

Survival of the fittest

As children or even as adults, we have all heard the story of the powerful lion, the king of the jungle with predator jaws, who used to make fun of the little mouse and humiliate him. We heard how the lion fell into a trap by hunters and was refused any help from his strong friends, who did not respond to his cries. The only one to help him was the weak and ridiculed mouse. That day, the lion expressed his gratitude and declared the mouse to be a close friend. This is the part of the story we have heard. The unknown and untold part is that the lion who thanked the mouse for saving his life, disowned the mouse the very next day. That is to say, he turned his back on him. Some jungle story writers relate that the lion fell into the trap again, and no one saved him but the stupid mouse, who was sold out yet again.

The moral of the story: The powerful remain powerful, oppressive and in control, while the weak remain weak and are deserted.

Editor-in-Chief

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4 PAGES

INSIDE

02 Birzeit Specialist Laboratory: Pumpkin seeds in whitewash are dangerous and may cause cancer over time

03 If ISIS reached Palestine and committed similar massacres... what would we do?

04 From Cuba and Palestine... Haja Sara, the unforgettable midwife of Silwad

Analysts: The Palestinian Authority is unlikely to collapse

Zahran Maali

There has been much talk recently about the collapse of the Palestinian Authority following the Israeli government's decision to withhold the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues for the past three successive months. The US State Department issued a warning and expressed concern at the prospect of the collapse of the PA. The Israeli army also provided their government with an assessment of the situation, accompanied by a warning of the serious consequences if it continues to withhold tax revenues.

Although the Israeli government has publicly threatened to take further penalties that may lead to the collapse of the PA in retaliation for the attempt to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), Israel attempts to hide its true fears about the collapse of the PA, whose survival remains a top Israeli priority according to observers.

These fears were accompanied by statements by Palestinian officials on the collapse of the PA. PLO Executive Committee member Wasel Abu Yusef said: "The open war carried out by the occupation government against Palestinians is merely an attempt to put economic pressure on the PA and the PLO by withholding tax revenues". He emphasized that the collapse of the PA is improbable because it had emerged from the struggle and sacrifices of the Palestinian people; it was one of the arms of the PLO, whose goal is the liberation of the Palestinian people, fulfillment of the right to return and to self-determination, leading to an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

In an interview with Al-Hal, Abu Yusef added that the Israelis do not abide by signed agreements, but pick out what is in their interests. Under the Paris Protocol, Israel collects tax revenues on behalf of the Palestinians and charges 3%. Israel takes advantage of this from time to time to put pressure on the PA and the Palestinian people.

Political debate

PLO Central Council member

Nabil Amr excluded the possibility of the collapse of the PA in the short term, arguing that what is happening is "a political debate about the PA and not a prelude to dismantling it. The US is trying to deal with this threat seriously and to ease the Israeli pressure".

Amr said that Israel may impose conditions to end the freeze on tax revenue transfers following the elections on the 17th of March. Netanyahu's actions were a response to political steps taken by the PLO to go to the UN Security Council and the ICC, and were also for electoral purposes.

Al-Ayyam newspaper journalist Akram Atallah described the current period as a "finger biting war". Israel does not want the Palestinians to file complaints to the ICC, in which Palestine will become a member on the first of April. Israel is employing intimidation as a form of extortion and not for the purpose of making the PA collapse.

Atallah said that American concerns are justified: "But I do not expect the PA to collapse because Palestinians are part of the establishment, side by side with the US, Israel and the European Union. Ultimately, international powers will intervene to find a solution for its continuity".

Collapse would be costly

Atallah told Al-Hal that Israel cannot handle the cost of a PA collapse, which would mean a return to direct occupation and costs that Israel does not want. The costs would mainly be political since Israel uses the negotiations with Palestinians as a cover and always tries to send the ball into the Palestinian court. If it was an occupying state again, things would be different.

Economic expert Dr. Nasr Abdel Kareem views the mere expression of concern by the US as a signal for European and Arab donors to assume the initiative and provide assistance to save the PA. He stressed, "No one is interested in the collapse of the PA for the time being".



