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FINDING AN ALTERNATIVE MULTI-PURPOSE SPACE FOR PALESTINIAN YOUTH IN MODERN CAFES: THE CASE OF NABLUS, PALESTINE

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Rawan Sami Alameya

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that the cafe, which provides a social and cultural space for its customers, is an alternative place for other unavailable or limited public spaces in Nablus.

A cafe is a place where people drink coffee; this was the first definition people gave when asked what is a cafe? Throughout history, this definition has expanded and become more inclusive as the coffee house has gone through different phases; the cafe has become a place not only for drinking coffee but also a place where people find and create various activities. Moreover, it has become a social and cultural center. Cafes emerged in the era of Enlightenment in Europe, nearly after a century and a half of existence in the Arabian Peninsula, Levant area, Egypt, Iraq, and Turkey where coffeehouses actually originated, to later reach the whole world. Even with the revolutionary invention of the internet in the late 20th century and the cyber cafe in the current century, the traditional cafe model is still a central public space for social and cultural activities.

This study projects Habermas' theory of the "Public Sphere" in a neoteric geography in the 21st century, which is Nablus city. In this thesis, I argue that the deficiencies in many public spaces in Nablus, such as public libraries, youth centers, and co-working areas, drove people, especially the city's youth, not only to look for alternative places but also to create them. In this study I am using a qualitative research methodology. Observations and in-depth interviews are conducted in two cafes in Nablus with some of their young regulars. This thesis suggests that the examined cafe model could partly solve the issue of public space availability or accessibility, forming an alternative multi-functional space for training centers, public libraries, mini theaters, and stages, for instance. I think addressing this topic can make people in the Palestinian community more aware of the importance of the public sphere, especially cafes in this case, since the public sphere plays a significant role in the daily lives of youth in Nablus. Indeed, these cafes have created a considerable change, even with all the challenging circumstances Palestinian youth encounter on a daily basis.

Keywords: Cafe, coffee, coffeehouse, public sphere, public space, Palestinian youth, Palestine, Nablus, multi-purpose space.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, müşterilerine sosyal ve kültürel bir alan sağlayan kafelerin Nablus'taki diğer mevcut olmayan veya sınırlandırılmış kamusal alanlara bir alternatif olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Kafeler insanların kahve içtikleri yerlerdir; en azından insanlara "kafe nedir?" sorusu sorulduğu zaman akıllarına ilk gelen tanım bu olmuştur. Tarih boyunca bu tanım genişlemiş, kahve evleri farklı aşamalar geçirdikçe daha da kapsayıcı hale gelmiştir. Kafe artık sadece kahve içilen bir yer olmaktan çıkıp aynı zamanda farklı etkinlikler bulup ürettikleri mekânlara dönüşmüştür. Böylece sosyal ve kültürel bir merkez haline de gelmiştir. Kafeler Avrupa'da Aydınlanma Dönemi'nde, aslen ilk icat edildikleri Arap Yarımadası, Levent Bölgesi, Mısır, Irak ve Türkiye'de icat edildikten yaklaşık 150 yıl sonra ortaya çıkmıştı ve zamanla bütün dünyaya yayılmıştı. 20. yüzyılın sonunda internetin ve 21. yüzyılın başında internet kafelerin devrimsel icadına rağmen geleneksel kafe modeli hâlâ sosyal ve kültürel etkinlikler için merkezî bir toplumsal alan olma özelliği taşıyor.

Bu çalışma, Habermas'ın "kamusal alan" teorisini 21. yüzyılda ve modern bir coğrafya olan Nablus şehri için ele almaktadır. Bu tezde ben, halk kütüphaneleri, gençlik merkezleri, ortak çalışma alanları gibi Nablus'taki birçok kamusal alan eksikliğinin insanları ve özellikle de gençleri alternatif alan sadece aramaya değil aynı zamanda yaratmaya da yönlendirdiğini savunmaktayım. Çalışmada nitel araştırma metodolojisine başvurulmuştur. Gözlemler ve detaylı görüşmeler Nablus'taki iki farklı kafenin düzenli genç müşterileri ile yürütülmüştür. Çalışmaya göre, kafe modelinin eğitim merkezleri, halk kütüphaneleri, küçük tiyatrolar ve sahneler gibi birçok işlev gören çok amaçlı alanlara dönüşebilme kapasitesi sayesinde kamusal alan mevcudiyeti ve erişimi konusundaki problemi kısmen çözebildiği görülmektedir. Bu konuyu el almanın, kafeler başta olmak üzere kamusal alanların Nabluslu gençlerin günlük hayatlarının üzerindeki rolünü anlamakla bağlantılı olarak Filistinlilerde kamusal alanın önemi hakkında farkındalık uyandıracağını düşünüyorum. Filistinli gençlerin her gün

karşı karşıya kaldıkları zorluklara rağmen kafelerin gözle görülebilir bir değişim getirdiği yadsınmamalıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kafe, kahve, kahve evi, kamusal alan, Filistin gençliği, Filistin, Nablus, Çok amaçlı alan.

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I would also like to thank the people I interviewed, whom I am friends with now. I would tell them your experiences in the cafes were the core of this study. Thank you so much for your time and effort. I learned a lot during this journey of conducting and writing the thesis. It helped me figure out new things. It reminded me of my ultimate goal, as I say to myself: you are here to try making this community better because I believe that as there is a light at the end of the tunnel, there is a liberation day for Palestine.

To the two I dedicate everything for,

My parents and Palestine

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Three years ago, on a Saturday afternoon, I decided to go out with a friend and have some fun in Nablus. I asked her to choose the activity or the place we would go to, so she told me that there is a new cafe called "Veranda" which she went to a week ago. She described the cafe as a "place with special ambience," saying that:

> *This one is not another boring cafe, where people only gather to gossip over a cup of coffee for an hour or two and then leave. Neither is it another cafe of those that compete on being more luxurious, or on offering better snacks or whatever.*

I remember asking her then, with a tone of disapproval: another cafe? Let's go somewhere else today. She replied in a sarcastic tone, saying, “yes, a cafe. Do we really have convenient alternatives to hang out in this city? I guess no." since that day, my friend's question hunted me often, so I decided to study what is beyond this question; not to forget that the recommended place on this day was Veranda. For the good total coincidence, I started to wonder and got some clues on what could it be behind my friend's statement while I was actually sitting in the cafe, which is one of the two cafes I am studying here in this thesis.

1.2. The Scope and the Purpose of the Study

This thesis aims to demonstrate how two recently established cafes in Nablus city act as substitutes of other unavailable or inaccessible public spaces for the city's youth, as they provide those young people with a space where they are not only served drinks and food, but also protected, accepted, supported, entertained, and motivated. Furthermore, the study aims to show that unlike most of the other cafes in Nablus which only care about making money; these cafes work to satisfy the social and cultural needs of their customers within the distinct ambiance of the two. The objective of the study is to recognize the significance of the coffeehouse in the public sphere in Nablus and the impact it leaves on the community, especially the youth. These coffeehouses motivate the community to

perceive the influence that they have had in adding to the concept of the cafe and coffeehouse in the city, creating a new definition of the word *Coffeehouse/cafe* in the minds of the Palestinian youth who are the major attendees of these cafes.

