economy: unsustainable small businesses, damaging social and environmental practices, and high unemployment rates among Palestinian youth. The hub is an integral part of the university, designed to engage its community, which includes students, faculty, and staff, in filling two important gaps: It serves both Palestinian entrepreneurs, whether from the university or the greater Palestinian community, and owners of existing companies – of any size, operating in any industry, registered or unregistered, and located anywhere in Palestine.

Why is the B-Hub important in our Palestinian context? The Palestinian economy relies heavily on micro and small enterprises, which constitute more than 90 percent of all local enterprises. Whereas larger enterprises provide about 4,500 jobs, the small and micro businesses employ more than 127,000 Palestinians. Due to the numerous obstacles to growth in the captive Palestinian economy (impeded by the Israeli occupation), small enterprises remain the best feasible business model. Ironically, this large economic sector receives the least attention from development agencies. Working with small enterprises is extremely challenging: they don’t have qualified staff able to build capacity from off-the-shelf workshops; they don’t have export potential; and their owners do not consider nicely formatted reports as true deliverables.

As for the employment of university graduates, there is a clear mismatch between the supply and demand: private companies report that they are unable to recruit graduates with up-to-date knowledge and experience relevant to the local context and job market, while 70 percent of graduates cannot find a job! Due to the size and nature of Palestinian enterprises (predominantly micro), internships and apprenticeship opportunities are extremely rare and limited. Palestinian university students are thus deprived of such an important learning modality.

To address this mismatch, the B-Hub has developed a new and unique approach that taps into the enormous knowledge capital of university students and uses it to support micro enterprises and solve the important problems that they face. Through the B-Hub, teams of university students, with the support of faculty members, engage in finding solutions to the challenges and difficulties that confront micro enterprises. This model not only serves the companies but also provides a very practical learning venue for the students and expands the horizons for faculty members. In addition, it stimulates the entrepreneurial mindset of students and gives them ideas for starting their own businesses. The business incubator within the B-Hub drives this agenda further and empowers entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.

Birzeit University’s B-Hub designs and develops services tailored to the specifics of local micro enterprises and future employees and entrepreneurs. All solutions are provided after a thorough diagnosis of the business performance and context of the micro-market in which the enterprise is operating. Business support is practical and aims to solve very specific problems, such as arranging the inventory, optimizing production processes, developing marketing campaigns and materials, developing new formulas and designs for products, restructuring or incorporating family businesses, building bookkeeping systems, etc.

Potential entrepreneurs are provided with a comprehensive range of support that includes idea generation; business-, production-, and technological-support.

B-Hub team.
services; networking opportunities; and incubation space. Existing companies receive support until they meet target revenues.

The B-Hub strongly promotes social and green practices as fundamental elements of the companies it works with. It especially considers the Palestinian context: a business environment held captive by the occupation, social biases and norms that are not sensitive to the environment, and common unfair employment practices. We help local companies adopt social and green practices in a feasible manner, without imposing additional financial burdens.

Currently the cost of all services offered to start-ups, existing companies, and university students is covered by EU funds. B-Hub also cooperates with other development agencies in implementing their projects that focus on entrepreneurship and private-sector development, on a cost-sharing basis. We are also working on financial sustainability through offering our business and technical services to successful companies as well as offering our premises for rent to be used for training, conferences, and other business activities.

From October 2017 (when it began to offer services) to December 2019, B-Hub has provided training and mentoring services to 2,471 beneficiaries. Twenty-seven start-ups were established and are currently operational, and another 35 are ready to begin. Eighty-five local private companies and production cooperatives (mainly women-owned) have boosted their operations. The industries supported vary widely and include manufacturing companies that produce paper, plastic, detergents, food, face and body treatment, construction materials, etc.; innovative IT startups; ecotourism; the invention of resources to replace imported raw materials with local ones; organic farming; educational services; waste recycling; art salons; entertainment; and e-commerce.

TollabCo start-up represents one of the most successful B-Hub achievements. With a very simple but potent idea – provision of knowledge-based services by university students to individual and corporate clients – three Birzeit University civil engineering students, Ameen Taha, Ahmad Edkedeik, and Tareq Ziyad, were up against five other teams, whittled down from over 200,000, in the final phase of the 2019 Hult Prize Challenge, the world’s largest student social entrepreneurship competition, and represented the Middle East at the United Nations stage in New York. The three students, TollabCo founders, were the first applicants to the newly established B-Hub in 2017. They had a dream – not even a business idea – to have their own business. Since that time, B-Hub has assisted them in framing their idea, planning, determining the services, structuring the company, registering the business, developing the financial system, and preparing for the Hult Prize Challenge. To date, TollabCo has engaged 450 students in service provision and has been able to gain $60,000 in 2018–2019. We are now working together on the TollabCo expansion in the regional Arab markets in such countries as Jordan, Tunis, and the United Arab Emirates.

Ratteb Umurak, a company located in Fawar Refugee Camp near Hebron, is operated by a 25-year-old young man. The company offers cleaning and logistics services and employs 20 male youth from the camp. B-Hub provided assistance with company registration at the Palestinian Ministry of National Economy and the opening of a tax file, which allowed the company to compete for governmental tenders. In addition, support was offered to create the financial system, to structure the relations with employees, including the provision of official contracts and life and health insurance (extremely important considering the dangerous nature of their work related to cleaning the façades of high buildings), and to devise a three-year business plan.

KTI, a company located in Hebron, produces plastic products from plastic waste. B-Hub provides support to develop a chemical formula for new products to replace the Israeli products that currently dominate the local market. B-Hub also provides assistance in formulating a business plan to introduce new products.

PaperPal, a company located in Jericho, produces paper products from paper waste and palm leaves. B-Hub provides assistance in adjusting production-line capacity; calibrating the automated equipment; developing solutions for cleaning wastewater to prevent environmental harm; creating chemical solutions to de-ink the wastepaper and prepare it for recycling; and creating chemical solutions to whiten the paper produced from waste materials.
My name is Hanan Ismael. I am a young woman from Ein Arik Refugee Camp, near Ramallah. I’m the mother of two daughters. Today I can proudly say that I am a founder and one of three owners of a carpentry business.

Our start was gloomy. We were three young women from a refugee camp, struggling in life, having been abused and neglected, feeling helpless, with nobody to rescue us.

About two years ago, I graduated from a vocational training course for young women interested in carpentry. It provided me with basic technical skills, strengthened my love for woodwork, and inspired me to dream of opening my own carpentry shop. I felt brave and saw my future in brilliant rainbow colors.

When a few of my classmates and I decided to enter a business-plan competition, and, surprisingly, won the first prize of US$ 13,000, we intended to use the money to start our business. But when the potential partners learned that the prize was in fact a loan from a microfinance institution with the stipulations that we find a guarantor and spend all the money on equipment, they withdrew, and I stood alone. Believing in my dream and adamant about pursuing it, I convinced my two closest friends from the refugee camp to join my project. They knew nothing about woodwork or the carpentry business, but they trusted me and were infected by my passion.

Finding a guarantor caused much anguish, and we already feared we would not be able to claim the prize. How happy we were, however, when the father of one of my business partners agreed to be our guarantor! But then, all the loan money had to go to the supplier of a carpentry machine, and we were given not a cent in cash. We now had a carpentry machine but no place to put it; neither did we have money to rent a venue or buy raw materials.

At this point, my relatives began to understand that I would not give up and gave me a helping hand. They allowed us to use an old building that belongs to my extended family: one room, a small corridor, and a kitchenette.

In August 2018, we finally celebrated the launch of our own business. We were flying! Overjoyed, we naively believed that we had surmounted all obstacles. Yet, even though my vocational training had been great, we had not been given the opportunity to practice all the necessary skills. So, I was not much better than my friends and partners in carpentering. Even buying raw materials was a problem. Men simply laughed at us when we introduced ourselves as carpenters. Nobody took us seriously, and all the men – wood suppliers included – gave us the same advice: quit and forget about this purely male occupation. And of course, we could not even dare to ask for a credit line, commonly given to small producers by local suppliers. When we finally found one small shop willing to work with us, all payments had to be in cash!

But we persevered and eventually began production. Each piece took plenty of time, and we made many mistakes – literally in every piece and with every operation. But nevertheless, we were happy. We were producing! We hit a snag after my friend’s father, our guarantor, the only person who had believed in our business, died from cancer. We stopped work for two months to stand by our friend in her grief. When we came back to our small carpentry project, we hardly had the courage and energy to continue. But our large loan had to be repaid, no matter our circumstances.

In February 2019, I saw an ad about B-Hub and the Obader project, implemented by B-Hub. We applied...
and were selected. Honestly, we applied in the hope of receiving a grant to cover part of our debt, as we were hardly able to repay it. We didn’t understand how else B-Hub could help us.

Now, I am able to say that working with the B-Hub team has turned around our business and our lives. In a first meeting, B-Hub’s team analyzed our situation and business and suggested ways to remedy the problems that they diagnosed. We put in days and months of hard work to reanimate our carpentry shop. A technical expert in wood processing introduced us to professional secrets in dealing with wood materials and connected us with suppliers of high-quality wood. Thank you, Abu Dawood, if you can read these words!

We conducted market research and visited tens of stores and other carpentry shops. Together with the B-Hub team, we found a niche in the market, giving us a big advantage: children’s furniture. We decided to specialize in this line of furniture and to comply with the most demanding EU quality standards. B-Hub engaged university students in chemistry to analyze finishing and painting materials and recommend the ones that are suitable for children. Students from the engineering faculty helped us design attractive-looking pieces that are multi-functional, durable, and affordable for young families with moderate incomes. Together with a financial expert, we developed a simple financial system to monitor our costs and profits and learned how to use accounting in business management.

B-Hub also covered the cost of building a prototype for children’s furniture. It is nearly ready, and very soon, we will be able to offer our clients a multifunctional set suitable for sleeping, playing, storage, and even the study needs of children from age 0 to 15 years – absolutely safe furniture that does not expose them to dangerous chemicals.

Since we started working with B-Hub, our monthly profit has increased by 900 percent (from NIS 200 to about NIS 2,500 monthly), and we expect a drastic boom next year, as we will expand beyond the Ramallah area.

We chose the name “Maryama” in honor of a character, an Arab woman, in Granada, a novel by Radwa Ashour. Maryama was authentic and had a strong character, creating beauty around her. We, Hanan, Aziza, and Baraah, aspire to be like Maryama.

---

1 Obader is a project implemented by several local partners, led by Care International and funded by the Canadian government.
2 The cost was covered by an EU-funded project via B-Hub.
Development efforts in the State of Palestine have resulted in major improvements over the years, especially in the delivery of social services, infrastructure, awareness about rights and entitlements, and questioning deep-seated beliefs and practices. The United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Palestinian National Policy Agenda, however, are ambitious. The twenty-first-century challenges that face everyone in the State of Palestine are more complex and dynamic. Effectively addressing these challenges requires new approaches, holistic solutions, and collective efforts of the government, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and citizens.

