

A fictional story

Our people decided to punish their politicians, who had not achieved even a little of what they promised: they made statements and erred; they argued and retreated; they negotiated and gave up everything that we possess in our hands. Thus, the people decided to punish them in an educational manner in the hopes of redressing the situation. A wise woman proposed: "Compulsory house detention is a tested remedy". Where, wondered a politician who believes that something must be done. She said: "In my grandchild's daycare". She clarified: "I watch our children who negotiate determinedly and obtain what they want. Putting politicians in homes with those children may teach them how to become bold negotiators like our kids, who hold tightly to their things, cling to them, and seek more ... never giving up or being cheated by 'candy'".

Editor in Chief

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Will the gains achieved by the resilience of Gaza be squandered in the negotiations and the Palestinian division?

By Rahma Hajja

Once the war on Gaza came to an end and the Palestinians celebrated the stunning resilience of the resistance, and after the Palestinian and Israeli delegations left Cairo, fears arose about the gains achieved on the battleground in the negotiations: that is, fears of Israeli procrastination and postponement. This has coincided with the return of media bickering between Fatah and Hamas to its previous levels, jeopardizing the reconciliation.

After 51 days of Israeli aggression, the warplanes left and the rockets of the resistance are back in their cache. A ceasefire was declared for up to one month to allow for indirect negotiations in Cairo to achieve Palestinian demands. Two weeks from now, the ceasefire will be over: the options are an extension for another month, the conclusion of an agreement, or a return to the arena of war.

Since the main aim of every Palestinian is to end the occupation and establish an independent Palestinian state, the demands presented by the united Palestinian delegation are irrevocable if victory is to be achieved. The core demand is for the release of those detained in the West Bank following the abduction of the three Israeli settlers, as well as the release of the fourth group of pre-Oslo Palestinian detainees, the construction of the Gaza port and the reconstruction of the airport, and the lifting of the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip to allow commodities and salaries to enter.

Al Hal surveyed the opinions of observers on the current negotiations to compare them with the negotiations launched 20 years ago between the PLO and Israel, which were exploited by Israel as a guise to plunder the land, expand the settlements and build the separation wall.

Member of Parliament and member of the political bureau of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - PFLP, Khalida Jarrar, stated: "There is a fundamental difference between direct and individual negotiations or a united Palestinian delegation aiming to achieve the conditions of the resistance movement simultaneously with resistance on the ground". This indicates that this is a new phase in Palestinian negotiations that differs from those of 20 years ago.

Political analyst Alaa Rimawi

concur with Jarrar's opinion of the "fundamental difference" for several reasons, including the participation of the entire Palestinian spectrum in the current negotiations, from the far right to the far left. The procedure of the negotiations is also different since the Palestinian delegation is negotiating on the basis of the conditions stipulated by the resistance and within a time frame, whereas Israel previously conducted negotiations without a defined time limit.

"He who does not go join in the wedding procession will not see the bride"

Professor of political science at An-Najah University, Abdel Sattar Qasem, has a different opinion. He describes the political performance during the negotiations as appeasement: "It was far inferior to the level of the military action in Gaza, proven by the fact that the Palestinian achievements were much less than their demands. In particular, the postponement of some issues means that Israel maintains the status quo. A popular Arabic saying is: 'He who does not join in the wedding procession will not see the bride'. Also, some phrases of the text of the agreement are ambiguous".

Fatah leader and member of the PLO central council, Nabil Amr, sees the results of the first phase of appeasement negotiations held in Cairo as "only a preliminary agreement for a ceasefire and not an achievement". He clarifies: "Perhaps the Israelis have undergone losses and Israeli policies have failed, which may be considered a success for the resistance, the Palestinians and the Gaza Strip. However, the end result of the battle has not yet emerged".

The Hamas representative for Ramallah and Al-Bireh governorates, Sa'ed Abu Bahaa, denied that these negotiations are a repetition of previous rounds. "There is a big difference between direct and

indirect negotiations. Moreover, the united Palestinian delegation has several advantages since it represents the entire Palestinian people, who were united for the first time by the resistance. Also, the negotiations are not about the fundamental issues of the Palestinian people, but for the achievement of the delegation's demands".

A Loose Unity

Kasem said that the reappearance of differences between Fatah and Hamas "affects the performance of the Palestinian delegation". He stressed that the reconciliation achieved earlier between them was only an "exchange of kisses without national unity".