Moreover, the study aims to show how this cafe model offers the customers a different experience. It offers them an open space, which is not only a place where people socialize but also a place where they study, hold meetings, run workshops, play music, and many other things. For instance, the following are usual activities that take place in Veranda and Antique: language workshops, public speaking clubs, and training sessions on different topics, musical events, poetry nights, and book discussions. Furthermore, through qualitative research, I put Habermas' theory of the public sphere into practice throughout this study; presenting a modern pragmatic model of the public sphere in Nablus, Palestine. Veranda and Antique, the two cafes that I will be studying, are both in Nablus city; one in the eastern part of the city, in the old city, while the other is in the western area. This extensive study lasted for a year. The targeted sample are youth regulars aged 18-30 in each cafe.

1.3. Chapters Overview

In the second chapter of this study, the concepts of coffee and coffeehouses are introduced. The second chapter provides a historical overview of coffee and coffeehouses, as well as the evolutions and transformations that both have undergone throughout history to the present day; the study focuses on Palestinian cafe culture, particularly in Nablus. Also this chapter presents an overview of related previous studies on the concept of public sphere and coffeehouses identifications. It gives detailed examples of previous cultural coffeehouses that presented a similar model to the model this thesis introduces, during the modern history in different geographies.

In the third chapter, this thesis explains the specialty of Nablus city, the urban nature of Nablus, and how it influenced the cafe culture in the city till today. It also presented and discussed the main social, cultural, and political and economic issues like unemployment in the Palestinian youth community, which also impact young people as they usually frustrate them. Hence, they tend to seek places where their needs are satisfied, even if partly. Furthermore, the second part of the third chapter states and

analyzes the findings of the conducted interviews. The opinions of regular customers in both cafes are stated and analyzed thoroughly. They were asked about their personal experiences in each cafe as they elaborated on how the cafe model of Veranda and Antique presents a functional public sphere where they discuss and exchange various ideas and matters, influencing social change in the community.

This study expounds how the public sphere of this cafe model I am studying presents a feasible alternative space to other public spaces that have a bureaucratic system, which makes them not easy to access at any time, or they are already unavailable for the citizens. Public libraries, youth centers, cultural centers, and others are examples of these places. This model presents a space that functions not only as a cafe but also as a meeting place, studying space, workshops hall, a platform for talents and creative ideas, and sometimes it functions as if it is a community service center. They offer similar activities to those which are supposed to be performed in other public places. Palestinians, specifically youth, often ask the following questions: do they have inclusive public spaces that embrace the society's various fabric of individuals? And with the availability and accessibility issues youth face when seeking public spaces, what are their alternatives?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Coffee and Coffeehouses: a Historical Background

Coffee is the reason that brought the notion of Coffee House to life in the first place. Coffee has influenced several communities on historical, cultural, social, political, and even religious levels, if not shaping some. Yemen is believed to be the first pioneer that spread coffee beans after it was discovered for the first time in the 15th century in Ethiopia. Some historians actually say that coffee's discovery goes way back to the 10th century, but the actual proof of its presence as a drink was in the late 15th century in Ethiopia and from there it spread across the red sea to Yemen. Coffee appeared in Yemen and then was carried to Mecca, Cairo, and Damascus where it has later become commonly bought and drank as a beverage. Coffee was first monopolized by "Elite drinkers" (Alqasmi, 1904, as cited in Alarnawt, 2012, p.14) Such as teachers, poets, authors, and educated individuals. This fact changes as coffee becomes frequently consumed by different society members later on. Although coffee was not sincerely welcomed at the beginning of the 16th century. The controversy on rejecting, legalizing, or accepting coffee lasted for the two following centuries, not only in the Middle East but also in Europe as the continent got to know coffee for the first time after breaking down the Ottoman monopoly over it as a commodity.

Furthermore, in Arabic, the word *Qahwa* (coffee) was used to refer to one kind of alcohol, so some people were confused about coffee and its use. Also, people who sold coffee sold it in what has become known as a "Kahvehane" in the first half of the 16th century (Alarnawt, 2012, p.15).The Kahvehane (coffeehouse) looked pretty much like a bar in its outright structure, which also confused the masses even more about this emerging beverage. Yet coffee attracted more people, and the number of its drinkers increased, which made some conservative clerics worried, so they started their endeavors to ban coffee. They suspected that coffee beans might have been mixed with alcoholic substances in these coffeehouses. Other factors also played a role in the banning process. One of which is that the coffeehouse has become a place where women sometimes joined men in gatherings, and that formed a challenge to the conservative culture of the community, especially in the Arab peninsula.

Moreover, other aspects followed the gatherings in coffeehouses. For example, playing games such as chess sometimes turned to gamble. Exploiting games that have become as common as coffee in these coffeehouses for the sake of gambling has made some of the community's clerics, chiefs take action against these practices. In general, they agreed on differentiating coffee beans (coffee itself) from the practices that followed having it in coffeehouses. They also outlawed gambling and similar acts in coffeehouses, yet there was still a separation on banning coffee. Therefore and with the excuse of maintaining society's manners, coffee was banned in some areas. It was banned for the first time in Mecca in the 16th century, but some of the ruling governors had opposed the ban. Alarnawt recorded that while the sheik Yunis Alaithawi dissented coffee, the sheik Abu Alfatih Almalki was one of its strong proponents. Also, other clerics and judges fluctuated between legalizing coffee and forbidding it.

As the controversy over coffee continued, coffee houses were increasing. They diffused more particularly in Damascus, in which the first coffeehouse in the world opened its doors for people in 1530. Also, coffeehouses went viral in the Levant area by the end of the 16th century, mainly because of the rising movement known as Alawkaf Aljdeeda "Wakif" which means endowments (Alarnawt, 1995, as cited in Alarnawt, 2012, p.27). During this period many governors and ministers like: Ahmad Pasha and Lala Mustafa Pasha have established endowments including coffee houses. Around the same time, more writers, scholars, and poets who supported the cafe culture were less hesitant to join and sit in these coffee houses. They also got themselves enrolled in some of these cafe activities. Thus, the concept of the coffee house/ cafe started to take the attention and the interest of locals in Damascus, and more cafes were established in the city. One of the oldest cafes in Damascus was found *in Souq- Alarwam* (*Al-Hamidiyah Souq*) in the year 1574.

Furthermore, it was not easy to make coffee at home. For it to be a drink, it has to go through several stages, starting with the process of drying the beans to the process of grinding them. Most importantly, making coffee requires specialized machines that are not obtainable for most of the public. The wealthy aristocratic households had no problem

with that; since they could afford that whole process and have coffee at home. As for the majority of the public, they did not have that privilege. Therefore, the notion of the coffeehouse was born. Coffeehouses have presented a new space for the masses in which anyone could drink coffee. And from a place where people mainly go to enjoy a cup of coffee to a place that offers the public the room for unjudged open speech and more other activities.

