

**Al-Hal has become a young woman**

The first issue of al-Hal was released in February 2005 and the publication became 12 years old this month, no longer a child. Al-Hal was published to tell the whole world that we are Palestinians with a lot to say, not only about the land of religion that has been occupied, or the price Palestine is paying to get rid of the occupation, but also about all the beauty that exists.

Over 12 years, al-Hal often glittered, but also suffered at times from censorship and accountability. It also ached from the political division.

Its pages remained open with half allocated to the West Bank and half to the Gaza Strip.

Thus, its heartbeat was and will remain Palestinian and integrated.

For all those who wrote letters to Al-Hal, we are grateful. For all those who whispered advice, we say thank you, and for all who took a photograph or drew a cartoon for al-Hal, we say thank you.

And for all who were silent, we say that their hearing, sight and hearts were all responsible. We can add that the tongue is the most responsible.



AL HAL - Wednesday 14/3/2017

5 PAGES

## Hamas elections: New leadership and old policy

### ■ Mohammad Yunis

The recent elections in the Hamas movement brought about remarkable changes in leadership positions, although no fundamental changes are anticipated in existing policies.

The movement held elections in four constituencies: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Diaspora, and prisons. Central elections must now take place in which the eighteen members of the Hamas Political Bureau will be selected, including the Bureau chief and his deputy.

Sources from Hamas said that the al-Shura Central Council [the Central Advisory Council] of 45 members was selected from these four constituencies (in addition to another 12 figures from Hamas and the Islamists). The sources also said that arrangements are underway to convene the Council in one of the countries in the region to elect members and the chief of the Political Bureau.

The elections brought about changes to more than half the members of the movement's political bureau in the Gaza Strip, where ex-detainee Yahya Sinwar, known for being close to the military wing, was elected as Chief. This raises many questions about the future of the Gaza Strip under a new leadership responsible for peace or war.

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas effectively controls external and internal policies since it steers an authority with 50 thousand employees, a military wing featuring a small army of about 30 thousand fighters, and a large bureaucracy that runs a network of companies and economic, social, health and educational institutions, including the Islamic University, the biggest in the Gaza Strip.

In spite of the fiery statements issued by the newly elected members of the Political Bureau in the Gaza Strip, such as that by Mahmoud al-Zahar on a final and decisive war with Israel, officials in the movement said that open confrontation with Israel will not take place in the near future.

The Hamas movement made a decision following the 2014 war not to resort to open military confrontation with Israel unless anti-craft equipment was available to neutralize the Israeli air force, whose direct bombing destroyed over 120 thousand houses and businesses, and killed more than 2,400 people, mostly civilians.

A number of the new Political Bureau members were members of the previous bureau that supervised the war and participated in decision making, including the new Political Bureau Chief Yahya Sinwar and members Dr. Khalil al-Hayyeh, Mahmoud al-Zahar, Rouhi Mushtaha, and Fathi Hammad.

A senior Hamas official said: "The central core of the new Political Bureau is the same as that of the previous one, which involved in strategic

decision making. Therefore, no change is expected in confrontations with Israel."

He added: "The Hamas movement is preparing for confrontation with Israel as if it may break out tomorrow, but it will not take the initiative to start such a confrontation."

The local political bureau in each of the four constituencies consists of 15 members, while the central Political Bureau consists of 19 members, six from the West Bank and six from the Diaspora. The head of the Bureau is chosen by members of the al-Shura Central Council in a direct and free election.

The current Chief of the Hamas Political Bureau, Khaled Meshaal, who is prevented by Hamas internal bylaws from running for another term in office, enjoys significant influence over al-Shura Central Council.

According to sources from Hamas, Khaled Meshaal's power and influence in the movement will not wane even after he leaves his post and he is likely to return to head the Political Bureau after four years. Khaled Meshaal's influence in the Hamas movement stems from his charismatic character as well as from widespread support by Hamas representatives in the Diaspora and the West Bank who comprise two-thirds of al-Shura Central Council and the Political Bureau. He also has a powerful influence over Hamas members in the Gaza Strip such as Ismail Haniyeh and others.

Informed sources said that the election of the new chief of the Hamas Political Bureau, for which Ismail Haniyeh and Mousa Abu Marzouq are competing, lies in

the hands of Khaled Meshaal, who appears to prefer Haniyeh as his successor over Abu Marzouk, his historic rival.

