

Women Artisans in Palestine

A Reality Hidden behind 4+1 Walls



By Majdi Habash



Autumn Market at La Vie Cafe, Ramallah.

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hen we study the conditions under which women artisans live in Palestine, we must consider a number of factors that affect women's employment: societal factors such as family status, gender roles, and education, as well as political and economic factors.

Women artisans tend to come from poorer areas in Palestine or from places where unemployment rates are higher, such as Khan Yunis, Rafah, the southern Gaza Strip, and Jenin in the West Bank. Women from cities such as Ramallah and Al-Bireh, Jerusalem, and Nablus are less likely to start their own projects because they can take advantage of employment opportunities in the private or public sector.ⁱ

Political, social, and economic factors prompt women to become artisans. The second Intifada encouraged many women to seek work and support the income of their families when their husbands or sons increasingly faced unemployment, especially those who had been working in Israel.ⁱⁱ In an unintended positive side to the Intifada, the societal constraints that previously had prevented women from pursuing work outside of their homes were relaxed. But the gender roles of these women were not truly changed or challenged because in many cases their work was considered a temporary necessity, to be pursued until men would go back to being the breadwinners. Married women are more inclined to start their own businesses and projects as their status gives them protection from a societal point of view. Divorced women or widows are less likely to initiate their own projects in societies that are more conservative due to fear of not having enough protection or support from their communities.ⁱⁱⁱ

Women who have finished secondary education are more likely to start their own projects (21.6 percent), followed by women who finished primary education (24.5 percent), and college graduates (14.4 percent).^{vi} According to the focus group examined by a study carried out by Qazzaz, Morrar, and Adwan,^v the reason for this distribution is that girls who do not finish higher education tend to come from lower-income families and get married at an early age. Secondary education raises their level of education and self-confidence and thereby empowers them to pursue courses in subjects that enhance their technical and administrative skills and thus prepare them to set higher goals. College graduates have the ambition to gain employment; but those who don't find it frequently embark on the journey to start their own projects. Although these numbers are from older research, a publication by UN Women titled "Women and Economy 2014–2016," which used statistics from the Palestinian Bureau of

The Aseela project in Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem was established in 2004 by a group of refugee women who sought a creative way to respond to many families' need for income generation. Today, these women produce traditional soap made from olive oil.

Statistics Labor Force Survey 2012, backs the same logic by stating that "women's participation in the labor force was the highest among women with 13 years of education or more compared to other educational attainment groups. The participation rate was 43.7 percent for women with 13 years of education or more, compared to 6.6 percent for women with 9 to 12 years of education, and 12.9 percent for women with 1 to 6 years of schooling."^{vi}

Um Raed is a Bedouin from Arab Al-Jahalin in Al-Khan Al-Ahmar who started wool felting a year ago, after being trained by Sunbula, a not-for-profit fair trade organization in Jerusalem. “The Bedouins create handicrafts because they need income,” she explains. Before, Um Raed used to go to Jerusalem to sell yogurt, goat cheese, and butter, but after closures were imposed by the occupation, she could no longer reach Jerusalem and had little to no income. Her husband is unable to find work, and she has three children to provide for.



Women are interested in work that is socially acceptable, such as that which utilizes skills related to Palestinian heritage. In the West Bank, projects in sewing and embroidery are ranked first choice, whereas hairdressing and food preparation come in second. In Bethlehem and Jerusalem, women are encouraged to work in projects related to wood carving, glass manufacture, and embroidery because these crafts are in demand with tourists, especially during the holiday seasons. In Nablus, women focus on jewelry and accessories, whereas women in Gaza engage preferably in beekeeping and agriculture. “Cottage-industries such as home embroidery are often valuable to women. Given the nature of female domestic roles, particularly in conservative societies, embroidery allows women to work flexibly and make money without leaving their family,” states Rachel Dedman.^{vii}

Embroidery is among the most important industries due to its being a heritage skill that doesn't require much training or education. Women embroiderers “inherit” this skill from their mothers or grandmothers. Many of these women have difficulties in accessing the market; hence, they find it easier to sell their creations to women's cooperatives or retailers. Unfortunately, markets don't often prioritize fair trade and ethical consumerism.