To reimagine development for the twenty-first century and accelerate progress against the SDGs, the United Nation’s Development Programme (UNDP) launched sixty Accelerator Labs embedded in UNDP country offices around the world as a new way of working. The Accelerator Labs offer safe spaces for learning through experimenting and capitalizing on what works. The goal is to collaborate with national partners to address today’s new challenges, not by struggling to find the one-and-only solution but to synthesize multiple combined innovations. The Accelerator Labs serve as bridges to the private sector, bringing in companies that have a developmental impact beyond their core business. The labs also strive to improve the connectedness of civil society organizations with Palestinian grassroots initiatives. The Accelerator Labs have the potential to be catalysts for the next generation of development solutions. While change requires time, the Accelerator Lab in the State of Palestine strives to experiment with short-term initiatives and identify existing locally sourced solutions to try to accelerate learning and inform actors who are eager to invest.

In its recent mapping to understand the innovation space and ecosystem, the Palestinian Accelerator Lab came across serious efforts that aim to boost Palestinian entrepreneurship towards generating employment.
opportunities and contributing to the Palestinian economy. In fact, some of these efforts have successfully supported start-ups that were able to export their products, outsource their services, bring in investments, and operate in regional and international markets. Despite their contribution to the local economy and generating employment, these entrepreneurial efforts rarely contribute to the pressing social challenges that face Palestinians. For example, very few of these efforts and solutions addressed the State of Palestine’s growing solid-waste problem, diminishing accessibility to drinking water, particularly in Gaza, limited and unreliable sources of energy, damaging effects of industrial pollution and waste, or quality social services, including education and health.

To our great delight, mapping results also came across social entrepreneurs and private-sector companies that are finding a business opportunity in these very same challenges. Young entrepreneurs are founding social enterprises that process solid and electronic waste into marketable, safe by-products. Energy generation through solar and renewable sources is attracting more investments. New smartphone and social media applications are tapping into the wide Palestinian user base to educate people on health and social issues. These are just some of the many ideas that are emerging locally and globally, inspiring entrepreneurs to both make a financial return and at the same time tackle economic, social, and governance problems.

For more than fifty years, UNDP has forged action-oriented partnerships with national governments, social development organizations, and the private sector in 170 countries. In 2019 alone, UNDP supported 15 countries to develop or implement strategies to prevent violent extremism. It was the primary actor on climate change in the United Nations and during the last year has helped 140 countries move closer to meeting their Paris Agreement pledges, also helping to cut 256 million tons of carbon emissions – equivalent to the footprint of 50 million cars in one year.

An online crowdsourcing platform called Solve It, one of the first joint initiatives between the Palestinian Accelerator Lab and the Prime Minister’s Office, aims to engage with various actors to tackle issues in a multidisciplinary manner that directly links with the SDGs. Solve It offers an opportunity for individuals or teams to independently present preliminary, tested ideas in social innovation that solve the most pressing problems in the State of Palestine. Instead of relying on experts in specific fields, Solve It goes beyond sectors to cultivate solutions that have been developed by those experiencing any given challenge daily. What distinguishes Solve It from other initiatives is its strategic link with SDGs and government priorities, moving away from vertical sectors. Ultimately, the vision is to make Solve It a bank for innovative ideas in the State of Palestine.

The Palestinian Accelerator Lab strives to collaborate with others who are passionate about finding new ways of working, and welcomes feedback on what kind of incentives should be in place for better collaboration with Solve It.

Other than the Solve It platform, the Palestinian Accelerator Lab will focus on identifying gaps in the innovation sphere and synthesize ways to fill in the gaps. Instead of injecting new concepts and ideas, the Palestinian Accelerator Lab will find existing mature ideas and offer support in further testing and scaling up to utilize the collective intelligence of citizens.

The Palestinian Accelerator Lab, embedded within UNDP/PAPP, is part of the Accelerator Labs Network whose founding investors are the Federal Republic of Germany, the State of Qatar, represented by the Qatar Fund for Development, and UNDP’s core partners.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP and other UN agencies.
No one disputes the centrality of East Jerusalem in Palestinian life. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and even in exile talk of Jerusalem and yearn to visit the holy city. This centrality, however, due to Israeli measures and the shackles of a dead peace process, has unfortunately become a figure of speech where Jerusalem’s economic, social, and political status has diminished in favor of more vibrant localities in the West Bank. One of the aspects that has suffered during the past few years is East Jerusalem’s innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Palestine’s entrepreneurial ecosystem was primarily nurtured in Ramallah and, to some extent, Gaza. This is due to many factors that include the presence of donors in both locations and the fact that the headquarters of all Palestinian corporates and the seat of the Palestinian government are in the city of Ramallah. While we lament the fact that East Jerusalem was left behind, we recognize the importance of Ramallah and Gaza finding a place on the map of innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting the attention of global technology companies and venture capital (VC) funds.

Despite its spiritual glamour and physical beauty, East Jerusalem suffers from an acute poverty rate of 72.9 percent and an unemployment rate of 73 percent among women. Yet, the high literacy rate and educational excellence of its youth cannot be exaggerated. In fact, the city suffers from a troubling brain drain; its brightest talents are grabbed by other cities and countries. This has prompted me and other colleagues from the entrepreneurial community in East Jerusalem to work harder to create and sustain a vibrant, innovative ecosystem in Jerusalem. What encouraged us to revitalize the city in this way is the wealth of human talent, its excellent geographic location, and the mobility and exposure of its youth to the global community. We started by creating a simple physical reality that was missing from the city and provided a national alternative to other less-accepted locations. We established Jerusalem Entrepreneurial Society and Technology (JEST), the city’s first incubator and working space for young entrepreneurs. The JEST community has grown year after year, as we have been able to provide mentorship, training, coaching, and networking. Today, JEST counts more than a thousand entrepreneurs. Some of its early members are now successful start-up companies. The physical space was not the only building block for this embryonic ecosystem. What has made the difference is the network we created beyond the space – a network that spans the West Bank and Gaza and includes Palestinians across the Green Line, Palestinians in the diaspora, international technology companies and entrepreneurs, and most important, the networking of entrepreneurs with their peers and mentors inside the city itself.

Graduation ceremony, Jerusalem Entrepreneurship Training, JEST program. (شباب القدس الريادي)
It was only inevitable that with the revitalization of the innovative spirit, East Jerusalemites rediscovered their innate values, their internal strengths; they regained their self-motivation and their ability to excel, innovate, and even compete with the globe’s best innovators. Today, East Jerusalem features a glowing hub of Global Shapers* of the World Economic Forum, and the small ecosystem that was once sidestepped is confident and growing. We are proud of this Palestinian ecosystem in East Jerusalem and are now focused on sustaining this effort and introducing new angles and contacts. Our work is not over. We look forward to the day when we will celebrate the city’s innovative spirit and growing community of entrepreneurs. We invite every innovation enthusiast to network with the innovative community in East Jerusalem.

Hani Alami is a Palestinian telecommunications tycoon who established a number of telecommunications companies. Born and living in Jerusalem, Hani is an experienced enthusiast who excels at creating blue oceans and the kind of added value that triggers markets. With multiple acquisitions and mergers in the telecom sector, he leverages his experience and network to mentor and support emerging entrepreneurs and promising ideas. A career of successful business exits in the technology sector grants Hani the ability to see the big picture and steer management through difficulties and challenging crises.

Article photos by Omar Amireh.

*For more information, please visit the website of the East Jerusalem Hub of the Global Shapers Community at https://www.globalshapers.org/hubs/east-jerusalem-hub.
FIKRA: JAWWAL SUPPORT TO ENTREPRENEURS

Fikra Innovation Hub, the corporate program that supports entrepreneurship, provides a place where individuals and teams can grow their technologies and businesses. Fikra (which means “an idea” in Arabic) is hosted by Jawwal, Palestine Cellular Communications Company which, in turn, is a subsidiary of Paltel Group. It is a creative space for entrepreneurs with innovative ideas who need to access physical infrastructure, capacity building, and mentoring.

The hub includes a well-equipped co-working space, access to Paltel Group infrastructure such as Jawwal’s own Application Store (through which Palestinian applications are visible to more than three million subscribers on Jawwal marketing channels) and Jawwal Pay (an e-wallet that will help start-ups to monetize), in addition to from other infrastructure services that aim to transform ideas into projects or products, ultimately turning them into investment opportunities.

A vital element in our business strategy is to discover and unleash innovative ideas, especially those that take advantage of fast-moving technology and that need assistance in order to develop the idea and into a viable business. We are launching the new forward-thinking innovation hub to unlock Palestine’s true potential as a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, and we will assist selected entrepreneurs with support services and investment funds to back Palestinian entrepreneurs who desire to launch their ventures.

The Fikra Hub also applies additional methods of Jawwal’s Corporate Entrepreneurship Responsibility (CER) program that include cooperating with other stakeholders to launch innovative and challenging ideas that hopefully will enable Jawwal to launch its own venture-capital funding that will invest in early-stage technology start-ups and be the bedrock of support for the technology start-ups ecosystem.

Jawwal’s innovation hub aims to prepare entrepreneurs to discover and explore their interests and to equip them with the knowledge, skills, infrastructure, and funding necessary to successfully execute their ideas to create successful ventures. Fikra’s vision is to become a leading innovation hub in the MENA region, a preferred location where start-ups can flourish and their ideas be validated, adopted, and scaled.

Since Fikra celebrated its first anniversary of operation, a lot of exciting things have happened. The co-working space now hosts a dynamic community of entrepreneurs, freelancers, and start-ups; the innovation space is buzzing with vertical integration and events; and it attracts many local and international visitors. The following are three examples of ideas supported by Fikra.
We Deliver

We Deliver was founded by Ahmad Ramahi as a back-to-back crowdsourced, tech-driven logistics company, proudly based at Fikra – Paltel Group Innovation Hub in Ramallah, Palestine. The company is revolutionizing the future of last-mile delivery. We Deliver essentially enables businesses and customers, such as IQOS by Phillip Morris, Pizza Hut, Hardees, authorized resellers for Huawei and Samsung, as well as e-commerce retailers, to deliver orders more efficiently and reliably.

We Deliver’s scalable platform was built on cutting-edge technology and adds extraordinary value to businesses that operate in emerging markets with payment and infrastructure challenges – leveraging an asset-light model and breakthrough machine learning techniques and artificial intelligence with unmatched automatic dispatching speed. We Deliver was recently awarded first place in Start-up Istanbul which, by all standards, is considered an amazing achievement!

Tollab

Tollab was founded by Ameen Taha and Ahmad Etkaidek as a platform to help university students who are looking to earn an income while pursuing their degree. Their focus was initially set on tutoring since Tollab recruits qualified university students to tutor students of all ages, in all subjects. Team members aspire to grow their businesses in other fields as well, providing a wide range of part-time jobs for university students. Their business model has qualified them to enter the semifinal competition for the Hult Prize in London for a five-week accelerator, where they competed with thousands of start-ups from all over the world and managed to achieve a great milestone by being selected amongst the top six teams to participate in the Hult Prize UN finals in New York. Tollab has received mentoring services and is an active member of the Fikra community of early-stage start-ups that are now generating revenue.