Khaled Meshaal's preference for Haniyeh is attributed to his concern that Abu Marzouk would control aspects of the movement in the Diaspora and would create a barrier to disallow Meshaal to return to head the Political Bureau in the next elections after four years.

The rivalry between Meshaal and Abu Marzouk goes back to the mid-nineties when the latter was Chief of the Hamas Political Bureau and Meshaal was his deputy. In the wake of Abu Marzouk's detention for two years in the United States in 1995, Meshaal was chosen as Chief and has controlled the keys of the movement to the present day.





## The Media Development Center (MDC) organized a conference on the National Initiative for Media Development



Participants in the conference held in Gaza recommended devising means to implement the outputs of the National Initiative for the Development of Media. These included drafts of legislation, codes of conduct, and the adoption of academic courses in universities, where some courses have already been included in the curriculum. These steps combined will encourage a free and impartial modern contemporary Palestinian media. They also recommended increasing the number of female journalists in media institutions, especially in decision making positions. The introduction of self-regulation in all types of media institutions was recommended to ensure a professional, transparent and organized media environment.



**Tahseen al-Astal, Vice Chairman of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate:**  
PJS supports all efforts to establish an agreeable and appropriate environment for media work.





Participants in the conference, held in Ramallah, recommended the adoption of outputs of the nine components of the National Initiative for Media Development, devised by journalists and specialists in the fields in which they had participated. They recommended the formulation of a committee made up of conference attendees to bring draft laws to the attention of the Prime Minister and for wider discussion. They also recommended advocating for the adoption of the Right to Information Law, the introduction of a course on media and gender in universities, and training teachers in this field. They stressed the importance of regulating media training to make it more professional and to meet market needs.



Abdul Latif Abu Hijleh, President of Birzeit University: The National Initiative for the Development of Media, organized in partnership with more than 80 media and legal institutions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, fulfils the objectives of the Media Development Center (MDC), which was established 20 years ago to ensure a free and professional media.





An interview by al-Hal with the head of the gender unit at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Kholoud Naser:

## The Palestinian curriculum is not biased against women but is not enough to eliminate gender discrimination

Amjad Samhan \*

In an interview with al-Hal on developments in gender indicators in the largest institution for public culture in Palestine, namely the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the head of the gender unit, Kholoud Naser, stated that the Palestinian curriculum does not discriminate against women but is not geared to the elimination of gender discrimination in Palestine.

Naser affirmed that the Ministry had raised specific issues regarding gender: steps to be taken in this regard, the priorities and focus, and existing gaps and problems in order to devise a planned strategy to overcome these problems.

She continued: "We found that we need a comprehensive evaluation of gender issues in the education sector. We determined that the gaps that still exist are deep and a work plan should be devised on this basis. We carried out a comprehensive study of the whole issue and proposed policies to solve these problems."

**Q. Do you think that the curricula alone can eliminate discrimination between sexes?**

A. There are two types of curricula, the written and the hidden. We must distinguish between the two. The

hidden curriculum is how the student perceives the curriculum and how this reflects on their behavior. Written material is not sufficient to bring about real change. I believe we should change the perspective of teachers towards gender issues and ensure that they deliver the curriculum to students without negative messages about gender, justice and equality. Hence, the curriculum is an important element, but is not enough on its own.

**Q. How convinced are Palestinian teaching staff of gender equality in the community?**

A. I think that beliefs on this matter vary and we have not evaluated the views of teachers on gender issues. However, we have the impression that intervention is required, whether with individual teachers or staff as a whole. One of our most important objectives for the coming three years for these new strategies is to find a common language among people with a basic shared understanding of the concept of gender; it is clear that there is confusion between the concept of gender and that of women's empowerment, and this affects students. We cannot blame the teacher since this is the culture of the whole community. We have started work at the Ministry to find a common language among teachers

following an evaluation in 2016 to define priorities for developmental action in the strategic plan for 2017-2022.

**Q. Have you noticed any change in the behavior of male and female students and teachers towards each other during monitoring?**

A. Nowadays, sources of learning are not confined to schools. Several sources have a stronger influence on students such as the environment in which they are raised, particularly the virtual environment, whether TV or internet. According to studies on this topic, children aged 12-16 are more affected by their peers than by their parents or teachers at schools. The current curriculum has undergone changes for the better in comparison with those of Jordan or Egypt. We have succeeded in including materials that advocate justice, equality, and an alternative image of women. Change may not be of the level desired, but clear and notable developments have taken place, especially when we compare students who studied the Jordanian curriculum for 12 years with Palestinian students. We can see a change in social behavior.