The cafe's notion has developed and sometimes challenged the community's rigid orders and habits to create a different ambiance that brings social, cultural, and political prosperity. Alarnawt (2012) argues that by the time cafes emerged in the Arab world, the common public space was mostly the mosque. There were neither restaurants nor bars; since alcoholic drinks were forbidden in Islamic countries back then. So the mosque was the place where people socialize, interact and obtain knowledge from each other, but the mosque, after all, is a sacred place; however, mosques are not only places of worship but also where some pupils get instruction and knowledge. For instance, in the Andalusia province, where Muslims have established a civilization that lasted for 800 years, the main mosques of the region back then served as teaching centers too. Indeed, Al-Andalus was known for its pioneer scholars. Until today many professors in several prominent universities around the world still teach these scholars' ideologies. In his article, Hedgecoe (2015) argued that the great mosque of Cordoba has been described in several books as a renowned learning hub, at which several prominent scholars have taught and been taught. Additionally, taking into consideration that the Arab community is a conservative private one and that hosting friends, especially if of both sexes in the house, was not really welcomed or accepted. Hence, the rise of the coffeehouse as a public sphere and a third-place where it is neither work nor home helped in filling this gap by creating a less confined public space.

In the beginning, cafes were male-dominated, customers were mainly people with high status, or as called "elites," but this has changed over time as the cafe has become a place not only for drinking coffee but also a space where people find and make entertainment. They play Chess and other games like Backgammon. Moreover, it has become a social and cultural center where people spend their free time, and in which some

poets recite their poems, musicians sing and even compose their music. Further, the tradition of oral storytelling was a significant medium in the Arab world, especially in the Levant area where storytellers (Hakwatia) found a space to perform their art and pass the transmitted heritage of stories and history on to the new generations sitting and listening in these cafes. Cafes were mostly intellectuals' favorite space, but in the 17th century, this space got more attention from ordinary individuals, who also joined them in the cafe to casually drink coffee and discuss society, culture, and politics. The cafe has become a space that gathers people who sometimes have mutual interests. As is mentioned earlier, those same participants have developed practices that become norms that follow drinking coffee.

As coffee was getting more common in the southern areas of the Levant, coming from Hejaz and Yemen, the Ottoman Empire was also coming to power ending the Mamluk rule. Ottomans took coffee to Constantinople (Istanbul) and monopolized it as a commodity in their commerce before Europe put its hands on it during the 17th century. Later on, coffee seeds traveled to the two Americas in the 19th century. Bukhari (2018) reported that the Ottoman historian Ibrahim Peçevi wrote in his journals (1642- 1649) that a man from Aleppo and a storyteller from Damascus came to Constantinople in 1555 and opened a coffeehouse store in Tahtakale, and they started selling coffee. Neighborhood coffeehouses were the most prevalent form of coffeehouse in the Ottoman Empire (Figure 2.1.).

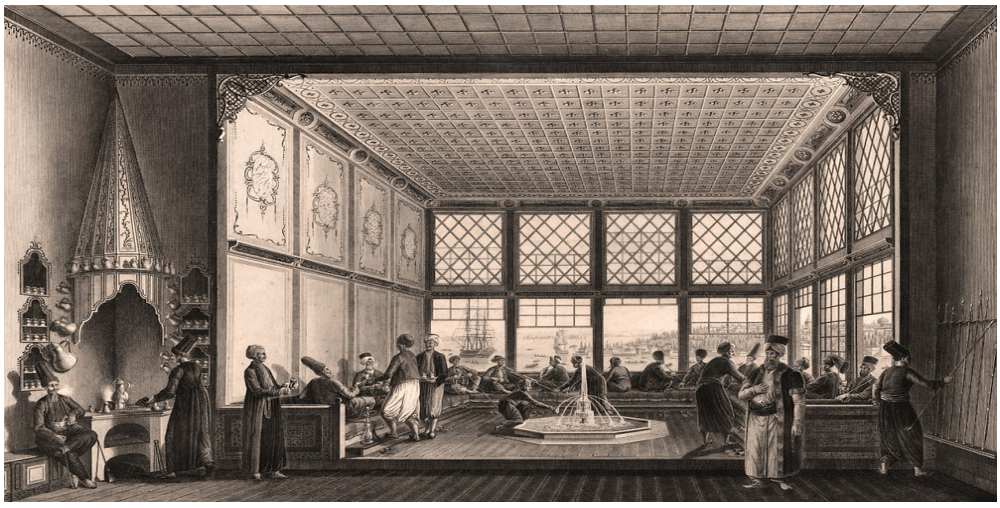


Figure 2.1. Neighborhood Coffeehouse in Istanbul. (Source: Özkoçak, 2009)

On the other hand, there is an intrinsic link between coffee prevalence and Mysticism (Sufism). Some people argue that Sufis are the ones who discovered coffee in the first place, playing a major role in spreading it in Yemen, Hejaz, Egypt, and the Levant area. Alarnawt (2012) gives an example in this regard.

Al- sheik Ali Alshazili, who was sent as a missionary of Sufism to Ethiopia, might be the one who found out about the coffee planet and took it back to Yemen with him. From Yemen, coffee has spread worldwide. Indeed, coffee was just the right drink for Sufis as it was favorable for their ritual routines and practices. It motivates the body and awakens the brain, which helps them worship and pray thoroughly.

With the emerging power of the Ottoman Empire conquering the Levant area, coffee was not a local commodity anymore. It has wildly spread in all the Muslim states. However, the debate over coffee continued between the people who accept and welcome its entity and those who still define it as "harmful" and attempt to manifest it as an illegal beverage. In the year 1546, the sultan Sulaiman al-Qanuni issued an order prohibiting coffee in the Levant area; however, it was re-allowed after breaking the ban. The controversy over coffee continued, yet differed on each ruling period with different governors and sultans coming to power; this meant having shifting opinions on the beverage according to the social, political, and economic circumstances each time.

At the end of the 16th century, there was a movement of counter objection, by which intellectuals, religious scholars, and sheiks would go and spend some time in coffee houses; proving that the cafe is not a place where people are lazy or non-productive; it has actually become a social and cultural center for people to gather, entertain, and discuss many issues. Sheikh Ahmad Alinaiti Al-Nabulsi used to pray the Morning Prayer and then immediately go to one of the city's cafes. Alburini (1959) reported that Al-Nbabulsi would drink coffee and then starts writing and composing poetry. Indeed, the end of the 16th century marked the beginning of the evolution of coffee houses. In addition, people have become more aware of the importance of coffee and that the cafe culture it created has changed their social habits permanently. Coffee has brought a new culture to the

world, where it is much more than just an exchanged commodity; it brought the cafe culture. Aybash (1982 as cited in Alarnawt, 2012) reported that one of the orientalist travelers who visited Damascus in the year 1664 was Jean Thevenot. He is a French globetrotter and linguist who wrote about coffee and coffee houses in his documentations, describing them to the westerners that have not known both yet back then. (p.47).