He added: "In spite of the paralysis in PA services and major functions, a collapse is unlikely". He attributed this to the fact that Arab and European countries such as Saudi Arabia and the European Union will provide payments to enable the PA to pay salaries.

The banking sector faces a difficult challenge

Abdel Kareem noted that the banking sector, an important funder of the PA, is affected by the liquidity crisis resulting from Israeli piracy. Total bank loans to the PA amounted to about USD one billion and USD 300 million, in addition to USD 700 million in personal loans to PA employees. He continued: "Around 40-45% of bank loans are for the PA and their employees. Therefore, if Israel continues to withhold tax revenues, the banks will face a difficult challenge, although not to the extent of a collapse since the banking system has learned from experience".

Abdel Kareem explained:

"The PA is in financial distress because it originally had a structural crisis due to its budget depending on assistance of USD 1.2 billion and USD 200 million, in addition to a deficit of USD 100 million a month covered by aid. Unfortunately, aid was inadequate during the first three months of the year because donor countries were busy preparing their budgets, and this was also accompanied by arbitrary Israeli measures". According to Abdel Kareem, the current expenditures account is USD 300 million monthly, with USD 6070- million available in the Treasury from local tax collection. This puts the government in a serious dilemma.

Options

Abu Yusef highlighted the importance of developing means to pursue the Palestinian national struggle within a strategy based on continued efforts by the international community against the Israeli occupation or via the ICC, or

by enhancing the conditions of the Palestinian people and ending the relationship with the occupation.

Atallah argues that attempts by the PA to halt security coordination with Israel - an option discussed by the PA - would mean the dismantling of the PA. He explained that if the PA received an offer like a halt to settlements or setting a timeframe for negotiations, it may quit its move to the ICC.

Amr said: "No one knows what will happen if the status quo continues as the mass reaction of people cannot be predicted in advance. An Intifada does not break out by pressing a button. The situation will be extremely serious if Israel continues with its policy".

He emphasized that the problem does not lie with money alone since there are other alternatives, such as loans provided by the European Union to be repaid later by Israel, but the PA needs to open the political horizons following the Israeli elections.

Birzeit Specialist Laboratory:

Pumpkin seeds in whitewash are dangerous and may cause cancer over time

Nadine Musalam

If we visit any shop for roasted nuts and seeds in the Palestinian territories, the size and color of the white pumpkin seeds attracts our attention because they are much bigger and brighter than normal pumpkin seeds. The reason for this is the addition of a white coating that contains whitewash [calcium hydroxide and chalk] in its formula. This is a hazardous chemical that may cause disease and blockages to the small intestine over time, as well as liver and kidney disease.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah newspaper published an investigative report about the whitewash entitled "White seeds: a deliberate manipulation of weight with scientifically unproven effects on health". Al-Hal newspaper looked at the effects on health of this layer added to pumpkin seeds by examining samples in Birzeit laboratory and revealed shocking results.

Roasters deny accusation

Al-Hal visited a shop for roasted seeds in Ramallah where the worker (S.A) answered our question by saying: "The pumpkin seed is basically light in weight and yellow in color before we add the "starch and salt" while roasting". His colleague interrupted: "We add whitewash, not starch". (S.A) stopped speaking because we were recording and he asked us for some time to consult and reach an agreement on a response to our query.

We did not wait, and asked the worker to speak frankly without paying attention to the stares of his colleague and the repeated attempts to stop him from speaking. When we asked about the amount of whitewash added, the worker asked: "Are you going to refer to the name of the shop in the newspaper?" We said that we would not if he did not want that. He answered: "White seeds are the only category that we get ready roasted from Hebron".

The confused responses of the workers enraged the manager of the roasting shop. He asked who we were affiliated with and what was the purpose of our investigation, adding that it would not benefit us at all. He told us to check with a shop for roasted seeds in Ramallah about the source of their seeds.

