Innovation and the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem
Message from the Editor

The upcoming commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Nakba is accentuated by the death of Khader Adnan (who died in solitary confinement after a hunger strike to protest administrative detention) and by tributes to journalist Shireen Abu Akleh who was killed by Israeli snipers while reporting. These and other rights violations are largely ignored or, for all practical purposes, condoned by governments worldwide. As Israel advances the surveillance of Palestinians, including the testing of robotic weapons, restrictions on daily lives abound. They impede the rights to self-determination (prolonged occupation), a fair trial (extrajudicial execution of suspects or protestors, administrative detention), education (demolition of rural-community schools, limiting numbers of exchange students and foreign professors at Palestinian universities), and life in dignity (house demolitions carried out in Area C and occupied East Jerusalem, where Israeli settlers can freely expand while Palestinians are denied building permits, or as collective punishment), to name only the most blatant examples. The restrictions placed on the right to movement not only affect persons and goods within the occupied territories and across international borders, thus hampering trade, but also limit the transfer of funds — e.g., PayPal does not allow Palestinians to open accounts — which has repercussions on the employability of those who wish to benefit from the expanding online job market, as many firms use this platform to pay for services received.

Palestinian entrepreneurs strive to overcome the limitations imposed on the local economic ecosystem. This issue highlights some of these efforts and the institutions that engage to support them. We sincerely thank those who chose TWiP to inform about their activities, which contributes to our sustainability! Our gratitude also goes to this issue’s authors: Lina Fattom, the project director of Innovative Private Sector Development (IPSD), and Amany Dahir, the market linkages component lead at IPSD; Alan El-Kadhi, director of Gaza Sky Geeks, a program of Mercy Corps; Kareem Kort and Emil Kort, the co-founders of Byrdbyte; Rateb H. Rabi, managing director of Intersect Innovation Hub; Hani Alami, a Palestinian Jerusalemite telecommunications expert; Yara Abu Meizer, a certified attorney and member of the Palestinian Bar Association; uMake, a coworking space in Ramallah; Flow Accelerator; Feras Nasr, who currently leads the UK Palestinian Tech Hub; Brigitte Baumann, one of the top three Female Business Angels in Europe in 2020, and Laith Kassis, a pioneer in the development of the Palestinian startup ecosystem; Hamzeh Ghosheh, a co-founder of Naviatx; Anan Copty, a physicist and prolific entrepreneur who develops medical devices; Olga Batran, a private-sector development professional; Lama Arrm, the executive director of BuildPalestine; and Dr. Faisal Awartani, CEO of Insights for Research Polling and Training. Our Personality of the Month is Rahaf Abu Aishe. Our two books of the month are The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine by Rashid Khalidi and Tales of Juha, edited by the late Salma Khadra Jayyusi. Where to Go takes us to Al-Jalama Botanical Gardens. Enjoy the many listed events.

From the entire team at TWiP, we wish for more peaceful times worldwide,

Tina Basem
THIS WEEK IN PALESTINE

Palestine on the Rise
By Lina Fattom and Amany Dahir

Fighting Digital and Financial Occupation
By Hani N. Alami

Scaling Palestine’s Tech Economy
By Alan El-Kadhi

Limiting Innovation
By Lama Amr

CASE X
By Emil and Kareem Kort

Building the Infrastructure for Innovation
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Unleashing Potential
Courtesy of Flow Accelerator

Angel Investing in Palestine
By Laith Kassis and Brigitte Baumann

Expand Your Tech-Based Business!
By Feras Nasr

Tapping Into Global Talent
By Hamzeh Ghosheh

Can Social Entrepreneurship Save Palestine?
By Lama Amr

Linkages to Industry
By Olga Batran

Innovation and the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

Personality of the Month

Book of the Month I

Book of the Month II

Where to Go

The Search for a New World
By Anan Copty

Events

The Last Word
Palestine on the Rise

Palestine on the Rise. That is the slogan we’ve taken on as we promote Palestinian companies in order to expand their regional markets and raise awareness of the young ecosystem our companies represent. That simple phrase is not only a cheeky play on what the world thinks when Palestine comes to mind but it also encompasses our hopes and beliefs in the entrepreneurs and their companies that come out of Palestine. It raises awareness of Palestine’s capabilities, talents, and economic growth.

As part of the Innovative Private Sector Development (IPSD) project, our aim is to support this promising developing ecosystem by acknowledging the challenges and difficulties that entrepreneurs face. In addition, we wish to identify the existing opportunities to support the enormous potential that is found in our ecosystem with our entrepreneurs. Our goal is to use this project to fill some of the identified gaps – in the short term – and to establish a support system that will allow the private sector and the government to fill those gaps in a more sustainable and long-lasting manner to allow for the sector’s growth. Many players operate in the Palestinian ecosystem, including entrepreneurs, accelerators, incubators, co-working spaces, a VC fund, government actors, universities, donors, individual angels, and the private sector. All of these believe that the future of Palestine will rely on the ability of Palestinians to participate fully in the global economy, reinforcing the belief that the tech and IT sector is the way of the future for Palestinian economic survival and growth.

Despite these efforts, the ecosystem remains in its nascent stage. The 2022 Startup Genome report estimated that the Palestinian innovation ecosystem is valued at around only US$66 million, with fewer than 300 tech startups.* The political situation remains the key contributor to the bleak outlook against success for entrepreneurs. As the Palestinian economy overall continues to suffer the long-lasting effects of prolonged occupation, so does the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Impediments include limitations on educational opportunities, limitations from restrictions of movement, limited market access and trade, and a lack of early-stage financing. Private investment falls at 15 percent of the GDP – well below that of most middle-income economies. The restrictions of movement on the trade of goods imposed by the Israeli occupation have encouraged the entrepreneurial ecosystem to focus on high-value service activities, specifically in the technology sector.

IPSD has identified some of the major gaps and binding constraints that affect the entrepreneurship ecosystem of the

PAID program launch: the launch of the Program for Angel Investment Development (PAID). The project aims to support and encourage angel investors in the Palestinian ecosystem. March 15, 2023.

Growth and expansion to new markets will continue to make a positive impact on the economy, creating jobs and new business.
digital economy in terms of human capital, finance, product markets, enabling policies, institutional support, and connectivity. The IPSD addresses some of the identified gaps by offering programs that contribute to support at the firm level in the form of technical assistance and grants that aim to improve the likelihood of success. It focuses on creating linkages to regional markets and supports the development of a dynamic startup finance ecosystem by cultivating business angel investors and providing early-stage catalytic grant funding to stimulate private investments, operating through the Ignite program and the Co-Investment program.

Over the past few years, IPSD directly supported 145 unique tech/tech-enabled startups and innovative SMEs with various grant mechanisms that improved their chances of remaining in the market and supported further success in new markets. IPSD has provided co-investment and pre-investment grants to increase startups’ runways and secure investments. It has made available emergency response grants for businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and offered a Gaza recovery grant to keep businesses open and able to weather the storm of the consequent external financial constraints. The direct support of firms through these grants has already yielded some important results for entrepreneurs’ growth and expansion. So far, over 30 beneficiary firms have entered 21 markets, including Saudi Arabia (SA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Kuwait, contributing to over US$19 million in closed deals. Beneficiary entrepreneurs have also reported raising over US$11 million in private investments with IPSD support, with US$5.5 million in private capital raised as part of the co-investment grants program alone.

The Palestinian ecosystem is small in comparison to other ecosystems in the region, but the potential is large. Many successful Palestinians thrive in international markets, and we want to ensure that the talent coming out of Palestine is supported throughout this journey.

As the region has seen a growth in entrepreneurial activity in recent years, Palestinian startups are eying the MENA and exploring how they can penetrate these markets. As the domestic market is small in population and fragmented, entrepreneurs are looking outward and penetrating new regional as well as international markets.

The local market is great for validating a product/platform, but in order to truly scale, startups are looking at the region for users, customer base, and new investors. A recent assessment conducted by IPSD has identified that entrepreneurs are most interested in reaching the KSA, UAE, Europe, and North America, however their impediments to access or scale were caused by a general lack of access to finance, external market business enablers and networks, and strategic global partnerships and talent acquisition. Additional challenges include how to establish a product-market-fit, ways to understand customer acquisition and retention, pricing, and so on. Many believe that growth and expansion outside of Palestine will cause a brain drain of talented founders, developers, and technology experts as well as the loss of jobs and identity. However, IPSD has found that supporting entrepreneurs with market linkage activities has created local jobs, improved investor relations, and contributed positively to the economy.

As Palestinian entrepreneurs scale up regionally and internationally, they continue to scale up their staff locally by hiring additional staff to meet the increasing demand, including back-end and front-end developers to work on products that are fit for their new markets.

When Palestinian entrepreneurs succeed in a new market, they ultimately raise awareness that Palestinians are capable of contributing to high-growth areas in educational technology, healthtech, logistics, artificial intelligence, the IoT, and smart cities development. The entrepreneurs who ultimately need to spend time in their new markets create an informal network that comes together to support other entrepreneurs in registering their companies abroad, finding talent in those markets, and, most importantly, making connections with potential investors. Although Palestine has yet to see a startup make a major exit, their successes should not be downplayed, as recently seen by UserPilot, a software-as-a-service (SaaS) company that delivers in-app experiences, which raised US$4.6 million in seed funding from an international institutional investor.

IPSD at the MENA ICT Forum: IPSD supported 17 Palestinian companies and startups to exhibit at the MENA ICT Forum, November 16–17, 2022.
smart solutions, and platforms do not need to physically cross borders to be successful. Take note, Palestine is on the rise, and growth and expansion to new markets will continue to make a positive impact on the economy, creating jobs and new business.

Lina Fattom is the Project Director of the IPSD, with over 20 years of technical professional experience in leading cross-sector work in law, policy, and program management in the private and public sectors, including with corporate, development, humanitarian, and human rights organizations. Lina is a merit scholar with a Doctor of Law from The George Washington University Law School.

Amany Dahir is the Market Linkages Component Lead at IPSD with over 20 years of professional experience in the area of operations in private sector services; maintaining investor relations, international development in areas of health, export development and promotion, and creating MENA region and international market linkages for tech-enabled startups and innovative SMEs. Amany has an executive MBA from Northwestern University – Kellogg School of Management.

The Innovative Private Sector Development (IPSD) project, is a Ministry of National Economy project funded by the World Bank and implemented by DAI. IPSD aims to support Palestinian startups, SMEs, and entrepreneurs from the West Bank and Gaza by helping to develop a dynamic startup finance ecosystem and improving business access and linkages to international and regional markets, with grant facilities to survive the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project further promotes business-enabling government reforms through the automation of business registration and streamlining, as well as providing a framework for home-based businesses. In addition, IPSD is implementing a pilot project to support GGateway as an outsourcing hub in Gaza.

IPSD Programs

NEXUS
A program provides up to US$25k cost-sharing grants to bridge gaps in accessing new markets and expanding in existing ones and by providing technical assistance in the form of business advisory consultations to firms penetrating new markets.

IGNITE
An investor-readiness advisory-services program to improve investor readiness for early-stage enterprises that also provides grant facilities of up to US$50K.

Co-Investment Grants
A matching grant program that focuses on reducing risk and stimulating larger private investment in early-stage startups and innovative SMEs by offering investment matching with grants up to US$350K.

Angel Investors’ Network
Support in building and structuring an angel investor advisory group while mobilizing complementary early-stage capital sources.

Automation of Business Registry
IPSD works with the Ministry of National Economy to assist in introducing an automated business registry system to encourage larger numbers of companies to register in Palestine through a simpler and more efficient process.

Home-Based Businesses (HBB)
IPSD supports the development of a legal framework for HBBs, allowing home-based entrepreneurs to reap the benefits of formalization.

GGateway (IT-outsourcing social-impact business based in Gaza)
IPSD works with GGateway to help it become a sustainable outsourcing hub by improving their business model, governance, and market outreach.

We all know the challenges of building the Palestinian economy: restricted movement, the occupation, the blockade of Gaza... Under such conditions, tech-enabled economic growth is the most viable and sustainable opportunity. The internet enables Palestinian individuals and companies to avoid local restrictions by accessing overseas markets and bringing revenue into Palestine.

