

Water in the Village,

or Is that No Water

in the Village?



By Maria C. Khoury

It is almost a miracle when you manage to make beer without a guarantee that you will have running water most days of the week. Since Amnesty International's 2009 report on water shortage in Palestine, you may be aware of this issue and its effect on local farming. But the issue has far-reaching consequences that affect all kinds of sectors in our local economy. Let me give you an example: a premium high-quality boutique beer consists of 90 percent water that, most of the time, is scarce, especially along the higher elevations on the arid edge of the Jordan Valley.

But we live in the Holy Land, so miracles are supposed to happen every day. For beer lovers, at least, it is a miracle to have a German-style beer available since 1994 in a region of the world where 99 percent of the people do not drink alcoholic beverages. Maybe I should drink a lot of the beer my husband produces in order to save him some money on buying drinking water. What would *you* do if you did not have a drop of water from your faucet and lived next door to the company that produces the first micro-brewed beer in the Middle East?

I might be better off than many of my neighbors who have no human-made alternatives to the colorless translucent liquid treasure that is so scarce in Palestine. Have you ever imagined filling up your bath with natural and pure beer? Sometimes I feel I could go crazy when I cannot have even a drop of water on my toothbrush. At least, they say, beer might be good for my hair. Well, in fact, I am not sure about that. However, I can guarantee you that the yeast left over from making



Taybeh sits on one of the highest hills overlooking the Dead Sea. It has 30,000 olive trees that need water. Photo courtesy of the Taybeh Group Photo Archives.

beer is excellent for anyone's hair. I am just too busy to collect this unique hair conditioner and use it appropriately. But I encourage you to visit our ancient village of Taybeh at any time to hear our story because, when the truth is told, we are just darn crazy.

Some days I cannot believe that I gave up life in a cosmopolitan city just to sit in a village waiting for water. The only benefit is that, when I am getting yelled at for leaving dirty dishes in the sink, I get to say, "What part of 'I don't have water' do you not get?"

Given these difficulties, who in the world starts to make wine when there isn't even enough water to make beer? Nadim Khoury, a mechanical genius and my Boston classmate, thinks it will work. I wish he would come up with more creative ways to have water! Pumping the rainwater that is collected in the family well is extremely expensive due to the high cost of electricity; we can only use it for showering, cleaning, and watering our garden. Many families in the area have started to collect rainwater, but with global warming we have been getting less and less rain these last few years.

During the month of July in 2014 and 2015, the village spent 21 days without

any running water coming from Ein Samia, our local natural spring that is our main water source. It is Palestinian, of course, but controlled by Israel. Everything in the West Bank – whether roads, borders, air space, or natural resources – everything is controlled by Israel. So if we are lucky, we have running water two days out of an average week. If we are lucky enough! Due to the ongoing water shortage, it has become normal for Palestinian villages to be last on the list of priority in terms of gaining access to running water. Settlements, of course, are first in priority and receive water 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

But I am not giving up hope. I spend a lot of time looking at the sun – on the company logo – my husband's personal symbol of hope that was used with the intention to reflect a bright future for all of Palestine. I hope that in a future free Palestine, natural resources will be distributed fairly to all people and that this will include safe, clean running water. Cheers from Taybeh!

Maria C. Khoury earned a doctorate in education from Boston University. She is organizing the 12th Annual Taybeh Oktoberfest, September 24 and 25, 2016.