Kitab Sawti

Kitab Sawti, the world’s largest Arabic audiobook platform, was founded in Sweden in 2016 by Sebastian Bond, its CEO, with the aim to support the integration of Syrian children into Swedish society. Today, it has offices in Dubai, Cairo, and Palestine, and hosts more than 2,000 Arabic titles on its platform with more than 1 million registered users.

Kitab Sawti has raised US$ 6 million in Series A funding from prominent new and existing investors. The platform will deploy the funds to expand its content and reach, offering thousands of content creators and narrators an opportunity to join a growing cultural movement in the region. Paltel Group was part of this round, given that one of its investment goals is to create jobs for Palestinians by having an international platform that will open new offices in Palestine.

“We are thrilled to be part of Kitab Sawti’s exciting growth journey, which will allow us to provide Jawwal subscribers with access to the largest Arabic audiobook library,” said Ammar Aker, Paltel Group CEO. “It is a great opportunity for us to co-invest in this round, alongside major Swedish venture-capital firms and regional angels, which opens new prospects for us to network with local and global innovation and start-up ecosystems.”

The Kitab Sawti platform is accessible through kitabsawti.com as well as the application, which is available for both iOS and Android users.
In 2013, the Bethlehem Development Foundation (BDF) was founded by the late Mr. Said T. Khoury with the clear vision and intention to transform the Bethlehem area into a vibrant, international, spiritual destination, worthy of the place that witnessed the birth of Jesus Christ with his message of Love and Peace for all humanity.

Mr. Khoury’s initiative was to help create a sustainable economic and social environment and foster the long-term growth of a fully integrated, prosperous, and harmonious community for all residents of the Bethlehem Governorate. The foundation has indeed helped the governorate achieve outstanding successes, marked by a number of milestones in various fields.

Engaging one of the world’s leading urban planning firms, BDF as a first step conducted a comprehensive urban analysis that underlined the governorate’s situation and delivered a strategic master plan for the regeneration of Bethlehem. Utilizing the expertise of the foundation, socially and economically viable projects were selected to harmoniously restore the holy city. To fulfil this aim and vision and its commitment to the wider community, BDF raised funds and, to a large extent, has accomplished its development plans. The funding has been provided by local, regional, and international public, private, and institutional investors who collectively intervened to revitalize Bethlehem.

It is clear to all concerned that tourism is the best driver for Bethlehem’s regional economic development and employment generation, and that the sector can be of great help in efforts towards poverty alleviation. BDF has done its best to follow the principles of sustainable tourism development outlined by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which has defined sustainable tourism as an enterprise that achieves a balance between the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development so as to guarantee the long-term benefits of recipient communities. According to UNWTO, sustainable tourism should: 1) make optimal use of environmental resources, maintain essential ecosystems, and help conserve biodiversity; 2) respect socio-cultural authenticity, conserve built and living cultural heritage, and contribute to cross-cultural understanding and tolerance; and 3) ensure long-term socio-economic benefits, fairly distributed to all community stakeholders, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities, social services, and poverty alleviation.

This is commonly called the triple bottom line for sustainable development: environmental, economic, and cultural returns on investment. One can also identify a fourth associated benefit of well-managed tourism: public education for both visitors and residents to deepen their understanding of cultures and the rich religious heritage.
As the Israeli occupation forces and their stringent military controls since 1967 have impeded any kind of development in Palestine, heavily targeting Bethlehem, the city has failed to prosper until recently. It used to employ the traditional tourism model where short-term rewards frequently out-ranked long-term planning; low-margin quantity eclipses high-benefit quality; and success is measured in the sheer number of arrivals rather than benefit per tourist. Without careful planning and management, the negatives in this approach outnumber the positives. The resulting issues transcend overcrowding: Reckless development harms the environment, degrades scenery, and disrupts local culture. Moreover, with traditional tourism, delicate historical, archaeological, and natural sites suffer physical wear and tear and – very importantly – revenues are channeled away from local communities. In a study conducted a few years ago, it was found that for every tourist dollar spent in Bethlehem, 85 cents reverted back to the Israeli economy. This resulted in a loss of added value for the Palestinian economy and a net gain for the Israeli economy – helping sustain the occupation. To best achieve long-term planning, BDF has worked closely with the various stakeholders involved to help facilitate dialogue among the private and public sectors and other stakeholders, parties that otherwise might never have collaborated or understood how their decisions reverberate down a tourism destination’s long value chain.

Since 2012, BDF has also successfully managed to elevate Christmas to international prominence, using world-renowned decorators and planners and attracting international media. In 2014, the Bethlehem Christmas tree was listed as the number 12 tree worldwide by Fortune 500. In 2015, the Huffington Post listed it as one of the most extravagant and creative Christmas trees in the world. It cannot be emphasized enough that Bethlehem is a main Palestinian window to the rest of the world. Bethlehem is a well-recognized international brand, and this intervention has helped emphasize the centrality of Bethlehem in the Christmas celebrations worldwide. It has led to growth in international and local tourism, with large numbers of visitors and pilgrims attending the Christmas tree lighting ceremony – tourism that comes to Bethlehem in a period that used to be considered very low season.

As this development targeted the entire community of the Bethlehem region, there is no doubt that these efforts have helped bring about greater appreciation and pride among all Palestinian residents of the area, Christians and Muslims. It has definitely and inordinately, however, given the Christian community a comparative advantage in this development, as historically Bethlehem’s Christians tend to be heavily involved in the various services of the tourism industry, recognized as Bethlehem’s main economic sector. This has somewhat helped stem the emigration of the Christian community.

Since the signing of the Oslo Agreement, there has been tremendous growth in room capacity, with the growth rate still accelerating, as about nine more hotels are expected to open in the near future, with others already in the planning stage. Driving through Bethlehem, one can notice also the growth of the souvenirs sector, as attractive new souvenir shops line the main roads of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour, contributing effectively to the ongoing revitalization of the crafts industry. Furthermore, visitors can enjoy the fruits of the tremendous growth in the food-services sector in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, and Beit Jala. This has also increased tourism among our own Palestinian community. Visitors come from the surrounding regions, from Jerusalem, and even from the 1948 region to the Bethlehem area on weekends to enjoy not only the rich heritage but also the various specialized restaurants that the cities have to offer.

All these developments and the associated enhanced services have contributed immensely to the economic regeneration and tremendous growth in employment in the Bethlehem region, a part of Palestine that previously had experienced high rates of unemployment among well-educated youth.
Tourism development requires services, and they include features such as access, security, food, housing, transportation, communication, the provision of souvenirs, and more. Service provision, in turn, requires qualified personnel, such as tour guides, chefs, drivers, transportation companies, street vendors, and an efficient, reliable police force. To help meet the challenge of providing part of these needed human resources, Bethlehem University has stepped forward and is investing in tourism education and training to the tune of US$ 30 million by purchasing three iconic buildings in Bethlehem known as the Mount David property. In its strategic plan, the university has decided to dedicate this largest expansion and development in years to its smallest department, the Department of Tourism Education and Hospitality. Two of these buildings are slated to become a 95-room training hotel and restaurant, while the third is dedicated to cultural education and development. Work is now in progress on the site.

In two direct activities, BDF has contributed to helping stem Christian emigration from Bethlehem. Firstly, BDF has actively participated in the Diaspora Convention, now being held yearly in Bethlehem in an effort to reconnect members of the diaspora community who have their roots in the Bethlehem region with the city of their origin. Many of these are Christian Palestinians.

Secondly, BDF’s most important current activity is its effort to assist the ongoing fundraising for the renovation of the historic Church of the Nativity. This ongoing, very much needed restoration is lifting spirits in the biblical town of Bethlehem, especially now, at Christmastime.

Visitors can view the church’s ancient mosaics and columns that have been restored to their original glory for the first time in 500 years. City officials hope that the restoration of the traditional birthplace of Jesus will boost tourism, enhance the weak economy of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and perhaps even help slow the decades-long drain of the Christian population from the land where their faith was born. “Christians are leaving the Holy Land due to the lack of peace and to escape economic hardship. We are struggling to keep them in their homeland,” says Bethlehem’s mayor, Anton Salman. “It is our hope that by generating employment through tourism development, we can entice many to remain,” he explains.

A tourism product must be promoted, even if that is done “only” by word of mouth. Visiting our city and telling others of the beautiful sights, hospitable services, and great experiences the city has to offer will certainly help greatly in the promotion of Bethlehem as a tourism destination. Day-tourists and visitors are invited not only to stop at the church and go to a souvenir shop but to extend their visit and opt to stay in one of Bethlehem’s hotels to enjoy the great variety of experiences that Bethlehem and the surrounding towns, villages, and areas have to offer.

*The study was conducted by the Higher Council for the Arab Tourism Industry with support from GIZ, the German development agency.

Hani Abu Dayyeh is the chair of Bethlehem University’s Institute of Tourism Training and a member of the board of trustees at the Bethlehem Development Foundation.
s the world reaches the end of incrementalism, the Palestinian economy struggles to innovate, disrupt, and create change at the same speed and scale as worldwide technology progress. The developing economy of Palestine is constrained by the political situation and poor e-infrastructure, which is reflected in the degree of expansion and innovation that a Palestinian start-up can bring to the economy. With the rise of Generation Z and the growth of the gig economy, Palestinian freelancers as well find it hard to compete at the regional and international levels. These challenges have called for a change in the economic development model and raised many questions about the quality of the Palestinian talent pool and its capability to produce innovative start-ups and businesses.

During the past fifteen years of economic development in Palestine, the bottom-up approach has proved to be more aligned to the national needs of the economy than its top-down counterpart. Before Palestinian entrepreneurs can gain access to finance and new markets, their business skill sets, culture, and education must be addressed. Development projects that responded to weaknesses and challenges at the grassroots level have managed to create more impact than those that focused on grassroots through venture capital (VC) and market-penetration strategies. The Palestinian talent pool was simply not ready. It needed the proper innovation culture and the disruptive environment in order to grow. Universities and schools needed to integrate the studies of innovation and entrepreneurship into their curricula so that their graduates could compete in the job market, whether as entrepreneurs or as freelancers.

Universities were recently able to produce innovative start-ups only after distinctive research projects were given the chance to be commercialized and turned into scalable business ideas. In the last two years, we’ve noticed the rise of around 30 minimum viable products from university students. We have witnessed the growth of multiple health start-ups that have the potential to expand and disrupt health care not only in Palestine but in the region as well. On the list of these start-ups is Pharma New Leader, whose use of 3-D printing technology promises to improve the production and responsiveness capability of orphan drugs – pharmaceutical products that are commercially undeveloped because they treat rare diseases. RadiologAI, is another university research project that was commercialized to use AI technology to analyze X-ray images and accurately identify bone fractures, minimizing recently increasing medical malpractice and human error.