Markets want startup companies with innovative solutions and services that are better or cheaper than elsewhere. Worldwide, a small percentage of startup companies survive after 12 months, and a fraction are successful. Successful startups tend to have an innovative solution that captivates a market. Such innovation typically comes from world-class university research or deep knowledge from a world-leading industry, so it is understandable that currently there are few successful Palestinian startups, even if they are supported by investors, accelerators, and consultants.

Conversely, Palestine is well positioned to supply services such as coding, graphic design, translation, and accounting via the internet to overseas clients: Palestine’s population of young, educated, un/underemployed is eager to learn high-value skills. English is well-spoken. Palestine is in a time zone that is convenient to service Europe and the United States. Tech services do not need natural resources or capital investment. And the tech-services sector is highly inclusive for women and people with disabilities.

Most importantly, tech services immediately bring revenue into Palestine. Freelancers earn US$600 to US$1,500 monthly, depending on skill and experience. Remote employees earn annual salaries of US$20,000 to US$100,000. This is good for individuals. But freelancers increasingly compete with low-cost countries in Asia and Africa, and remote employment in overseas companies means that Palestine’s best talent is unavailable for Palestinian companies.

Wider: Palestine needs to train thousands of young people annually. In 2022, Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG) delivered training to almost 5,000 participants (50 percent of them women) across Gaza, Jerusalem, and the West Bank. If just 2,500 of those participants earn US$700 a month, they will bring US$21 million annually into the Palestinian economy. (US$700 is the average income of GSG’s participants 12 months after graduation.) Imagine the impact on the Palestinian economy if tens of thousands of young Palestinians were trained each year!

Deeper: Those who have specialist skills do not compete for low-paying jobs. But it takes experience to become an expert. Hence, GSG...
tries to place graduates into tech companies as interns to accelerate their experiential learning. Plus, GSG delivers a wide range of short training courses to help participants to specialize after completing foundational training.

Companies: Palestine needs companies to generate revenue from overseas markets to build a sustainable and strong economy. There are only a handful of Palestinian tech companies with over 100 employees. Palestine needs dozens of large tech companies and hundreds of smaller companies, each specializing in a high-value niche. To assist tech companies in Palestine, GSG accelerates eight startup companies annually. We support startups with proven products that are motivated to expand locally and regionally.

GSG also partners with Palestinian tech-services companies to help them improve internal skills and access to overseas markets. For example, GSG assisted Creativity, a specialist e-marketing company in Gaza, in growing its team of experts. Creativity was founded in 2019 by two sisters, graduates of GSG, and now employs approximately 60 staff. GSG’s train-to-hire program resulted in 20 additional employees joining Creativity. Similarly, GSG’s Job Hunter program assisted Dash, a specialist tech-services company in Gaza, in improving its sales and marketing capabilities and winning more projects with overseas clients.

Palestine can replicate countries such as India, Vietnam, Ukraine, and Estonia that have thousands of tech-services companies, employing thousands of people. And as Palestinian employees become experts in an industry sector, they will create successful startups with compelling, innovative solutions.

Gaza Sky Geeks actively pursues partnerships with local and international companies to create internship and employment opportunities for its graduates while also generating projects for Palestinian tech businesses. GSG also seeks financial assistance. As a program of Mercy Corps, a global aid organization, Gaza Sky Geeks operates as a not-for-profit entity, relying solely on donations to fund its work. Partner with GSG now by contacting us at info@gazaskygeeks.com.

Alan El-Kadhi has served as director of Gaza Sky Geeks, a program of Mercy Corps, since mid-2021. Alan had a successful UK tech startup, ran tech companies in the UK, USA, and Australia, and assisted the tech-startup sector in Australia and Vietnam.
The journey of building CASE X has been a true labor of love, conceived in the heart of Palestine. As the founders of Byrdbyte, we believe that simplicity is the key to productivity. Our goal was to create a unique product that affordably transforms MacBook Pro laptops into more powerful workstations – and that’s exactly what we did.

Byrdbyte was created with the mission to provide digital freedom to all its users. Our company’s logo, the Palestinian sunbird, symbolizes freedom, while “byrd” represents the freedom we aim to provide, and “byte” stands for the byte of storage that our products deliver.

After 18 prototypes, we finally achieved the perfect fit with our multi-patented invention, CASE X. This innovation magnetically attaches to the back of any MacBook Pro, providing up to 4TB of storage using Thunderbolt technology, which delivers high-speed data transfer rates. The magnetic connection not only adds a unique factor to the design but also ensures easy installation and removal. However, it’s not just about the product or the specifications themselves. Our focus was also on proving the viability of a completely sustainable tech product that’s luxurious and affordable.

Throughout the development process, we carefully chose materials, finishes, and colors that reflect the values and morals of our brand. We were determined to create a zero-waste product, using only recycled and recyclable materials while ensuring that manufacturing itself didn’t have any toxic outputs. We are even collaborating with Alcantara, an Italian company that produces high-quality, sustainable materials, to incorporate a touch of premium feel to our products by using their fabrics.

As creators, we wanted to ensure that our product not only met but exceeded users’ expectations. We underwent the patenting process, solidifying our commitment to offering the CASE X for the next 20 years. Our innovation presents a cost-effective alternative to pricey upgrades through Apple, with the high-end version boasting speeds comparable to the MacBook’s internal SSDs. This solution offers users an affordable way to enhance their MacBook experience without compromising performance.

Looking back, we are humbled by the opportunity to create something that we believe can truly change the way people work and create. Given that we originate from Palestine, our commitment to innovation is deeply rooted in our background, and it does not stop with CASE X. We at Byrdbyte plan to expand our line of CASE X variations in the future, providing users with even more options and utilities. In
addition, we are venturing into the realm of blockchain cloud storage and its integration with CASE X models.

To fund these exciting developments and fuel future growth, Byrdbyte is currently in an open round of investment. As we continue our journey, we are filled with anticipation for the future of our company and the impact our innovations will have on users around the world.

To find out more, visit www.byrdbyte.com.

Kareem Kort is a civil and architectural engineer with a master’s degree from Bath University, UK, and a co-founder of Byrdbyte. For his thesis he developed innovative transparent membrane technology that makes rocks act like skin and fights degradation of the Church of Nativity building blocks. Kareem is a true problem-solving ninja, with a love for beautiful design and blockchain technology.

Emil Kort, a Palestinian entrepreneur with a master’s degree in engineering from Exeter University, began his journey focusing on water conservation in Palestine through his thesis and is committed to exploring innovative, aesthetic, and sustainable solutions in both the tech and hydro sectors. He is now in the role of co-founder and creative director of Byrdbyte. Fueled by his passion for art and technology, Emil expertly leads multidisciplinary teams, guiding them to create remarkable products that marry form and function while highlighting the potential of Palestinian innovation.
Building the Infrastructure for Innovation

By Rateb Rabi

The last decade has witnessed a remarkable shift in the Palestinian economy. Tech startups have emerged left and right as more entrepreneurs take the risk to make their ideas a reality. Given the abundance of talented and driven entrepreneurs in Palestine, one might wonder: Why aren’t there more success stories?

Creating a startup requires drive, talent, passion, and a significant amount of time. However, having access to a well-established entrepreneurial infrastructure is essential to overcoming the many challenges that startups are likely to face. This infrastructure includes resources such as mentorship, access to networks, funding, and technical expertise.

One of the major challenges in establishing a strong entrepreneurial infrastructure is the geographic fragmentation imposed on Palestine. Checkpoints, sieges, and export restrictions can stifle the efforts of even the most resourceful entrepreneurs. At the most basic level, this fragmentation limits opportunities for team-building and knowledge transfer to an entrepreneur’s immediate surroundings.

Moreover, significant regional disparities have prevented many entrepreneurs who hold our society’s most innovative ideas from accessing the resources they need. In Ramallah, for example, there are more than 15 organizations that offer support for startups, ranging from capacity-building to incubation. Unfortunately, beyond Ramallah, the infrastructure is still catching up.

To overcome this geographic fragmentation and ensure that all entrepreneurs in Palestine have access to the resources they need, it is essential to establish a strong network of support throughout the country. This network should include not only incubators and accelerators but also educational institutions, government agencies, and private investors.

In 2020, Intersect Innovation Hub – as part of the Bank of Palestine Group – launched its first incubator in Ramallah, providing a diverse range of services to support entrepreneurs throughout their growth journey. In May 2023, we will be opening our hub in Nablus, offering a variety of services and support programs for the city’s entrepreneurs. Our goal is to expand the services available in the northern West Bank, in close proximity to Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Jenin, and surrounding villages. There is a great deal of innovation in the north, and this central hub aims to connect innovators in the region with the necessary support. Coming later in 2023, Intersect Innovation Hub will be launching in Hebron – creating another bridge for entrepreneurs in the southern West Bank.

With the support of Bank of Palestine, Intersect is able to strategically operate hubs in each region of Palestine, thus setting in place the critical infrastructure needed to level the playing field. We aim to ensure that every innovator is connected, and every innovative idea has a chance to succeed.

In the upcoming months, we’ll be collaborating with many different stakeholders to create a vibrant and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem that drives innovation, creates jobs, and improves the life of every Palestinian.

With the right infrastructure in place, we can unleash the full potential of Palestine’s talented and driven entrepreneurs — and build a brighter future for all.

Rateb H. Rabi is the managing director of Intersect Innovation Hub, a business incubator serving startups in Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron, with hubs in Jerusalem and Gaza City coming soon. Powered by Bank of Palestine Group.

Applications are now open for our Startups-in-Residence program in Nablus! Go to www.intersechub.org/startups-in-residence to learn more and apply.
years ago, Palestine decided to move forward and support entrepreneurship in order to develop new streams in technological coding. This new stream is able to generate new revenues and create new jobs, helping Palestinians resist the occupation and overcome its siege on Palestine. It is especially helpful given that Israel controls the borders and severely hampers the export and import of goods while simultaneously restricting the movement of goods and people between cities and confining Palestinians to ghettos. The international community quickly encouraged such developments because it believes that investing in this stream will improve economic conditions in Palestine where high numbers of recent graduates find themselves unemployed, having very limited job opportunities.

It is no secret that salaries in high tech and coding are among the highest in the international market. This situation would be similar in Palestine: With the huge demand for these skills, such a strategy has the potential to be an economic game changer. For this reason, we have witnessed massive efforts being made by the government, the international community, local players, and recent graduates who are working together to help build this new ecosystem. Engaging all relevant partners in the ecosystem, enablers, accelerators, and incubators play a crucial role in supporting the growth of Palestinian startups and connecting them to global markets.

In a few years, when we assess what has been achieved, we will see huge success at the outsourcing level, especially because most of this outsourcing fills the gaps and responds to the needs of international firms with branches in Israel that desire to expand. This channel creates a win-win model for both parties. The Israelis responded to the demand and at the same time created a few thousand new outsourcing positions that generate good incomes. Unfortunately, this is the only track that has been developed and expanded, since Israel has resisted all other tracks. Outsourcing alone cannot build a healthy ICT ecosystem. Palestinians and international sponsors aimed to encourage international tech companies to establish local offices in Palestine and strengthen research and development. But the occupation played its ugly role and destroyed any track that would benefit Palestinians alone, even adding digital occupation as a new feature of the game.

On the educational level, the occupation authorities work hard to paralyze the Palestinian education system and prevent international lecturers or university professors from staying in Palestine to contribute to research and development within universities and higher education institutions by refusing to grant them visas. Every time we have come close to convincing one of the big-name firms to establish an office in Palestine, Israel has used its veto through the firm’s local branches that operate in Israel. They argue...
that such a small area cannot accommodate an additional office in Palestine and claim that political instability would affect the commercial model. At the same time, mega platforms such as PayPal have worked very hard from their Israeli branches to prevent any activities from taking place in Palestine. PayPal has disconnected the service for Palestinians and destroyed digital financial transactions, thereby preventing developers from working remotely given that most payment systems rely on this platform.

In addition, we have begun to see apps such as Google’s Waze that promote and spread the racist spirit of hate and bias: any tourist who uses the app in order to visit a place inside Palestine will be welcomed with a pop-up alert that warns, “You are entering a dangerous zone.”