**Q. Do you think that we have succeeded in the issue of quality between men and women? Academic achievement for females**

is higher than for males, but in the labor market we find the opposite.

A. In the public space, we find that the presence of women is lower in the labor market. This reflects a clear injustice against females in job opportunities, although indicators of their presence in schools and universities are higher than males. This situation requires intervention by the government and changes in local culture to achieve a balance between the inputs and the outputs of the educational process. We hope to make a change through the Palestinian curricula and the interventions of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

**Q. How do you explain the fact that males hold higher senior posts (from Director 'C' and up), although females achieve higher grades than males in the secondary school certificate and the proportion of females studying at universities is also higher than males?**

A. If we look at the distribution of females in higher education, we find that there is little justice since most of them choose to study education because of the difficult economic conditions. Yes, female enrolment in universities is higher, but this is in specific fields that perpetuate existing social roles. Palestinian decision making is closely linked



Kholoud Naser

to a patriarchal mentality, which is also an international and Arab problem and is not confined to Palestine. We are working to improve job opportunities for women and are moving from slogans to implementation on the ground because Palestinian discourse is very supportive of women's role in decision making. Therefore we look forward to the necessary changes being brought about in the future.

\* Amjad Samhan is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.

## Three female students at the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering designed an application to filter abusive tweets on Twitter

Walaah Hjeiji

Scientific expertise and a love of excellence combined to design a new innovation to be added to a list of those created by Birzeit University students. Reem Jazi, Yara Ghawadrah and Dania Shelleh are three students in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Birzeit University who successfully designed an automated system to filter unwanted offensive and spam tweets on the Twitter social network. The work was supervised by the department Professor, Dr. Mohammad Hussein, and a PhD student at Toulouse University in France, Mahdi Washaha.

The assignment was a graduation project topic and there were no expectations for such success and excellence. As Yara Ghawadrah said: "Initially, our objective was to get a grade that we would be satisfied with, but when we started the work and sensed how important it was, we started to look for more than passing the course with a good grade. It took us almost a year of hard and continuous work to reach our goal."

The widespread use of social networking has allowed some ill-intentioned users of Twitter to do harm or abuse another user by

posting specific topics, spreading viruses, faking accounts, creating spam or impersonating users. This shows the need to design a mechanism to filter the content of a site, according to student Dania Shelleh.

Reem Jazi said that the system devised detects users who abuse the services provided by Twitter and filters spam tweets by looking at a range of properties from which spam accounts can be determined. Jazi added: "Many people obtained grades much higher than they believed possible because others convinced them that nothing is impossible. Support and assistance were not confined only to professors: parents and their prayers through the long nights, as well as the encouraging words of friends, all boosted the stamina to continue and persevere to prove ourselves and not to let down those who put their hope and trust in us. This provided the inspiration to achieve a dream at the end of an academic term and the beginning of a new phase in life where success in a scientific field is a significant motivation to achieve more success and progress."

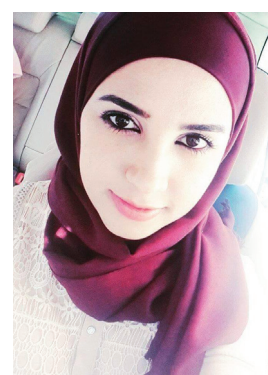
Shelleh spoke of the many difficulties faced by the three students during their work on the project, particularly the lack of suitable equipment all



Mohammad Hussein.



Dania Shelleh



Reem Jazi



Yara Ghawadrah

the time and the difficulties running the system because it needs huge and powerful computers. She said: "There were problems in the system itself. We had to work on a set of characteristics to distinguish the spam accounts from others and it was difficult to collect information for experimentation. This took up a huge part of the project time because it was difficult to find effective and strong characteristics to work from."

Jazi continued: "Despite the difficulties we encountered, with the support of Dr. Mohammad Hussein and Mahdi Washaha, and their attention to the tiniest details that we sometimes missed, we were able to overcome all the odds."

The completion of secondary school is usually the beginning of a new

phase where some excel if they choose their field of specialization carefully in line with their talents, beliefs and the needs of the Palestinian market. Dr. Mohammad Hussein confirmed that graduation projects are the most important projects in the university and students must choose their idea carefully, and work hard to make it successful and market it. Birzeit University considers graduate projects as one of the students' pillars of strength and engages with students to follow up and support these projects.