Birzeit Laboratory: Percentage of whitewash in pumpkin seeds was 1.66%

Al-Hal purchased samples of white seeds from two shops in Ramallah and Al-Bireh governorate and took them to Birzeit University laboratories, which are independent and are financed and recognized by the Palestine Standards Institution. The first sample revealed a large quantity of whitewash material totaling 1.66%, a result that shocked the laboratory technician, while the tests on the second sample showed a percentage of 0.112% of whitewash.

These results confirmed that owners of shops use the cancerous whitewash when roasting pumpkin seeds, albeit in different quantities.

Dr. Salah: Whitewash is hazardous and bleaches the intestines

Al-Hal visited Dr. Ousama Salah, former Secretary-General of the Medical Council and a specialist in clinical nutrition and

public health, who said: "Whitewash is very harmful. Nuts usually have great benefits, but when such materials are added, they lose their value and become harmful in spite of their improved appearance and higher weight. In medical terms, these nuts are harmful".

Dr. Salah continued: "Whitewash is a white chemical material consisting of calcium elements that bleach the pumpkin seeds and may bleach the intestines. This is apparent in people who eat a lot of this type of seed. Moreover, it has a severe effect on children who eat the whole seed without peeling".

Dr. Salah pointed to the increased spread of cancer and chronic diseases due primarily to fertilizers and chemical and industrial materials added to foods.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the annual overall consumption of nuts in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is over 12,000 tons.

Whitewash causes kidney diseases

Dr. Saeed Mustafa, a specialist in laparoscopic surgery [minimally invasive surgery (MIS)] and kidney transplants said: "Whitewash may lead to a higher incidence of kidney stones, which is widespread in Hebron due to the use of this material in the production of molasses". He said that whitewash is harmful and when it exists in pumpkin seeds, it will definitely lead to health problems in the future.

Obvious manipulation of weight Many consumers are aware that the addition of whitewash to pumpkin seeds is mainly for profit by increasing the weight. Dissolving the whitewash in water that is then added to raw pumpkin seeds during the roasting process definitely increases the weight [of the seeds].

On field trips to these shops, Al-Hal met (M. Sh.) the son of one of the owners of a shop for roasted seeds. He confessed that they add whitewash to pumpkin seeds in appropriate quantities because this type of seed is light. They add whitewash to increase the weight and also to make the seeds bright white. He highlighted that this type of seed is the one to which the most whitewash is added.

The Ministry of Health: some merchants disregard regulations

Nader Barhoush, head of the Trade and Industry Department of the Ministry of Health, commented that the use of whitewash is prohibited in all foods and the Ministry fulfills its role of inspecting all factories, especially those manufacturing food. He pointed out that 'inspection' is not applied to a specific food item unless there is a problem when health officials tour the factory listed for inspection to check on conditions and to ensure that the required hygiene conditions prevail inside the factory.

According to Barhoush, there are two types of whitewash: one used in construction and the other allowed in edible products in specified quantities. Whitewash is added by merchants to pumpkin seeds to bleach them and increase their weight for marketing and profit purposes. However, he noted that no evidence exists so far that whitewash is being added because no samples have been examined due to the



Food Safety Unit - FSU
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Analytical Report


Report Date : 26 November 2014
Customer : دائرة الاكل بجامعة بيرزيت

Sample Code : HF-12390
Source Sample Code : Sample 1
Sample Name : بزر ابيض
Sample Receiving Date : 11 November 2014
Category : Human Food
Brand : بزر ابيض
Batch No. :
Sample Size : 10 gm
Manufacturer : N/A
Production Date : N.A.
Expiration Date : N.A.
Container Type : Plastic
Sampled By : نادين مسلم
Sample Condition : OK

Test	Result	Method	Comments	Test Date
CaSO4	1.66 %	AOAC		25 November 2014

* The Center is only responsible for the results of the sample tested.

Signatures:


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Page 1 of 1

lack of specialized centers for such tests. The facilities are not available for tests to be conducted on all factories because the laboratory is new and cannot conduct all the tests necessary on foodstuffs. Barhoush explained that if the use of this material by any roasted seed shop was clearly evident, the shop would be subject to a fine, in addition to closure of the shop and prosecution if the test had been conducted in a licensed laboratory. He asked us to provide the Ministry with the results of our tests to enable necessary action to be taken.