Figure 2.2. A Miniature of a Coffeehouse in Ottoman Times. (Source: Özkoçak, 2009)

The presence of the cafe has changed the community's social habits; it created new norms. In fact, it has initiated substantial social, cultural, and political changes in society. Askar (2008) explains that not only intellectuals or people with literary interests would care to attend cafes, but also Imams and students of prestigious religious schools, such as Al-Azhar mosque as shown in Figure 2.2. Those students joined for coffee in the first place, as it keeps them alert and helps them study, but later on, they liked the ambiance that coffeehouses offered for people of various backgrounds. However, this made some religious teachers, who stood as opponents of coffee, complain and accuse coffeehouses of moral corruption. Thus some jurists (Muftis) continued issuing statements against coffee and cafes, but as coffeehouses became more prevalent, people became more rebellious and daring.

In fact, what stands behind the criticizing and banning of coffeehouses has been the fear of revolt and rebellion against the ruling power. Sultans, governors, and some Muftis that worked under their rule fabricated accusations such as that coffeehouses make people lazy and corrupt them morally; since some of these cafes brought female singers and performing dancers later on. They adopted these excuses to accuse cafes; thence, issued statements that induce banning them. Additionally, because both coffee and tobacco emerged at roughly the same time in the 16th century in the Ottoman Empire, a connection between having Nargile (water tobacco pipe) and being in a cafe has evolved. It is believed that coffee and tobacco were mainly combined as people were getting to know them around the same time. Indeed, both started to be served in cafes. I think this is a turning point in cafes' history. The cafe now is not a place that only serves coffee; and only functions to fulfill the purpose it was created for, which was serving coffee in the first place. The cafe has become a public space and social center, in which drinking coffee might not be the main purpose for a visit anymore.

This combination bothered some Sultans and Muftis; it was suspicious to them, especially with the harm tobacco brings to the body, which also led them to consider both as "haram" (illicit) and issue banning orders against coffeehouses. In 1623, Murat IV decreed that coffeehouses must be closed as reported by Gamm (2014). Nevertheless, coffeehouses were praised later on; smoking Nargile has become a popular social activity that even sultans relished. In fact, till today, the notion and practice of smoking tobacco, either cigarettes or Nargile in the cafe are very popular. I deem that smoking has become a normal social practice in cafes, especially among youth in the Arab world.

The authoritarian rulers feared coffeehouses as they offered people a space to gather, discuss, and criticize, not only social matters but also political ones. New prospects and critical decisions were coming to light in coffeehouses, which triggered rebellion and change. According to a manuscript, a copy kept at the Academy Library in Belgrade, which states that in the year 1632, there was a call not only to ban coffeehouses but also to demolish them. For instance, the ruling period of Sultan Murad the 4th witnessed these orders of demolishing. However, by the beginning of the 18th century,

coffee was served not only in coffeehouses but also in streets, homes, and then in royal palaces; serving guests coffee has become a sign of generosity and prosperity.

Coffee and the cafe culture reached the Balkans in nearly the second half of the 16th century. Bosnia has played the role of being the connecting gate to Eastern Europe and then to the whole continent, starting from Venice. Coffee became the nation's drink in the following century before reaching Central America. The Bosnian historian Hamdija Kreševljaković (as cited in Alarnawt, 2012) reported that cafes in Bosnia offered a space where new entertaining activities are presented. For instance, the art of storytelling which was inspired by the Arabic tradition of Hakawati (p.65). However, in Europe, when coffee first emerged and coffeehouses came to life later, they were not welcomed or even accepted right away, especially by the church. The church discarded the beverage itself and coffeehouses altogether. Some European orientalists described the church's demeanor towards coffee, treating it as a "mysterious drink" that comes from the far exotic east as they defined it. This projection of coffee in Europe has changed gradually over time. Coffeehouses have become known as the "schools of the wise" (Ameen, p.69, 2019). Some people go to cafes to understand what is happening around them and get some knowledge. In England, for instance, cafes were known as "penny universities." In Cambridge and London, cafe attendees drink coffee for a penny and engage in enlightening discussions. According to Samuel Pepys, by the year 1675, there were around 3000 cafes in England alone. Coffee houses back at the time acted as the internet network today for cafe habitues, in which they gather and discuss many issues (Figure 2.3.).



Figure 2.3. London Coffeehouse in 18th Century
(Source: Kafadar, 2016)

The cafe notion has gone through a long journey of five centuries until it reached people today. It has roamed many geographies, which influenced both the cafe notion itself and the changing culture of the various communities that adopted the cafe culture. Fjal (2019) stated that in Europe, cafes emerged simultaneously as the birth of the Enlightenment age, in which thinkers and intellectuals found the cafe as an inclusive space. Cafes also gave the floor to artists; for instance, the musician Richard Wagner, who used to compose music in the space, which the cafe offered him. In his study, Topik (2009) argues that cafes have played an essential role in "the birth of civil society, public space, and the democratization of a semi-feudal aristocracy" (2009, p. 93). He gives an example of how cafes have affected life-changing events throughout history. For example, Camille Desmoulins planned to attack the Bastille while sitting in a cafe in Paris in 1789. In addition, Fjal (2019) reports that cafes served as platforms for many artists. In the 19th century, the cafe served as a cultural center in Europe, in which various activities have taken place in the space it provides. For example, one of the first films to be displayed on a screen was a film by the Lumiere brothers, who played it in the basement of the Grand Cafe in Paris in the year 1895.

It did not take coffee long to cross the Atlantic Ocean and reach America. In the country of quick economic solutions, coffee has gone through a new phase. It has become the national beverage. Indeed, as tea symbolizes the English culture, coffee does the same

representing the American one. The United States of America is the birth place of the biggest specialty coffee stores and cafes in the world. Further, large companies have figured out a way to make coffee easy to brew without much effort, money and time. Although quick ready-made coffee has spread widely worldwide, this does not change the fact that cafes have become a major need for society. It is not only about the beverage anymore. By the twentieth century, cafes have adapted to the rapid changes in the world, with globalization and capitalism taking the lead and controlling the general scene. American popular coffee shops, specifically Starbucks, which has established several chains in many countries around the world, have competed with small traditional coffee houses and formed a kind of threat to them. And because of some newly adopted habits, I think several cafes have lost their cultural aspect since financial benefit has become the main focus. Coffeehouses have become consumerist and commercial. Also cafes that followed the third wave of coffee emerged.

As the 21st century began with the revolutionary invention of the internet, a new kind of cafe emerged, known as "Cyber Cafe," in which attendees are provided with internet access inside the cafe. Till now, the cafe represents an inclusive "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989) for society. Moreover, today, with the age of remote workers, the cafe fulfills another need, which is providing attendees with a working space. In brief, the cafe proved it has become an indispensable public space, which renders the community a space with much more to offer than just a drink.