On future aspirations for innovative projects that are now emerging, Dr. Hussein said: "We follow up these projects to ensure they will become a nucleus for a successful and outstanding project through

the efforts of students and their supervisors. There is also modest financial support from the University and the Department. In the coming period, we will engage in marketing the project locally and regionally. We will also contact some local institutions through the University to continue work on the project."

He concluded: "The Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering is one of the largest in the University. Its students are academically and professionally distinguished. They work in the biggest companies at home and abroad. Therefore, the Department supports its students to be the best ambassadors for their University."

Walaah Hjeiji is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.



# Fatima al-Majd ... A bride awaiting a wedding to her husband who has spent 20 years in detention

**Bayan Baydoun**

Fatima Ali Barbar, or Fatima al-Majd (glory) as she likes to call herself, spent barely three years of her marriage with Majd (Abu al-Muntaser). Only 15 days after she gave birth to her child, Zeina, the Israeli occupation forces kidnapped her husband Majd Barbar from his house in the Ras al-Amud neighborhood of Jerusalem. That was the start of her journey of waiting that will not end for another five years.

Al-Hal interviewed Fatima about the years of her husband's detention, the first time he met his daughter, and her hopes for resuming their life together after his release.

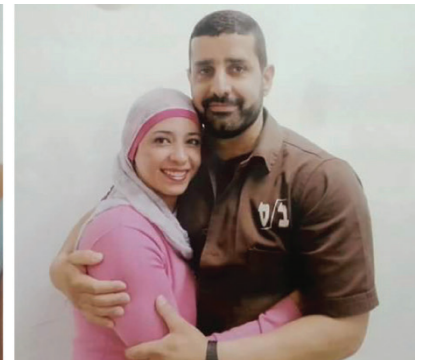
**Q. After all these years of your husband's absence from home and children, what are the most difficult moments and situations you have lived through?**

A. The most difficult moments that I have undergone, and still do every day, are at times of joy and sadness. That is when I remember my husband most, especially when there is a loss in the family. A month ago, it was very hard for me to tell my husband, when I visited him in prison, that his uncle had passed away. He had already lost another uncle and a cousin while in prison.

On happy occasions I also feel very sad. I try to enjoy the pleasure of the moment, but my happiness is always diminished because of the absence of my beloved husband.

**Q. You were 23 years old when your husband was arrested. Now you are 38 years old; how would you sum up 15 years of struggle as a young Jerusalem woman?**

A. It was not easy to come to terms with the fact that my husband would be absent for more than 20 years. It hit me like a thunderbolt and no words can describe my feelings on that day. Yet hope implanted itself inside me and allowed me to stand on my feet. I see my best achievement as raising my two children, Muntaser



Majd and his wife. Majd carrying Zeina on two occasions: once when she was 15 days old and the other when she was 15 years old.

and Zeina. They were my struggle and my struggle was for them.

**Q. What fueled you in this long battle?**

A. I was armed with hope and love for the husband I chose, the infinite hope and love that binds us together. I was also armed with the love and support of my family, my in-laws, and my friends. I helped myself through sport and reading. My husband is my pillar of strength as we support each other psychologically in each visit to the prison.

**Q. How do you see your life in five years when Majd is released and how do you imagine your life with your children and him back together after 20 years of separation?**

A. Life will be as Majd and I have been dreaming of. We always talk [about it] during my visits to him in the last couple of years. We are planning a new Palestinian wedding in which I will wear a wedding dress since we have only spent two years and seven months together. We have plans to travel

with our children and make up for the deprivation and the time we suffered in separation. We want to live together in happiness and spend the rest of our lives together. I believe that Majd deserves all this after waiting.

**Zeina meets her father after 15 years**

**Q. Describe the first encounter between Zeina and her father, and their embrace for the first time after he had last seen her when she was a 15-day-old baby.**

A. Those were a few moments of fear when Majd was worried to meet his daughter and I was frightened and worried about Zeina meeting her dad. Her eyes revealed her shock: she was smiling but holding back her tears in case they would drop on her cheeks at any moment. We could hear our heartbeats. Majd stroked his daughter's face and hair, holding her up and saying: "Fatima, she is big and heavy!" I replied: "She is 15 years old so she is a young woman."