Today, Palestinians are under siege by a digital and economic occupation. Israel insists on monopolizing the brand by calling itself the Startup Nation, while we continue to fight for our right to upgrade and become part of a Startup Region. As a result, there have been many casualties, such as unemployed persons who leave the country. Yet I believe that in the diaspora, these people will succeed and become our ambassadors, working to build bridges internationally. One day, they will return to establish their next startup in Palestine. We have no other option than to keep looking for creative ways to make our technological contribution to the global community from our occupied land.

Hani Alami, a Palestinian Jerusalemite, is a telecommunications expert. He has established a number of telecommunications companies — first and foremost, Coolnet, an internet service provider that operates high-speed internet services. He has recently acquired Fusion and SMT, two Palestinian operators in the Gaza Strip, in order to develop broadband over fiber and microwave infrastructure. In 2020 he co-founded EziCodes in Egypt with Saudi Partners to respond to the coding developments in the Middle East and recently joined Maalchat, a new startup in the area of financial technology. A few years ago he established JEST (Jerusalem Entrepreneurs for Society and Technology), the first entrepreneurship center and hub for startups in East Jerusalem. He is also the founder of Yaboos, the first Palestinian radio station in Jerusalem.
Limiting Innovation
The Legal Framework Regulating Startups in Palestine

By Yara Abu Meizer

In an ideal ecosystem, laws and policies function as startup enablers and investment attractions. In Palestine, the situation is far from ideal. Although Palestinian entrepreneurs continue to innovate and inspire, a number of legal limitations are imposed on them. This article briefly discusses the limiting impact of the Palestinian legal framework on Palestinian startup founders, the alternatives, and the way to move forward.

Palestinian political history and political divide have resulted in the existence of two separate legal frameworks that are applied in two different jurisdictions in the occupied state, one in the West Bank and another one in the Gaza Strip.

It is worth noting that the law regulating companies applied in the West Bank is the Law by Decree (42) of 2021. Whereas in the Gaza Strip, up until 2012, the applied law was the Companies Law of 1929, that was later amended by the new Companies Law that the effective government in Gaza adopted in 2012.

Startups are neither defined nor regulated in any of these laws. The main consequence of this absence of definition and lack of regulation is that startups are treated as companies or small businesses. In reality, however, startups differ from other forms of companies: A startup is “a temporary organization designed to look for a business model that is repeatable and scalable,” whereas a company is “a permanent organization designed to execute a business model that is repeatable and scalable.” This distinction between the nature and objectives of these two types of organization means that their regulatory needs differ as well.

Furthermore, because the applied laws are outdated, many areas surrounding the work of startups remain undiscovered and unregulated. Startups are all about innovation and aim to bring to life new products/services in response to a specific demand or provide creative solutions to today’s problems. Outdated legal frameworks do not respond to the “advanced” needs of today’s startups.

According to the Genome Global Startup Ecosystem report of 2022, “artificial intelligence and big data” is a leading subsector in the MENA region. With legal frameworks failing to recognize the existence of such subsectors and not offering much protection or stability to startup founders and/or investors, it is extremely risky and challenging for founders to establish a startup in Palestine.

Ecosystem stakeholders have long criticized the Palestinian legal framework for limiting innovation. For example, most founders view the registration and other official processes as slow and bureaucratic. In addition, due to the outdated applicable intellectual property laws, tech-based startup companies face major problems when initiating the intellectual property registration process, and the legal framework does not provide for or regulate flexible financing options that would respond to the nature and needs of startups at various stages. Palestinian
entrepreneurs, moreover, suffer from a lack of e-government or e-payment systems that would facilitate processes and enable entrepreneurs to act swiftly and, in some cases, ensure compliance with government and donors’ demands – to name just a few of the existing impediments and challenges.

It is evident that the Palestinian government in the West Bank is taking steps to achieve some sort of legal and administrative reform, attempting to create a nurturing environment for the business and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Just recently, the Palestinian legislature abandoned the 57-year-old legislation that regulated Palestinian companies up until March 2021 by adopting Law by Decree (42) of 2021 Regarding Companies. Furthermore, the Palestinian government has also adopted Law by Decree (41) of 2022 regarding national payments, which is a step forward towards the regulation of e-payments and fintech technologies.

The introduced laws are still hard to digest for Palestinian startups, as they are not specifically designed to respond to their legislative needs, nor do they take into consideration the financial and business structure of startup companies. For example, the newly adopted companies law does not provide a clear definition of a startup company. The law regulating national payments does not take advantage of innovative technologies and does not encourage or facilitate the creation of new e-payment systems by Palestinian entrepreneurs. As a result, Palestinian entrepreneurs are part of the brain drain and are moving to more business-friendly alternative jurisdictions such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Dubai, and the United States (Delaware).

Palestinian entrepreneurs should not have to rely on alternatives. A profound political and legal reform needs to take place in order to allow the law to act as a business enabler rather than a business limitation. This means that all stakeholders in the ecosystem must collaboratively play an active role to make this happen. Government and state officials should take serious steps to reform and update the applied laws. Lawyers need to understand the specific legal and business needs of startups, and entrepreneurs and startup founders need to be more vocal about the need for change in the legal system.

A step forward in legislative reform could be the adoption of a Startup Act that would be complementary to the new companies law (Law by Decree (42) of 2021). A preliminary step for the adoption of a Startup Act is to make sure that the new companies law is validated and properly implemented by various business stakeholders, including investors, business practitioners, public sector employees, and lawyers.

In the event that a Startup Act is adopted, it should be designed to support the establishing, financing, governance, organization, structuring, expansion, IP protection, and internationalization of Palestinian startups. This act should be attractive to all Palestinian entrepreneurs, including marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, Palestinian Jerusalemites (Palestinians holding Israeli IDs), and Palestinian women living in conservative environments.

The design of the Startup Act should depend on a bottom-up participatory process, which means that it should assess and take into consideration the various legislative and administrative needs of all relevant stakeholders within the startup ecosystem – starting with entrepreneurs, founders, accelerators, incubators, and entrepreneurial hubs and ending with donors and different types of investors – and the Palestinian government’s readiness to respond to these needs. The figure below explains the bottom-up approach that should be used when developing a Palestinian Startup Act.

In conclusion, the current Palestinian framework does not respond to the Palestinian startup ecosystem’s legislative needs. Given this reality, a legislative reform process should take place in order to create a business-friendly legal environment for startups in Palestine. In order for the legislative reform process to be beneficial, legal practitioners must collaborate with innovative businesses to create enterprise opportunity and value in order to drive quantifiable and impactful results for the Palestinian startup ecosystem and the Palestinian economy as a whole.

Yara Abu Meizer is a certified attorney and a member of the Palestinian Bar Association. She is an Associate II (Senior Associate) and the head of the Entrepreneurship and Startups Department at Andersen in Palestine.

1 Steve Blank, a serial entrepreneur and professor at business schools such as Stanford, Berkeley and Imperial College.

A community-centric approach to empowering the Palestinian tech ecosystem

We are uMake...

The number one destination for aspiring entrepreneurs, promising founders, and emerging startups. We are an authentically entrepreneur-centric movement of visionaries, innovative changemakers, and the home of a truly diverse community and a space of endless inspiration, creation, and growth. We embrace the growth mindset, we work hard, and we learn from our mistakes as we continuously thrust ourselves forward on the quest for lasting social impact. Housing everything from inspiring talks to coworking spaces and acceleration - we are the leading space for entrepreneurship and innovation in Palestine.

The space of infinite possibilities where changemakers inspire, create, and grow

Rooted in a steadfast vision of uniting entrepreneurs, innovators, and changemakers in a strong, collaborative community, uMake has come a long way. Founded by Daoud Ghannam in 2017, uMake had its humble beginnings as a coworking space, located in Ramallah Hisbeh, hosting 20 members.

Since then uMake has come a long way, and what started out as an ambiguous concept for the local community has since solidified. Now uMake has not only outgrown the tiny space surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the city center, but also challenged and propelled forward the concept of a community-centric innovation hub.

An innovation hub rooted in local changemakers

It's safe to say that uMake is different from most other innovation hubs and tech-ecosystem players in Palestine. Rooted in its community members, uMake is a commercial initiative by Palestinians for Palestinians - on a mission to challenge the status quo of an aid-funded tech sector. In doing so, uMake is attempting to break the cycle of the short-term, repetitive interventions that dominate the development sector. Instead, uMake puts the community first, and we believe strongly in creating actual, viable solutions with longevity based on the needs of our community members.

“uMake is just different. The community here is simply amazing. All the members, the uMakers, are high-profile individuals who are making waves in their respective industries.”

- Community Member, Ashraf Awawda

The alternative? Inspire, create, and grow!

So what does being community-centric mean? For uMake it means putting our community of founders, innovators, and changemakers first. “Community” is an integral part of uMake’s DNA, and the uMake community has been a driving force behind the development and growth of uMake over the years. Their contributions to building a sustainable tech ecosystem have been the building block of everything that is uMake today:

- SPACE: in every sense of the word. Whether you’re in need of a desk in our coworking space, a private office - or perhaps you want to rent a meeting or conference room: we have you covered!
- ENTREPRENEURSHIP: not only is uMake home to some of Palestine’s most promising startups - through our three-tiered training programs we offer support to all aspiring entrepreneurs, promising founders, and emerging startups.

Open office culture breaks down walls, literally and figuratively.
“uMake is a place where we can expand our networking, enrich our knowledge, learn how to set plans, and know exactly how to build the business we’re dreaming of. It is invaluable to be surrounded by ideators, changemakers who are all ready and willing to help the second you ask for it!”

- Community Member and Founder of Flowless, Baker Bozeyeh

How can you get involved?

If you’re looking for new CSR opportunities, uMake has a proposition for you: rather than viewing CSR as Corporate Social Responsibility, we suggest renaming it Corporate Startup Reciprocity. By reshaping your approach to innovation and embracing rather than avoiding the fast-paced startup scene, your company doesn’t just stay relevant - you directly position yourself in the context of the tech innovation scene in Palestine. By supporting uMake you gain access to an already existing structure (with a proven track record), a thriving community of innovators, and a global network of experts - all without having to create your own costly interventions.

So what are some ways for you to get involved? You can:
- Sponsor our space or one of our programs
- Offer your services as business service providers
- Rent space: from desks to meeting rooms and conference rooms
- Co-create events, trainings, or other activities
- Provide offers or benefits exclusive to the uMake community members

In short: supporting uMake is the best way for you to support the Palestinian technology and innovation community - and ultimately leave your mark on the future of the Palestine startup ecosystem.

Get in touch with us!
- Visit our space: we’re located on the fourth and fifth floors at Burj Amaar.
- Call 02 242 1435: for questions regarding memberships and space rental.
- Check out our website: www.umake.space.
- Follow us on social media: https://bit.ly/40jERml
- Book a meeting with Daoud Ghannam to explore sponsorship options via QR code.

• COMMUNITY: a place of safety that encourages growth, enables learning, and empowers. uMake makes for the ideal playground for founders, innovators, and changemakers to come together and learn and grow from each other’s experiences.

Our programs: a defined pathway for founders

Establishing a self-sustaining tech ecosystem with a mantra of “paying it forward” is a fundamental pillar upon which uMake as an innovation hub is built. In addition to providing a physical space for community members to inspire, create, and grow, uMake wanted to go the extra mile by laying out a clear pathway to success for any budding founders - regardless of the stage of their journey!

Through our three levels of entrepreneurship training we aim to support:
- Aspiring founders curious to learn more about entrepreneurship → through Startup Weekends
- Promising founders hustling to validate their business idea → through the acclaimed Founder Institute
- Emerging startups looking for funding in order to scale and grow → through the IGNITE investment readiness program

These three levels of training have been developed and implemented in collaboration with internationally renowned organisations like Techstars, the Founder Institute, and the World Bank. By doing so uMake not only provides entrepreneurs and innovators access to world-class training resources with a proven track record - we facilitate border-transitioning networking opportunities with world-class professionals and mentors.
Innovation and entrepreneurship have the power to transform societies, and as Flow Accelerator’s team, we have witnessed firsthand how fostering a thriving ecosystem can ignite this potential in Palestine. Our passion and commitment to nurturing a vibrant startup scene in our homeland lie at the heart of our work, and in this article, we share our vision and approach to building a more prosperous and inclusive future for Palestinian entrepreneurs.