2.2. The Cafe Culture in Palestine

Alajawi (2017) argues that in Palestine, generally, cafes were not as common as they were in Egypt, for example. Before the Nakba (the permanent eviction of Palestinians out of their lands in1948), cafes concentrated mainly at the coastal side, such as Haifa and Akko, and that was because of the traveling and trade motions of the local and non-local labor force that worked in ports and producing companies. Cafes emerged in Palestine in the sixteenth century, and due to the importance of their cultural and social role, they were exempted from paying taxes in Jerusalem. During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, cafes in Palestine were limited. And as well as in the neighboring countries, they

were exclusively attended by men mainly, but this has gradually changed as cafes became more inclusive. They have often been founded in cities, especially city centers.

As a response to the local stagnation in both social engagement and political activism after the second Intifada (an uprising against Israeli occupation that lasted for more than four years), investing in entertainment facilities, including cafes, has increased, especially during the last decade.

Moreover, the cafe has become a private-public space as the modern decoration provided the attendees with some privacy in several cafes, as there are partitions between tables. Also, women have made a clear presence in cafes, as they have mostly become mixed. According to Alajawi (2017), by the year 2017, Ramallah, the administrative capital of Palestine, alone had around four hundred cafes, which makes it the city with the highest number of cafes in Palestine. All of these cafes have a mutual context, focusing on providing the attendees with entertainment. For instance, streaming live Football matches is a very popular custom in most cafes nowadays. However, holding cultural activities in the cafe is not prioritized. Some old cafes in Ramallah are referred to as intellectuals' places. They act as meeting points for intellectuals, artists, and some locals. As for the vast majority of the newly opened cafes, which have rapidly increased in cities and city centers, these cafes are mostly luxurious and target the middle class and high class.

In general, in Palestine, cafes are distributed in a particular geographical aspect. Cafes are seen densely in city centers and around university campuses; for instance, the cafes surrounding An-Najah National University in Nablus. In my opinion, as a former student of this university, today, many of the same cafes' services are considered of a high price for a university student, but with the limited available alternatives, students are left with fewer choices. As when talking about Al-Quds Open University, which is an independent public university in Palestine, the situation differs a bit; adjacent cafes are less there, and that is because students who are enrolled in the university are foremost people with limited income. This fact discouraged investors from exploiting the area, as it is probably less profitable than other areas. Indeed, Alajawi (2017) reported that many public local cafes have become places of status categorization. Consequently, the

maldistribution of cafes and alienation of some areas continued. Barakat also states that opening more cafes in the city is a normal consequence since Ramallah has become the administrative capital of Palestine, where ministries' offices, institutions, and big companies' headquarters are. Furthermore, the city offers more job opportunities than any other city in the West Bank. Indeed, the head of Ramallah and Al- Bireh Chamber of Commerce, Khalil Rizk, declared that investing in cafes in the governorate has become very prevalent; not to forget that Ramallah also has had a growing motion of internal migration in the last decade. Despite the poor economic situation a lot of Palestinians suffer from, cafes have become necessary for both locals and visitors, especially with the inadequacy of public recreational facilities in Palestine.

2.3. Cafes in Nablus: Different Phases and Major Shifts

Coffeehouses spread from the coastal areas to Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine; in Nablus, Al-hamouz, for example, is one of Nablus's most renowned cafes. Prominent authors like Ibrahim Toqan, Adel and Kareem Zaiter, and Mohammad Darwazeh used to attend the cafe constantly. As with most emerging cafes in different geographies, Nablus' cafes were male-dominated for some decades, till several functional, social, and political changes have taken the lead in modern society. As cafes emerged in Nablus, traders, visitors, and wayfarers sought rest and entertainment in the space they offered, especially at the time when the city was a leading economic center in Palestine, before the Israeli occupation. Moreover, Nablus is nicknamed "little Damascus" due to the commonalities both cities share, such as architecture, particularly in the old city. And as in Damascus, cafes in Nablus acted as social hubs for the community; they hosted various social events, during which political debates and discussions also took place. Al-Hakwatiaa made a weekly presence in cafes and were there on a daily basis on Ramadan nights.

According to Kanan's report (2017), professor Al-Osta, who is a literary critic, declares that the social and cultural prosperity Nablus witnessed in the early 1900s was a natural consequence following the contributions of several significant authors and scholars in numerous fields, especially science and literature. The municipality of Nablus city was concerned about the social and cultural development in the city in the early beginnings of the twentieth century and has made developmental plans to achieve that. In fact, it used to allocate more of its budget to boost recreational and educational facilities, besides the several associations and clubs that the municipality supported. Also, they promoted local cafes like Al-Hamouz, when hosting local and regional lecturers; organizing musical, poetic events, and political debates. In brief, Nablus had witnessed a thorough cultural and social renaissance from the late 19th century to the time before Nakba, as intellectuals, authors, poets, and historians were actively present in the public sphere and with the community. Yet, this cultural revival has declined due to several reasons.

The first one is the conservative background of the locals, who also don't treat social needs as a priority. Second, many of the city's intellectuals have moved to Ramallah due to several social, economic, and political reasons. In fact, Ramallah leads the scene of cultural development and social change in Palestine today. It has many training and art centers, museums, cinema halls, public libraries, and many cafes. Also, it is the main broadcasting center in Palestine, where most local and international Television channels' offices are. Indeed, some of the city's elites left it and migrated or immigrated as the inducement was very little, besides the regressive economic situation in the shade of occupation. Sahar Khalifeh, for example, is a writer from Nablus, whose works have been translated to twenty languages, as Kanan states. She left Palestine to live in Jordan, where she found better opportunities for her career.

The culture and familiarity with reading, for instance, is little in Palestine in general, and the reasons that stand behind this vary, starting from the political impediments to the deteriorating living conditions; which caused the society to marginalize the cultural aspects and their social needs because they are busy attaining their basic needs in life. Furthermore, like the rest of the world, Palestine has witnessed a transformation to

modern technology; the Internet and Social Media have seriously affected people. They have become fast readers that seek quick ready-made solutions.

Even though education is essential for most Palestinian families for both genders, some consider it as a winning situation in their lasting strife with the occupation. However, An-Najah National University, which was founded in 1977, played a considerable role in the educational progress and the evolution of science and research, especially in Nablus, which inspired a social rising. Although the university's influence has not been totally comprehensive, it has definitely helped the city to become an educational hub.

Recently, in the former five years, as I have witnessed myself as a member of this society, there has been a growing tendency towards creating a better social and cultural awareness in the Palestinian society led by youth as individuals, initiatives, and organizations that offer to provide the community better conditions to satisfy their social needs mainly. Among these rising projects, some cafes are present. The cafe's space itself provides customers with what they need. Furthermore, in the case of the two cafes studied in this thesis, the cafes have helped active initiatives and voluntary groups coordinate their educational or recreational activities as they manage the space with the cafe owners, especially when they have limited options elsewhere. This cafe model is bringing back the pragmatic cultural coffeehouse that used to exist in Nablus before the Palestinian catastrophe. Although this cafe model is still limited in number, they have already made considerable influence in their surrounding community.