Political analyst Khalil Shahin believes that "these differences will have an adverse impact on the negotiation process, weakening the Palestinian position because differences are not about how to achieve Palestinian demands, but who bears the responsibility for starting the war itself. Some lay the responsibility for the bloodshed and destruction in the Gaza Strip on the Palestinians, ignoring the fact that Israel alone should be the one held responsible for the aggression".

Amr stated: "What I hear indicates that matters are still not matured between Fatah and Hamas, or between President Abbas and Khaled Mechaal. Thus, I am not surprised by the internal dialogue and the verbal clashes, which are common in the Palestinian situation". He added: "There is a very special relationship between Hamas and Qatar, at a different level from that with Fatah. Qatar tends to assist and support Hamas, while it treats the PLO, Mahmoud Abbas or the Palestinian Authority as the legitimate Palestinian power. Qatar is therefore requested to encourage Hamas to take steps towards unity with its partners in the Palestinian sphere. Qatar should also support Hamas to adopt political



flexibility that does not constitute submission".

Events are judged by their endings

Shahin said: "If Palestinians return to negotiations, they will have lost the battlefield element that put pressure on Israel. This will, in turn, result in further evasiveness in an attempt to exploit factors emerging now and during the coming phase that are not in the interests of the Palestinian delegation. This relates especially to the pressure of the humanitarian disaster resulting

from the Israeli assault, with tens of thousands of displaced population requiring the reconstruction of infrastructure. These elements will put pressure on the Palestinian leadership, the resistance, and certainly on the negotiating delegation".

Comparisons between direct and indirect negotiations to one side, the Palestinian people, and specifically those in the Gaza Strip, await the reward for their huge sacrifices in the form of freedom, dignity and an improved standard of living.

Nabil, a refugee for the fourth time ... 'Clacket'

Mohammad Akel

Up until 1948, Nabil's father, Fathi Abu Nahel, lived in Barbarah village, to the north west of Gaza city. Along with all the people in the village, he lived in safety, peacefully tending the famous Palestinian grapes. When Zionist gangs led by the Haganah attacked them, fathers ate the unripe harvest and their children are still suffering from its bitter taste.

Scene One

Nabil's family and the residents of Barbarah drifted across the soil and were dispersed like the people of Sheba. The family passed through the stage of migration and headed north to Syria, but their eyes were always fixed to the south in the hope that the promise of return would soon be realized when the Arab armies liberated the country.

Nabil was born in Syria and, through his mother's milk, he learned that he was a Palestinian from Barbarah village, and that he was a refugee only until a time when he would gain power and affluence. He always discounted his tragedy in the same way that a farmer takes for granted the cumin that survives and blossoms with little irrigation. He hoped for a prompt return.

The fighting in Syria that devastated the country added a note of discord to the mandolin of Nabil's life, especially affecting the weak strings: the Palestinians suffered from the fighting of their brethren and their blood was wasted between the tribes [fighting factions]. The neighborhood where Nabil's family lived in Yarmouk refugee camp was destroyed, repeating

history to make Nabil a refugee in the country of refuge.

Scene Two

Nabil decided to return to the part of the homeland accessible to him, in eyeshot of the anguish of Barbarah. He fled from Syria's scorching heat to what he thought to be the spring of Gaza, renting a shop in Al-Nada residential towers in the north of the Gaza Strip. But the spring did not last for long: war broke out, and the shells of the warplanes reached the residential apartments of Al-Nada Towers where Nabil lived with his wife and four children.

Scene Three

As the flames of war rose, Israel asked residents in the area where Nabil and his family lived to leave their homes. Nabil moved from the far north to the far south of the Gaza Strip, to Rafah, in search of safety, only to see scenes very similar to those he witnessed in Syria, and even more ferocious.

Scene Four

Nabil and his family of six "live" in an UNRWA school in Rafah after the



Nabil and his family are in one of the asylum scenes.

house owned by a relative where he had taken refuge was hit, following their evacuation when an adjacent house was targeted.

It is frustrating that the "film" of Nabil's life has no finale and includes a many scenes of agony, displacement and suffering. Yet, he

and his people insist on giving it a happy ending like in the old films, where good defeats evil no matter how long it takes.