Apart from education, capacity building and funding at various stages has played a key role in developing the capacity of some Palestinian start-ups, especially those that have succeeded in keeping their products unique, market-driven, competitive, and scalable. Doroob, for example, is one of the promising Palestinian start-ups. It is the first mapping, navigation, and location-based solution to cover the West Bank and Gaza. The mobile application is currently being used by Palestinians, tourists, and expatriates, and is recommended by a number of diplomatic missions to their nationals visiting and residing in Palestine. Another promising success story is that of Mnjam, a green start-up that aspires to decrease plastic pollution by around 50 percent if its solution is used by every household in Palestine.

At the ecosystem level, capacity-building programs target not only start-ups but the whole pipeline. The expertise and capacity development of Palestinian incubators, accelerators, and business development service providers has resulted in better ideation, scalability, testing, and business growth. On the other hand, development projects should not overlook the potential of the Palestinian gig economy, which can compete regionally and
Internationally if given the needed capacity-building resources on international freelancing platforms such as Upwork and Freelancer.com. In order to maintain the quality and transparency of such capacity-building programs, the economy must produce and adopt more efficient and reliable digital-for-development solutions. BOOST is one solution that stakeholders across the value chain have been able to utilize for the benefit of ecosystem development.

Another strategy that can change the realities of the start-up economy in Palestine is initiating policy dialogue with the Palestinian government. Initiatives such as the Open Data Government Initiative are crucial in enabling start-ups to conduct market research and analysis, cultivating an evidence-based, decision-making environment at all business levels. Open data can ultimately improve our start-ups’ competitiveness and readiness to cope with market changes. It creates and bolsters the e-infrastructure that start-ups require to collect information and make informed decisions.

To this day, the start-up economy in Palestine has not been able to find or identify its competitive advantage. This is due to the lack of specificity in planning and managing economic development projects. Many questions have yet to be asked. What is the Palestinian national economic need for start-ups aside from job creation and revenue making? What needs to be solved through start-up solutions? What are our expectations of the start-up community? Should we prioritize AI, solar energy, fintech, P2P, or health-care start-ups? What prevents the ecosystem from amending its policies and regulations?

After more than 15 years of managing economic development and innovation projects in Palestine, we believe that it is worth giving niche industries the chance to grow and flourish. Concepts such as eco-innovation, smart cities, and solar technology have the advantage to solve problems that are specific to the Palestinian people, and at the same time, scale and expand into regional markets. Integrating eco-innovation can decrease plastic pollution, enhance nature’s resilience to other environmental pressures, and lead to the responsible use of natural resources. Smart-city innovation and IoT, on the other hand, can precipitate the creation of innovative public services, transportation, entertainment, and e-commerce. Innovation at niche industries is expected to change the dynamics of the economy, unlock the potential of diverse talents, and create an impact at a multi-sectoral level.

Leaders International is an international network of local organizations specialized in planning, managing, and monitoring innovation and economic development projects in developing economies. Through its offices in Brussels, Amman, and Ramallah, it delivers professional project-management services with a focus on private-sector development, access to markets, job creation, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Despite all economic and socio-political challenges, the realities of the start-up economy in Palestine remain promising. During the past two years, it has become clear that the talent pool is growing, the start-up ecosystem pipeline is improving, incubators’ expertise is developing, education is on the road to recovery, and the culture of innovation is flourishing.
Jerusalem has great historical and spiritual value, yet it has been struggling with extremely complicated political and economic challenges for over six decades. Its separation from Palestinian cities, the discrimination practiced by the Israeli occupation regime against Palestinians in Jerusalem, and the scarce opportunities for employment or entrepreneurship are among Jerusalemites’ major challenges.

Despite these challenges, however, East Jerusalem has the potential to be a fertile ground for healthy entrepreneurial activity. The pull created by an urgent need for new job opportunities, relatively easy access to global markets compared to the occupied territories, and talented young men and women who constitute valuable human resources are among the indicators that this overlooked area can foster an entrepreneurial community and replicate the success achieved by its neighbors. These factors served as an inspiration for Hani Alami, a Jerusalemite businessman, to found Jerusalem Entrepreneurs Society and Technology (JEST). JEST was launched as an NGO in 2014 with the goal to plant a seed from which an entrepreneurial community could grow.

The concept of JEST creation revolves around a physical hub for existing and aspiring entrepreneurs – from those engaged in the idea stage to those who own companies. Hub services include technological, financial, and marketing consulting and support; strategic planning advice; networking meet-ups; and platforms for joint ventures, all geared to help create a rich and effective entrepreneurial/start-up ecosystem in East Jerusalem.

Located in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, an easily accessible, centralized location, JEST has offered services to almost 800 young Palestinian men and women annually since 2014. A good number of them are expanding and developing start-ups, whereas others are still in the establishment phase. Currently, JEST is working on diversifying services in order to adapt to clients’ needs and to support them in creating and developing viable enterprises.

JEST is particularly dedicated to reaching more women entrepreneurs in Jerusalem. In 2019, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) declared that in Jerusalem, the rate of women’s participation in the workforce is alarmingly low (9.7 percent), which means that the remaining women are either housewives or involved in informal labor, estimated to be 40 percent of Palestine’s workforce (see PCBS statistics for 2018).

In 2019, the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research published statistics stating that 341,500 Palestinians live in Jerusalem, compared to 559,800 Israelis; and poverty among Palestinians reached 78 percent, compared to 25 percent among Israelis.
One may argue that women’s entrepreneurship requires more efforts in order to succeed and flourish. After all, Jerusalem’s critical and unique situation offers very few opportunities to support women, which is why JEST is engaged in diversifying its services to serve both female and male entrepreneurs.

In addition to offering a shared workspace, JEST provides entrepreneurs with networking opportunities, technical assistance, and capacity building. For example, it continues to hold Jerusalem Tech Nights where multinational organizations provide fireside chats and tailored up-to-date training sessions to help aspiring entrepreneurs grow their networks and be exposed to realistic experience, expertise, and knowledge.

Throughout the years, JEST has hosted promising start-ups, watched them succeed, and provided technical support and networking opportunities, but the hard work that these entrepreneurs invested and the time they allocated to take their start-ups to the next level was astonishing. SynergyMED is one of them. Founded by our own Dr. Anan Copty, who now sits on JEST’s board of directors, SynergyMED is working on a nonsurgical device to treat and remove cancer tumors. The methodology was tested on mice where cancer diminished within only three days. SynergyMED continues to work on the development of its device and is currently seeking investments and strategic partnerships.

DAAD Center (ض), established in 2014, focuses on the Arabic language and operates in three regional locations. The center in Jordan develops curricula to support children from 6 to 12 years old who have learning and speech disabilities; the center in Palestine offers individual and group sessions that have served 700 children since establishment in 2014; and Arabic-language summer camps take place in Turkey. Ameer Abu Laban, founder of the center, intends to work with his team on developing and launching a new IT arm that aims to design and launch applications that tackle stuttering and learning disabilities by providing speech therapy.

JEST also houses the Global Shapers Community, an initiative that is supported by the World Economic Forum and part of a network of 408 hubs spread throughout the globe. With 8,875 shapers in 153 countries and 1,837 alumni, the East Jerusalem Hub* comprises a network of budding and established young changemakers with varying expertise and lived experiences, unified by a common desire to contribute to social and economic advancement at all levels of society in East Jerusalem.

With tens of ongoing projects, Jerusalemite young and brilliant minds are looking for technical and financial support to help turn their ideas into viable businesses. JEST will continue to support these enterprises and strive to attract new ideas to be fostered.

A focal point for business development, strategic planning, marketing, and access to local, regional, and global markets, JEST provides a home for the start-up community of Jerusalem, helping businesses achieve growth and success and live up to their full potential. Through cooperation and partnerships, JEST engages to promote technology development and a culture of innovation, and to support women.

Article photos by Omar Amireh.

*For more information, please visit https://www.globalshapers.org/hubs/east-jerusalem-hub.
Despite the challenges that surround Gaza, Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG) was launched with a self-imposed mandate to help Gaza’s highly educated youth, particularly those who are unemployed and whose prospects look bleak. Luckily, Gaza has consistent access to high-speed fiber internet that enables its youth to sidestep many of the current restrictions on movement of people and goods that hamper the Gazan economy. In light of this vision, GSG was founded in 2011 in partnership with Google and the international NGO Mercy Corps.

We started our mission by holding the first Start-up Weekends in Gaza. Then, we began to raise awareness about tech entrepreneurship among Gaza youth. In 2014, we began to work with start-up founders to grow their businesses outside Gaza and develop our own incubation-program curriculum. In addition, we facilitated the first venture investments into Gazan start-ups between 2014 and 2015, which had a great impact on passionate participants.

Today, GSG is a leading co-working space, start-up accelerator, and technology-education hub in Gaza. We bring together under one roof online freelancers, outsourcers, and start-up founders to share ideas, learn, innovate, code, and geek out!

One of the main programs of GSG is the GeeXelerator Program, which is an intensive 16-week pre-seed acceleration program that aims to help teams build a usable product that depends merely on the most essential core features, validate the core product feature with users, launch the feature online for public use, and scale their products’ user base. In fact, the GeeXelerator is divided into three phases, namely: business-case validation and building business models; coding to develop the most important core features; and public launch online and investment preparation.

The start-ups that were qualified to participate in the acceleration phase returned recently from the Road Show, which is a tour around the MENA region. The tour included visiting incubators and accelerators in addition to start-up participation in pitching competitions in Jordan, Dubai, Egypt, Bahrain, and Sharjah. Hala Arab and Ways are examples of the incubated start-ups that participated in the Road Show.

Hala Arab is a tourism website that targets Arab tourists traveling to Turkey. It provides tourists with various suggested travel programs. Razan Abu Tawaheena, CEO of Hala Arab start-up, had this to say: “When I came to GSG for the first time, I participated at the Code Academy to learn how to build web apps. That encouraged me to start my own business. Fortunately, I found the opportunity to build a product that helps travelers and tourists from the Gulf region who plan to go to Turkey. I am blessed to have had the support of my brother who lives in Istanbul.”

Ways is a mobile application that links customers with nearby cyclists to arrange the delivery of goods, products, and meals. Jamal Miqati, CEO of Ways start-up, explains: “Since college, my dream was to be a successful entrepreneur. This is not my first time to participate in the GeeXelerator Challenge. During my journey, I learned from my failures and did my best to make my start-up succeed. All the hard work brought about fruitful results in the end as I won first place in the competition with an award of US$ 5,000.”

Dalia Shurrab, the communication and social media coordinator at Mercy Corps and GSG, is a passionate writer and social media guru. She is an active ambassador to ArabWIC (Arab Women in Computing) in Palestine and the Palestine TechWomen/TechGirls Club leader.
GAZA INCUBATORS

What Needs to Be Improved

The Gaza Strip suffers from an economic crisis and rising unemployment levels. According to the Labour Force Survey conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in November 2019, the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip was 45 percent compared to 13 percent in the West Bank, whereas the unemployment rate for males in the State of Palestine was 20 percent compared to 42 percent for females. Thousands of graduates are seeking job opportunities, yet the Palestinian labor market is not capable of providing employment for all of them. Incubators are part of the solution and have been established to contribute by helping innovative youth grow and start their own businesses.