## The BDS movement faces an Israeli counter-attack and tough international challenges

**Nadine Aranki**

Today the international boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement and its activists are facing stiff Israeli opposition locally and internationally, especially as BDS has grown and supporters and advocates have adopted a boycott of Israel as an act of resistance to the occupation. Al-Hal interviewed the General Coordinator of the Palestinian National Committee for Boycott, Mahmoud Nawajaa, and the Coordinator of the Committee at Birzeit University, Samia al-Botmeh, to talk about the challenges facing the movement.

**Tens of millions to confront BDS**

Mahmoud Nawajaa stated that the movement does not consider the difficulties encountered as new challenges. However, these difficulties have escalated recently after the Israeli government described the boycott as a strategic danger, as stated by a number of Israeli officials including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Security Minister Jelaad Ardan.

The stepping up of opposition was reflected in the transfer of the BDS issue from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Strategic Affairs run by Ardan. Millions of dollars were pumped into the Ministry's budget for this purpose. Nawajaa said: "Initially, there was talk of \$100 million, but today there are other undeclared budgets." The Zionist lobby also donated millions of dollars to confront the BDS movement, including \$20 million for American universities.

The coordinator at Birzeit University, Samia al-Botmeh, said that Israel is the main cause of the hardships faced by the BDS movement since it strongly opposes the boycott locally and internationally. The pressure being felt by Israel is reflected in the creation of a ministry specifically to fight BDS. Al-Botmeh added that this ministry monitors boycott activities around the world, counters them, and attempts to file cases against boycott activists.

**An attempt to label boycott as terrorism**

Nawajaa said that the Israelis had failed in their attempts to label the movement as a 'terrorist' or 'ISIS' movement. He attributed this to the success of the international boycott movement in proving that its stance and work fall within the framework of international law and human rights.

Al-Botmeh explained that Israel perceives of BDS in Europe as a form of racism against Jews. Zionist campaigners intimidate activists in the boycott movement by putting pressure on them personally or in many other ways. Defamation and libel are used in the media against activists, accusing them of belonging to terrorist movements. Nawajaa added that the Israeli occupation prevents boycott activists from visiting Palestine as well as preventing the leaders of the movement from travelling abroad such as the travel ban imposed on Omar Barghouti, one of the founders of BDS.

Legal confrontations in the United States The Israeli counter attack is based on

intimidating BDS activists through the enactment of laws and regulations against the movement. Nawajaa clarified that more than 31 states in the US have enacted legislation to confront the boycott movement and put pressure on it, although these laws are not yet in force. The Governor of New York state declared a boycott of those who adopt BDS, making it clear that this relates to government tenders. He also refused government support to businesses and institutions that support BDS. He added that attempts to pass a federal draft law in the Congress had failed so far, but would be voted on again.

The French Supreme Court enacted a law criminalizing the BDS movement, which will present an appeal to the Court of Human Rights.

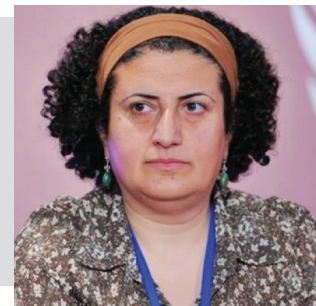
**Prosecutions against activists in Europe**

According to Nawajaa, criminalization also applies to activists in the United Kingdom following the enactment of a law that criminalizes the BDS movement and dealings with it. The Israeli attack includes suing activists by accusing them of anti-Semitism, which is considered a crime in Europe. These trials may result in conviction with the complicity

of the courts or authorities. In some cases, sentences have varied from four to five years of imprisonment. BDS activists in Spain were prosecuted after they put pressure on a festival hosting an Israeli settler who supports and justifies crimes by the Israeli army. Attempts to prevent people from attending the festival were interpreted as anti-Semitism.

Nawajaa explained that the BDS movement is countering these challenges by putting pressure on governments, engaging public opinion on these issues, and providing legal assistance to have activists released. Al-Botmeh stated: "We oppose the Israeli occupiers of our land regardless of their religion. Our antagonism against Israelis is the result of colonization and has nothing to do with anti-Semitism or religion. Our opposition is based on debate, argument, explanation, and uncovering the real face of Israel." Locally, a Supreme Court decision indirectly criminalized BDS activists who hold a blue Israeli identity card in cases such as when an Israeli company subject to boycott records losses and files a case against BDS activists.

Nadine Aranki is a student at the Media Department of Birzeit University.



Samia al-Botmeh.



Mahmoud Nawajaa.



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