Was Gaza an appetizer for a war on Lebanon?!

Nazir Mjali

Since the assault on Gaza came to an end, the Israeli media are covered in reports of the dangers of Hezbollah and comparisons of the war against the Gaza Strip and the second war against Lebanon in 2006, highlighting the scenario of a third war on that country, already debilitated by conflict.

It is obvious that the Israeli army is the main source of information, and not leaks from one individual officer or another, because the reports contain detailed information on the type of weapons held by both Hezbollah and the Israeli army. The reports state that during the past eight years since the second war on Lebanon, the Israeli army has learned lessons on how to avoid failure. The reports also state the need to benefit from the lessons of the war on Gaza, particularly the battle against the tunnels. The possibility that Hezbollah has dug dozens of tunnels that stretch underground from southern Lebanon to Israeli towns and military posts is not excluded. One report disclosed that the Israeli army evacuated a military post adjacent to the border with Lebanon due to fears that Hezbollah had made a tunnel underneath it.

Strident statements that sound threatening to the Israeli public are published by Israeli military leaders via these reports. Israeli Channel Two broadcast a report stating that, "Any future confrontation with militant groups in Lebanon would be

totally different from the latest war on the Gaza Strip. The volume of firearms, destruction, and the launch of missiles would be massive in both directions". Other sources quoted in Haaretz newspaper on the 3rd of September 2014 stressed that there are about 100 thousand rocket missiles in Lebanon, mainly stored in villages near the border with Israel. Most of these are manufactured in Iranian, Russian and Syrian factories with high-tech features, meaning that they are more accurate than the primitive Hamas missiles. These weapons include a large number of heavy rocket launchers capable of launching tens, perhaps hundreds, of missiles simultaneously that the Israeli Iron Dome defense system would find difficult to repulse. Worse still, these are installed in the Beirut area and Israeli raids to destroy them would hit facilities in the Lebanese capital, drawing worldwide criticism and risking the loss of a number of major allies such as France.

The Commander of the Hiram 769 brigade of the Israeli army, Colonel Dan Goldfos, said that, in the event of a military confrontation in northern Israel, the army would be able to, "take decisions on what should be done to best protect our vital installations, where I may say to the population that we are obliged to take hard decisions such as the evacuation of towns". He continued: "I am not concerned about the occupation of the Galilee by the enemy as they will not achieve that because we are there to prevent it, but citizens may be affected, which is not acceptable as our role is to protect and defend civilians".

Channel Two disclosed that, at the end of 2012, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, visited Tel Aviv and met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu showed him aerial photographs of the south of Lebanon and told him that, in the event of a war breaking out with Lebanon, Israel would hit the southern villages with force because these areas would be the bases for launching missiles towards all geographical areas of Israel. He stated: "We should start the shelling before them, as it would be disastrous for us if they were the ones to start first".

People living in northern Israel are terrified by reports published during the war about Hezbollah digging tunnels day and night. We got the impression that many people have become paranoid as they reported hearing the sound of drilling in the ground beneath their houses. The army's rumors stoke these fears.

So, will Israel really wage war against Lebanon? And will this be any time soon?

Logically speaking, there is no real reason for Israel to wage war on Lebanon. Hezbollah is preoccupied with the civil war raging in Syria and thus, poses no threat to Israel's security. It has even gone so far as to declare that it has no intention of engaging in a war with Israel. When a separate faction unilaterally launches a small shell at the Galilee, Hezbollah immediately denies any responsibility. We are well aware that all the distress calls emanating from the Gaza Strip were unable to

influence Hezbollah's decision to abstain completely from launching missiles and opening a backup to support the people of Gaza in the war.

So, what is this provocation by Hezbollah all about now? Seeing as Hezbollah has demonstrated more commitment to the ceasefire agreement than any other faction or Arab country?

Below we identify Israel's strategy and tactics.