Specifications and standards for white seeds

Haidar Hajja, Director of the Palestine Standards Institution, said that standards and specifications exist for every type of seed and nut. There are over seven pages on treatments which are determined depending on the age of the seed, the season of harvest, color, size, smell and weight. All recipes mention the addition of materials or chemicals. According to these specifications and standards, some additions to seeds are allowed on condition that they are healthy, hygienic and authorized for human consumption. Tests for bacteria are conducted to ensure that the materials added are free from germs or any kind of pollution. Hajja indicated that the task of monitoring and supervising shops for roasted items is entrusted to the Ministry of Health

because nuts are a food item and therefore fall under its jurisdiction.

Consumer protection: a controversial issue

Salah Haniyeh, head of the Palestinian Society for Consumer Protection, said that the whitewash used in pumpkin seeds was discussed in the media one year ago with differing opinions regarding the extent of the risk caused to humans. He added that tests had been made at the University laboratories. Although the Ministry of National Economy confirmed that whitewash can cause harm when it accumulates in the body of a consumer, Haniyeh said that most shops do not use whitewash, thus reducing the risks.

Rania Khairi, the secretary-general of the Society, said that the Society had pursued this issue with the Ministry of National Economy a year ago after receiving a complaint. She added that whitewash causes liver and kidney disease if consumed regularly because the body cannot discharge it.

She stated that no legal action has been undertaken by the relevant parties at the Ministries of Health or National Economy against shops using this material. The role of the Palestinian Society for Consumer Protection is only regulatory and to advocate that the parties responsible should pursue issues that pose a threat to the lives of consumers and should raise public awareness of the risks.

If ISIS reached Palestine and committed similar massacres... what would we do?

Fenteena Shooli



Mariam Dagher
English language graduate from
Birzeit University

There are many who would join ISIS, especially those who support the idea of killing non-Muslims. In Palestine, there are many who share same fanatical beliefs as ISIS. As to what we would do then, I guess we would be unable to do anything because we have been under Israeli occupation since 1967 and we did nothing. In other words, our situation would go from bad to worse.

For me personally, I believe that I would do everything I could to be a human rights activist and work for the rights of oppressed women. I would work for the liberation

of any woman kidnapped for being a non-Muslim, as is happening with the Yezidi women. I would also work to educate children and young people on the significance of humanity as an integral aspect of religion.



Salah El-Din Al-Touri
Business administration student
at Birzeit University

I believe that the answer lies in what we can do as Muslims. Palestine has special circumstances unlike any other Arab country where ISIS has emerged. Palestine is under an occupation that expropriates land and living resources, as well as the potential to formulate beliefs similar to those of ISIS. The controversy about ISIS cannot be halted for it involves different beliefs and approaches in far away places.

The crimes of ISIS are merely coated with an Islamic veneer but may be labeled as tyranny. They uphold the banner of Tawheed (monotheism) and religion, but fail to apply the highest value called for by religion i.e., humanitarianism. These are not my words, but the provisions of the Quran and Sunnah. We as Muslims must try to return them to the right track to avoid sedition and anguish, but if we cannot, we should oppose them by every means until the truth is revealed.



Khaled Mahameed
Civil engineering student at
Birzeit University

I don't think that ISIS will emerge in Palestine. But if that should happen and their beliefs take root, there would be many who would join them as a means to release internal tensions. At the same time, a large opposition would emerge and this would lead to civil war. Personally, I would oppose them because their beliefs are in conflict with my religion.



Ghada Sameer
Psychology student at Birzeit
University

I hate to think about this matter because I fear those who claim that they represent Islam. What ISIS is doing is painful because Islam calls for respect for religions and has never called for the slaughter of people. If ISIS committed massacres, I would fall apart and would probably do anything if I had the opportunity to do so. If ISIS confronted the occupation, I would not hesitate to join because I hate the occupation and any harm inflicted on my people.