Ethical consumerism can be promoted by inviting audiences via online channels and by questioning the available buying choices. “Purchasing power” is named as such for a reason, and our actual power can be applied consciously, for example, by choosing to learn about the lives of local producers and by taking active actions to shift

our buying behaviors. When we go to the market to buy a *keffiyeh* or a traditional gift for our relatives, we must ask vendors about their sources and do our best to seek handicrafts or food products made by local producers. Many might comment that locally produced handicrafts are expensive; this is true due to the fact that they are handmade. For instance, it takes three to four working days for four artisans to make 25 wool camels: sourcing the wool, cleaning it, drying it, and then felting it to create the end product takes so much time that in the end, they barely make enough money to cover their labor and the costs of raw materials.

Although I grew up in Ramallah, I met women artisans for the first time through my work for Handmade Palestine. With this

Ammoun Sleem founded the Domari Gypsy Society that serves a community of gypsies who came to Palestine more than 500 years ago. As a minority living in Jerusalem, the dom face many obstacles imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities in East Jerusalem that undermine their identity. In 2005, a society center was established to help the community respond to severe discrimination, cultural marginalization, and poverty. The Domari Society provides support and opportunities for the dom community, including development programs such as tutoring and learning programs for dom children, as well as work and skill improvement courses for dom women.

project, Morgan Cooper promotes 18 women's cooperatives and helps them sell their products. Some cooperatives include more than 100 women who come mainly from villages and refugee camps around Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, and Gaza. They frequently belong to communities that are marginalized due to the Israeli occupation or because they are a minority. Many of these women artisans are the sole providers for their families.

These examples are but a few of the hundreds of stories of women artisans who struggle against occupation and



Women artisans.

other socio-economic challenges, creating handicrafts to support themselves.

Dalal, a 58-year-old woman from Beit Duquq, a village northwest of Jerusalem blocked by the separation wall, sought work 15 years ago because the financial situation of her household was dire. When after the second Intifada her husband was no longer permitted to work in 1948 Palestine, he was no longer able to provide for his family. "I wanted my children to pursue their university education," Dalal explains, "and I didn't want to be under the mercy of my husband when it comes to asking him for money. I first took courses in self-development and stress management. Later on, along with other women, I began to do embroidery. We divided the work and helped some women to work from home because they couldn't leave their houses." Initially, Dalal faced objections from her relatives. "My brothers would argue with me saying that I have everything I need. They thought that life was

only about having enough money to sustain a living. I wanted to be able to discover the world and to network." Today, many years of experience have made Dalal an example of an entrepreneurial woman in her village. She is trusted by many men in the village who want to send their daughters to development programs. "I am the head of food production and processing at the community center, and my brothers are very proud of me. But I remind them sometimes of how they used to object to my going out to seek work."

Local bazaars provide a great opportunity for Dalal and many other women artisans to network with retailers interested in their work as they bring the local community together with women artisans. For many of these women, local bazaars are their only marketing channels, as they are not internet savvy and don't market themselves using social media; they have no skills that would allow them to produce printed brochures to introduce their work.

Ruwaida, a single mother of one from Nisf Jbail, a village northwest of Nablus, started working more than three years ago at the Nisf Jbail Ceramic Center. It was her first job. As she had no other opportunities, she was inspired to develop her hobby – painting on ceramics. When asked about the hardships she faces, Ruwaida noted that it was mainly marketing, as she depends solely on retailers in Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Jericho, in addition to tourists who visit her village. These connections are affected by the political situations and are unreliable. In addition, Ruwaida seeks to participate in bazaars to showcase her work and make contact with more retailers.

When asked about their wages, the women stated that they are not paid fairly. Ruwaida earns 5 shekels per hour, and Dalal said that although she has worked at the development center for 15 years, no severance pay is guaranteed, nor does she have health insurance. This means that when she retires from her work at the society center, she won't have any financial security. This is the case for all the women who work in women's associations and society centers in

Palestine and has to do with local policies.