2.4. The Cafe as an Active Public Sphere: Former Cafe Models

Coffee started as a stimulating beverage for Sufis in east Africa and the Arab peninsula, and then it spread all around the world. While coffeehouses were emerging, rising movements that called for enlightenment and rebellion were also increasing. Furthermore, some political parties had their first meetings in the cafes' space. Also, some coffeehouses applied specific cultural themes; that distinguished them from traditional cafes, representing a special literary identity. The more the city has these cafes, the more

it reflects its rich cultural identity. Mshara's article (2019) explained that due to World War I and world war two in the 20th century, the cafe entity has become more important to people. It represents the space in which they meet to reflect on the current matters, educate themselves, and inform one another periodically. The feelings of isolation and fear that many individuals suffered from during the war urged their need to communicate and be informed and aware of the updates around them; the sympathetic environment of the cafe offered them that.

Paris, for instance, had several cafes of those identified as the most well-known literary spaces along with the Salons, of which remain until today, such as Cafe De Flore (Figure 2.4.). Jean-Paul Sartre's and his wife Simone de Beauvoir and other members of the Existentialist school used to attend this cafe. Another example is Brasserie Lipp, which was Emile Zola's and Ernest Hemingway's favorite cafe. These cafes, which intellectuals, authors, artists, and activists attended frequently, have actually motivated revolutionary views and protesting voices. In fact, cafes became the space in which declarations, literary works, and political statements are sometimes formed and announced to the public. According to Mshara (2019) from Cafe De Flore, Sartre condemned the war against Algeria. In fact, he helped in organizing protests that supported the Algerian revolution; he was severely attacked because of his critical approach. Le Procope, which is one of the most prestigious cafes in Paris, if not the most, has become a hub for the arts and literature community in Paris during the 18th and the 19th century.



Figure 2.4. Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir
And others in Cafe De Flore, Paris 1949.
(Source: Nessy, 2019)

The cafe notion emerged in the era of Enlightenment in Europe; during this time, many intellectual movements sought coffeehouses as their shelter. Mshara (2019) illustrates that in Le Procope, where Montesquieu wrote some of his famous letters, the walls today are still decorated with the Declaration of the Rights of the Man and the Citizen, following the French revolution. In fact, the first spark of the French uprising started in Le Procope, in which several political statements were made. Also, some leading members of the upheaval used to attend the cafe regularly; such as Maximilien Robespierre and Georges Danton. Mshara states that Napoleon Bonaparte was the most famous regular habitue of Le Procope. Mshara points in his study that the cafe still keeps his hat hung on the wall along with his signatures exhibited for visitors. Today, these cafes don't hold or offer the same ambiance for their visitors as some of them have become more fancy places that are run for benefit, or touristic attractions, where people reconnect with history.

As stated in Fikr's (2015), In Egypt, one of the most famous cafes in Cairo, if not the most famous, is Al-Fishawi cafe. It is one of the oldest in the city. Actually, it is

believed that the first opening of the cafe goes back in time to the year 1760, when the founder Fahmi Al-Fishawi first established the cafe. The cafe has been known as a symbol of a highly appreciated cultural space. The dignified political activist and Islamic ideologist Jamal Al-deen Alafghani; the Nobel Prize Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz, Ihsan Abdel Quddous, Abbas Alaqad; the famous singer Abdel Halim Hafez, and the second president of Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser, along with other leading influential figures, were all regular attendees of Al-Fishawi. Even Jean-Paul Sartre and his wife Simone de Beauvoir visited the cafe when they came to Egypt. In fact, the cafe played such an important role in the rapid growth of the local art and literature movement. The cafe offered a space for local and international Fine artists as well. Some of Al-Azhar's preceptors and students were regular attendees at the cafe as well. There was a room dedicated just for them in the cafe on Fridays, in which they would gather to discuss religion.

As Fikr's report states, Harafeesh cafe is also famous for its cultural free space. This cafe used to have a daily program each night, which would include playing music, singing, and other activities. The cafe had a special corner for books and caricature drawings by the Syrian artist Hasan Edelbi. As for Mattatia coffeehouse, which was established around the year 1870, it witnessed the first leading steps of Jamal Al-deen Alafghani, establishing what is believed to be the first political party in modern history. Even in the last Egyptian revolution in 2011, Khaled (2019) reported that some modern cafes have been used as meeting points for protesters and activists. Albursa cafe is one example, but the cafe was shut down later; for undeclared reasons.

In Iraq, Al-Zahawi cafe was the most popular in Baghdad. Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi, the poet that the cafe is named after, used to write his famous response letters; addressing Abas Al-Aqad in this cafe. As for Syria, it is the country where the first cafe ever existed, as several historians declared. Al-Ghitani states in his book as cited in Abu-Darwish (2018), that Naguib Mahfouz described the essential role coffeehouses played in intellectuals' lives, saying that the cafe played a substantial role in his novels, and before that in his own real life (Figure 2.5.). Besides, Mahfouz named some of his novels after

the names of his favorite cafes. Some of Mahfouz's novel plots actually take place in these cafes.



Figure 2.5. Naguib Mahfouz buys books from a bookseller at El-Fishawy Cafe (Source: AbdulRahmah, 2020)

As for Northern Africa, especially Algeria, Althewadi (1999) illustrated in his book (as cited in Abu-Darwish, 2018) that coffee houses played such a significant role in enhancing the intellectual presence in the country. Also, they were present in the resistance movement against the French colonial force. In fact, activism in Algeria, before the independence was resolutely restricted by the French colonizer; to an extreme that they examined all literary texts and even musical performances; averting political action as they claimed; however, some places were influenced by the colonial's culture, even in architecture, which has resulted in a complex social identity and habits.

The art known as "Biography narration," (Abu-Darwish, 2018, para. 5) by which the life story of a historical figure is dramatically narrated) was a famous practice in the Arab world, particularly in the Levant area. It has remained today as some cafes still recreate the narration in a creative setting. While in Egypt, the phenomenon of the Rababa Poet (the one who recites poems with a musical instrument called Rababa) had evolved throughout the years because it was their only mean of entertainment before the invention of the radio, which brought a major social and cultural change in society. Al-thewadi clarifies that in Damascus, Al-Hakawati, the commonly used name for the traditional storytellers that perform in cafes, especially in the Levant area, has been a noted cultural

practice that remains until today in some cities. Al Hakawati usually has a particular setting in a cafe, where he sets on a high chair and starts recounting stories and reciting the biography of usually noblemen and knights.