Khaled Awwad
Civil engineering student at
Birzeit University

Since I do not know what ISIS represents or who they are because of the obvious media propaganda related to everything associated with them, from their name to their actions, I cannot currently judge. However, if the massacres that we are hearing about reached here, no one would accept it no matter what their religion. Personally, I would do better to think about opposing the Israeli occupation before I think about what to do if ISIS arrives.



Rami Masri
Physics student at Birzeit
University

I might switch off the TV and all forms of communication; switch off the lights; not go out on the street so they would not know about my existence. Or I might surrender to the law of the jungle and join them to save my life. Sorry, I am kidding. In fact, I have no idea whether ISIS is more brutal than the Israeli occupation or not; whether it would start with slaughtering the colonialists or not. But I do know that here we have been subjected to a lot under the law of the jungle. This means that I would not join them because we only emerged from the chaos a little while ago. Whether I would fight against them would depend on who I would fight with.



Khaled Mansour
Ramallah

If ISIS came, I would be on the front line of resistance as I would not wait until they reach my city and enslave my mother and sister. I prefer to die with my beloved ones than die crushed and defeated. I might think of fleeing, but I do not want to become a refugee twice.



Omar Kittaneh
English language student at
Birzeit University

If ISIS emerged in Palestine, I would be the first to go in search of it and its fighters. If what we have heard about them via the media is proved to be true, I would be a martyr. But if it is not as we have heard, I would become one of its fighters. In both cases, I would have lived for the truth and the true and legitimate religion.

Bakery owners ignore new pricing for loaves of bread amidst claims of "stored flour"

Noor Abdel Fattah

In an alley in Ramallah, the voices of people waiting in queues for their turn to buy loaves of bread get louder. A man's voice: "Two kilos of bread please". This is Mohammad Nasser who buys two kilos of bread or more per day, which means about NIS120 per month to supply part of his family's basic needs for bread that has become the most expensive in the world.

The baker does not weigh the bread for Nasser, but counts the loaves instead and puts them in the bag. Thus, the pricing announced by the Ministry of National Economy based on weight is gone with the wind.

Although Mohammad's hopes rose after he heard news of a reduction in the price of bread as an essential item, they fell again after the owners of bakeries opposed the reduction and were unwilling even to charge by weight. Mohammad said: "It is not fair for bread to be so expensive as it is only an essential food item. If bread is so expensive, what about other items? Bakery owners should empathize with people and not think solely of profit".

Early this year, there were indications of reductions in certain commodities related to bread making, such as fuel. This prompted the relevant parties to

conduct research on the prices of these commodities and the repercussions on bread prices today. Most of these studies demonstrated that the cost of producing one kilo of bread was no more than NIS 3.15.

As a result, the Ministry of National Economy held a meeting in late February with all parties involved in flour and baking, and with the presence of the Palestinian Consumer Protection Society. Nevertheless, the meeting concluded that the price of NIS 4 per kilo of white bread should be retained because of objections by bakery owners and their threat to strike if prices were reduced. Bakery owners explain that their opposition to reductions in bread prices is due to the large quantities of wheat and other production inputs that they have stored, so any drop in price in early 2015 would cause losses or a reduction in their profits.

Abu Rayan, a bakery owner in Ramallah, explained that a reduction in bread prices would cause losses for bakeries because they purchased quantities of flour and other necessities earlier.

Mohammad Nasser rejected this excuse as failing to take into consideration the poverty faced by residents, who are already crippled by price rises in

consumer commodities.

The Palestinian Consumer Protection Society insists on a price reduction. Many of those working in consumer protection have calculated that bakery owners make profits of up to 33%. This is not in the interests of the public; with average consumption of one kilo per day, a price reduction of half a NIS per kilo would enable the purchase of an additional four or five kilo of bread per month.

Salah Haniyeh, head of the Palestinian Consumer Protection Society in Ramallah and Al Bireh, confirmed his opposition to retaining the price of bread at a time when consumer purchasing power has declined and the prices of fuel, electricity and the inputs of bread production have dropped substantially. This has not been reflected in consumer prices, but, on the contrary, has increased the profits of bakery owners.