Flow is a cutting-edge enabler dedicated to providing early-stage Palestinian startups with the resources necessary to transform their ideas into successful ventures and enable their growth. By cultivating an ecosystem that encourages creativity, collaboration, and risk-taking, Flow aims to propel the next generation of Palestinian entrepreneurs onto the global stage.

Our vision is simple: to create a vibrant, thriving startup scene in Palestine in which entrepreneurs are empowered to drive meaningful change and shape the future. We believe that a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem can not only create opportunities but also foster hope, resilience, and self-sufficiency among Palestinians. By nurturing homegrown innovation, we can unlock the immense potential of our people and contribute to the Palestinian economy.

We have developed a comprehensive programming strategy that addresses the needs of startups at different stages of their journey. We break this down into three focus areas: formation, validation, and growth. In the formation stage, we help aspiring entrepreneurs turn ideas into viable business models, providing them foundational skills and knowledge, and activating the entrepreneurial mindset. In the validation phase, we assist startups in refining products, ensuring that they are solving real-world problems and meeting market demands. In the growth stage, we support startups in scaling their businesses by connecting them to potential investors, partners, and clients.

We recognize that the innovation landscape is constantly evolving, and staying adaptive is key to our success. Our customer-centric approach drives us to continuously assess the needs of entrepreneurs and adapt our programs accordingly. We constantly strive to stay ahead of the curve by identifying unmet needs and addressing them in the most efficient and resourceful manner, as we aim to be among the initiators and catalysts that propel our ecosystem forward.

Our perspective on activating the Palestinian entrepreneurial ecosystem extends beyond aiding individual startups. As catalysts, we tirelessly encourage collaborations for growth and success. Our aim is to establish a thriving ecosystem, essential for the flourishing entrepreneurial spirit. To date, we have completed 22 programs, supported 80+ startups, and fostered 25+ partnerships, demonstrating our dedication to cultivating a fertile environment for innovation.

As we forge ahead, we envision a future where the Palestinian entrepreneurial ecosystem is streamlined, efficient, and a powerful generator of success stories. We acknowledge that this is only the beginning of a long journey, and we are committed to playing our part in shaping the ecosystem during its early stages. By connecting the dots and building bridges, we foster a more prosperous and inclusive future for Palestinian entrepreneurs, while showcasing our nation’s immense potential. We invite all who share this vision to join us in collaboration, amplifying our collective impact on the entrepreneurial landscape.
Angel Investing in Palestine

By Laith Kassis and Brigitte Baumann

V shows such as Shark Tank, Dragons’ Den, in which entrepreneurs pitch their businesses to a panel of potential investors, have helped popularize the concept of angel investing. Business angels are individuals who support startups to grow by providing cash, guidance, and contacts. In exchange, the investor becomes a shareholder in the startup. Historically, angel investors were limited to "exited" entrepreneurs (those who had successfully sold their businesses), high-net-worth individuals of whom more than 95 percent were men. During the past 20 years, angel investing has been "democratized," becoming accessible to a broader range and younger set of individuals, including those working in the tech industry, middle managers, and professionals such as consultants, accountants, and lawyers. Women also have begun to serve as business angels.

Angel investments in 2021 in the United States totaled US$29.1 billion, 15.2 percent more than in 2020. The year 2022 has seen a decrease compared to 2021, but the role of angel investors and the funds they bring continue to be significant. The deal sizes, the number of deals, and the number of angel investors have also increased year-over-year. Individual angel investors usually invest between US$5,000 and US$200,000 in each round. A standard angel funding round for a startup consists of seeking to raise US$100,000 to US$1,000,000 from four to twenty angels. The individual amounts of money invested do not have to be large if a group of angel investors syndicate together.

Becoming an angel investor presents a unique opportunity to support innovation and economic development in Palestine while also potentially earning angels a significant return on investment. Angel investment offers substantial room for growth and the potential for high returns but is also very high risk. Out of ten investments only one or two will succeed. However, many Palestinian

Investing in startups is inherently risky, and angel investors should have an understanding of how to manage risk and mitigate potential losses. Becoming an angel investor requires a certain level of knowledge and expertise in the field of startup investing, and investors should be able to conduct thorough due diligence on startups to assess their potential for success.
startups such as Userpilot, weDeliver, Gamiphy, and Mashvisor have gained recognition in the global market. These successful startups are evidence of the potential for Palestinian startups to succeed in the global market. The timing has never been better to start an angel investment journey now.

But who’s to say that Palestinian angel investors should limit their investment into Palestinian startups coming from the West Bank or Gaza? They can stretch their boundaries and look towards investing in Palestinian startup founders in 1948 Palestine and the diaspora. They can also increase their appetite as angel investors and syndicate with other angels. They can even invest in non-Palestinian startups to diversify their investment portfolios. Angel investing provides diversification benefits for investors who look to spread their risk across a variety of asset classes.

Other than the potential for high returns that may be higher than traditional investment options, angel investing provides an opportunity to support innovative startups and help bring new products and services to market, thereby contributing to the growth and development of the startup ecosystem. Successful angel investors report that they (i) join an angel network to access good investment opportunities and benefit from other members’ insights and experience; (ii) take a portfolio approach and frequently start with small investment amounts/tickets via syndicates; (iii) keep funds for future/follow-on rounds; (iv) continuously learn, access best practices, and review/refine their investment strategy; and (v) take angel investing seriously as an asset class and have fun with their engagement.iii

Several initiatives are under way to launch angel investor networks in Palestine. One initiative to support these networks is the Program for Angel Investor Development (PAID), which is a part of the Innovative Private Sector Development project (IPSD),iv a Ministry of National Economy project funded by the World Bank and implemented by Development Alternatives Incorporated. PAID is delivered in partnership with Efino, an initiative that offers prospective and experienced business angels angel-investing awareness sessions and webinars on topics such as investment strategy, due diligence, company valuation, deal terms, and investment and portfolio management and exit procedures. Those who are interested can register for the investor learning tracks via PAID.v

Becoming an angel investor requires a certain level of knowledge and expertise in the field of startup investing. Some key areas of knowledge that are important for aspiring angel investors include a deep understanding of the startup ecosystem and its dynamics, including how startups are formed, how they are funded, and how they operate; and being able to analyze a startup’s financials and projections to determine its potential for success. It can be helpful for angel investors to have expertise in a particular industry, as this can provide insights into market trends and the competitive landscape. Furthermore, angel investors should be able to conduct thorough due diligence on startups to assess their potential for success. This includes evaluating the team, market size and competition, intellectual property, and regulatory issues, among other factors.

Brigitte Baumann is the founder of Efino and GoBeyond, fintech companies that have transformed angel investing into a new scalable asset class for small and large as well as novice to experienced investors. She has been a business angel since 2003 and was honored as the European Angel Investor of the Year 2015, and one of the top three Female Business Angels in Europe in 2020.

Laith Kassis is the co-founder of EnterVentures consultancy and has been a pioneer in the development of the Palestinian startup ecosystem. His experience includes managing incubation programs, technoparks and innovation hubs that have invested in several Palestinian startups.

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v Registration is available at https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeZAYqZcLiLyRvRlEcMOZ0iX0vB6E NMISn/1fSVNZRWozg9w/viewform.
any of us have likely experienced the same dream: a spark of inspiration that ignites within us, realizing a solution that will revolutionize the world and potentially allow us to make millions. Enthusiastically, we sketch out screenshots of what our product will look like, write down features, and try to decide on a clever and catchy name for our new company. Most people quit at the idea stage because doing the work is much harder than it sounds. For the few who embark on the journey of startups and entrepreneurship, it can be a rollercoaster of a ride that most likely fails, as do 90 percent of startups globally. This does not mean that it’s not worth it. Startups are born every day regardless of economic or political situations. In 2022 alone, for example, there were 3,860 startups registered on Crunchbase.

For those who live in Palestine, working in IT provides distinct advantages unmatched by other professions. The occupation-imposed restrictions on the movement of goods and people don’t apply to the same extent as in other industries, and travel expenses and checkpoints can be overcome from the comfort of our homes or offices. Anyone with a laptop, internet connection, and desire to succeed can compete in the global workforce and build products that can be sold around the world. Despite its negative impact, the COVID-19 pandemic has made remote work and virtual meetings more acceptable as a means of conducting business.

Although the advantages for Palestinians working in software development and technology are evident, the same benefits apply to anyone else worldwide who is thinking of exporting software products or services. Therefore, why should you care about selling your product outside of Palestine, and more importantly why should others care? How do you overcome the obstacles and objections to selling your innovative solution abroad?

According to an assessment by Startup Genome of Palestine’s startup ecosystem, globally connected startup ecosystems grow faster and perform better than less connected ecosystems, and startups with global connectedness grow twice as fast. Given Palestine’s small domestic market and relative isolation, startups and companies need to have a global reach. Other reasons to go global include expanding your potential customer base, diversifying customers, attracting investors, and promoting Palestine.

Expanding your potential customer base is advantageous because the market in Palestine is small. The population is slightly over 5 million, average wages are low at NIS113 daily, and unemployment is high at 24 percent as of 2022. Startups and tech companies benefit from expanding their total addressable market (TAM). A market of only Palestine significantly limits their growth and revenue potential. A TAM of Gulf countries, Europe, and/or North America provides greater room for revenue growth. Companies in other sectors intend to expand their markets as well, however, with the added complexities and costs associated with exporting physical products, the effort becomes infeasible.

Diversifying customers has many benefits. Tech Nation in the United Kingdom is a recent example of an organization that relied primarily on funding from one source, namely the British government. A decision by the government to award funding to
another organization left Tech Nation unable to fund its operations and stay afloat. As a result, Tech Nation ceased operations at the end of March 2023. This is one of the many examples of organizations that rely on a large and important customer that can be greatly impacted by any action affecting that organization. Having customers abroad, preferably in multiple countries or geographies, helps limit any dire impact in cases of political, economic, or social disturbances. While this is not a guarantee, as we have recently experienced a global pandemic that impacted everyone around the world, it could help minimize the impact of such events.

Investors are attracted to companies with the potential to grow exponentially. For Palestinian startups seeking investors, a small market of Palestine (or even Palestine and Jordan) wouldn’t be enticing. Large markets equal large potential revenue equals huge returns for the investor. If investors can’t see how your company will scale and grow multiple times annually, then they will most likely look elsewhere.

It is satisfying and disappointing to see the reaction of people abroad when they hear about the technical abilities and achievements of Palestinian startups and tech companies. As they are accustomed to hearing negative stories about Palestine in the media, changing the narrative of Palestine is important. Palestine should be seen as a source of talent, innovative products and solutions, and tech companies and startups that can compete on the global stage. This is not to deny or minimize the impact of an unjust occupation, but rather to note that despite this occupation and restrictions, Palestinians can overcome, build, and succeed.

While there are challenges associated with going global, numerous challenges can be overcome if they are identified and necessary actions are taken. Three of the main challenges include the competition, the lack of a professional network, and the risks associated with working with a Palestinian partner.

In major markets such as Silicon Valley, New York, London, Riyadh, Hong Kong, and elsewhere, fierce competition exists with well-funded and well-staffed startups. How can you prepare yourself and your company for success? First of all, know your market. Different cities can be hubs for different sectors, so whether your startup is an edtech, agritech, fintech, or cleantech should have an impact on where you decide to expand. Moreover, understand your competition. The absence of competition is a sign that something is wrong, most likely it’s a result of your analysis and assessment of the competition. There is always competition, and you need to be realistic in your assessment and know what sets you apart from them. Look at their customer reviews and understand their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, have a clear value proposition and offer. You should be able to clearly state: “This is what we are selling, this is how it will help you, this is what it will cost.” Finally, you should build your online brand. Your website and social media channels should have a professional look and feel.

