



BAIT ALKARAMA



photograph by Tanya Habjouqa



Slow Food® Nablus

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Bait al Karama (House of Dignity) is the first Women's Centre in the heart of the Old City of Nablus (Palestine). **The Centre combines a culinary social enterprise with social, educational and cultural activities and features: The first women led international Palestinian Cookery School**

The project is a collaboration between the Women Affairs Committee of the Non Governmental Organization Nablus Old City Charity (Palestine), the artist Beatrice Catanzaro and the cultural manager Cristiana Bottigella.

Director: Fatima Kadumy

Coordinator of the Centre and Social activities with women and children: Hanan Shamlawe

Bait al Karama_Slow Food Nablus is the first Slow Food Convivium in Palestine, looking at food as cultural heritage to preserve and reevaluate.

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At the heart of **Bait al Karama** stand three main goals:

- to support the social and economic needs of women struggling in the aftermath of the occupation of the Old City of Nablus.
- to recuperate, research and make known the highlights of the Palestinian food heritage and culinary tradition.
- to draw international attention to the Old City of Nablus as place of culture.

The Centre, which is the **first Slow Food Convivium of Palestine**, is home to the foremost school of traditional Palestinian cuisine run entirely by women and it is managed accordingly to a social enterprise business model.

In conjunction with the school, Bait al Karama runs several additional socio-economic ventures: a cafeteria, a beauty salon, a shop boasting a store of local products, as well as a functional spaces which facilitate training and socio-cultural activities for women and the community of the Old City of Nablus.

Through the creation of a designated space for social aggregation, education, income generation and culture expression, we aim at engender Palestinian socio-cultural re-growth and development.

Entry of Bait al Karama



A stack of colorful, hand-painted bowls and plates with intricate blue and gold patterns.

What we have done in 2012



Training Room of Bait al Karama,
before and after the rehabilitation.



**In 2012 we have rehabilitated two new spaces:
the Training Room and the Beauty Salon.**

The **Training Room** today hosts a number of social and educational activities, such as psychological counselling for women, afterschool for children, meeting groups for women that lost their children during the last Intifada, English for women and children, creative workshops (video and photography) etc.

Given the increasing number of women and children visiting the Centre and participating to our social and educational activities, we foreseen the need to expand the capacity of the building and implement on our rooftop a café'/restaurant.

Our dream is to have a fully functional café' place for women, where they can gather on a daily base, converse and meet each other's. In fact in the Old City there is no such a place devoted to women. Moreover, it would serve as restaurant for groups and events. The restaurant will provide seasonal and home made food, that you won't be able to taste elsewhere!



Beauty Salon of Bait al Karama,
before and after the rehabilitation.

The **Beauty Salon** is another income generating activity for the Centre as well as being a meeting point for the women of the local community.

The beauty Salon offers also training for young women in hairdressing and make-up.





What our Women think about Bait al Karama

photograph by Tanya Hab-

My name is Aisha Ali

I am responsible for the Beauty Saloon in Bait al Karama – is the first time in my life that someone gave me such responsibility, that gives me a strong feeling of confidence and trust in my own capacities.

I had the opportunity to organize training workshops and the women participating surprise me with their enthusiasm in learning.

During the year I took part of the English course organized by the Centre for the team of Bait al Karama – it was my first time I could approach a foreign language and that open my mind.

I could slowly relate with the foreigners coming for the cooking courses. I discover that my picture of the foreigners was far from reality.

I was afraid from them and I could not imagine how I could deal with them.

But then I realize that they were kind and open and I was really happy to work with them.

Though I know how to cook the traditional Palestinian dishes, during the cooking classes I learned a lot, a lot of new things ...

... also walking in the streets now is different, when I see the Knafe makers (typical sweet from Nablus) in the old city, I see them as beholder of our tradition.

Through the eyes of the foreigners I understood the richness of my tradition and environment.

Bait al Karama is a place I feel belonging to and, though the future is uncertain, I will always find my place in the Centre and with my colleagues. It is like a family!



photograph by Tanya Habjouqa

My name is Hanan Shamlawe

I am working with Bait al Karama as secretary and activities coordinator since October 2012. I am a social worker with a BA in the field and I come from four years volunteering in other centres in Nablus before meeting Bait al Karama.

In the beginning I started with Bait al Karama as volunteer for psychological support for women and legal counselling, to then be officially employed.