It is very probable that the aim of these reports is to mobilize public support in the campaign to increase the army's military budget. According to reports, the army is

demanding NIS 20 billion, to be paid in two installments: 9 billion now and 11 billion in next year's budget. The Ministry of Finance is not only refusing, but also inciting the public against the army for wasting public money. The Ministry states that conditions in the Arab world do not pose any threat of war for as long as 20 to 30 years to come. Arab armies have disintegrated and are occupied with internal affairs, so the Israeli army should reduce its demands rather than insisting on an increase. If the public is not convinced, the army may fabricate any military confrontation to prove that it still faces security risks. This could turn out to be a war and not only a confrontation, and would inevitably be even uglier than the war on the Gaza Strip.

alhal

Al Hal is a monthly newspaper that has been issued since 2005, it's a critical daring newspaper that discuss controversial delicate issues that varies between political, economic, social and cultural themes, with the participation of a group of professional outstanding journalists in West Bank and Gaza, in addition to Media students at Birzeit University, Al Hal has contributed to uncovering lots of cases that are not being publicized in daily newspapers or being banned for censorship; subjects of Al Hal are handled through reporting ,investigative reporting, articles and interviews along with criticizing caricatures in every edition, The newspaper has in parallel to the paper edition a digital version that showcases best articles in multimedia, check our newspaper website following this link:

<http://hal.birzeit.edu>

The Riyadh Arab Agreement for Judicial Cooperation: the terms are a liferaft for those wanted for crimes

Haitham Al Sharif

In 1983, Palestine joined the Riyadh Arab Agreement for Judicial Cooperation, which was endorsed by all members of the Council of Arab Justice Ministers, except for Egypt and the Comoros.

The provisions of the agreement stated that cooperation in extradition between these countries should be consistent with the procedures stipulated by international, regional and bilateral conventions. For the signatories, this agreement replaced in several aspects three agreements concluded in 1952 within the framework of the Arab League, including extradition, as we will attempt to highlight below.

Legal Requirements

Al-Haq legal advisor, lawyer Naser Al Rayes, reviewed some of the agreement's provisions and procedures. He said: "The agreement does not categorize the offenses for which extradition may be required and confines it to criminal offenses. There are legal requirements to provide the individual named with guarantees. These include a court decision in the request for extradition and a request by an official party, namely the Ministry of Justice, given that the competent court in the country receiving the request has the right to determine the request after ensuring the authenticity of documents and the integrity of the legal procedures before acceptance or rejection of the extradition request".

Al Rayes explained the reasons under which a state may refuse extradition. "The agreement gives member states the right to reject a request for extradition if its implementation would undermine the sovereignty of the state, its security and public order; or if the person accused is sentenced to death and the state receiving the extradition request does not apply this penalty; or if the sentence provided in the request contradicts with Islamic Sharia law; or if the state believes that torture and intimidation will be used against the individual. Therefore, states may reject the request on the grounds that it is committed to the protection and impunity of human rights. This is based on the Convention Against Torture, which takes precedence over any other agreement. Practically, the most important point is that the Arab

countries have a problem, not only in abiding by the agreement, but in adhering to the law in general. If any political problem arises between one state and another, the first reaction is to upend all legal affairs between the two states, whether criminal or otherwise".

Slow Procedures

Deputy prosecutor Dr. Ahmad Barak spoke about whether some of the extradition requests drafted legally by the public prosecutor using data and investigation records in their files have had technical or formal flaws that may have led to the rejection of requests. "A request may not be rejected on the grounds of formalities, but it may be rejected on core subject matters. Even where shortcomings exist, a process of clarification and demands for missing information will take place. However, I would like to point out the importance of having flexible procedures between countries because the relatively long time it takes the court to examine the extradition request for persons on its territories, and the number of official bodies involved, may facilitate the escape of the accused before a decision is taken against them".

Decisions are not Binding

The former head of the High Judicial Council, Judge Issa Abu Sharar, stressed that the court has the discretion to arrest a wanted person, or to prevent him from traveling in case he escapes from the country,



Premature infants in the nursery.

in view of the lengthy period of time required to decide on an extradition request; the right of judgment confirms that decisions included in the extradition requests are not binding. He clarified: "The need for a court decision from the country receiving the request is consistent with justice and human rights. A state may not extradite a fugitive just because he is wanted. Therefore, the court reviews and examines the documents and data provided by the public prosecutor as evidence that an individual has committed a crime. If the court finds that the file necessitates extradition, it will accept it. Otherwise, it will not hand a person over, especially if the fugitive is a national of that country. On a judicial basis and that of constitutional principles, a state does not extradite its nationals. Thus, the court may require further investigations and evidence of violation of the laws of the state. Witnesses may need to be called from the country that submitted the extradition request, or they may rely on the testimony of witnesses made in the courts of that state".