These incubators have implemented several programs and projects in the Gaza Strip related to the promotion of entrepreneurship, incubation, and acceleration in various sectors. Hundreds of start-ups graduated from the incubators, resulting in other youth being employed in these start-ups.

Statistically, entrepreneurship has been rising year after year in the Gaza Strip. On average, there is an annual increase of 19 start-ups, resulting in a 34 percent compounded growth rate in start-up creation since 2009, as indicated in the graph below.

There are many organizations that conduct programs and carry out projects and initiatives to support entrepreneurs in the Strip. One of the pioneering incubators is the Technology Incubator of the University College of Applied Sciences (UCASTI), founded in 2011 as a supportive initiative to help in decreasing the level of unemployment. It has successfully incubated over 100 projects, marketing them for local and regional markets and stakeholders. UCASTI Technology Incubator supports entrepreneurs who have creative and ambitious ideas by providing them with administrative, technical, and financial support.

The aim is to assist these start-ups in becoming successful businesses in the market.

With a fund from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), UNDP supports Gaza incubators, aiming to improve the applied incubation models and systems. It identifies shortages in the selection process and in the support given to entrepreneurs and proposes action plans that address these gaps. To accomplish this, UNDP has partnered with UCASTI and implemented interventions that enhance the Gaza incubators by improving three main components: the administration level, the incubation process, and networking and investment. Each one of these components entails multiple activities.
To determine an incubator’s success, specific standard criteria can be applied. Each year, several studies rank incubators worldwide, and focus is placed in particular on those that are university-affiliated. One of the best studies regarding incubator ranking is that of UBI Global, founded in 2013 in Stockholm, Sweden, to identify where innovation hubs are located worldwide and to learn and share what makes them successful.

UBI’s report and world ranking of business incubators and accelerators 2019/2020 utilized 21 key performance indicators (KPIs), identified by the relevant research literature. These KPIs form the base of the seven subcategory scores, which in turn form the scores in the following three main categories used to calculate the individual program’s impact and performance scores (PIPS) for all benchmarked incubators and accelerators.

The Value for Ecosystem category assesses the economic impact and performance of a program and its client and alumni start-ups, also considering program success in retaining human capital and start-ups in the ecosystem. The subcategories Economy Enhancement and Talent Retention encompass six identified KPIs.

### Economy Enhancement
1. Jobs created and sustained (#)
2. Sales revenue ($*)
3. Graduates (#)
4. Self-generated revenue ($*)

### Talent Retention
1. Client start-ups accepted (#)
2. Graduate retention (#, %)

The Value for Client Start-ups category assesses the number and efficiency of services provided by the programs. Numerous studies have shown that the quantity and quality of services provided is a crucial indicator of long-term start-up success. Of equal importance for individual start-ups – as well as for the ecosystem in general – is the program’s function as a facilitator of community- and network-building. The subcategories Competence Development, Access to Funds, and Access to Network encompass a total of eight KPIs.

### Competence Development
1. Services offered (#)
2. Coaching and mentoring hours (#)

### Access to Funds
3. Total investment attracted ($)
4. Average investment attracted ($)
5. Seed-funding attraction (#, %)

### Access to Network
6. Partners (#)
7. Events (#)
8. Alumni engagement (#, %)

The Value for Program category assesses program success in attracting deal flow and third-party support as well as the capacity to create viable companies. The subcategories Program Attractiveness and Post-Graduation Performance encompass a total of seven KPIs.

### Program Attractiveness
1. In-state applications (#, #/spot)
2. Out-of-state applications (#, #/spot)
3. Sponsorship attraction ($)

### Post-Graduation Performance
1. 1-year survival rate (%)
2. 5-year survival rate (%)
3. High-growth enterprises (%)
4. Qualified exits (#)
In order for an incubator to evaluate itself using these KPIs, it is important to understand the different weights used for each criterion, which is explained in the table below.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>21 KPIs (DIMENSIONS)</th>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>WEIGHT</th>
<th>SUBCATEGORIES</th>
<th>3 CATEGORIES</th>
<th>1 PIPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jobs created &amp; sustained (Workforce)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>1. Economy Enhancement (22.2%)</td>
<td>1. Value for Ecosystem (33.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sales revenue (Economic output)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>1. Economy Enhancement (22.2%)</td>
<td>1. Value for Ecosystem (33.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Graduates (Economic development)</td>
<td>5 yrs</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>1. Economy Enhancement (22.2%)</td>
<td>1. Value for Ecosystem (33.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-generated revenue (Sustainability)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>1. Economy Enhancement (22.2%)</td>
<td>1. Value for Ecosystem (33.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Client start-ups accepted</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>2. Talent Retention (11.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Graduate retention (Human capital - long)</td>
<td>5 yrs</td>
<td>#, %</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>3. Competence Development (8.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Services offered (Support)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>3. Competence Development (8.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Coaching and mentoring hours (Guidance)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>3. Competence Development (8.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Total investment attracted (Funding - total)</td>
<td>5 yrs</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>4. Access to Funds (11.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Average investment</td>
<td>5 yrs</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>4. Access to Funds (11.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Seed funding</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#, %</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>4. Access to Funds (11.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Partners (Business development)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5. Access to Network (13.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Events (Stakeholder engagement)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>5. Access to Network (13.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Alumni engagement (Peer support)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#, %</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>5. Access to Network (13.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. In-state applications (Reputation - local/regional)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#, #/ spot</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6. Program Attractiveness (15.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Out-of-state applications</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>#, #/ spot</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>6. Program Attractiveness (15.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Sponsorship attraction (Brand)</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>6. Program Attractiveness (15.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. 1-year survival rate (Success - potential)</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>7. Post-Graduation performance (17.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. 5-year survival rate (Success - promise)</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>7. Post-Graduation performance (17.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. High growth enterprises (Success - evidence)</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>7. Post-Graduation performance (17.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Qualified exits (Success - proof)</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>7. Post-Graduation performance (17.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study and the UBI KPIs can help the incubators to better design and enhance their current and future programs. For example, incubators can develop their strategies based on specific success criteria. These can address the employment of youth, revenues generated by the start-up, or the networking and number of clients reached.

The mentioned KPIs can also help the administration level to track specific information for their reporting, which leads to a better evaluation of the programs and enables them to be more successful.

Incubators in the Gaza Strip should work with a shared vision and strategy, and there should be a higher level of synergy among the various projects and initiatives related to the entrepreneurship sector in the Strip. The KPIs mentioned by UBI can be selected and adopted to improve the current performance of the Gaza incubators, but priority should be given to specific KPIs, based on the three levels: the administrative level, the incubation level, and networking.

Furthermore, incubators should design their programs based on their strategies and adapt to donor requirements based on the common ground they share. The current situation is proving that most incubators are donor-driven with no clear strategy for their future programs.

In addition, more work should be done to integrate research, academia, the private sector, and other components of the entrepreneurship ecosystem into the incubators’ programs.

The criteria for the selection of start-ups should be more flexible and must allow innovative ideas to be selected. Thus, alternative methods of selection must be created that also shorten the currently very long selection process.

Ideally, mentors in the incubators would receive international training, enabling them to gain a greater understanding of the mentoring and coaching processes and to acquire more experience regarding international best practices and standards.

Finally, Gaza’s incubators should collaborate, streamlining their efforts through creating a unified database of beneficiaries to organize the selection process of start-ups; coordinating the networking efforts to have better future opportunities for outreach to external markets; and planning regular meetings to collaborate and organize the scheduled events throughout the year.

*Source: The UBI Global world ranking of business incubators and accelerators report – 2019

Salah Hammad is a project manager at UNDP, with a focus on poverty reduction, employment generation, entrepreneurship, and innovation through incubation and acceleration works. He has a master’s degree in stakeholder management.

Mohammed H. Alafifi is a Palestinian academic and trainer in the fields of e-marketing, freelancing, and entrepreneurship. He has a master’s degree in computer engineering from VUB-Brussels and works with UCAS Technology Incubator in Gaza.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP and other UN agencies.
Radio Yaboos makes real its founders’ goal to create a local media platform for marginalized voices that are not heard on mainstream media. It is the only media body in Jerusalem that addresses Palestinian entrepreneurs in general and Jerusalemites in particular, as they are the main target, in addition to small-business owners. Radio Yaboos creates a large media space that offers Jerusalemites the opportunity to talk about their own concerns and aspirations. It aims to promote ideas and help find solutions in the social, economic, health-related, educational, and cultural fields.

Introducing Jerusalemite listeners to concepts regarding civil and human rights, Radio Yaboos aims to put into practice the guarantees that have been enshrined in human rights conventions, namely the dignity and freedom of the individual, the right to freedom of expression, the right to work and housing, and the right to reject all manifestations of racism that are based on national, ethnic, or religious affiliation. In addition, Radio Yaboos works directly with officials and advisers to identify the most pressing problems that face Palestinian citizens of Jerusalem in various aspects of their lives.

Radio Yaboos airs short informative programs in tweet-style, which appeals to young audiences who are not interested in long reports. Hon Irbena (Here We Were Raised), for example, revolves around issues related to Palestinian heritage and introduces the old villages of Jerusalem whose residents were either forced to leave or killed. In two-minute clips, places such as Deir Yassin are introduced – their location, size, income resources, and more – to revive their memory among our new generation. Makan min Zaman (A Place from the Past) presents short blurbs about famous buildings in Jerusalem – places such as Cinema Al-Hamra; the
Radio Yaboos is a digital platform that aims to empower and connect its listeners.

Augusta Victoria Compound on the Mount of Olives that has served as a hospital for more than a century; Rashidiyyeh School that used to be a hospital; and Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, across from New Gate, that has hosted pilgrims since the 1880s – many of which we pass daily without knowing their stories or former glory. With such tweets, Radio Yaboos aims to keep Palestinians connected to their heritage in the city.

“From the outset, we have taken it upon ourselves to make this station noncommercial, as we do not broadcast any advertisements. Nor do our programs include any news spots or long talk shows,” co-founder Adele Zu‘mot explains. “Our goals include education and entertainment. But we consider entertainment to have a special dimension in terms of the music we select. Our broadcasts and programs are chosen based on valuable standards. We want to create an opportunity for our listeners to be entertained through direct participation and live programs.”

Radio Yaboos thus broadcasts a mixture of short programs that offer music and variety throughout the day. Hosted specialists shed light on the issues that are pertinent in East Jerusalem, putting them into focus and discussing their various aspects in short programs.