There is no need for expensive software development projects. Any of the available website builders are sufficient, if the main components are checked, such as a clear description of what the company does, a Contact Us page, a valid SSL certificate. Remember, the first thing most new contacts will do when hearing about your company for the first time is to visit your website and social media pages. Make sure to leave a great first impression.
It is crucial to build relationships and professional connections in the market that you are planning to reach. LinkedIn is your friend and can help you quickly expand your reach and build your brand. There are several things you can do to quickly build your network: Ask for connections. Done with courtesy and patience, this can be a very effective method for creating a network. Many people are happy to help and provide support given that it isn’t inconvenient for them. Your chances are better when you have clearly stated who you want to connect with and why you want to connect with them, and preferably have a short email written for them. Likewise, at the end of a conversation with a new person that you are introduced to, ask for suggestions of other people with whom you should speak. If they have some names, ask if they can make the introductions. If possible, attend and participate in conferences, workshops, and meetups in your sector and your market.

One major challenge that sets Palestinian startups apart from others is the associated risks in working with a Palestinian entity. There are many questions and unknowns, resulting in legal, political, financial, and technological risks. One option to overcome some of these risks is to register a company in your target market. Having a legal entity in the market you are seeking is a simple way to build assurances. It is easy, quick, and inexpensive to register a company in top destinations such as Delaware or London. As long as your company is complying with regulations, such as the (European) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the team can be located anywhere in the world. Moreover, it is important that you build the case. Customer education is important to ensure that they feel safe working with your company. Where possible, showcase the success stories of your company and other companies within Palestine that are working with multinational companies, and selling their products and services to customers around the world. Depending on your product or service, a discount or proof-of-concept could encourage potential customers to proceed. While it may be tempting for you to provide the service for free, this method rarely provides positive results. Instead, agree on the price of the service or product, and offer a discount if needed. Offering a free product simply means that anyone will try it, regardless of whether or not they find it valuable. What you need is someone who wants what you have to offer. Their willingness to pay is a sign that they are serious and will provide important feedback that will help you with your next customers.

It should be noted that going global does not mean going everywhere all at once. Facebook started with a few universities in Boston before it expanded to other universities in the United States, then the public across the United States, and then the rest of the world. Google started with just its search engine and later expanded its product base to include the wide range it now offers. Amazon started only selling books and now has become the e-commerce marketplace for the world.

Expanding globally is key for any startup that seeks to raise investments and drive revenue and customer growth. Startups can achieve their objectives through consistency, patience, and proper communication.

Feras Nasr is a technology professional with a diverse background who has worked in various industries in the United States, Canada, and the Middle East. With experience in IT management, system and network administration, security, software development, and more, he is passionate about startups with interests in fintech, machine learning, data engineering, and cybersecurity. Currently, he leads the UK Palestinian Tech Hub.

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As the Palestinian tech ecosystem continues to flourish, local startups are increasingly looking to scale their operations beyond the region. A critical component for achieving this growth is tapping into global talent pools to secure the human resources necessary for expansion. This article explores the various strategies and channels that Palestinian startups can leverage to access human resources in external markets, ultimately positioning themselves for success on the world stage.

The first step for Palestinian startups that seek to access global talent is recognizing the importance of creating an inclusive and diverse work environment. By fostering a culture that welcomes individuals from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, companies can better position themselves to attract top talent from around the world.

Ecosystem enablers, such as accelerators and incubators, play a crucial role in supporting the growth of Palestinian startups and connecting them to global talent. These organizations provide resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities that can help startups establish linkages with international partners and markets. They also sponsor Palestinian startups to participate in regional conferences and events, enabling them to showcase their innovations and connect with potential investors, collaborators, and talent.

Another crucial aspect of tapping into global talent is leveraging remote work and the gig economy. The rise of remote work has opened up new possibilities for Palestinian startups to access a diverse range of professionals from around the world. By embracing remote work and flexible employment arrangements, these companies can secure the necessary expertise and skills to scale their operations without the constraints of geographical boundaries.

To access global talent, Palestinian startups should also consider collaborating with international partners and networks. Joining global entrepreneurship and innovation communities can provide startups with valuable resources, connections, and support in their quest to scale. Such partnerships can facilitate access to new markets, mentorship opportunities, and potential investors, all of which contribute to the growth and success of a company.

In addition to remote work, Palestinian startups can explore talent-sharing initiatives and joint ventures with other companies in similar industries or markets. Such collaborations can provide mutual benefits for all parties involved, as they offer access to new markets, resources, and expertise. By entering into strategic partnerships,
Palestinian startups can leverage the strengths and networks of their partners to scale more efficiently and effectively.

One region ripe with talent that Palestinian startups can tap into is Egypt. Its highly skilled workforce, exposure to international corporations, and affordable currency make it an attractive destination for Palestinian startups looking to scale. Moreover, the proximity and cultural similarities between the two regions can facilitate smoother collaboration and integration. The strong Egyptian ecosystem, characterized by a growing number of tech startups, accelerators, and incubators, further enhances the appeal of Egypt as a source of talent and potential partnerships for Palestinian startups.

Moreover, participating in international industry events, trade shows, and conferences can provide Palestinian startups with ample opportunities to network with professionals in their fields and establish connections with potential talent. By engaging in these events, startups can showcase their innovations, company culture, and growth opportunities, ultimately attracting skilled individuals who can contribute to their success.

However, there are several obstacles that Palestinian startups may encounter when recruiting talent from other countries. Some of these challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, visa and work permit requirements, and varying legal and regulatory frameworks. To overcome these hurdles, Palestinian startups should invest in building strong relationships with local partners and stakeholders in target countries, as well as seeking the support of accelerators, incubators, and industry experts.

In addition to accessing talent from external markets, investing in local talent development is crucial for the long-term growth and sustainability of the Palestinian tech ecosystem. By nurturing homegrown talent, Palestinian startups can ensure that they have a steady pipeline of skilled professionals to support their scaling efforts. Initiatives such as partnerships with local universities and technical institutes, as well as mentorship and training programs, can help cultivate a skilled and capable workforce that can drive the continued growth and success of Palestinian startups.

In conclusion, tapping into global talent is a vital component for scaling Palestinian startups and positioning them for success on the world stage. By leveraging a diverse array of strategies, including creating an inclusive work environment, partnering with ecosystem enablers, and embracing remote work and the gig economy, these companies can access the human resources necessary to drive their growth and expansion. In addition, by overcoming obstacles and investing in local talent development, Palestinian startups can ensure a sustainable and thriving tech ecosystem, both at home and abroad.

Hamzeh Ghosheh is a co-founder of Naviatx, a leading Palestinian smart mobility startup.
Imagine being Christopher Columbus in the fifteenth century who dreamt of exploring a new trade route from Europe to the East Indies and Japan. It was well-known that he was embarking on a risky but profitable voyage that may or may not change the course of history. For his journey to succeed, however, several conditions had to be met. He needed to: 1) demonstrate that it would be useful and profitable; 2) generate enough support to fund the journey in terms of ships, crew members, supplies, and food; 3) ensure that the timing of the journey would align with current needs in Europe; 4) demonstrate that he was the right person to lead; 5) be able to recruit the right crew members for the journey; and 6) ensure that the right legislation was in place to allow him to sail.

I often use the above example to demonstrate to my students that their startup dreams, as entrepreneurs, must be backed by data, and that the entrepreneur’s personal drive can help develop external aptitude. Just as in Columbus’s case, the correct “ecosystem” is needed to support the journey: finance, the art of building ships, legislation, experienced sailors and leaders, and the right timing for the project.

Nowhere in the startup world is this more apparent than in the medical innovation world. Medical innovation is risky, expensive, and time-consuming. It requires a strong ecosystem and adherence to regulatory standards.

Every year, thousands of Palestinians graduate from medical schools in Palestine and abroad. The medical profession is considered one of the most respected and prestigious in the Palestinian community. Almost every family would be proud to call their son or daughter a doctor. If not a medical doctor, then perhaps a medical scientist, a biomedical engineer, or a pharmaceutical developer, among other professions. However, despite the enormous number of medical professionals, the development of new and innovative pharmaceuticals, digital health tools, or medical devices is very close to zero.

When I created my medical device startup company, SynergyMed, rather than recruiting a crew, I had to build one from scratch, as the art of developing medical devices is almost nonexistent in Palestine. SynergyMed developed a medical device to treat solid cancer tumors as an alternative or adjuvant treatment to surgery. After developing the first prototype, I managed to find an animal testing laboratory at Birzeit University near Ramallah where, with little help, we carried out the testing procedures. The results were exceptional.

The next stage of development was to perform what is known as first-in-human studies at a hospital. Palestinian medical oncologists loved to be on board and saw this as a great opportunity to be part of a new scientific work and publication that could be attributed to local development. However, we were surprised to learn that the Palestinian Ministry of Health does not even have a protocol for conducting clinical studies. In order to carry out the studies, we would have to develop a protocol from scratch, which could take years.
Clinical studies in the United States or Europe require millions of dollars. Therefore, the next phase was to look for substantial investments from medical venture capital firms, which are also nonexistent in Palestine. As a result, the company is working on product development locally with Palestinian talent and looking to raise funds, perform clinical trials, and grow abroad.

The risk-tolerant mindset required to discover a “new world” is still being developed. Not only in Palestine. The Arab world favors startups that imitate a working business model in the West and is less interested in breakthrough innovations. These they can buy with the oil money from the West.

The whole world is moving towards supporting a startup-driven economy. Startups are considered a driving force for innovation because multinational, large corporations are more rigid in their structure. With over 900 unicorns (startup companies that are valued at over a billion dollars) to date, it is no wonder that startups are seen as an attractive asset in many countries throughout the world. In addition, startups and small businesses create more than 80 percent of the jobs in developed countries. The time is ripe for the Palestinian community to take matters more seriously when it comes to startups as well as innovation. It is time to take entrepreneurship from a social-media, happy-photo exercise to actually taking concrete steps to build a viable entrepreneurial ecosystem. This time, it is not about infrastructure. We need to focus on building the individual.

The following steps are needed to move the startup ecosystem into a better phase. 1) We must create an immediate task force of qualified personnel completely devoted to boosting the startup ecosystem. The semi-casual meetings that have been taking place are insufficient. 2) We must restructure the education system in schools and universities, utilizing the new approach of instilling in the students a spirit of research and development and removing them from the traditional “memorize the information” methodology. 3) We must make it possible for talented Palestinian entrepreneurs, company leaders, business development experts, scientists, and engineers who live abroad to return to Palestine and offer them significant financial incentives and positions. 4) We must train successful businesspeople in investing in risky but promising startups where, if successful, the profit is exponentially higher than in traditional businesses. 5) We must create local government grants that are designed to support breakthrough innovative technologies for startups and help them make traction in order to minimize the risk for investors. The grants should be substantial and include salaries for the startup team and not just money to buy equipment or pay for a few services. 6) We must create effective startup sandbox communities that are designed to help test and develop scalable ideas and rapidly create minimum viable products with a strong product-to-market fit.

Sailing will not always be smooth, but the Palestinian community has seldom seen a calm blue ocean. It is ready to find its own pathway towards a new world.

Anan Copty holds a PhD in physics. He has worked at the three different Harvard University laboratories in physics, astrophysics, and medical physics. He was a staff scientist at Radiation Monitoring Devices, Boston. Later, he worked at Intel Corporation for ten years, where he developed new technologies. Anan has founded two startups, the current one being SynergyMed, a medical device company focused on the treatment of cancer through noninvasive thermal ablation for human and veterinary applications.

SynergyMed envisioned product for treating localized cancer tumors. Mechanical design made by engineer Saed Shweiki.
In 2022, 51 local higher education institutions graduated 46,000 students, 50 percent of whom remain unemployed. This is not surprising when we take into consideration that half of the local economic establishments are small traditional, frequently informal firms, geared towards the domestic market – with low potential for growth and competition and limited employment capacity.

Educational institutions: 51
Graduates: 46K
Total economic establishments: 140K
Private establishments: 90K (80K micro and small)

Occupation-imposed restrictions, together with outdated technology, high operational cost, and zero investment in R&D by small local businesses, create a vicious circle in which small enterprises emerge as a last resort for self-employment. They compete mercilessly in a micro market, only to fail quickly. This cycle also has a negative effect on recent graduates who find themselves ill-equipped to fulfill labor market needs and struggle to get the practical experience that would make them attractive to employers.