According to the former head of the High Judicial Council, the problems of the agreement are not limited to the rejection of extradition requests, but extend to its legality as a whole. He says: "The PLO signed the agreement

while in exile and, in order to render into binding law, it must be endorsed and ratified again, then published in the Official Gazette. The legal foundations stipulate that an individual cannot legally be addressed or charged if he is not aware of the law".

Dual Nationality

Said Shehadeh, director of the office of the head of the Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission (PACC), described the procedures followed in drafting extradition requests for individuals whose files are associated with cases of corruption. He said: "There is a joint committee and a complementary relationship between all relevant bodies such as the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and the public prosecution. Nevertheless, we are the ones who prepare the cases related to corruption based on specific and clear rules. We send the file to the Ministry of Justice to prepare the extradition request and dispatch it to the relevant state. For extradition requests from a foreign country, we pursue two methods: the first method is the United Nations Convention against Corruption since member states can directly address corruption commissions in other states via official channels; the second method is through bilateral agreements for the

prosecution of criminals. In all cases, most countries face the problem of dual nationality in the provisions of those agreements".

On the number of extradition requests for suspects in cases of corruption outside the country up to the first quarter of this year, Shehadeh said: "There are no more than ten extradition requests in total for wanted individuals in Arab and foreign countries who are suspected of corruption. The court for corruption offenses has determined the sum stolen required for restitution or as a fine in each of these cases. There are four cases of conviction in absentia against individuals charged with corruption".

The Ministry of Justice state that they have not yet calculated the number of extradition requests that have been submitted to them or to Arab and foreign countries.

Azmi Shuaibi, Commissioner for the Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (Aman), the representative of the Palestine branch of Transparency International, said: "The issue of 'an end to impunity' is addressed internationally to prevent the escape of individuals to states with which there is no coordination on matters related to investigations, extradition and restitution of funds".

The premature newborns of war ... when the cry of life sings to challenge death

Manal Yasin

Pregnant women in the Gaza Strip did not escape in safety from the Israeli aggression. Many died and the others were exhausted by anxiety and fear of the unknown. Devastated by the loss of their homes and loved ones, women express the agony of their lives in pains that bring premature labor, and danger for them and their unborn children.

In the first ten days following the Israeli aggression, the maternity unit at Al Shifa hospital recorded 1625 admissions that resulted in 425 births, 650 miscarriages, and pregnancies put at risk. In July, 1242 natural births and 400 caesarean sections were recorded, 290 miscarriages, and 51 premature births of under 37 weeks.

Speaking about the risks of premature births,

Dr. Ahmad Al Amoudi of the neonatal intensive care unit indicated that the risks are higher for births in the seventh month of pregnancy than in those after eight months because the fetus is not fully grown and the organs will be underdeveloped.

He explained that it is extreme difficulty for the fetus to adapt to the outside world, in particular the respiratory, cardiovascular and nervous systems, and a period in an incubator is required.

Pediatrician Dr. Abdel Rahim Abu Selmieh stressed that, in some cases, fear may affect the mother's heart and lead to sudden hemorrhaging and the need for a caesarian section. Premature labor may therefore result in the death of the mother or the fetus, or both.

He explained: "The growth of organs in the fetus is completed naturally in the ninth month

of pregnancy. In premature births, the baby has not achieved its normal weight and its organs are not developed. In these cases, the weight of a baby varies between one kg and 800 grams. This requires the baby to be put in an incubator for varying periods of time depending on the case."

Dr Al Amoudi stressed that maternity wards had seen an unusual increase in the number of admissions for premature labor where the fetus had not spent a normal duration in its mother's womb. These cases were for pregnancies of 28 to 30 weeks.

During the war, health services deteriorated. There were shortages in some medicines and great congestion [in hospitals].

Dr Al Amoudi stated that these women endured severe pain during childbirth due to premature labor brought on by intense fear

from the shelling and the whole atmosphere of war and displacement.

Hala, the daughter of Hiba Zaidieh and Rashid of Gaza city, gave birth to her child during the war amidst constant shelling. Grandmother Oum Ramez Zaidieh said: "We moved from our house in the Shaaf area of the Shejaieh neighborhood five days before Hiba gave birth because of the intensity of bombs and rockets fired at us".