In Nablus, some cafes played a pioneering role in the social and political life of the Nabulsi community. For instance, Al-Hamouz cafe which always offered its space for political activism. The professor Abdel-Star Qasim (2015) reported that the leading steps for instituting an Arab committee to run the great strike of 1936 were first discussed and activated in Al-Hamouz cafe (Figure 2.7.). He also adds the cafe has been one of the favorite places for the prominent local figures of the 20th century. Moreover, within the first and second Intifada, Al-Hamouz acted as a gathering venue for university students, who used to take their lectures in the cafe during the siege. The political activist Hawash (2015) claimed that the first Intifada added a new aspect to the Palestinian cafe's definition. It occasionally became the place in which some political activists and parties chiefs coordinate and discuss their plans. Dr. Halawa has also reported that the Israeli occupation shut down universities for long weeks during the Intifada. The academic staff and students did not have many options to keep their educational progress going in such a critical time, yet they persisted in finding a temporary place in which teachers and students who are capable of coming would join. One of the places that hosted the students back then was Al-Hamouz cafe.



Figure 2.6. The British Mandate Taking over Al-Hamouz

(Source: Aljazeera, 2015)



Figure 2.7. The Arab committee that ran the great strike of 1936 in Al-Hamouz cafe (Source: Aljazeera, 2015)

According to Ayman and Rayaq Al-hamouz, the current owners of Al-Hamouz, who are working in the cafe with their children; the 3rd generation owners, the cafe was established in 1892 during the Ottoman times, and it witnessed many events, including being closed and seized as a military barrack in 1940 by the British mandate (Figure 2.6.). Al-Hamouz is not only a cafe; it is considered one of the city's attractions. Until today, the cafe hosts diverse masses, but with a majority of middle-aged men with average income. The cafe is still keeping its local setting and affordable prices, yet it has changed some details in the interior decoration in order to follow up with the demands of the current attendees. For instance, the owners removed the stage that used to be in the cafe because it is not used anymore. They replaced it with a big flat screen, on which they mainly display football matches. The motion towards modernity has led Al-Hamouz, like many other cafes, to change its approach. Today the cafe is considered a private-public place, by which owners do business in the first place as they serve attendees their needs. As for making a social change; mostly it is not a priority in today's cafes since many cafes now are considered business projects that provide recreational services. However, Al-Hamouz has maintained its authentic local identity, which can be seen today in the welcoming ambiance of the cafe.

2.5. Public Sphere Theories

2.5.1. The Notion of the Public Sphere and the Cafe Sphere

Cafes' significance in satisfying specific social and cultural functions has long been considered in humanities' studies. Habermas' (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is the most cited work on the topic when speaking about the public sphere. His book *Between Facts and Norms* is also frequently referenced in the literature of the public sphere. Throughout history, several other scholars and researchers have studied the concept of the public sphere and its several manifestations. For example, in 1992, Calhoun published a volume titled *Habermas and the Public Sphere* in which he collected several articles that discussed the concept. Fraser's article, published in 1990, is one of the most renowned critiques of the Habermasian public sphere. Furthermore, modern studies and elaborations have been made in the present century on arguments related to the public sphere concept, like Putnam's and Dryzek's analyses. The most prominent one is Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*, published in 2002.

Most of the prior studies related to the public sphere concept have focused on historical analysis, but this has actually changed as recent studies focus on the Internet. For example, in his book, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, Morozov discusses the capability of the Internet to enhance a better public sphere that functions duly. The book published in 2011 relates to the Habermasian public sphere as it mentions Habermas' article, which he wrote in 2006. In this article, Habermas refers to the Internet for the first time, which makes it a significant reference when speaking of public spaces and the public sphere in the age of the Internet; according to Dahlberg's (2005) "The Habermasian Public Sphere: Taking Difference Seriously?"

Although many social and political theorists agree with Habermas on the significance of public debate for robust democracy, many others are skeptical of his specific definition of the public sphere; criticism comes from a wide range of theoretical and political views. One of the most prominent critics of the Habermasian public sphere is Nancy Fraser. She contends that the exact form in which Habermas has developed the

concept of the public sphere is not entirely adequate. In fact, through her famous article “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” she argues that Habermas' understanding of the public sphere requires further critical questioning and reconstruction to understand the constraints of the current democracy better. A new adaptation of the public sphere is needed instead of the invalid bourgeois public sphere model, and that is to maintain the public sphere's crucial role in the community and spread democracy. Habermas has not developed "a new post-bourgeois model" (Fraser, 1990, p.58) of the public sphere that can meet the needs of the citizens and the changes in society today.

In fact, Habermas did not really question the problematic assumptions underlying the bourgeois model; thus, by the end of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, the public is left with a hazy definition of the public sphere that focuses on the role the bourgeoisie played in the well-making of the public sphere, marginalizing all those who are not considered bourgeois members of society, which can be seen as social inequality. Fraser has demonstrated that a viable public sphere would allow for the inclusion, rather than the exclusion of interests and concerns that bourgeois masculinist thinking deems as "private" and dismisses them as they are considered impermissible. In brief, Fraser rejects the bourgeois concept of the public sphere while also identifying some equivalent features of a new post-bourgeois public sphere.

Many critics of the Habermasian public sphere theory point out his thoughts on rational communication, arguing that this concept supports elite political discourse as it focuses exclusively on fostering rational discourse, which actually devalues "aesthetic affective styles of interaction" says Dahlberg (2005, p.129), thus creating a group of people that consider themselves superior to others, which in turn results in having a sphere that includes a particular type of people and excludes others. Moreover, rational discourse presumes that power can be isolated from communication, which conceals dominance and exclusion. Also, it enhances consensus, thus marginalizing those who disagree.

However, Dahlberg (2005) has argued that these criticisms are grounded on a limited understanding of Habermas' public sphere conception. He argues that if these critics read expansively on the concept of the public sphere, they would agree that it does

indeed allow "aesthetic-affective forms of discourse" (Dahlberg, 2005, p.129). Furthermore, he expounds that the Habermasian public sphere takes into account both positive and negative forms of power in communication. It also focuses on the process of rational deliberation rather than the final outcome of this deliberation in forming public opinion. In fact, having various analogous views and arguments on the concept of the public sphere, yet also critical ones is the point of having a public sphere in the first place. It is a sphere that allows regular and agonistic debates in a democratic atmosphere where the masses are heard.

Amosin (2017) studied Habermas's Public Sphere theory and its transformation in the 21st century. The concept of the public sphere is crucial to understand, especially in the present century, emphasizing the value of public social life. He states that the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the concept of the public sphere is still relevant today. The media plane has witnessed significant developments, especially in the twenty-first century. The concept proves that it can surpass its traditional framework and be perceived differently. This study basically gives people a better understanding of the public sphere's progression, decline, and reconfiguration. Amosin infers that the advent of various information technologies in this century, particularly the internet's rise, has played a major role in revitalizing and transforming the notion of the public significantly. Amosin sheds light on the huge role that new technologies, particularly the internet, have in today's social life and the public sphere as there are cyber communities on the internet today. New technology has made it possible for people from other countries, cultures, and religions to communicate with one another. The new digital arena, known as cyberspace, allows them to meet and learn about one another's practices, principles, and traditions.