The Ministry: We are discussing inputs, not prices

The Ministry of National Economy stated that it had not issued a statement on price reductions; it had decided to revise the prices of production inputs and had called for a meeting to reach an understanding and study the variables existing in bread production. Mahmoud Abu Shanab,

the director of public relations and information at the Ministry, highlighted that a study of production inputs showed that some inputs had dropped in price. However, bakery owners have large quantities of flour in storage, which would cause a loss if bread prices were reduced. Thus, a decision was taken to defer discussion of any change in prices until the end of March to allow for further study of the new variables.

Pressure by bakery owners obliged the Ministry to delay its decision to reduce bread prices, despite the findings of the Ministry study that the prices of certain commodities had fallen. The interests of bakery owners took precedence over those of Palestinian households for whom bread is an essential commodity. Remarkably, the fact remains that as soon as the prices of goods such as bread or fuel rise in the West Bank market, the providers of these goods rush to raise prices without being subjected to any constraints by the government, while the situation is not the same if prices fall.

The Palestinian consumer who suffers from this clash between stakeholders must ask whether the retention of existing prices of one product or another is not a breach of the rights of Palestinian consumers.

I witnessed the birth of Khaled Meshaal From Cuba and Palestine...Haja Sara, the unforgettable midwife of Silwad

✶ **Jenan Ousama Silwadi**

At the end of the First World War and the beginning of the British Mandate in Palestine and the Arab world, the poor living conditions and poverty that plagued Palestinians led a group of men to leave Silwad village near Ramallah and sail via the port of Jaffa to Cuba to seek a living. Among this group was the father of the renowned Sara, a woman who assumed the profession of a midwife at an early age and who was considered as a mother to many generations in the mountainous Silwad village, east of Ramallah.

The villagers considered her as Cuban because she was born and brought up in Cuba. For decades, she was associated with the newborns of the village and her name was linked to the lives of many girls and boys. When people spoke of births, the "Cuban" would be remembered as the one who saved mothers during a difficult labor.

Al-Hal conducted an interview with Auni Fares, a researcher and teacher of history (aged 42) who documented stages of Sara's life via research and interviews with her about her journey as a midwife.

Describing the eventful life led by Sara, Fares explained that the people of Silwad historically migrated to Latin American countries such as Peru, Mexico, Cuba and Brazil. They even used Spanish and Latin names such as Haj Pedro, who lives currently in Silwad. Sara's story started with the departure of a large group of men from Silwad to Cuba via the port of Jaffa to seek work and make a living after the end of First World War and the beginning of the British Mandate in Palestine. Among them was Sara's father, Haj Musa Laily, who met Ms. Thomasa Antonios Gonzales there; she was later called Alia when she adopted Islam at Al Aqsa Mosque. They married and gave birth to Sara in Cuba in 1930. Like many expatriates, her parents did not want Sara to grow up in Cuba and they returned to Silwad when Sara was aged six months.

After the family settled back in Silwad, the father, Haj

Musa, left to Cuba again to marry another woman and have more children. He became a rich merchant in Cuba and, as a result, he was killed along with his sons from his second wife during the revolution and class struggle at that time. Many Palestinian merchants, especially those originally from villages to the east of Ramallah such as Silwad, al-Mazraa al-Sharqia and Kufr Malek, were never allowed to leave Cuba since anyone owning a large fortune was prevented from leaving during that period. With the departure of the father and no news from him, Alia and Sara were left without a breadwinner. The mother started to work as a midwife in the village to earn a living and her daughter learned the basics of the profession at an early age by accompanying her mother to all the births. The birth of Khaled Meshaal

Fares narrates that Sara began work in the world of midwifery when her mother, Alia, was busy with a woman one day and was unable to help her neighbor who was in labor. Alia asked her daughter to take over. When Sara went to the neighbor, she found her in the final stages of labor and helped her to give birth to the boy who became the head of the political bureau of Hamas, Khaled Meshaal.