Within this landscape, the B-Hub at Birzeit University presents a holistic model that aims to tackle the pressing issues confronting the Palestinian economy, such as the vulnerability and downfall of small businesses, harmful social and ecological practices, and the prevalent joblessness among young people. It provides a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship between education and industry and is well-suited to the local circumstances, where the prospects for internships and apprenticeships are minimal, owing to the predominance of micro and small private enterprises (96 percent of all local enterprises).

By Olga Batran
B-Hub’s model taps into the enormous knowledge capital of Birzeit University faculty and students and uses it to support small enterprises. Through B-Hub, university student teams, supported by faculty members, engage in solving the problems that micro enterprises are facing.

Instead of producing consulting reports with recommendations on what the enterprises should do, B-Hub supports companies in developing and implementing effective solutions after conducting a thorough diagnosis of the business performance and the micro-market context in which the enterprise operates. These solutions cover various business and technical areas, including production process optimization, family business restructuring, inventory management, realistic business planning, creative marketing plans, crisis management, and so on. These areas of expertise are often inaccessible to local small enterprises through conventional consulting models. Another crucial service is R&D for product development, which is vital for local companies that tend to replicate existing product designs from the market without much improvement. This service is also central to B-Hub’s industry exposure model, as R&D assignments involve students from various university faculties, especially scientific and technical specializations, who have the fewest opportunities to get practical skills. Examples of R&D projects that have been completed for local manufacturing and agrotech companies include methods for paper recycling, wastewater treatment, recipes for natural cosmetics, design for production lines and machines, electricity-saving techniques, and the development of chemical formulas for detergents, polymers, and isolation materials as well as innovative construction materials.

This model of exposing students to the industry not only benefits companies but also provides a highly practical learning venue for students and broadens the horizons for faculty members. In addition, it stimulates an entrepreneurial mindset among students, inspiring them with ideas for starting their own businesses. In fact, several B-Hub startups have been launched as a result of R&D assignments, where students identified niches where they could apply their technical and engineering knowledge. Moreover, this model naturally cultivates twenty-first-century skills, such as problem-solving, communication, research, negotiation, and analytical skills.

Olga Batran is a private-sector development professional with more than 20 years of local experience. She is deeply committed to supporting local small manufacturing enterprises and social and green entrepreneurship, and her passion lies in creating opportunities for these businesses to thrive, grow, and contribute to sustainable economic development. Currently, she manages B-Hub, a business incubator of Birzeit University.

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3 The total number of economic establishments in Palestine is about 146,000, among these, 94,000 are private, of which 83,000 are micro and small enterprises, employing 1 to 10 persons. See “Preliminary Results of the Population, Housing and Establishments Census, 2017,” PCBS, 2018, available at chrome-extension://efaidnmbpnjapjpaiaiiclépamkknaa/jhttps://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2364-1.pdf.
Can Social Entrepreneurship Save Palestine?

Harnessing Social Entrepreneurship for Economic and Social Development in Palestine

By Lama Amr

If you ask any Palestinian child about their dream, you will likely hear something that involves making Palestine a better place. As a Palestinian myself, my dream has always been to be an agent of change. But the challenges facing our people are significant – from high rates of unemployment to human rights violations, a poor educational system, and limited access to our natural resources such as land and water, among others.

Although there has been a significant increase in economic development aid to Palestine since 1993, we have not seen notable progress in addressing these challenges. One of the main reasons for this is that the projects implemented with this aid are not necessarily addressing the actual needs on the ground. Even if they have an impact, it is not sustainable and ends once the funding expires.

At BuildPalestine, we believe that social entrepreneurship can be the solution for Palestine. Social enterprises are businesses created to solve social or environmental challenges and make a profit at the same time. They are effective, financially sustainable, and have a long-lasting impact. Because they are independent, they are not hindered by foreign agendas or funding restrictions, and as they grow, their impact grows with them. They interact with beneficiaries directly and constantly, which means that they are always responding to existing needs in an innovative, effective, and accessible way.

Sunbula’s House of Palestinian Crafts, for example, is a fair-trade social enterprise in Jerusalem that supports hundreds of local Palestinian artisans and their families through income-generating opportunities. Through its store in Jerusalem and an online platform, it unlocks access to global marketing for local artisans, which is hardly available otherwise. Since 2010, Sunbula has provided over US$2 million in income to artisans and their families, and the organization actively contributes to preserving Palestinian heritage and culture through innovative products such as embroidery manuals that document all kinds of Palestinian stitches.

Another social enterprise, Flowless, a startup established in 2018, leverages cutting-edge technology to provide communities with sustainable and reliable access to water. Starting with a system to detect water leaks for utilities,
the company has expanded its solutions to include farmers, helping them optimize their operations with technology to reduce water consumption and increase energy conservation. Flowless has implemented multiple projects in Palestine and abroad, and since its launch, it has helped save 300,000 cubic meters of water and improved the water supply for over 23,000 people. Starting with three co-founders, the Flowless team has grown to 11 employees, all dedicated to making a positive impact in Palestine and beyond.

Social entrepreneurship can help Palestine gain economic strength, ensure high-quality education, encourage innovation, preserve its rich cultural heritage, and develop a mindset of environmental stewardship. By empowering and incubating agents of change who make an impact in our community and profit at the same time, we can make a real difference through resilience and impactful businesses. At BuildPalestine, we offer three primary programs: The BuildPalestine Summit, which inspires community members to take action; the Social Innovation Bootcamp, which helps identify problems and develop innovative solutions; and the Fellowship program, which supports established social enterprises to enhance their business models and implement systematic methods for measuring and improving their impact.

If you wish to stay connected to a global network of people dedicated to social innovation in Palestine, I invite you to join our virtual community Taht al-Zaytouna, Under the Olive Tree, designed for people who are working on social impact projects for Palestine and for those looking to support them. You can subscribe by visiting our website at www.buildpalestine.com.

Lama Amr is the executive director of BuildPalestine. She holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Birzeit University and also co-directs the Founder Institute acceleration program in Palestine for tech startups. She possesses significant expertise in crowdfunding and in designing support programs for entrepreneurs in Palestine.

Let’s build a thriving, resilient Palestine through investing in social entrepreneurship.

Baker Bozeyeh, the founder of Flowless water management solution company.

Sunbula, a fair trade organization in Jerusalem.
Augmented Intelligence
How Large Language Models Could Level the Playing Field for Individuals with Learning Disabilities

By Faisal Awartani

Individuals with learning disabilities often face significant challenges that make it difficult for them to reach their full potential. These challenges can be caused by a range of factors, including genetics, trauma, or socioeconomic status. In marginalized areas, such as Gaza refugee camps, sociopolitical determinants like the Israeli occupation have had a significant impact on the learning outcomes of children living there. The prolonged violence, displacement, and trauma experienced by Palestinian children have negatively affected their ability to learn and succeed academically. Children in the West Bank and Gaza have experienced school closures, destruction of school buildings, and limited access to educational resources due to the ongoing Israeli occupation. In addition, the conflict has created economic instability and poverty, which can also impede access to education and hinder academic performance. The combination of these factors has led to lower literacy rates, higher dropout rates, and a decrease in opportunities for children in the region.

However, initiatives such as the use of large language models like ChatGPT can provide innovative solutions to support the learning outcomes of children in Palestine and the region. The concept of augmented intelligence refers to the use of technology to enhance human cognitive abilities. In the context of large language models, augmented intelligence means that individuals who face challenges due to genetic, environmental, or socioeconomic factors can use ChatGPT to augment their own cognitive abilities. For example, individuals with dyslexia, who may struggle with reading and writing, can use ChatGPT to dictate their thoughts and ideas, making it easier for them to communicate effectively.

Similarly, individuals with autism or other neurodivergent conditions may struggle with social interactions, making it difficult for them to communicate effectively with others. By using ChatGPT as a communication tool, these individuals can overcome some of the challenges associated with social interactions, allowing them to participate more fully in society. Language models like ChatGPT can also provide support for individuals with learning disabilities or other cognitive challenges. By using ChatGPT to assist with reading comprehension, spelling, and grammar, these individuals can improve their writing skills and communicate more effectively.

The Palestine Data Science Forum’s inaugural conference, which will gather researchers in artificial intelligence (AI) and data science from Palestine and the diaspora, will introduce a project that aims to promote statistics and AI literacy in the Palestinian context. One of the conference themes will focus on innovative ways to leverage large language models like ChatGPT to enhance learning outcomes for children residing in marginalized areas, such as Gaza refugee camps. The project seeks to promote the use of AI and statistics as a public good in Palestine.

While the use of large language models to provide augmented intelligence may seem like an obvious solution, it raises a number of ethical considerations. One of the most significant concerns is the potential for these technologies to exacerbate existing inequalities. For example, individuals who cannot afford access to these technologies may be left behind, creating a new class of digital have-nots.

Another concern is the potential for large language models to replace human interaction altogether. While these technologies can provide valuable support for individuals who face cognitive challenges, they should not be seen as a substitute for human interaction. We must continue to prioritize human interaction and recognize its importance in building relationships and fostering empathy.

In conclusion, large language models, such as ChatGPT, have the potential to level the playing field for individuals who face cognitive challenges due to genetic factors. By providing augmented intelligence, these technologies can help individuals communicate more effectively and participate more fully in society. However, we must also be mindful of the ethical considerations that arise from the use of these technologies and work to ensure that they do not exacerbate existing inequalities or replace human interaction altogether.

Dr. Faisal Awartani is CEO of Insights for Research Polling and Training (www.insights.ps).
Rahaf Abu Aishe

Following a Passion for Beauty to Entrepreneurship and the Startup World

With a degree in finance from An-Najah University, Rahaf Abu Aishe initially embarked on a career as a sales representative but quickly realized that this path was not for her. As she took time off to reflect and figure out next steps, she stumbled upon a customer-relationship management training course offered through a large software company (SAP-CRM). She applied and was accepted. Rahaf wholeheartedly committed to the course, received her certificate with a final score of 92 percent, and soon after secured a job as an accountant at a big tech company. Being exposed to tech and its ability to transform lives was fascinating for Rahaf. In her new job, she started to learn coding and the language of tech, which drew her more into this new world and its endless possibilities.

Rahaf eventually relocated to Ramallah for her new job. One day, she went to a hair salon to get a new look but left feeling unsatisfied. She wished that, as a newcomer to Ramallah, there was a better way to find tried-and-tested hair salons in the area. That’s when her idea was born: an app to connect customers with highly rated salons across Palestine. She shared her idea with two colleagues – front-end and back-end engineers – who were excited by the idea and became her co-founders. Together, they launched Salon, a platform for customers to find preferred stylists hassle-free. In just one year, they had two mobile apps ready to go, one for hair salons and one for customers.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit and everything changed. The team knew that they had to adapt to survive. They came up with a plan to keep the app relevant during the pandemic by creating content related to DIY beauty and self-care during the lockdown. The content was a hit, and it kept the platform alive during a difficult time. They also created a loyalty program that allowed customers and salons to collect points, which helped mitigate the pandemic’s economic consequences.

After the pandemic, Rahaf and her fellow co-founders applied for several grants and contacted accelerators. They were referred to the Gaza Sky Geeks’ Startup Program and were particularly interested in the mentorship component program.

Rahaf and her team were thrilled to be accepted into the eighth cohort of the Gaza Sky Geeks’ Startup Program. Not only did they gain access to a network of mentors and resources, but they also received a US$20,000 grant as a top-performing startup in the program. With this support, Rahaf and her team are more determined than ever to take the Salon app to the next level. Rahaf explains, “Being a part of the Gaza Sky Geeks community was a pivotal moment for Salon and for me personally. I knew that I had found a community that would support me through thick and thin – whether I needed a mentor, a connection, problem-solving help, or just someone to talk to. The support and resources provided by Gaza Sky Geeks were invaluable to our success, and we are grateful to be a part of such a supportive and empowering community.”

Winning the US$20,000 grant from Gaza Sky Geeks was a game-changer for Salon. With this funding, the app was able to boost its online presence using influencer marketing tactics. Moreover, the grant allowed Rahaf to shift her focus towards B2B marketing and develop a platform that enables beauty salons to easily register and customize features.