Radio Yaboos’s first target group consists of Palestinians from East Jerusalem, estimated to be 340,000 persons, 89 percent of whom are adults. The second target group includes the entire spectrum of Palestinian listeners, whether they live in Palestine or in the diaspora worldwide, as they can tune in over the station’s mobile apps or directly from our website www.yaboos.fm.

“The relationship between listeners and radio is unique, as one can listen to it everywhere,” Zu‘mot states. “Radio, therefore, is an ideal medium for entertainment and a source of credible information that can reach listeners in record time. Furthermore, it can communicate with listeners of all age levels and at all times and places.”
Laila Akel is a Palestinian self-made entrepreneur and innovator with a passion for art. According to the consensus of the people around her, she is a strong and empowering woman and an avid advocate of perpetual learning and self-development.

At 18, Laila traveled to Tunisia to study theater and then moved on to the United States to obtain a degree in applied science. After returning to Palestine, she worked as a graphic and web designer. To advance in her career, Laila taught herself online and social media marketing. When she became interested in the data aspect of it all, inspired by the collected data and the patterns it created, she found her passion for data-driven solutions.

In 2016, after two years with only occasional freelance and part-time jobs, Laila co-founded RedCrow, a company that provides practical risk-mitigation solutions to organizations and individuals in the MENA region. "I wanted to work harder and be more innovative; every job was an experience and sculpted a different skill, preparing me to take the risk and jump from being an employee to becoming an entrepreneur and a business owner," she explains.

Together with her co-founders Hussein Nasser Eddin and Tayeb Akel, Laila worked on developing an application that helps people safely navigate through difficult and volatile environments. By automating the intelligence cycle, they created a better way to collect data, thereby converting data into security and safety information in real time. RedCrow started in Palestine yet today works in seven countries in the MENA region – Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Pondering her success, Laila notes, "Seeing RedCrow develop from an idea into a company made me realize that it's not just about the responsibility to myself but also to the people who believed in me."

The words of her late father Abdul Latif Akel, a poet and professor of sociology and philosophy, also weighed in on her character and career choices. “Alternating between what I wanted to do and what should be done has taught me a lot about myself and shaped the kind of person I wanted to be,’ he frequently told me,” she remembers. “He taught me not to conform to society’s expectations but to set the standards high for myself. This gave me the confidence to take on bold roles in my career and life.”
In protest of his role as the poet of the resistance, Mahmoud Darwish famously said that he too wanted to write of love and flowers. It was a brave statement, but it had no effect on the perception of Palestinian poetry as an adjunct of the ongoing struggle. And judging by his continued commitment to classical language and Arab nationalism, even if his style did evolve, Darwish meant it less as a real objection than an oblique acknowledgement of his accepted position.

But if the free-verse tradition that Darwish represents created a national poetry of Palestine, which remains an abstracted, ideational country indistinguishable from the Palestinian cause, in stark and provocative contrast, here is poetry that states literally: “Palestine is not a cause.”

Carol Sansour’s acclaimed sequence of image-intense texts, In the Time of the Apricots, published with Al Kotob Khan in Cairo (December 2019), is a beautiful art object designed by Maryanne Jaraysi. It includes Sansour’s original Arabic together with Youssef Rakha’s English translation and Henri Jules Julien’s French translation of the complete text.

In all three languages, it is immediately clear that Sansour makes no distinction between verse and prose or between literary and vernacular registers of the language. She uses what is at her disposal, including Darwish’s legacy, to present the picture of a self, a human being, a woman who happens to be Palestinian. And in the process, she conflates two distinct concepts – the nation and the homeland – underlining the conflict between them, which free verse glosses over, and so evokes a gritty and credible place where people live unhindered by ideology or angst.

“It may be that the idea of Arab nationalism precisely is the idea of the state of Israel…”

Sansour’s Palestine is a place of nature and of intimacies, small things performing on small stages: the household, the church, “the swing on our high balcony”… Hers is a post-national discourse of belonging by necessity which, in its truth aesthetic, speaks as eloquently to the human condition as the best free verse. Here, for real, is writing about love and flowers.

* Soon to be available on www.jamalon.com.
A table in our home, a figure of a woman sits in the outer courtyard of her house, a pan in her lap, pots of cactus beside her, and tall pines behind her. The windows and doors of the house are inviting – but the house is split in two. Vera Tamari’s 1980s ceramic piece speaks both of quiet domesticity and public violence, the latter presented as a jagged crack separating the woman from the entrance to her home. In Vera’s other works of that tumultuous time, we experience violence even more directly as in the mourning figures of Mothers of the Martyrs, although the perpetrator – the Israeli occupation and its forces – is still absent.

All these qualities – the intersecting themes of public violence and intimate lives, the evocation of loss and a celebration of beauty – are explored and amplified in this signal exhibition of Vera’s new work, Warriors Passed by Here. The scale of the artist’s attention has shifted from home – so ably and intimately portrayed in earlier bas-relief ceramic works based on pre-Nakba family photographs – to land and seascapes in watercolor, acrylic, and mixed media, in addition to sensuous sculptural pieces. The public violence expressed as a crack in a home in the earlier work, evoking the house demolitions of the time, is now powerfully represented in this exhibition by a series of ceramic helmets of invaders of the land – from the Bronze Age to the present. The artist who responded to the systematic Israeli army and settlers’ uprooting of olive trees in Palestinian orchards by creating over 600 trees in clay, painted in pastel colors in her 2002 work Tale of a Tree, now looks farther back. Thinking as well of the lovely watercolors in this exhibit, Vera remarked: “My landscapes were too idyllic. I began to think of all the armies that have marched through the land and its orchards.”

In a room in the main building, the visitor will encounter colorful landscapes dotted with olive trees, painted in watercolor on delicate Japanese paper and suspended on the walls, juxtaposed in the same room with an installation of a group of helmets in clay. Warriors, indeed, passed by here – as the Israeli army continues to do in the nighttime streets of Ramallah. The march of helmets reminds us of a striking installation titled Going for a Ride? that Vera created in response to the 2002 Israeli incursion into Ramallah and other Palestinian cities when army tanks rolled over and crushed Palestinian cars whose unlucky owners had parked them on city streets.

Just as these helmets – whether Persian, Roman, Crusader, Israeli, or imagined – evocatively stand for the human armies that have crisscrossed the land, and continue to do so, the human figure in the exhibit, so evident in the earlier ceramic pieces, has also either vanished or is abstract and sculptural, the latter quality recalling Vera’s training and skill as a potter. Women have metamorphosed into swirling olive trees on fabric – or, in another interpretation, olive tree trunks have changed into sensuous female bodies – in her series entitled Dance, displayed in the street-level garage gallery. Vera’s turn towards abstract form is also prominent in the next room where the hills of Palestine’s central highlands are portrayed in small watercolor collages and larger bright acrylic abstract forms – that, indeed, also seem to dance across the canvas.

In Warriors Passed by Here, Vera draws on her intimate memories, her visions, both troubled and beautiful, of Palestinian land and seascapes, and her interrogation of the past of a fragile and battle-scarred land, work she created in tandem with her role as a teacher at Birzeit University and a founder of the university’s museum. The new work in this exhibit evokes the many stages of her artistic development over half a century. Like many artists with decades of creative work behind them, Vera’s new work is both a departure and a homecoming. And for viewers who have followed her work over decades and for those who come new to it through this exhibit, the work offers both pleasures and challenges.
narrow winding alleyway at the start of Ras Iftais Street (Star Street) tempts you to enter the high old stone walls. Your heart beats faster with every step. Here, you discover an open-air alleyway, then an archway, then an open courtyard with a narrow paved road and tall trees that stretch to reach the sunlight. To the left, high staircases with hanging plants that adorn the walls lead you to the sky. A breathtaking moment brings you to a small sign in Arabic that reads: Hosh al-Syrian (Syriac Quarter).

The welcoming smile of a beautiful, black-eyed Bethlehem hostess invites you in, where a tree laden with oranges stands to the left, near an old stone staircase. Its seven stairs lead to a fork that forms two arches underneath that take you to cave-like alleyways.

You feel lost. A chill spreads through the air. The first thought that comes to mind is the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Chaos is another way to describe the experience, or better, a millennium-old monastery, similar to that of Mar Saba to the east of Bethlehem.

But this is a monastery of luxury. A maze of alleyways, arched passages, vaulted ceilings, and a stairway to heaven, reminiscent of Led Zeppelin.

Climb the stairs, sit on one of the many roofs in the heart of Bethlehem’s old city that overlook the hilly cityscape, order a shot of tequila, and enjoy this ancient town.

A staircase to the left of the entrance takes you to the upper level. A small glass door with a wooden frame bears the title: Fawda Café (Chaos). Inside, a small hall leads to a second dimly lit room that ends up in a third, where an old piano stands with one table and a bar.

Outside the café, three tables with vintage red-mesh metal chairs and an umbrella overlook the entrance to the monastery. A biting aroma unlike any other permeates the air. Newly installed open-riser stairs lead you to the third level where a wide arched door and another balcony overlook the historic town. A sign at the entrance reads: Fawda Restaurant – member of Truth, Love & Clean Cutlery, which, according to its Facebook page, is “a new, kinder dining guide designed to identify the restaurants and food experiences that go above and beyond great food and wine in the ethical, organic and environmentally sustainable ways with which they run their business.”
 Events

**BETHLEHEM**

**CONCERTS**
Saturday 11
19:00–20:00 LEJ concert organized by the Institut français de Jérusalem - Chateaubriand, in cooperation with Bethlehem Municipality and Alliance Française de Bethléem. Bethlehem Peace Center.

**EXHIBITIONS**
Wednesday 1 – Friday 10
10:00–18:00 Bethlehem between Sight and Insight is a photography exhibition by the photographer Elias Halabi. Bab idDeir Art Gallery.

**RELIGIOUS EVENTS**
Sunday 5
11:30 Arrival of the Custos of the Holy Land in a procession that culminates at Manger Square, to celebrate Roman Catholic Epiphany Eve. St. Catherine’s Church.

Monday 6
8:30 Welcoming of the Syrian Orthodox bishop’s procession for the celebration of Orthodox Christmas Eve. Along Star Street to Manger Square to the Syrian Church of the Virgin Mary.

9:30 Welcoming of the Coptic bishop’s procession for the celebration of Orthodox Christmas Eve. Along Star Street to Manger Square to the Church of the Nativity.

10:00 Pontifical High Mass celebrated by the Custos of the Holy Land, attended by the Mayor of Bethlehem and the consuls of Jerusalem. St. Catherine’s Church.

10:30 Welcoming of the Greek Orthodox patriarch’s procession for the celebration of Orthodox Christmas Eve. Along Star Street to Manger Square to the Church of the Nativity.

14:45 Welcoming of the Ethiopian bishop’s procession for the celebration of Orthodox Christmas Eve. Manger Square, in front of Bethlehem Municipality building towards Milk Grotto Street to the Ethiopian Church – Ethiopian Monastery of Peace – Church of Eysesus, Milk Grotto Street.

23:30 Greek Orthodox Christmas liturgy. Church of the Nativity.