I encourage you to imagine the lives of these women. They are only examples of those at the bottom of the hierarchy of our society, barely sustaining their lives, but striving every day to live and provide for their children. And while we all strive to thrive under occupation and although many circumstances are out of our hands, we have the power to make

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their lives better by adjusting our purchasing behaviors and choices today.

Majdi Habash is Handmade Palestine's communications coordinator. His interest is in social marketing and the use of marketing channels to advocate social issues. He believes in the importance of creating content in cyberspace, especially in the Arabic language, to raise the voice of the marginalized and to create awareness of and an open discussion on issues worth noting and ideas worth sharing.

Initiated to raise funds for and support Mashjar Juthour's activities of planting trees, conservation work, and holding environmental educational activities for Ramallah's community, Handmade Palestine is a project that aims to present the best of Palestine's handicrafts locally and internationally. It welcomes the work of artisans who create new designs by using traditional materials and strives to connect buyers with local artisans, including their stories to provide meaningful gifts.

ⁱ Dr. Hadil Risq Qazzaz, Shua'a Mrar, and Yousif 'Adwan, Female Entrepreneurs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Current Situation and Future Prospects, Local Aid Coordination Secretariat, 2005, available at http://www.lacs.ps/documentsShow.aspx?ATT_ID=2020.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. ^{iv} Ibid. ^v Ibid.

^{vi} Women and Economy, Fact Sheet Economy, UN Women, available at http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/fieldoffice%20palestine/attachments/publications/2013/fact%20sheet%20economy_en.pdf?la=en.

^{vii} *At the Seams, A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery*, Rachel Dedman, curator, international exhibition, Beirut, 2016.



Razan Madhoon

My name is Razan Madhoon. I am a film director from Gaza City who is based in the United Kingdom. After I received an MA in film directing in the United Kingdom, I began to work as an associate producer with

Red Kite Animation on a UK feature-animation production that is set in Palestine. I also work as a freelance writer/director in live action films.

Growing up in as challenging a place as Gaza has given me unique insights into the world and into issues that concern human rights. My films are a way for me to express these insights, share them, and let my voice be heard.

My advice to every woman? Trust yourself, believe in your voice, and fight for your own dreams.



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Achieving Independence

Women Entrepreneurs in Palestine



By Ghada Qaddoumi

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historically, Palestinian women have been largely responsible for ensuring the domestic well-being of their families. However, imprisonment and exile of husbands and sons has meant that many families and communities suffer from a frequent absence of male wage earners and community leaders. In such circumstances, women have often emerged to take up new roles in communities and central positions in decision-making processes. In Palestine as a whole, few women participate in the official labor market, but many women, especially in rural areas, often work unofficially or their labor is not recognized because it largely takes place in the home and is unpaid. However almost 65 percent of agricultural work is done by women as part of their household duties, and women often carry out a significant amount of unpaid work in rural areas.

MA'AN understands that there are constraints that block women's equal participation in the development process. These obstacles include a lack of social services, lack of training, low self-esteem, lack of technology, and a lack of information, in addition to social and cultural constraints. Women also lack access to adequate assistance, training, and rehabilitation to allow an exit from poverty or to meet the needs of their families. Despite the onset of female participation in social, political, and economic fields, there is a lack of female leaders, policy makers, and decision-makers. They are largely absent from senior positions in key political and economic institutions that shape their access and control over resources. Their marginalization from obtaining real power has further increased as a result of the unstable political situation.

Entrepreneurship of Palestinian women is considered a significant factor in national economic growth. Over the past years, institutes' interest in women entrepreneurship has increased, allowing women to play a crucial role in the economic development process and



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transform themselves from inactive individuals into dynamic role models in society. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, entrepreneurship empowered women to practice innovation in creating new projects that contribute to community development as well as decrease unemployment rates – 47.8 percent for women and 22.5 percent for men in 2017.