In 1970 Haja Alia passed away and Sara took over her role, acting as the village midwife for a generation of village residents throughout the period from 1952 until 2002.

Sara's role during the second Intifada

Although Sara was over seventy years old at the time of the second Intifada, she continued to work as a midwife and was never slow to assume her duties. The Cuban midwife never stopped learning and took part in a number of courses in nursing offered in the neighboring villages. The residents of villages to the east of Ramallah attest that Sara had real intuition. One woman from Silwad was told by doctors that she was pregnant with a girl, but Sara advised that it was a boy, and she was right as usual.

Fares added: "During the confrontations that took place in the second Intifada, Sara turned her house into an infirmary to help women giving birth. She also helped women in neighboring villages during the siege and was never afraid



of going out at night and traveling between villages. Sara never paid any attention to curfews or feared the Israeli occupation forces, who always obstructed her work". Sara died last month at the age of 84 after assisting in the births of generations of residents of Silwad and carving her memory and name in stories of births and village folklore.

Journalism photography between the longing of amateurs and the immunity of the professionals

✶ **Malek Abu Areesh**

Of the thousands of young Palestinians, only a few have ambitions and clear objectives. Images from here and there make up the dream of Omar Khatib, a media student at Birzeit University. He dreams of becoming a famous journalist who conveys the lives of Palestinian youth through his camera. For Omar, photography is the eyes through which he views the world around him and that comforts him.

Omar says: "I have a problem of nerves and my hands tremble when I hold anything apart from the camera, which lies still in my hands."

"With many professional photographers, young people face difficulties working in photography. Yet, with perseverance and self-development, they can overcome difficulties. My ambition is to improve my knowledge in this field and work in photography. It is true that I have been in the field for three years, but it needs a longer time". [To become a professional photographer]

Omar Khatib and other young photo-journalists face many difficulties, primarily from competition with professional photographers, the high cost of cameras, the absence of advanced media technology in Palestine to facilitate their work and the lack of guaranteed job opportunities.

Photo-journalist Jamal Arouri teaches photography. He stated: "In general, photography is a profession, and if someone masters it properly, he can obtain an

independent job."

A photography teacher at the Modern College added: "Photography is a profession and an art. If the young photographer can handle it in a professional way, it will be his source of income and will provide him with good potential for an independent income despite the stiff competition in this area from the large numbers of graduates."

Arouri comments on an age where speed prevails: "New technology has facilitated the use of smart phones and reduced the need for photographers in all aspects of life and institutions. It has also reduced job opportunities for new graduates."

"The image is the language of this era and, as a result, things have changed drastically. A while ago, job opportunities were available for those who write reports, news and articles. Today, this has changed to the image, which is more effective. This has had an impact on the opportunities available, although there are many who work in this profession. All cultures deal with images as a first priority and it is the same with communications and advertisement companies."

Of professional photographers in the West Bank, Arouri says: "There are no more than 20 photographers who work for well-known Arab and foreign agencies. There are dozens who are not working or who used to work with foreign agencies and now work in various projects. There are professional photographers with long experience who

work with Arab agencies or in technical aspects. Those employees were recruited long time ago and young people do not have a chance to enter that market because such opportunities arise only every year or two, and also because the big agencies are cutting back on employment."

On the many amateur photographers, he states: "I respect this phenomenon and I am not opposed to it because it contributes to raising the awareness and ability of people to find out what is going around them, especially that today's tools are the camera and the mobile phone. This is the result of the ability of any person to buy a camera and establish a page on Facebook."

Omar Abu Erra, who has worked in photography on call or as a freelance with local institutions, says: "Opportunities for work are affected by the many amateur photographers available, but mostly lack the required expertise."

"This is a very annoying phenomenon. You need specific conditions, including possession of a professional camera and the talent to enter this field."

"You can build an identity for yourself through photography. It is good to convey a beautiful image of our homeland. I care about altering images for aesthetic purposes and do not consider this as cheating or forgery."

Photography remains an art more than a course taught in universities, but courses in photo-journalism are entitled to encourage students to address this aspect more closely and to provide them with the first steps to enter the field.