Saturday 18
11:00 Welcoming of the Armenian patriarch. Manger Square to the Church of the Nativity.

**SYMPOSIA**
Wednesday 15
11:00 Human Rights conference organized by the Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission. Bethlehem Peace Center.

**RAMALLAH**

**BOOK LAUNCHES**
Thursday 16
18:00 Book launch: The Bereavement of Martyred Palestinian Children: Gendered, Religious and National Perspectives by Maram Nasarwi. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

Saturday 25
18:00 Book launch: Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding by Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian about Palestinian childhood. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**EXHIBITIONS**
Until Sunday 12
18:00 Warriors Passed by Here is a solo exhibition by Vera Tamari organized by Gallery One in cooperation with Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre, presenting Tamaris’ recent work in ceramic sculpture, painting, and installations, encompassing a multi-dimensional edge in her artistic practice over half a century, and drawing on her intimate memories, her visions, both troubled and beautiful, of Palestinian land and seascapes, and her interrogation of the past of a fragile and battle-scarred land. Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre.

Thursday 20

**FILM SCREENINGS**
Wednesday 15
18:00 Screening of short films, curated by Maike Mia Höhne, including Have You Ever Killed a Bear – or Becoming Jamila, Hand Tinting, Afronauts, Ten-Metre Tower, Symbolic Threats. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

Wednesday 22
18:00 Screening of short films, curated by Maike Mia Höhne, including The Revolution Will Not Be Televised, Song of Young Men, Martin Cries, November, Red Chewing Gum, Everything. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

Wednesday 29
18:00 The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant, produced in 1972 and directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, is a 119-minute German film with Arabic subtitles that presents an insightful exploration of the nature of relationships in the story of a famous fashion designer called Petra von Kant. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**SITEMAP**

- Bethlehem
- Ramallah

**BETHLEHEM - RAMALLAH Events**

- **CONCERTS**
  - Saturday 11
    - 19:00–20:00 LEJ concert organized by Institut français de Jérusalem - Chateaubriand

- **EXHIBITIONS**
  - Wednesday 1 – Friday 10
    - 10:00–18:00 Bethlehem between Sight and Insight
  - Wednesday 15
    - 11.00 Human Rights conference

- **RELIGIOUS EVENTS**
  - Sunday 5
    - 11:30 Arrival of the Custos of the Holy Land
  - Monday 6
    - 8:30 Welcoming of the Syrian Orthodox bishop’s procession
    - 9:30 Welcoming of the Coptic bishop’s procession
  - Sunday 12
    - 10:00 Pontifical High Mass
    - 10:30 Welcoming of the Greek Orthodox patriarch’s procession
    - 14:45 Welcoming of the Ethiopian bishop’s procession
    - 23:30 Greek Orthodox Christmas liturgy

- **SYMPOSIA**
  - Wednesday 15
    - 11:00 Human Rights conference by Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission

- **BOOK LAUNCHES**
  - Thursday 16
    - 18:00 Book launch: The Bereavement of Martyred Palestinian Children: Gendered, Religious and National Perspectives by Maram Nasarwi
  - Saturday 25
    - 18:00 Book launch: Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding by Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian

- **EXHIBITIONS**
  - Until Sunday 12
    - 18:00 Warriors Passed by Here by Vera Tamari

- **FILM SCREENINGS**
  - Wednesday 15
    - 18:00 Screening of short films by Maike Mia Höhne
  - Wednesday 22
    - 18:00 Screening of short films by Maike Mia Höhne
  - Wednesday 29
    - 18:00 The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant
CULTURAL CENTERS

Al Ma’mal Foundation for Contemporary Art
Al Jawalida St. #8, New Gate, P.O. Box 14644, Jerusalem 91146
Tel: 02-6283457, Fax: 02-6272312
Email: info@almamalfoundation.org, www.almamalfoundation.org
Al Ma’mal Foundation for Contemporary Art

Palestinian Heritage Museum
Abu Obaida St, P.O. Box 19377, Jerusalem.
Tel: +972 2 627331, Fax: +972 2 6272341
Email: info@dta-museum.org
website: www.dta-museum.org

The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM)
Jerusalem 11 Azzahra St, Shihabi Building
Tel: +972(0)2-626-3230, Fax: +972 (0)-2-627-1711
PO Box 6666, Jerusalem, 91666
Email: info@ncm.birzeit.edu, http://ncm.birzeit.edu
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/esncm/

Birzeit University,
Old Girl’s Hostel, Birzeit, Tel: 02-281-9155/6
Ramallah: Tel: 02-2959070-1, Fax: 02-2959071
Beit Sahour Tel & Fax: 02-2748704
Tchaikovsky Musical School Tel & Fax: 022788606
Nablus Tel & Fax: 09-237773
Gaza Tel & Fax: 08-2628903

Photo courtesy of ESNCM

Palestine Museum of Natural History
Mar Andrea, Antonya Street, Bethlehem
Tel: 977-2273553 info@palestinennature.org
www.palestinennature.org/visit

A.M. Qattan Foundation
27 An-Nahda Women Association Street, Al-Tira, Ramallah – Palestine, P.O. Box 2276, Postal Code 90606
Telephone: +972 2 296 0544/+972 2 296 3286, Fax: +972 2 296 0544
Email: info@qattanfoundation.org, www.qattanfoundation.org

Popular Art Centre
Al-Ain Street, Box 3627, El-Bireh, Palestine
Tel: +970 2 240389, Fax: +97 0 2 2402851, Mob: +97 0 598947907
Email: info@popularartcentre.org, www.popularartcentre.org
Facebook: PopularArtCentre Twitter: @PAC_ArtCentre

Sareyyet Ramallah – First Ramallah Group
Al-Tireh Street, P.O. Box: 2017, Ramallah – West Bank, Palestine
Tel: +970 2 295 27 66 / +970 2 295 26 90
Jawwal: +970 597 777 096, Fax: +970 2 298 05 83
E-mail: sareyyet@sareyyet.ps / art@sareyyet.ps, www.sareyyet.ps

SareyyetRamallah

The Palestinian Circus School
Al Manzel Street, Bireit
Telefax: +972-2812000, Mobile: +972-59-2812001
Email: Info@palcircus.ps, www.palcircus.ps
The Palestinian Circus School

Dar Al-Sabagh Centre for Diaspora Studies and Research
Dar Al Sabagh Centre for Diaspora Studies and Research
Star Street, Bethlehem, Tel and Fax: +970-2-2742225,
Email: daralsabagh@cchp.ps daralsabagh
Dar Al Sabagh Diaspora Studies and Research Centre

The Palestinian Museum
Museum Street, PO Box 48, Birzeit, Palestine
Tel: +970 2 294 1948, Fax: +970 2 294 1936, Email: info@palmuseum.org
The Palestinian Museum
@palmuseum Instagram: palmuseum
ACCOMMODATIONS

**Ambassador Hotel**
By Ambassador Collection
Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem, 91196
Tel: 541 2222, Fax: 582 8202
reservation@jerusalemambassador.com

**Ambassador Boutique**
By Ambassador Collection
5 Ibn Abu Taleb, Jerusalem
Tel: +972 2 632 5000, Fax: +972 2 632 5029
Email: boulique@ambassadorcollection.com

**Austrian Hospice of the Holy Family**
Via Dolorosa 37, P.O.Box 19000, Jerusalem 91194
Tel: +972 2 6265800, Fax: +972 2 6265816
Email: office@austrianhospice.com, Website: www.austrianhospice.com

**Casa Nova - Jerusalem Hospice Guesthouse**
Casanova Street, New Gate
P.O.Box 1321 Jerusalem 9101301 Israel
Tel: 02 627 1441, 02 626 2974, Fax: 02 626 4370
Email: casanovaj@custodia.org, https://casanovaj.custodia.org/

**Christmas Boutique Hotel**
Ali Ben Abi Taleb Street, Jerusalem
Tel: 02-6282588, Fax: 02-6264417
christmasshotel@bezeqint.net

**Gloria Hotel**
Latin Patriarch St. 33, Jerusalem
Tel: 628 2431, Fax: 628 2401
glorialh@netvision.net

**Jerusalem Hotel**
15 Antara Ben Shadad St., Jerusalem
Tel: 628 3262, Fax: 6283292, raed@jshotel.com, www.jsnhotel.com

**Knights Palace Hotel**
Freres Street, New Gate, Jerusalem
Tel: 627 5390
kp@actcom.co.il

**Pontifical Institute**
Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center
3 Paratroopers Road, P.O. Box 20531, Jerusalem, 91204
Tel: 627 9111, Fax: 627 1955, www.notredamecenter.org

**Ritz Hotel Jerusalem**
8 Ibn Khaldoun Street, P.O.Box 19186, Jerusalem
Tel: +972 (02) 626 9900, Fax: +972 (02) 626 9910
Email: reservations@jerusalermritz.com, www.jerusalermritz.com
www.facebook.com/RitzHotelJerusalem

**Seven Arches Hotel**
Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, 91190
Tel: 627 7777, Fax: 627 1319
svnarch@bezeqint.net, www.7arches.com

**St. George Hotel**
6 Amr Ibn Al'As Street – Jerusalem
P.O.Box 69272 Jerusalem 91544
Tel: +972 2 627 7232, Fax: +972 2 627 7233
E-mail: info@stgeorgehoteljerusalem.com

**Tantur Hills Hotel**
Hebron Road 303 (before Rachel's Tomb)
P.O.Box 19250, Jerusalem 9119201
Tel: +972 2 5658800 Fax: +972 2 5658801
reservations@tanturhills.com, www.tanturhills.com

**Caesar Hotel**
Al Masryoun, Ramallah
Tel: 022979400 Fax: 022979401
info@caesar-hotel.ps, www.caesar-hotel.ps

**Carmel Hotel**
Al-Masyoun, Ramallah, Palestine
Tel: 2972222 Fax: 2969666, www.carmelhotel.ps
74 rooms & suites, 20 hotel apartment, Spa, Gym, 2 Bars, 6 conference rooms, 2 restaurants, and outdoor parking.