Despite the challenges of shifting consumer behavior and the traditional way of making bookings with pen and paper, Salon has achieved remarkable success with its unique service. The team, three co-founders and eight full- and part-time employees, is determined to scale to other beauty-related merchants outside of hair salons.

Rahaf and her team embody the best of the entrepreneurial spirit. They followed their passion, innovated in challenging times, overcame setbacks, and are making their mark in the tech world in Palestine and beyond. Gaza Sky Geeks is proud to have played a role in Rahaf’s journey as a founder and role model for entrepreneurs across Palestine.

“Embarking on your own startup journey means much more than simply becoming your own boss,” Rahaf asserts. “It involves navigating a challenging path that is filled with both highs and lows. However, entrepreneurship means learning to persevere through tough times. Through trials and tribulations, you learn valuable lessons and grow. Ultimately, it is the willingness to push through the obstacles that leads to success as an entrepreneur!”
simple letter written in 1899 was perhaps the opening shot fired in the war on Palestine. It was written by Theodor Herzl, Viennese journalist and leader of the world Zionist movement, in response to Yusuf Diya al-Din Pasha al-Khalidi, the great-great-great-uncle of author Rashid Khalidi. Yusuf Diya was part of a family of Islamic religious scholars and the mayor of Jerusalem for nearly a decade. He witnessed “the first years of proto-Zionist activity, starting with the arrival of the earliest European Jewish settlers in the late 1870s and early 1880s.” He was a prescient and prominent man in Palestinian society, and he clearly saw the aggressive Zionist ambitions for his country. So Yusuf Diya wrote to Herzl, expressing respect for Judaism and Jews and outrage at the persecution of European Jewry but reminding him that Palestine is inhabited by others. He closed his letter with a plea for his home and people: “In the name of God, let Palestine be left alone.”

Professor Khalidi says that the letters between Yusuf Diya and Theodor Herzl were probably “the first meaningful exchange between a leading Palestinian figure and a founder of the Zionist movement.” At the time, Palestinians constituted 95 percent of the population, but Herzl refused to see them as a people with an identity, a culture, nationalist aspirations, and ancient and sacred ties to the land. Herzl’s diary entries reveal his Zionist plan for ethnic cleansing in Palestine. But he lied in his 1899 letter of response to Yusuf Diya: “Who would think of sending them away?” Herzl thus initiated the treacherous bad faith that has characterized Israeli diplomacy and negotiations to this day.

Khalidi cites Palestinian scholar Edward Said, who confirmed that Zionists “have no use for us. The best Palestinian for them is either dead or gone.” But the criminal Zionist settler-colonial war of expulsion and occupation has failed to silence the Palestinian people or their righteous resistance. Their fundamental strengths are their presence on their own land combined with their refusal to surrender. The result is “Israel’s inability to either swallow the Palestinians whole or spit them out entirely.”

Palestinians are the moral victors in this Hundred Years’ War because Israel, like America, must forever bear the shame of building a nation on stolen land, on the tears of another people. Rashid Khalidi combines the personal with the political, eloquently telling the story of a deceitful letter written in 1899 and how it led to tragic consequences for his family and relentless war on the Palestinian people.

1 Rashid Khalidi, The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine, p. 4.
2 Ibid., p. 5.
4 Ibid., p. 7.
6 Rashid Khalidi, The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine, p. 207.
Tales of Juha
Classic Arab Folk Humor

Edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi
Translated by Matthew Sorenson, Faisal Khadra, and Christopher Tingley
Foreword by Said Yaqtine

Available from online booksellers worldwide, directly from the publisher at www.interlinkbooks.com, or in Jerusalem from Educational Bookshop.

Juha is an old Arab comic literary figure (known also to Persians and Turks) around whom countless popular anecdotes were written. He appears variously as preacher and beggar, porter and petty merchant, thief and honest man, judge and social critic, wise man and fool, and jester and charlatan (though never as a wealthy man or oppressor).

Referring to the introduction by Said Yaqtine, Banipal magazine states, “Yaqtine’s remarkable introduction allows readers to enter the world of Juha and get a better understanding of Arab humor and anecdote traditions.” While the subject matter is Arab or otherwise Islamic, the humor transcends national and cultural boundaries to achieve a universality that is instantly recognizable and accessible today.

This unique collection by the late Salma Khadra Jayyusi is a treasure. Dr. Jayyusi was one of the Arab world’s most distinguished literary personalities. Born in Safed to a Palestinian father and Lebanese mother, she obtained a PhD in Arabic literature from the University of London and taught at the University of Khartoum, Sudan, and at the University of Algiers and the University of Constantine in Algeria. A renowned writer, translator, and anthologist, she was widely known for her poetry and literary criticism. Her books include Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry, The Legacy of Muslim Spain, The Literature of Modern Arabia: An Anthology, and Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature. Dr. Jayyusi was also the founder of PROTA (Project of Translation from Arabic) to make Arabic literature available in the English language. She passed away on April 20, 2023, in Amman, Jordan, at the age of 95.
Where to Go

Al-Jalama Botanical Garden

In the northern reaches of Jenin Governorate, in the village of Al-Jalama, the Jalama Botanical Garden opened at the end of 2022 on an area of three dunums. The garden is located on the outskirts of the fertile Marj bin Amer plain (Jezreel Valley) and contains a group of globally and locally threatened rare plants, including the national plant of Palestine, Iris Faqqu’a, and a group of orchids such as the Galilee orchid, the Carmel, al-Musannan (Orchis tridentata). Other plants include the common water plantain (Alisma plantago-aquatica) and the Scorzonera phaeopappa, which are among the recently recorded plants in the West Bank. (Location: 32.5060216, 35.3192113.)

The botanical garden is a place to study and learn about the diversity of wild and nectar plants in Palestine. It preserves and protects more than 150 species from 40 families of plants that grow in our Palestinian environment. New species are also protected as they are planted in the garden as part of an ex situ conservation program. Among the most important featured plant groups are the irises, which include 6 species in the botanical garden, and the orchids, which include 12 species, and more than 60 species of nectar plants. More plant species will be added in order to contribute to the preservation and protection of wild plants in Palestine and to be part of the global network of botanical gardens, focusing on plants that provide food for bees and pollinators.

The garden also contains a community environmental farm based on the principle of voluntary work to help build a sustainable society, where the depletion of natural and agricultural resources, along with rapid population growth, puts great pressure on the environment and Palestinian society. Palestinian farmers have little information about green environmental agricultural practices and their importance, and about environmental issues related to the green economy, food sovereignty, and sustainable development.

In addition, there are 30 beehives in a training apiary that is equipped with the latest modern technologies. The apiary provides a means to expand the capabilities of current beekeepers and train new beekeepers, with a focus on recent graduates in agricultural engineering, veterinary medicine, and related disciplines. It works according to the latest scientific methods of sustainable beekeeping principles, including the biological control of diseases, the organic production of honey and various bee products, the recycling of beekeeping waste such as wax by using it in many applications, and the adaptation of beekeeping to the effects of climate change.

It is noteworthy that the garden was established by the Jenin Beekeepers Cooperative Association in partnership with Al-Jalama Women’s Center and Ma’an Development Center.

Visitors to the botanical garden are welcome at any time, and visits may be coordinated with the manager, Islam Daghlas, at +972 594 055 529 or by email at info@jbca.ps.
**JERUSALEM**

**CONCERTS**

**Wednesday 10**

20:00 Al Kamandjati Ensemble presents the Alastaza Program by Mohammed Abd Al Wahhab, performing pieces of the famous Egyptian composer and singer Mohammed Abdel-Wahhab, one of the most important masters of Arabic music in the modern era. Conducted by Iyad Stalati and performed by Ubahad Darwesh, with the participation of professional Palestinian musicians. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Palestine National Theatre — Al-Hakawati.

13:00 A concert by Duo SaZi, with Saeed playing the kamancheh and Ziya playing the tombak. Weaving together a respect for heritage and a taste for exploration, they seek to open new avenues and give birth to scintillating music. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Augusta Victoria Hospital.

**Thursday 11**

11:00 School concert by Duo SaZi, with Saeed playing the kamancheh and Ziya playing the tombak. Weaving together a respect for heritage and a taste for exploration, they seek to open new avenues and give birth to scintillating music. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi School.

**Friday 12**

18:00 A concert by Duo SaZi, with Saeed playing the kamancheh and Ziya playing the tombak. Weaving together a respect for heritage and a taste for exploration, they seek to open new avenues and give birth to scintillating music. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Indian Hospice.

20:00 "Al Wajd wal Rouh" concert presents Sufi music performed by the Ibn Arabi Ensemble and artist Yara Gawaqiq, who take the audience on a journey of Andalusian music that touches the soul through melodies and poetry. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music.

**Saturday 13**

20:00 Shadi Warasna presents religious poems set to Arabic melodies and the art of ghazal, performing the well-known patterns of old tunes as well as modern melodies that build on and develop this eloquent traditional style of Arabic music. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi.

**Sunday 14**

10:00 A musical concert by Fabienne van Eyck that accompanies a yoga practice with Aurelle Chauleur concludes Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Maison d’Abraham.

**LECTURES**

**Sunday 21**

19:00 “Surviving the Colonial City” is a panel discussion with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Eve Ewing, and Zukiswa Wanner in conversation with Mahdi Sabbagh. Presented as part of the Palestine Festival of Literature 2023. Nordic Café.

**BETHLEHEM**

**BOOK LAUNCHES**

**Wednesday 3**

18:00 A Moon Will Rise, by researcher and writer Christiane Dabdoub Nasser and published by David Paul, will be launched in a conversation with Hind Khoury, the PA’s former Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and current PLO ambassador to France. The story tells the poignant story of a prominent Bethlehemite family in 1920 Palestine. The plot is drawn in parallel to the political context of the time and makes generous references to the historical, economic, and social contexts, showing the vibrancy and chaos of this defining period in Palestinian history. Dar Al Majus.

**CHILDREN’S EVENTS**

Fridays 5, 12, 19, 26

9:00–12:00 Kids Club, for children between the ages of 5 and 12, encompasses various activities such as storytelling, film screening, arts and crafts, and music. Bethlehem Peace Center.

**CONCERTS**

**Thursday 11**

19:00 Sunset concert by the Ghilan Ensemble, organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Abu Ismael Bedouin Tent, Rashaydeh.

Friday 12

5:00 Sunrise concert by the Duo SaZi, with Saeed playing the kamancheh and Ziya playing the tombak. Weaving together a respect for heritage and a taste for exploration, they seek to open new avenues and give birth to scintillating music. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Dead Sea view point, Al-Matal, Rashaydeh.

**EXHIBITIONS**

Tuesday 2 to Monday 15

9:00–15:00 The exhibition Machine for Peace is organized by Bethlehem Municipality in cooperation with the Italian Network of Celebrations of Large Shoulder-Borne Processional Structures, included on the UNESCO List of Intangible Heritage. Bethlehem Peace Center.

Tuesday 2 to Thursday 18

9:00–15:00 The exhibition Holy Land Roots presents works by Yousri Shalaby that show Christian religious scenes and Palestinian significant features and locations, carved into a large olive tree. Organized by Bethlehem Municipality in cooperation with the Brazilian Representative Office in Ramallah. Bethlehem Peace Center.

**LECTURES**

**Tuesday 23**

18:00 “Four Generations of Palestinian Writing” features Vera Tamari, Ibtsam Azem, Isabella Hammad, and Abed Tamimi. Organized as part of the Palestine Festival of Literature 2023. Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

**Tuesday 2**

18:00 Greek Cypriot-Palestinian Cultural Day is celebrated in a performance of traditional and popular works by the Greek folklore band ILIDA and the Palestinian Baqoun Folklore Dance Group. The Arab Orthodox Cultural Club Theater, Beit Sahour.

**Tuesday 10**

13:00 Signing of the Sister City Agreement between the cities of Bethlehem and Paphos, Cyprus. Vienna Hall, Bethlehem Municipality.

