

# The Village of Jalqamous



## LIKE HUMAN LIKE CLAY

The way to Jalqamous goes through curvy valleys filled with wild sumac, oak trees, and magnificent plains planted with onions, wheat, and other seasonal crops. Known as *the Princess of All Hills*, Jalqamous is located only 10 km southeast of the city of Jenin. Out of the 1,867 inhabitants 60% depend on farming and the rest on day labor jobs in urban areas. The 1194 Dunoms of farmed land belonging to Palestine Fair Trade Cooperative members is mostly located in the hills and produce an average of 15 tons of olive oil a year. Many out of the 25-member cooperative are now the first farmers to achieve *Naturland* organic certification from Germany making Jalqamous the first *Naturland* certified farms in

Palestine. This certification encourages farmers to implement organic practices in all their crops with the goal to transform farms to 100% organic. As this certification gains more recognition, farmers in Jalqamous are setting new standards. According to Mahmoud, “this was not very hard for us to achieve. Most farmers in our village were always uncomfortable with spraying and conventional agricultural practices that have clearly destroyed the natural soil.” Emphasizing the importance of an ‘alive’ soil, he refers to a verse from the Qur’an that says, “I have created you from clay”. And according to Mahmoud, “this is why we are like the soil, human beings are diverse and people have different skin color, we have in our bodies all the minerals that exist in the soil. We are from the soil. So we must cherish it as we cherish ourselves and the different people we





love.”



*A Typical house in Jalqamous*

### **HILBEH -FENUGREEK POWERS**

Treasuring others is perhaps one of the most evident qualities in Jalqamous. Women in particular have a strong sense of collaboration. As in most villages neighbors share resources such as the outdoor *Taboun* oven, which requires daily maintenance to keep it hot. This kind of sharing extends to kitchen utensils and food alike. Tasty aromas are always permeating the neighborhoods especially when Aida for example is baking her famed *Hilbeh* bread, which she shares with everyone. *Hilbeh*, which means fenugreek in Arabic, is often used in Palestinian cuisine for making sweets and breads. To make the *Hilbeh* bread, the fenugreek seeds are soaked overnight so the bitterness is taken out of them. After draining the seeds, chopped onions and spices such as cumin and salt are added to the dough while kneading. After baking it on the hot stones of the *Taboun* oven, fresh olive oil is spread evenly on the bread making every bite a memorable experience on its own! *Hilbeh* is also well known in traditional Arab medicine as a healing seed that has liver and kidney cleansing properties. Dalal whose daughter suffered from kidney stones says that she treated her homeopathically by strictly boiling *Hilbeh* seeds every day for her daughter to drink on an empty stomach and throughout the day.



*Aida's Famous Hilbeh Bread*

### **PLANTING LOVE**

The same kind of confidence in traditional knowledge and practices is displayed in the attitude of most everyone in the village especially when it comes to resolving familial disputes. Speaking to one of the elders in the village, Haj Ahmed, he describes the process in which disputes and conflicts are resolved. “We have the rule of *El Ahali* (the families). If someone for example steals something we would gather representatives of his family and the family of the people he stole from and we would get him to return what he took and ask forgiveness. We try to understand why he did what he did and help him not do it again. And then we drink a cup of coffee together as a sign that the problem is resolved and that the hearts have been cleared.” Aside from the elders of the village itself, Jalqamous like many villages in Palestine is a member of a restorative



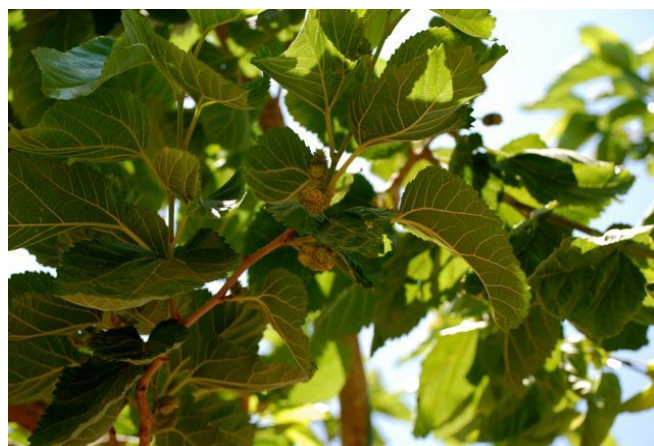
committee called *Lajnit El Islah* that includes members of the surrounding villages who volunteer to play the role of arbitrations and mediators in case disputes occur between individuals from their different communities. When asked why they choose to continue with the old tradition rather than seek legal venues that are available for them today, Mahmoud says, “*El Ahali*, they are the families, we choose the elders not just because of their age but because they are widely respected in the community. They have the ability to soften people’s hearts. The legal courts may be able to force someone to return what they stole or pay a fine for something they did or even prison someone but they do not have the power to make a person forgive. *El Ahali* can do what governments cannot do which is to not allow seeds of bitterness to take root. The government can’t make you love someone but families and your community can.”

agricultural representations of village life as well as political struggle. In each painting or drawing she makes, one can clearly sense the collective harmony that Hanin comes from. As most people who know Jalqamous would say, “treatment in Jalqamous is sweet”. Many of the international visitors that come through Canaan Fair Trade to Jalqamous experience this sweetness and the residents of Jalqamous say that in return they learn new things about different cultures and they get to appreciate the similarities between people of different backgrounds. The spirit of openness in Jalqamous is, without a doubt, rooted in a strong belief system that all people are equal. According to Abu Mohammed, “there is no real difference between us and other people or between what they call the East and West. The only real difference is the financial one and that is a superficial distinction. In the end we all want to give our children a good life.”



*Hanin’s piece depicting Jerusalem*

At first glance this communal bond can seem too good to be true but spending more than a couple of days in this community one can start to observe that they truly operate as one big family. With a big value placed on education most everyone in the village has been celebrating Hanin, a young artist who has become the first Canaan Fair Trade scholarship recipient to pursue a degree in fine arts at the university in Nablus. Her work is heavily based on



*Sunflowers (above) and Berries (below)*