She added: "Hiba was very worried all the time, although her pregnancy proceeded normally. She was at the beginning of her eighth month, but suddenly went into labor and gave birth prematurely".

Baby Hala weighed 1.650 kg and was put in an incubator. [Her mother] was due on the 15th of September, but gave birth on the 24th of July as a result of the war.

Nablus: Al Hamouz defeats the Zionists!

Abdel Baset Khalaf

The Al Hamouz café has stood in the center of Nablus since 1892 with its antique features, metal gates, stone, documents and pictures. The grandchildren of Ismail Mohammad Al Hamouz boast of their grandfather's defeat of Theodore Hertzl (founder of the Zionist movement in 1897) by establishing one of the oldest cafés in Palestine, and a place that has witnessed events that changed entire nations.

Rayeq Walid Al Hamouz, a man in his fifties, takes a seat at the oldest table dating back 80 years. He is surrounded by photos of the same building enclosed by dense trees. Other pictures show old uniforms, weapons and military parades, all evidence of how this location became the headquarters of the British High Commissioner to Palestine and a barracks for soldiers. Other pictures reveal high-ranking guests.

Artists and a theater

Rayeq says: "My grandfather emigrated from Hebron and settled in Nablus, where he married Fareeza Al Nouri and established a café in another part of the city. He moved to Shweitra Street 122 years ago and rented four shops in a backyard. At a later stage he turned this into a theater where Arab artists like Oum Kalthoum, Fareed Al Atrash, Samia Jamal, and Mohammad Abdel Wahab brought it to life by their concerts and performances".

Rayeq represents the third generation of café owners, having inherited it from his father who died in 2006. Ismail, the grandfather worked actively until 1960 and transferred the profession to his grandchildren. Walid specialized in the field, while his brothers Mohammad, Mahmoud, Khaled and Khalil turned to other businesses and blacksmithery, with their products reaching Damascus.

He recounts that the café has traded in bargout, the smallest unit of the Ottoman dinar, the Palestinian pound, the sterling pound, the Jordanian dinar (JD), the Israeli shekel, as well as the euro and dollar today.

According to Al Hamouz, many changes occurred



Al-hmuz cafe during past and present.

in the café. Most importantly, the four shops were abandoned and the theater demolished to move slightly to the east of the city in 1972, when the municipality raised the rent from JD 11 to JD 360. Energy supplies changed from firewood to primus stove, then to electricity and gas. Another change was to allow entry to those under 18 rather than restrict the café to adults only. In addition, prices and salaries have shot sky high. In the past, an employee would receive five piasters as a monthly wage!

The café has continued to operate for more than a century. It was forced to stop only by the British Mandate forces, which occupied the site for several years and took over the top parts of the building as the headquarters of the British High Commissioner, transforming the courtyard to parking for motorcycles and a barracks for soldiers.

Ritual and visitors

Al Hamouz displays the coffee pots and a sugar bowl made purely of copper that date back to the days of his grandfather: "We still have most of the drinks that used to be served, such as coffee, tea, boiled cinnamon water, cocoa, sahlab, lemon and sour grape tea. We also have new additions of ready-made

juices and soft drinks".

Political circumstances have had a powerful impact on the café. Once, the Shah of Iran (overthrown by the Iranian revolution in 1979) banned the export of Ajami Tombac, which used to be brought into Nablus. Among the political leaders who were frequent visitors to the café were Suleiman Tuqan (the Mayor of Nablus and leader of the city, one of the founders of the Al Difa'a defense party and minister of defense from 1951 to 1957. He was assassinated in Baghdad during the revolution led by Abdel Kareem Qasem); Hamdi Kanaan (one of the pioneers of the establishment of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Nablus); and Sheikh Ahmad Hanbali (a judge, politician and activist). Also the late King Hussein Bin Talal visited the park adjacent to the café".

A Witness to History

According to Al Hamouz, the café witnessed many wars, revolutions and incidents, including the British Mandate and occupation of Palestine, and the devastating earthquake that hit the country in 1927 and which the café survived. The café gained a high reputation among local leaders. At the beginning, those under 18 were not allowed entry; this ban

was lifted after the 1967 war – the Naksah. The café maintained the habit of receiving its customers following the Fajr morning prayers up to sunset Azan Al Magreb, especially for those working in the stone quarries surrounding Nablus.