**Gemzo Suites**
Fully Furnished Executive Apartments
Al-Bireh, Ramallah, P.O. Box 4101, Tel. 02-2409729,
gemzo@palnet.com, www.gemzosuites.net

**Lavender Boutique Hotel**
Al-Nuzha Street 24, Ramallah
Tel 297 7073
reservation@lavenderboutiquehotel.com, www.lavenderboutiquehotel.com

**Millennium Hotel Palestine Ramallah**
P.O Box 1771, Palestine, Ramallah, Al Masryoun
Tel: +970 2 2985888 Fax: +970 2 2965333
reservations.mh@millenniumhotels.com, www.millenniumhotels.com

**Taybeh Golden Hotel**
Main Street 100, Taybeh (Ramallah District)
Tel 289-9440
info@taybehgoldenhotel.com, www.taybehgoldenhotel.com
ACCOMMODATIONS

**Ambassador City**
By Ambassador Collection
Star Street, Bethlehem
Tel: +972 2 275 6400, Fax: +972 2 276 3736
Email: city@ambassadorecollection.com

**Jacir Palace Hotel**
Jerusalem-Hebbron Road, P.O.Box 1167, Bethlehem - Palestine
Tel: 0097222766777, Fax: 0097222766770
reservation@jacirpalace.ps, www.jacirpalace.ps
Facebook: jacirpalacehotel, Twitter: JacirPalace

**Nativity Bells Hotel**
City Center - Manger Street
Tel: 00 972 2 2748880, 2748808, Fax: 00 972 2 2748870
Email: nativitybells@palnet.com, www.nativitybellsps.com
https://www.facebook.com/NativityBellsHotel/

**Ibda'a Cultural Center Guesthouse**
Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Bab al-Mohayem, Bethlehem
Tel: +970 02 277 6444, info@ibdaa48.org www.ibdaa48.org
Facebook: Ibda’a Cultural Center

**Al Yasmeen Hotel**
Nablus
Tel: 09 233 3555 Fax: 09 233 3666
info@alyasmeen.com, www.alysmeen.com

**JERICHO RESORTS**
Bisan Street, Near Hisham Palace, 162 Jericho,
Tel: 232 1255, Fax: 232 2189
reservation@jericho.com, www.jericho.com
Facebook: Jericho Resort Village

**Oasis Hotel – Jericho**
Jerusalem Street, Tel: 022311200, Fax: 022311222
Email: info@oasis- jericho.p, website: http://www.oasis-jericho.ps
www.facebook.com/OasisJericho, Snapchat: oasis.hotel

**Rawabi Hotel Rental Apartments**
Rawabi 666, Palestine
Mobile: 059 420 4378
rent@rawabi.ps

RESTAURANTS

**360°**
Casanova Street, New Gate
P.O.Box 1321 Jerusalem 9101301 Israel
Tel: 02 627 1441, 02 626 2974, Fax: 02 626 4370
Email: casanovaj@custodia.org, https://casanovaj.custodia.org/

**Al Diwan Restaurant Ambassador Hotel**
Sheik Jarah, Jerusalem, 91196, Tel: 541 2222, Fax: 562 8202
reservation@jerusalemambassador.com, www.jerusalemambassador.com

**Borderline**
Restaurant | Coffeehouse | Lounge
Sheik Jarah, East Jerusalem 97200
Tel +972 (2) 532-6342, borderlinejm@gmail.com
Facebook: Borderline JLM Borderline JLM

**Cheese & Wine Rooftop Restaurant**
(Pontifical Institute Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center)
Tel: 627 9177, rooftop@notredamecenter.org, www.notredamecenter.org
Facebook: Notre Dame Rooftop/Cheese & Wine Restaurant

**Jerusalem Hotel Restaurant (Kan Zaman)**
15 Antara Ben Shadad St, Jerusalem
Tel: 628 3282, Fax: 6283282, raed@jasrihotel.com, www.jasrihotel.com
Facebook: Jerusalem Hotel Mediterranean Cuisine

**La Collina Bistro and Restaurant**
Tantur Hills Hotel, Hebron Road 303
Tel: +972 2 5658800 Fax: +972 2 5658801
Email: reservations@tanturhills.com, www.tanturhills.com
On Waze: Tantur Hills Hotel
Opening Hours: 17:30 – 23:00

**Meejana Lounge (at St. George Hotel)**
6 Amr Ibn Al A’as Street – Jerusalem
P.O.BOX 89272 Jerusalem 91544
Tel:+972 2 627 7232 , Fax: +972 2 627 7233
E-mail: info@stgeorgehoteljerusalem.com
**RESTAURANTS**

**Al-Jisser Pub**
Al Madaares Street, Beit Sahour
Mobile: 0597492175
Facebook: Al-Jisser, aljisser

**Bab idDeir Gallery & Kitchen**
D'aik Quarter, Manger Street, Bethlehem
Tel: 02 276 9222
Facebook: Bab idDeir Gallery & Kitchen
Opening hours: Tuesday-Sunday (9:00 AM - Midnight)

**Fawda Restaurant** Chef's Table
A modern take on Palestinian cuisine
Hoeh Al-Syrian Guesthouse, off Star Street, Bethlehem
Tel: 02-2747529, Email: reservations@hoshaelysian.com
Bookings required at least a day in advance

**Q Lounge**
Nativity Street (opposite Arab Bank), Bethlehem
Tel 02-2771481, Email: salibaasfour@gmail.com
Facebook: Q Lounge 1 @qlounge1
Closed only on Tuesday
11:00 AM till 1:00 AM

**Shams Al-Aseeel**
Enjoy Palestine's nature and cuisine
Al Makhour Valley, Beit Jala, Tel: 059-481-6011 / 052-744-2003
www.fb.com/shams.alseeel.palestine

**Singer Café**
Old City Street, Beit Sahour
Tel: 02-2771171, Email: Info@singercafe.com
Facebook: Singer Café

**Azure Restaurant** Our home is yours
Mediterranean and Steaks
Tel and fax numbers +972-2-2957850, Email: Azure.rest@gmail.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/Azure.restaurant

**Zeit ou Zaater**
Rukab St., Ramallah
(02) 285 4455, Email: zeitouzaater@gmail.com
Facebook: zeitouzaater

**Zest**
Issa Ziadah Street, Ramallah, Palestine
Tel. 02.295.3555, E-mail: info@zest.ps
Facebook: ZESTRestaurantOfficial @zestrestauranofficial

**Artoos**
The Art of Gelato
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
Tel: 02 282 5599
https://www.facebook.com/QCenterRawabiOfficial/

**Lilac**
Pizza, Pasta, & Pastries
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
Tel: 02 282 5599
https://www.facebook.com/QCenterRawabiOfficial/

**Qburger**
Burger
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
Tel: 02 282 5599
https://www.facebook.com/QCenterRawabiOfficial/

**Shrak**
Shawarma & Falafel
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
Tel: 02 282 5599
https://www.facebook.com/QCenterRawabiOfficial/

**Siroter**
French Café & Bakery
Q Center, Rawabi 666, Palestine
Tel: 02 282 5599
https://www.facebook.com/QCenterRawabiOfficial/

**Zeit ou Zaater**
Tel: 09 233 3555 Fax: 09 233 3666
Info@alysameen.com, www.alysameen.com
Facebook: zeitouzaater
**ATTRACTIONS**

**Jerusalem**

*Levantine Gallery*
Affordable originals, top quality prints and Arabic calligraphy
16 Christian Quarter Road, Old City Jerusalem
Tel: +972-2-970 7790  Mob: +972-52- 675 4276
Follow us on Facebook or Instagram!

**Ramallah**

*Birzeit Brewing Co. Shepherds Beer*
Brewing Beer of Palestine with passion for friends
Municipality street, Old town, Birzeit
Tel: +972 2 2819111, Mobile: +972 56 2776665
Email: info@bobic.ps, Website: www.shepherds.ps
Shepherds Beer Have you booked your tour!

**Poster**
Making Palestinian Art Accessible to Everyone. Get yours now!
7A President Square, Al-Balo', Albireh
Tel: 02 2426486, Mob: 0592947732
zanani@zawyeh.net, www.zawyeh.net

**Taybeh Brewery**
Proudly Brewing & Bottling Premium Palestinian Beer since 1994
Near the rotary, Taybeh Village, Ramallah District
Tel: 02-289-8868, taybeh@palnet.com, www.taybehbeer.com
https://www.facebook.com/taybehbeer/
Opening Hours: Monday- Saturday 8 AM-3:30 PM

**Taybeh Winery**
Making Boutique Palestinian Wines since 2013
Main Street, Taybeh Village, Ramallah District
Tel: 02-289-9440, info@taybehwinery.com, www.taybehwinery.com
https://www.facebook.com/Taybehwinery/
Opening Hours: Daily 9 AM-5 PM

**Zawyeh Gallery**
Current exhibition: Bashar Khalaf | Solo exhibition |
7A President Square, Al-Balo', Albireh
Tel: 02 2426486, Mob: 0597994997
zanani@zawyeh.net, www.zawyeh.net

**Jericho**

*Telepherique & Sultan Tourist Center*
Enjoy the panoramic view of Jericho
Elisha’s Spring, P.O.Box 12, Jericho
Tel: +972 (2) 2321596; Fax: +972 (2) 2321596
info@jericho-cablecar.com, www.jericho-cablecar.com
JerichoCableCar

**Museums**

*Sa'adeh Science & Technology House- Alnayzak*
We bring joy and science together and it’s for everyone!
Location: Al Haq Street in The Old City of Birzeit
Tel: +970 2 281 9523 +970 2 281 9040
Email: sciencehouse@alnayzak.org, www.sciencehouse.ps
Al Nayzak - Science and Technology House
الراك - بيت العلوم والتكنولوجيا
RAMALLAH
NABLUS
IT’S TIME TO FLY

I hope this column will not seem overly pretentious, but I feel that at times, it is important to shed light on one’s success, mainly to demonstrate solidity and to further encourage client confidence.

In a nutshell, 2019 has been a good year for This Week in Palestine. With this current January issue, we commence our twenty-second year on the journey, and with humility and pride, I add, without having missed a single issue. In fact, we’re now putting out special issues in addition to the regular monthly ones. The record number of full and partial sponsorships we received this year can only be interpreted as a sign of the sponsors’ confidence in the magazine and its website. During 2019, our sponsors have included Paltel Group, the Representative Office of Norway, UNESCO, UN Women, East Jerusalem Hospitals Network, the Higher Council for Youth and Sports, UNDP Rawabi Municipality, the European Union, PADICO Holding, Ambassador Collection, UNICEF, the Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine, Placenti Spa, and last but certainly not least, Bank of Palestine.

We have also been acknowledged by Paltrade for our role in promoting Palestine. The award was given by our prime minister himself in the presence of the minister of tourism and the minister of national economy, in addition to other dignitaries.

As importantly, This Week in Palestine has matured as a national communication platform that engages in topics pertinent to Palestine while maintaining its two-decade self-imposed mandate to promote and document Palestine. Each and every one of our 260+ issues has gone through a rigorous process of data collection, content and language editing that includes getting author approval at every stage, and layout before being sent to the printer. Our authors can probably vouch for our editor’s thoroughness in clarifying every single detail in their articles. The following comment we received from one of our readers might be an exaggeration, but it’s worth sharing: “This Week in Palestine has become the most popular and most credible communication tool in Palestine.” It is important to add that this wouldn’t have been possible without the hard work of every single person, past and present, who has been part of the TWiP team.

Palestine has been our base and will always be so. However, I truly believe that there are many people around the world who are interested in remaining connected with Palestine and learning more about it. The time has come for This Week in Palestine to spread its wings and fly! As I posted on Facebook after receiving our most recent award: “It’s all about teamwork.”

Long live Palestine.

Sani Meo
Publisher
Happy New Year

2020

Ambassador Collection

Jerusalem | Bethlehem | Tiberias | Amman