

Let's talk about Gaza

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Pottery in Gaza

Bessan Shehada, project coordinator of the Rosa Luxemburg Siftung (RLS) in Gaza interviewed Sabri Attallah, the owner of a pottery factory in Gaza.



How long have you been working here?

This factory was established in 1960. Since I was 7 years old and going to school, I used to come here and learn the craft. I learned it from my father, and now I transferred my experience to my sons, I have 12 sons; many of them are working with me, though not all of them because this craft needs to be loved. If you don't love

it, you can't learn it. Some of my sons learned since they were 10 years old, while others who are 22 years old still have not yet. Selling also helps to love the craft; if you sell your products, you acquire more love for it.

Many families in Gaza have been making pottery for a living such as Al-Shubaki, Herez, Al-Masri, Johaand Bolbol, and my family Attallah.



Where do you get the materials?

This is a local industry. We use the mud from the lands of our country. We never import any material from outside. We find all the mud we need in East Jabalia in the north Gaza strip. Its mud is very rich and perfect for making great products. We bring the mud in the summer and spread it all on the ground so it dries. After that, we put it in a big pool where two thirds the amount of mud is added in water and stirred until the residues and waste comes up and is cleaned out. This way we have clean and good mud that's ready for production.

The first step is to stir it in a giant mixer, and then cubes are formed. Then the cubes are taken and put on the wheel where they are formed and crafted into the desired shapes. Some products require more than one wheel; which means multiple processes are involved. When the products are finished, they are spread on the ground in the sun so they dry. After they dry fully, we put them in a big oven. We use a temperature of 700 C to finalize the process. We keep the products inside the oven for 3 or three days until they are completely cold and safe to remove without breaking - and then they're ready for use.



Why there are three colors for pottery red, white and black?

For white, we add sodium (food salt) to the mixed mud, and we raise the temperature a little more than 750C. For red, we set the temperature to 700C or a little bit less. For black, we reverse the output of the CO₂ back inside to give the pottery a black color in 48 hours.

We're in the era of technology and people seem to be satisfied without pottery, what makes you continue making these?

First of all, I love this craft and I can't just quit it. Nowadays, we're losing. If I'm to calculate the input costs and the salaries of my sons and everything else, you'd discover that we barely can afford paying the basics; there is no material benefit. Nevertheless, it's all worth the effort. I'm dedicated to this craft as if it was my home.

What obstacles do you face?

I don't have other resources for living, if it wasn't for my sons who help me, I would've shut the business down. If I was hiring other workers to help me, I would have to give them more than I give my sons, and thus I would go bankrupt.

The situation in Gaza is much more difficult than it was previously. Average citizens are barely able to find something to eat, let alone buy pots and support this heritage craft

Also, there is a huge gap in our production due to the cuts in electricity. Now we have it only for 4 hours, which is not nearly enough time to work, and if I have to continue, I should borrow a generator which costs a fortune. And if I do that, I then have to raise the prices of my products, which will surely result in unhappy customers.



In addition to the closure of borders and the inability to export the products to Israel, more than 40 shops have been closed. There are very few pottery shops in Gaza now.

Do you still export pottery to outside Gaza?

We used to export pottery to Europe, but the Israeli exporter had written 'Made in Israel' on the clay products that were sent there. When we recently tried to export another shipment — but this time to Italy, and through a Palestinian exporter — the products were broken and we were left with only 20% of them to sell. These products need a pottery maker to take care of them, but due to the Israeli occupation, we are not allowed to pass with our goods across the border.

Which shapes and types of pottery do you make now?

At the moment we only make necessary pottery for cooking Qedra (a type of rice cooked stuffed with meat), fresh water pots and bowls.

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Let's talk about Gaza is a collection of interviews from people of Gaza about their personal daily life experience. It describes the sociopolitical and economic situation of the people in Gaza. Views and opinions expressed in the interviews are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily represent the views of interviewer/organization.

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