Throughout 30 years of rooted experience in the sustainable development of poor and marginalized communities, MA'AN programs have focused on agriculture and food security, community development, capacity building, emergency response, environmental protection, and the development of youth and women. In its commitment to the social and economic empowerment of Palestinian women, MA'AN programs aim to develop women's skills, knowledge, and attitudes, which results in their increased participation in the community as essential partners in national development and prosperity. The goal of MA'AN's Women's Development Program is to empower Palestinian women who live within a context of continual hardship brought about by the Israeli occupation and equip them to succeed in the extraordinary and multiple roles that are often demanded of them. Through this program, which emphasizes equality and a more just society, approximately 180 projects were implemented for women in Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Jordan Valley, and

MA'AN strongly believes that women should play a central leadership role in Palestinian society. It works to empower women as agents of change and to increase their participation as leaders and wage earners at the household, community, and national levels.

the Gaza Strip, guiding them in suitable entrepreneurial projects to generate income, assisting them in improving their livelihood and contributing to the reduction of people living under the poverty line.

The difficult economic and social situation that youth and women experience in Palestine stems from an increase in unemployment among marginalized groups. MA'AN believes in the importance of the role of women in the development of Palestinian society and the contribution of women to the world of entrepreneurship.

Currently, MA'AN Center, in partnership with the Welfare Association and through the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, is implementing a program that focuses on the economic empowerment of youth. It encourages women to start their own income-generating initiatives

MA'AN is committed to supporting the role of women in society through promoting their participation in its development projects.

by developing their entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, and techniques through introducing marketing, project management, and preparation of business plans that would enable them to join the work force.

The program encourages these income-generating projects by providing a \$15,000 grant to establish small, viable, and sustainable businesses that will enhance women's entry into the world of entrepreneurship, create jobs through projects implemented, and allow women to contribute to developing the country's economy. Through these established small businesses, women will be supporting the commercial, educational, recreational, and cultural sectors, which is a priority and an urgent need in order to attain improved economic status, to reduce unemployment rates, and ultimately to strengthen women's status at a national level.

Hala Abu Eid, 28, from Bedo Village, northwest of Jerusalem

Hala, one of the beneficiaries of the program, lives in a conservative environment and has little to no access to work or other means to support herself and her family due to the lack of educational opportunities. Through joining the program, Hala was able to acquire the necessary skills needed to start her own project – a lingerie and cosmetics shop. Hala has been able to establish herself, facing

all the challenges and obstacles, and prove her ability to achieve her goals and ambitions as well as improve the living standards of her family. Hala's business has created job opportunities for other women in her village, allowing her to hire a young woman to work with her on the project.

"Our limited financial capabilities and the need to seek help from others to provide treatment for my son makes me feel weak and embarrassed, but now that I have a project of my own, I am thrilled to be able to support my family. My project has boosted my confidence and enabled me to secure a decent life for my children." Hala Abu Eid

The impact of MA'AN programs is not only limited to the West Bank and Jerusalem but also extends to the Gaza Strip, enabling women's productivity and family support in that region.

Ahlam Arafat, 51, from Rafah, Gaza

As a beneficiary of the Rights and Resilience Project (implemented by MA'AN in Gaza with Action Aid, and funded by DANIDA), Ahlam Arafat has modest experience in the field of sewing. She used to take advantage of the absence of her children during school hours to visit her friends and women's centers to learn sewing skills. She had occasional opportunities to sew school uniforms and sell them at cheap prices so that she could pay off her debts and afford food for her children. Ahlam's children describe her as a patient and persistent mother as she struggles to provide a decent life for them to complete their education. Her eldest daughter, who was divorced at the age of 20, was able to enroll in college and study fashion design to support her mother at work. However, Ahlam and her daughter were unable to find job opportunities or start a small business, resulting in an increase in their stress and frustration.

The project empowered Ahlam to establish a small sewing shop

equipped with all the tools and materials she needed to start her income-generating business. Over a period of three months, Ahlam participated in training/coaching led by qualified consultants on how to start and sustain a small business. Ahlam and her daughter have managed to gain financial stability through sewing, which has improved their living conditions and livelihood.

