



1for3 News

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May 2019 * Special Walk for Water Edition



Planting in Palestine: Seeds of a New Society?

By Hubert Murray*

It is planting season in Palestine. For the last few weeks Shatha Al-Azzeh and her colleagues in the Environmental Unit at the [Lajee Center in Aida refugee camp](#) have been working with young people to set up new rooftop planters. At a day of activities on March 27 members of the public and residents of the camp could view the planters potted by the youth volunteers with lettuce, cauliflower, sage, onions, mint, thyme and geraniums, the latter as insect repellents. Vines and saplings included passion fruit, loquat and varieties of citrus.

Why is the Environmental Unit at Lajee doing this and why, with their U.S.-based partners 1for3, should they regard healthy, locally produced food as so important of an issue when there are many other things to be concerned about in the refugee camps?

Since the Oslo Accords the produce market in Palestine has been increasingly dominated by Israeli produce... Palestinian agricultural production has fallen over the years since Oslo, partly because of the increasing encroachment of settlements; and partly because [Israel controls 80 percent](#) of the water from an aquifer that is mostly under the West Bank. Oslo further established a system where Palestinians would buy back their own natural resource from Mekorot, the Israeli national carrier, at a significant premium. Finally, severe restrictions on the use of fertilizers (deemed to be potential explosives) are reckoned by the United Nations agency, [UNCTAD](#), to have been responsible for a 20 to 33 percent decline in yield between 2002 and 2015....

Faced with this situation,...growing vegetables domestically is not only economically attractive it also promotes a healthy family diet. ... The planters are immensely popular... Even at this small scale, the crops contribute to the family food budget and owners are more aware of the dietary benefits of what they are growing and even what they are discarding – home composting is part of the program. Not least, however, is the reconnection with an agricultural heritage from which the refugees have been cut off for more than two generations...

The rooftop garden project is but one of many [including on water quality and community health] being promulgated by the Lajee Center and 1for3, each linked to the others as part of a comprehensive vision for what it will take to build a proud and resilient society. ... There are in these programs models for communal self-determination, mutual support and shared responsibilities designed for liberation now, in the moment, in the tasks of living and eating and caring, as circumscribed as they are by the ongoing Occupation.

* Read a longer [version](#) originally published on Mondoweiss on April 10, 2019.

A breakfast in Lajee's Garden for the Patients in the Community Health Worker (Health for Palestine) Program



Why Walk for Water? A word from 1for3's Executive Director, Nidal Al-Azraq

This Saturday, May 4, hundreds of people will come together in Cambridge to Walk for Water to Support Palestinian Refugees. As a Palestinian who grew up in Aida Camp, it is always inspiring to see so many people! But our gatherings are even more urgent in these times. As the US president flagrantly undermines human rights and defunds everything having to do with Palestine, it is crucial that we here do what we can. Walking stands against reactionary policies. It supports a political vision for healthy communities that can sustain and nurture their members. Thanks for joining us!

Voices of 1for3: Dr. Bram Wispelwey

Can you tell us about the inception of the Community Health Worker (CHW) Program and your role in it?

We hatched the idea together with 1for3 and Lajee: What would it look like to have young community members fill existing gaps in health care by delivering care and organizing themselves to demand something better?

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? Have you ever lived in Palestine? What is your “day job” now?

I lived in 1948 for four years studying medicine. Immediately after moving there in 2010, Israel ramped up its ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian Bedouins in the Naqab (Negev). This was a light bulb moment, pulling me into the story of Palestinian dispossession and generating the question of how I could use my skills and position in pursuit of Palestinian liberation. I’m now a hospitalist and faculty member of Brigham and Women’s Division of Global Health Equity, working locally to bring Palestine into global health discourse.



What are the challenges for you of moving between working in the US and working in Palestine?

I spend about eight months of the year at an elite Boston teaching hospital. It’s always a bit of shock to return to work there after time living in Aida. As I write this [in March 2019], Israel is dropping bombs on Palestinians in Gaza and the

power is off here in the camp.

What is most rewarding about working with the CHW program?

Watching the CHWs interact with their patients brings me so much happiness and satisfaction. The relationships they’ve built, the trust they’ve generated in the community through their work – I think this is the most important part of health care, and it creates the possibility for transformation.

Tell us about your experience of working with the CHW team.

On a typical day we’ll see patients in their homes, the CHWs will chat with them about how things have been going and check their vital signs and blood sugar. We’ll review any new health documents and adjust medications as needed. When I give teaching sessions to the CHWs, it’s at a very high level, similar to medical students. They’re very bright and hungry for new knowledge and skills, so it’s an absolute pleasure to work together. Their growth over the last year has been extraordinary. Every day they teach me about Palestine and life in the camps.

What are your hopes for this project over the next year?

We hope to expand our services to all community members of Aida and Al-Azza who are struggling with diabetes and hypertension by the end of the year. A trauma-informed mental health component will kick off in the fall, and we’re organizing community mobilization workshops for the CHWs throughout the year. The next step is to expand to other camps, with our CHWs leading training efforts and catalyzing new grassroots refugee projects.



Read more! “Impacts of Intermittent Water Supply on Water Quality in Two Palestinian Refugee Camps” published in *Water*

Results of a multi-year collaboration between 1for3, Lajee, and Tufts professors has led to the publication of a peer-reviewed journal article about how the water quality in Aida and Azza Camps is affected by the gaps in water delivery. The team included Shatha Al-Azzeh, the director of Lajee’s Environment Unit, John Durant, a professor of Civil & Environmental Engineering (CEE) at Tufts, Stephanie Galaitsi, a graduate of CEE at Tufts, Nidal Al-Azraq, 1for3’s Executive Director, and Amahl Bishara, a professor of Anthropology at Tufts. Between March 2016 and June 2017, the team examined water quality within the distribution system in the camps, testing for total coliforms, *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) bacteria, and residual chlorine. We observed deterioration in water quality in both camps, but the deterioration was more pronounced in Aida Camp.



Photo of 2013 Tufts Water: Systems Science, Society Practicum.

The main factor influencing water quality deterioration in rooftop tanks in Aida Camp appears to be air temperature. The team recommends further water testing and expanded communication with camp residents. The article is free and [available](#) to the public!