Concluding his talk, Al Hamouz said: "Nowadays, we serve the same drinks that my father and grandfather used to serve. In this place, the stones, fences, orange orchards and vineyards still stand as witnesses to a permanent history, despite the fact that the faces of the customers and workers in the café have changed and the city has expanded hugely around the café. The important issue is that we were here before the creation of Israel and its occupation of our land".

Abu Radi Bleibleh, a regular customer at the café, recalls what he heard from his father and the older generation when the café was a destination for famous singers of those times and a popular venue. He states: "The café is an indispensable part of Nablus without which we cannot imagine the city".

Other young people, like Sameh Abdel Haq, hope that the Al Hamouz café will witness the end of the Israeli occupation, just as it witnessed the end of the British Mandate which ruled over the area for years.

Darrajoon: A team of young cyclists dreams of representing Palestine internationally

Tahrir Bani Sakhr

The dream started as fun when a group of young athletes adopted cycling as a hobby to break the routine and travel from one place to another. Later, they formed a team called Darrajoon, cycling around cities and villages and documenting their trips in pictures: an archive of a history that they feared would disappear.

Al-Hal accompanied the cyclists on one of their tours and found out that they have budding dreams that just need support and assistance. Alaa Hmouz from Nablus is the leader of the team and its photographer. A 23-year old student at An-Najah University majoring in physical education, he won the spring race of 2006 and 2007, breaking the record by nine minutes. He says that cycling has been his hobby since childhood; he formed the Darrajoon cycling team that comprises around 10 athletes. Hmouz said: "The team is a group of friends from different areas of Nablus. At the beginning, we were merely cycling for a change of routine by going somewhere outside Nablus. Our bicycles and clothes were ordinary and simple. Then we became a team with each member contributing certain skills and we grew through our outings".

Hmouz explained that Darrajoon plans outings with the aim of taking photographs of all the locations they visit, including villages, towns and historical or archeological sites, to introduce these places to a wider public.

Cameras are also affixed to the bikes to capture any unexpected incident while cycling. The team is self-financed and members collect money prior to each trip to cover needs such as first aid kits.

The goals of the team, Hmouz explained, are primarily to exercise and train in endurance, strength and patience. The team also wants to get to know all areas of Palestine and publicize this information. He explained: "The team does not accept new members because of the demands of this sport. It requires six months of training for anyone who wants to participate in a trip to adapt to the exertion that it demands".

The team's activities are not confined to visiting sites. They also camp at locations and talk to people about cycling as a sport in an attempt to spread and encourage its popularity. Hmouz aspires to represent Palestine in the Arab world and internationally, especially as "this is an acknowledged field that requires additional care and development".

Wajdi Raii from Nablus is a 23-year old member of the team. He works in aluminum and spends his free time cycling, a hobby that began in childhood. His talent developed and he contributed to the establishment of the Darrajoon cycling team.

Raii says: "When I cycle, I feel good and have psychological benefits because cycling is the best thing in my life. I have ambitions that our team will grow larger and our sporting activities will expand outside Palestine."

Mikdad Bahaa Al Din, from Amrieh in Nablus, is a 21-year old member of the team. He started bicycle riding when he was eight and started cycling to travel from his home and work. He describes the bicycle as "more than a transportation vehicle with wheels, but rather an instrument for entertainment that gives feelings of happiness and beauty."

Bahaa Al Din added: "I joined the Darrajoon team by chance through Alaa, who I met at a bicycle repair shop. We established the team to make a statement that a bicycle is not only for entertainment and we want to introduce cycling as a sport that is rare in our society, and to travel around our beautiful country."

Bahaa Al Din wants the team to spread his idea more widely in Palestine and to establish cycling as a sport. "We aspire to travel outside Palestine and participate in races representing Palestine to prove that Palestinians are successful athletes in all sports. We would like support to develop the team and the idea it represents, and we hope to obtain sponsorship from official institutions to achieve our main goal of establishing Palestine as a participant in international races."

Rami Haitham, another member of the team, also seeks this goal. "After joining the team, we had a common goal that carries us beyond boundaries, creating ambitions to develop ourselves more and more through our weekly, perhaps daily, activities aimed at visiting all of Palestine on a bike."



Alaa Hmouz