"This project has given me strength and increased my self-confidence after I had been feeling confused and ashamed about not being able to take care of my children. My hands were shaking in the beginning, but the motivation I received from my coach helped me overcome all these

obstacles. Now I see myself as an active person and capable of running my project and receiving my clients." Ahlam Arafat

Ghada Qaddoumi, a program manager who works for the economic empowerment of youth in Jerusalem, has over 20 years of extensive experience at MA'AN Development Center in project management, women's programs, capacity-building, and youth projects. She is also a trainer and certified master facilitator in the "Active Citizen" and "Women Participating in Public Life" programs.



Madees Khoury

Madees Khoury is the first female brewer in the Middle East. Holding a BA in business management from Boston and an MBA from Birzeit University, she manages Taybeh Brewing Company, the first micro-brewery in the Middle East. As she deals with the daily challenges that come with doing business in a politically and economically unstable region and in a male-dominated industry and society, her work has taught her the difference between equality and justice, and the merits and downfalls of trying to reconcile the two.

Her perspective to share with other women? Determination is not the only key to success; you also need high hopes that the future cannot and will not remain unchanged.

Al-Muntada

Combatting Domestic Violence against Women

Courtesy of Al-Muntada

Translated by Rania Filfil

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The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) confirmed in a 2011 report that around 37 percent of women are faced with some form of violence. Amidst such alarming findings, Al-Muntada endeavors to enact a law on family and community protection against violence.

In pursuing the drafting of a family protection law, Al-Muntada refers to international human rights instruments, mainly conventions that relate to domestic violence, including The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW), and hopes to also secure adoption of the Optional Protocol annexed to CEDAW. Al Muntada depends on the steps undertaken by the State of Palestine to adhere to international conventions and treaties without any reservation.

The State of Palestine must harmonize its national legislation and bear all responsibilities laid upon it by virtue of these conventions. It must also create the environment necessary to implement the agreement, including through the enactment of a Palestinian law against domestic violence. Al-Muntada has also reviewed Arab legislative experiences in the area of domestic violence in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Tunisia, which have already adopted special family laws.

The rationale behind the law includes a number of points.

1. The existing legal framework in Palestine is insufficient because it is a general law that restricts family affairs to the private sphere. This affects other applicable laws and requires addressing the root to ensure better and more inclusive protection against all forms of family and domestic violence.
2. Socially, violence against women is spread throughout Palestinian society with insufficient accountability and deterrent measures within the family sphere. The state needs to address these cases responsibly and allow for handling family issues in public fora. Only in this way can it fulfill its obligations under the international conventions it ratified.

3. Penal codes and procedures relating to domestic violence should take the social structure of family relations into consideration and assert the principle of secrecy and confidentiality in handling these cases. Law enforcement agencies must tailor their ways of dealing with family cases, especially with respect to women, children, disabled persons, and senior citizens. Follow up on cases must be associated with the submission of a complaint because of the sensitive nature of these cases and the social taboos that victims face. The particular nature of family offenses, especially those related to physical, sexual, or verbal violence, require adapted procedures and confidential proceedings. This cannot be achieved without a special regulation that safeguards this confidentiality.

4. Issues related to domestic violence are multiple and different. Violence is not restricted to physical harm but also includes threats of physical and psychological harm, sexual violence, arbitrary deprivation of rights, and other forms of abuse, including insults and contempt in addition to other forms of unlawful exploitation that stem from power relations within the family. These include the power of a husband to exert pressure on and influence the spouse and children, and relations involving a group that needs special care, such as people with special needs. The definition of violence is also extended to offenses by parents against offspring and vice-versa.

Limited progress has been reached in the formulation of the draft law so far. A draft law was submitted by the Ministerial Council to His Excellency, the President, on December 27, 2018. It was returned to the Ministerial Council after having been reviewed by Diwan Al-Fatwa Wa Al-Tashri (The Bureau of Legal Counsel and Legislation). The draft was then returned to President Mahmoud Abbas's office. Al-Muntada wishes to understand the reason behind this delay in enacting the law. We do not understand why it was returned to the Ministerial Council after it had been submitted by the same council to the President's office.

Al-Muntada is an advocacy NGO that aims to combat violence against women.