The Centre represents to me a great possibility to engage in a stable working position and to really improve my skills and create continuity with my social work.

Also my household has improved as life costs are very high in comparison with wages, with my contribution I can support my daughter's university studies.

The journey with Bait al Karama has also strengthens my self-esteem, which is fundamental in my field in order to be truly supportive.

Bait al Karama gave me also the freedom to engage directly in social cases, without imposing an agenda like many NGO's do, but trusting in my capacities.

Along the way I have constantly improved my skills, such as English and computer work.

Moreover, meeting foreigners through the cooking classes and caterings has been a "golden" opportunity to open up my mind and to drop the fear of the "other".

... and to find ways to relate beyond diversities, for instance through conviviality.

The encounter with foreigners make me aware even more on my own tradition and customs as I understand that I can be a filter of our culture through my position in Bait al Karama.

Seeing, day-by-day, foreigners coming to the Centre, interested in our culinary culture, I started to understand its value and the importance to preserve it.

I began to do food education in my family, the difference between fast and slow food, local production versus imported goods etc. I want my daughters to understand the importance of a healthy and sustainable food culture as one day they will be mothers too.

Bait al Karama Activities in 2012



photograph by Tanya Habjouqa

Cooking Classes



take the time to read from our “Students”



“I loved that we were always busy with a task and included in the food preparation, I loved tasting some of your other concoctions (and the food we were making during the process), and I loved being able to hear your story while cooking. And the trip to Sama Nablus was the icing on the cake. Getting to visit a place that represents the perseverance, beauty, and strong spirit of the Nabulsi people – yourself included – together was very meaningful” (by Daniel)



“Last Saturday I had the pleasure of learning to cook maklooba and fettoush from some masters at Bait al Karama. I had been hoping to learn some Palestinian culinary skills from home cooks. I was lucky and in addition to that I found strong principled women intent on uplifting all members of their community. From meandering through the bustling Old Nablusi market and being introduced to the thorny vegetable Akoub to learning to cut fleshy cucumbers into micro-pieces on a handmade wooden cutting board, I was

deeply impressed with the care these ladies put into preserving and transmitting traditions through sustainable methods. Thank you for the incredibly warm welcome, and I wish the family at Bait al Karama the best as it continues its important work.” (by Shama Farooq)

“Where do I find the best food in Palestine?” In the months preceding my trip to the Middle East, this question left my lips more times than I can count. Friends recommended this or that falafel shop; told me not to miss the chicken foukhara; and warned that after tasting real hummus, I’d never be able to eat the American variety again. But I craved something more. I embarked on a search for the home-cooked. The slow cooked. Food with soul.

It was Bait al KARAMA’s association with the Slow Food Movement that intrigued me from afar and led me to its soaring doors on only my second day in Palestine. A smiling woman, Hanaam, greeted me at my taxi and I could tell, by her welcoming face, that I was in for an unforgettable day! She led me through the winding streets of Old City Nablus—past overflowing carts of oranges, knafeh vendors, and somber memorials—pointing out the sights and answering my barrage of questions. After hearing that I’ve a particular interest in all things preserved and pickled, Hanaam led me to the “oldest man in Nablus” who gave us a taste of his turnips, which were pickling in neon pink brine! Hanaam taught me to shop for the best pita, the brightest lemons, and the strongest coffee.



We arrived at Bait al KARAMA’s sunny kitchen with bags full of fresh food and hearty appetites! Together with women from the neighbourhood, we discussed the day’s menu over a breakfast of Nabulsi cheese, olives, pita, and tea. Then, it was time to cook! We hollowed out turnips, stirred tahini smooth, and explored the kitchen’s endless cabinet of spices, as women shared with me old family recipes and tales of life in Palestine.

Nabulsi women, young and old, visited Bait al KARAMA that day—they came for camaraderie, classes, advice from social workers, and to lend their own culinary secrets to my recipe book. They told me how Bait al KARAMA—an organization focused on advancing the socio-economic role of Palestinian women, run entirely by women—helped them to find a livelihood, to deal with a child’s injury, and to find an outlet for their voices. I was not only touched by the women’s openness, but by their strength, their talents, and especially by their laughter.



*We shared an incredible lunch together—the type of authentic, local, home-cooked meal that most travellers only dream of eating (and cooking!) in a foreign country. As we said our long goodbyes, it was clear that I’d not only tasted the Palestinian cuisine I’d been hoping for, but also a slice of its inspiring women’s movement.
(by Jenelle Eli)*

Lunches for groups



We have organized an increasing number of lunches for groups this year. It is a way to share our food tradition, to share stories and life experiences, to shorten the distance among foreigners and the local community ... as well as a way to generate income, to sustain our women and our social endeavours.