**Friday 19 to Sunday 21**

10:00–23:30 A communal celebration of creativity, discovery, and wonder accompanies the opening of Wonder Cabinet, a new production facility and cultural space in Bethlehem that opens its doors to the public. The celebration features performances, exhibitions, workshops, and events, with the participation of local and international artists. The Wonder Cabinet, Al-Karkafeh Street. For the full schedule, please visit https://forms.gle/U66C5PKdOSLq9wOvy9. For more information, please contact office@wondercabinet.space.
CONCERTS

Thursday 4
18:00 The opening concert of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music in Nablus presents the Jenin Qanoun Ensemble with advanced Al Kamandjati students Afaf Hathnawi, Idris Ateeq, and Mahmoud Taleb who have been performing together for the past three years. Multi-Purpose Community Resource Center.

19:30 “Al Wajd wal Rouh” concert presents Sufi music performed by the Ibn Arabi Ensemble and artist Yara Qawariq, who take the audience on a journey of Andalusian music that touches the soul through melodies and poetry. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Downtown.

Saturday 6
17:00 Improvisations in the style of Arabic tarab, performed by Munther Al-Rai. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Sheik Qasem Coffee Garden.

19:30 Shadi Warasna presents religious poems set to Arabic melodies and the art of ghazal, performing the well-known patterns of old tunes as well as modern melodies that build on and develop this eloquent traditional style of Arabic music. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Khan Alwakala.

SEBASTIYA

CHILDREN’S EVENTS

Friday 5
14:30 The Musical Instruments-Making Workshop for Children by Shehadeh Shalaldeh aims to preserve Palestinian heritage, including the art of making musical instruments, and educates children on how to make instruments from natural and available materials. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Town Square.

CONCERTS

Friday 5
12:00 The opening concert of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music in Sebastiya presents the Jenin Qanoun Ensemble with advanced Al Kamandjati students Afaf Hathnawi, Idris Ateeq, and Mahmoud Taleb who have been performing together for the past three years. Al-Kayed Palace yard.

14:30 This music concert by Al Fanfardjati Ensemble is the result of a five-year project implemented by Al Kamandjati and funded and supported by Wallonie Bruxelles International, Province du Hainaut, and CasaPalabre. A brass band composed of Al Kamandjati students from various Palestinian cities has been formed through this project and will perform during the festival. The ensemble includes singers as well as oud, percussion, saxophone, brass, clarinet, and flute players. Town Square.

16:00 A concert by Al Samer Ensemble presents a mix of folk music, including the art of Filstianh Samer, Al Haddaa, Al Badawiyat and Al Dehieh, seeking to document the musical heritage of Palestine and leave a legacy for future generations. Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Town Square.

17:00 A Sufi musical concert of spiritual reflections by Munther Al-Rai, organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Mosque courtyard.

18:30 Musical concert by Zaid Hilal, organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Upper Square.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Friday 5
9:00-10:30 “Sharing a Moment of a Traditional Palestinian Breakfast” is organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Sebastiya Town Square.

13:30-15:00 “Sharing a Moment of a Traditional Palestinian Lunch” is organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Sebastiya Town Square.

THEATER

Friday 5
10:30 Storytelling by Hossam Abu Eisheh, presents unique stories about Jerusalem: “The Spring between Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher,” “People and Stones in the Ancient City,” “The People Who Were Here and Still Are, Even after They Have Died,” and “We Breathe the Fragrance of Her Morals and Wisdom between a Jolting Laugh and a Crying Tear.” Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. Al-Kayed Palace yard.

15:00 Qahwet Zatara, a theater play by Hossam Abu Eisheh that presents stories about Jerusalem: “The Spring between Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher,” “People and Stones in the Ancient City,” “The People Who Were Here and Still Are, Even after They Have Died,” and “We Breathe the Fragrance of Her Morals and Wisdom between a Jolting Laugh and a Crying Tear.” Organized as part of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music. The Stables.

BOOK LAUNCHES

Monday 8
19:00 The Lives and Deaths of Jubrail Dadoud by Jacob Norris and discussed by Salim Tamari recounts a story of the merchants of Bethlehem: the young men who travelled to every corner of the globe in the nineteenth century, setting off on the backs of donkeys with suitcases full of crosses and rosaries, to return via steamship with suitcases stuffed with French francs, Philippine pesos, or Salvadoran colons, and with news of mysterious lands and strange inventions. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

Tuesday 16
18:00 Prison Papers by Basel Ghattas narrates his diaries in the various Israeli prisons during his 23-month detention, after being charged with smuggling mobile phones to Palestinian prisoners. It recounts details about the lives of Palestinian prisoners and various aspects of political and humanitarian issues, all from the position of the prisoner behind bars. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

CHILDREN’S EVENTS

Thursday 18
17:00 Storytelling and interactive activity for children. Leila al Miqdadi al-Qattan Library, A.M. Qattan Foundation.

Saturday 27
17:00 Short film screenings in Arabic for children aged 3 years and older, organized by Leila al Miqdadi al-Qattan Library in cooperation with FilmLab. Leila al Miqdadi al-Qattan Library, A.M. Qattan Foundation.

CONCERTS

Tuesday 2
19:00 Opening concert of Al Kamandjati Festival for Spiritual and Traditional Music, featuring Al Kamandjati Ensemble presenting the Alastaza Program of music by Mohammed Abd Alwaahhab, and performing pieces by the famous Egyptian composer and singer Mohammed Abdel-Wahhab, one of the most important masters of Arabic music in the modern era. Conducted by Iyad Staiti and performed by Ubadah Darwesh with the participation of professional Palestinian musicians. Organized by Al Kamandjati Association. Ramallah Municipal Theater.

Saturday 20
19:00 Samah Mustafa’s solo show, in which she performs several roles with the help of a looper, including electronic rhythms, sound effects, and therapeutic instruments. The show presents special songs, in a lively and new style, from her album Ballour and folkloric and traditional songs that are familiar to the audience. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

EXHIBITIONS

Monday 1 to June 24
11:00–18:00 Sparkling Cities presents works by Palestinian artist Inass Yassin who draws inspiration for her artistic practice from the seventies and eighties, when an enchanting image of Arab cities was consolidated by popular Egyptian films. The exhibition runs until June 24, 2023, and is open every day except Friday. Zawyeh Gallery.
**THIS WEEK IN PALESTINE**

**Monday 1 to Wednesday 31**

11:00-16:00 *Art Gallery* is an exhibition that displays paintings, video art, photography, and sculptures by young Palestinian art students. Ashlar Theatre.

**Saturday 13**

20:00 *Opening of the exhibition Instant Modernism: On the Architectural Fabrication of Israel*. The exhibition sheds light on the role of architecture and urban planning, combined with law and military force, in the establishment of the occupying state and its image. Using visual archival material, 47 Palestinian artists, academics, writers, and directors showcase their interpretation and reflection on this interplay and offer narratives, representations, and perspectives formulated by those whose presence, culture, and history were obliterated from the onset of the instant creation. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**FILM SCREENINGS**

**Wednesday 3**

20:00 *Not Just Roads* is a 67-minute Indian and Swiss ethnographic documentary in English and Hindi with English subtitles, produced in 2021 and directed by Nitin Bathla and Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou. It tells the story of the massive urban transformation under way in India and documents the displacement of communities and tribes, the demolition of spiritual and ecological spaces, and the further marginalization of the working-class people who find themselves priced out of the area. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**Wednesday 10**

19:00 *Metropolis* is a 150-minute German film in German and English with English translation, produced in 1927 and directed by Fritz Lang. The story tells of the forbidden love between a young man from the industrialist class and an activist who preaches against the divide between the two classes. It depicts the great future city of Metropolis that in the film is inhabited by two distinct classes: the industrialists live off the fat of the land and are supported by the workers who live under the city and endure a bare-bones existence of backbreaking work. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**Wednesday 17**

19:00 *Mirage*, a 42-minute Serbian and English film in Malayalam, Swahili, and Bengali with English subtitles, produced in 2011 and directed by Srdjan Keca, references the destructive elements of neoliberalism and the relationships between people and places as two of his main themes to create this poetic visual reverberation of the growing city of Dubai. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**Wednesday 24**

19:00 *Taste of Cement*, an 85-minute Syrian observational essay film in Arabic with English subtitles, produced in 2017 and directed by Ziad Kalthoum, documents how Syrian construction workers rebuilt Beirut in the hollow of the civil war, while their own cities were being demolished by the then-current revolution-turned-war. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**Wednesday 31**

19:00 *The American Sector*, a 70-minute American film in English with English subtitles, produced in 2020 and directed by Courtney Stephens and Pacho Velez, takes viewers on a road trip to visit fragments of the Berlin Wall that are scattered across the Unites States. With static filmed images of these pieces, we look at the various expected and unexpected places that these monuments have been installed. A.M. Qattan Foundation.

**LECTURES**

**Thursday 4**


**Saturday 20**

19:00 Opening of the Palestine Festival of Literature 2023: Palestine & the Global South. The Ottoman Court.

**Wednesday 24**

18:00 *South Asia and Palestine* is a panel discussion with Mirza Waheed, Preti Taneja, and Anjali Kamat in conversation with Yara Saghafkhait. Organized as part of the Palestine Festival of Literature 2023. The Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center.

19:00 “Latin America and Palestine” is a panel discussion with Oscar Guardiola-Rivera and Lina Meruane in conversation with Budour Hassan. Organized as part of the Palestine Festival of Literature 2023. The Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre.

**Thursday 25**

18:00 “Histories of Resistance from Ethiopia and Eastern Europe” is a panel discussion with Maaza Mengiste and Molly Crabapple in conversation with Budour Hassan. Organized as part of the Palestine Festival of Literature 2023. The Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre.

**Friday 5 to Wednesday 17**

**INTERATIONAL**

Vienna: *The Wonders of the Nativity* is an exhibition supported by the Higher Presidential Committee of Church Affairs in Palestine, the Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity, the Mission of the State of Palestine to Austria, the Permanent Observer Mission to UN, the International Organization in Vienna, and the Embassy of the State of Palestine to the Holy See. The exhibition is open every day except Saturdays and Sundays. Rotunda, Vienna International Center.
The Strategy of Fatalism

Have you ever wondered why our galaxy is called the Milky Way? According to some, the name comes from how the galaxy appears from the perspective of Earth – “a hazy band of light seen in the night sky formed from stars that cannot be individually distinguished by the naked eye.” Others claim that our galaxy gets its name from a Greek myth about the goddess Hera who sprayed milk across the sky. In other parts of the world, however, our galaxy goes by other names. In China it’s called the Silver River, and in the Kalahari Desert in Southern Africa, it’s called the Backbone of Night.

In other extraterrestrial news, a certain galaxy out there is approaching ours at an alarming speed of 200 kilometers per second. Scientists agree that a collision of the two titans will most definitely occur. The good news, though, is that the collision will probably take place in about five billion years!

Collisions, new entities emerging, and black holes are also happening here on earth, too. There’s mayhem in Sudan that threatens further division in a country that is immensely rich in natural resources; the hydroelectric power of Al-Nahda Dam in Ethiopia is 90 percent complete, and Egypt is eyeing it like a hawk, which signals that an explosion is likely in the near future; the USA’s national debt stands at almost 31.5 trillion dollars and is growing by one million dollars every 40 seconds; the chatbot revolution (including ChatGPT and other software that simulates human-like conversations with users via chat) is happening, jeopardizing thousands, possibly millions of jobs; BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) is recruiting, putting out a new currency, and working on a new world order; the French Revolution II goes on, and Robespierre is adamant about the retirement law passed without his parliament’s consent; world interest rates keep going up, causing more banks to fold and imposing more hardship on people; demonstrations in Europe are becoming the norm; in the Middle East, one axis is on the rise and another one is going down the drain (hint: the first axis includes Iran!); for the first time in history, the Israeli population is more divided than the Palestinian people; a heat wave in Vietnam; and oh, WWII appears to be imminent. Other than that, all is well!

I believe that apart from short lulls, our world (and universe) has throughout history been in turmoil. In the meantime, we go about doing what we do, we duck when needed, keep our fingers crossed that we’ll be spared from major disasters, and stand firm as proud human beings. Some might call this strategy fatalism. We prefer to call it sumud.

Long live Palestine!

Sani Meo
Publisher
Regardless of your bank!
You and the merchant are winners
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10 Prizes
for the amount of your purchases
A maximum of 2,000 shekels per prize