We always look at seasonal products and authentic recipes and sometimes we take groups around in the Old City to get a flavour of the Suq (the market) and to have a real sensorial experience by immersing in the flavours of fresh backed bread, toasted coffee and sweets!



Knuafe maker - photograph by Alessandro d' Onofrio





Slow Food®Nablus



Bait al Karama was part of the Palestinian delegation at Terramadre-Salone del Gusto 2012 in Turin (Italy). Beyond presenting our activities, we displayed local specialities such as Summac (a typical spice used in the Palestinian kitchen with a peculiar sour taste) and Thaini (sesame paste). We also took over the Terramadre kitchen for few hours where we prepared Maklube (a typical rice, meat and vegetables dish) for a hundred guests!



Previous to the Terramadre-Salone del Gusto, Bait al Karama gave a cooking class in Bologna during the Mercato della Terra, a weekly Slow Food market in the heart of the city of Bologna.

The almost 20 participants learned how to prepare Malfuf (cabbage rolls stuffed with rice and meat) and the class ended with a joyful collective lunch!

on the left, Fatima Kadumy, director of Bait al Karama and Falak Nasser one of the chefs of Bait al Karama



Fundraising Activities



Fundraising events and dinners represent for us a way to support our activities as well as to spread knowledge around the Palestinian culinary culture.

Among the events in 2012 were:

Fundraising dinner event at **OSTERIA della VILLETTA** in Palazzolo S/O – the event was organized by the wonderful hosts of Osteria della Villetta, Maurizio and Grazia with the support of Love Difference –Pistoletto Foundation.

The evening had some very special guests, the artist Michelangelo Pistoletto with his wonderful wife Maria, the world renown genetics' Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and the great chef Gualtiero Marchesi.

The Mediterranean Food served during the evening was prepared by Gualtiero Marchesi, Sergio Mei, Enrico Bartolini, Roberto Abbadati, Omar Sultan and Pasticceria Franco.

Fundraising dinner and “mini-suq” at **Villa Piazzo** (Pettinengo – Italy), organized by Lions Club Biella – Bugella Civitas and Soroptimist International – Biella, with the collaboration of Pacefuturo association.

A fundraising dinner was organized also by the **Slow Food Condotta of Bergamo** (Italy). Slow Food Bergamo has followed us since our very first steps and always supported us!

... and in March 2013

We were invited by MEPS Gianluca Susta and Silvia Costa
to present Bait al Karama at the European Parliament.
As example of social entrepreneur model for women in the Middle East.



What do we offer?

Bait Al KARAMA is featuring a Palestinian Cookery School for foreigners visiting Palestine.

The school offers and coordinates courses and tailor-made programs, which run a minimum of one day, and are facilitated by the women chefs of the Centre.

The courses focus on the preparation of traditional Palestinian and Nabulsi dishes and are suitable for everyone, professional chefs, food lovers and Middle East tourists.

Each course is designed in collaboration with the participants to meet their interests and needs. Additionally, special programs can be arranged for researchers, artists and academics.

We offer as well traditional Palestinian lunches to groups and we can organize culinary tours in the Old City of Nablus, offering guided visits to the Souk, food shops and factories – knafeh producers, Tahina factory and such like – As well as tours to visit producers and farmers in the countryside around Nablus.



photograph by Tanya Habjouqa

Future Dreams

In times of great difficulties, our hopes and ambitions are vivid and sparkling!

In 2013 and 2014 we dream to:

- . build a restaurant on the rooftop of Bait Karama where we can host a cafeteria for the local women community as well as where we can host groups for lunches.**
- . consolidate our cookery school through marketing and a training program for the women.**
- . strengthen the Slow Food Philosophy among the local community, and to strengthen the network with local farmers.**
- . initiate a children centre focused on delivering schooling support for children with analphabetic family backgrounds and to foster environmental education through creative workshops. As well as to offer young mother pre-natal education and pedagogical support.**

What can you do for us?

Bait Al Karama mostly comes to life through sponsorships and donations.

If you wish to support Bait Al Karama with a donation or you can help us expanding our network and fundraising opportunity,

please contact us at baitalkarama@gmail.com



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Slow Food®

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