Furthermore, Amosin argues that people today can use the internet and many other technological innovations for the benefit of society and the society's members that play irreplaceable roles in the evolution process, always seeking a better democratic ambiance. The study actually argues that the community's social power has increased since the emergence of the internet; people have become more involved in social and political issues. Amosin argues that Habermas's theory of the public sphere is an active paradigm for the amelioration of society's public life. By focusing on the societal significance of

the public sphere and how it dramatically impacts society's lifestyle, people will be more motivated to know and understand the public sphere theory better.

In the opinion of Charles Lindblom (2001), despite its intricacies, the author thoroughly articulated and analyzed society's prevalent logic, which strives to meet the needs of a large audience. The book's writer Lindblom contends that a huge change has occurred in society and that the world has been witnessing a radical transformation. Similarly to Habermas' findings, society's structure has changed indeed. Moreover, the concept of the public sphere declined in the nineteenth century. Lindblom agrees with Habermas' argument in the final chapter of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. He analyzes the growing power of the state and the emergence of several groups who claim they dedicate their endeavors to satisfy societal interests and needs; they manipulate and influence society by that. Lindblom argues that not only has the state gained more power but also the elites' presence in society has distinctly increased. Furthermore, the book identifies the logic of advanced capitalism as a factor in the erosion of the public sphere during the 19th century. The book discusses how capitalism changed the definition of the public sphere drastically.

In the book *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, the two writers, Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts, criticize the Habermasian public sphere, described by Habermas in his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The book criticizes the public sphere theory, aiming to define and understand its limitations and its capability of reconfiguration in the present century. In fact, the book is a collection of various social theorists' publications that analyze and criticize the concept of the public sphere. Through thesis studies, social theorists worked on exploring the public sphere's potential ambiguities and challenges in the twenty-first century in order to prevent having a "refeudalized public sphere" (Crossley and Roberts, 2004). This book also sheds light on other alternative viable mediums through which the public can understand the concept of the public sphere and relate to it in today's world. The book demonstrates that there are other adaptations of the public sphere in the present time and that it is important to understand the concept further and better.

Furthermore, cafes' significance in fulfilling specific political, social, and cultural functions has long been recognized in various public sphere studies, such as Oldenburg's. The urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) defines the concept of the third place as an informal gathering place that serves the public. He also describes the characteristics of third places and focuses on their value. The third place, which Oldenburg defines in his book as neutral ground, has been an essential part of each society; its history is more than five centuries old. In fact, the third place has become a norm on its own, for example, the cafe culture, which has been present on different levels for centuries now.

Oldenburg argues that pubs, coffee shops, general shops, and other "third places" (Oldenburg, 1996, p.6) are vital in order to achieve democracy and bring about better communities that are vibrant and harmonious. According to Oldenburg, most people spend their lives in three realms: home, work, and public social spaces. Communal spaces such as cafes are the core of the city's life. They provide a shelter in which people escape the stresses of daily life. As the author argues, those third places balance the rising commercialization of public life. Oldenburg cites English coffeehouses as instances of levelers, where people of all social strata relished the new connections made possible by the demise of feudalism. The inclusivity of the cafe created an ideal ground for discussion and debate for the masses, as well as a place for spending joyful and entertaining time together; it has become one of the main places where people enjoy cordiality and freedom. Also, as Oldenburg argues, third places must be accommodating, flexible, and accessible in terms of working hours and location. Because if the location of a cafe, for instance, is difficult to reach, it is unlikely to host regulars, as regulars are the ones who give the third place its character by contributing to its original identity that is already present.

In addition, Oldenburg claims that the notion of the third place is changing and losing traction as public spaces are becoming more consumerist and money-oriented. It also proves that this is not always the case, as there are public spaces that aim to make money, and this is a necessity to achieve growth and sustainability, but it's not their primary and only objective.

On another hand, a youth cafe is a drug-and alcohol-free meeting place where young people gather and relax. As Brady, Forkan, and Moran (2017) reported in their study, the

youth cafe concept has emerged over the last decade in Ireland. Although the youth cafe model is not exclusive to Ireland, there have been limited published studies on these cafes' significant role in youths' lives. The data in this paper has been collected from more than five youth cafes in Ireland. The paper demonstrates that a good model of a youth space, especially a cafe, is where these young cafe goers feel welcomed, accepted, and supported in a secure, friendly atmosphere, which also stimulates their potential and creativity. Consequently, young customers develop a sense of connection and belonging to these cafes. According to the findings of this study, the model appeals to youth because it respects their individual preferences for interaction while also providing them with a feeling of belonging and ownership, much like a home away from home, but also a public space. It is asserted that such cafe models are fundamental in creating spaces that help young people develop a healthier lifestyle.

Young people who took part in this study described how they formed and maintained friendships with fellow peers and the cafe's staff. In fact, they describe the cafe as a united community that supports each other. Furthermore, the research sheds light on the importance of youth spaces in the public sphere and shows that both societies and authorities must dedicate more places and facilities to youth centers and areas. Indeed, dedicated youth places are necessary for collective and individual development in society. The study also emphasizes the importance of creating a diverse, integrated community where young people are supported, respected, and protected. It focuses on the role of cafes in young people's lives and the societal, cultural, and even political changes that might follow the emergence of such a space in the public sphere.

In accordance with, Warner, Talbot and Bennison’s paper (2012) the cafe is presented in this paper as a central social space. The existence of non-profit cafes in the community makes it evident that cafes greatly influence society's lives, especially in recognizing and appreciating marginalized people. This paper focuses on cafes that operate as commercial entities in areas of extreme social deprivation. These cafes do not have a set plan that they follow to satisfy their customers in terms of providing them with care and attention. In fact, these cafes have adopted caregiving as an approach they adopt and a goal that they work on achieving with their customers. This cafe model, discussed

throughout the article, serves as a functional community space. The authors expound how the three key concepts of the cafe, care, and community combine to present an inclusive community space. The paper emphasizes that third places' emotional and affective dimension is as fundamental as their effective function.

It discusses how the cafe's owner sees her role as a major one in this space. She believes that providing and showing care and sympathy to both workers and customers is very important and makes the cafe a better community space that acts as a home away from home, providing safety, comfort, and liberty in a non-judgmental atmosphere. In fact, the situation for judged and stigmatized attitudes elsewhere is not the same as in the study case the article discusses. The cafe's atmosphere is generally inclusive and accepting, and this is also the case for both of the cafes my study examines. According to Bennison, Warner and Talbot, the cafe owner believes that the cafe's customers' needs are compatible with her desire to create a unique ambiance in the cafe as they complement each other. “It doesn't feel like a job. I've made it sort of like a family, "says Anita, the owner of the cafe.

Moreover, the paper discusses how the care the cafe attendees receive from the cafe owner and staff works as a key element in creating a strong network and community in this sphere of the cafe; regulars say that the personal attention they get makes them feel present and that they matter. In fact, the staff in the cafe do not call regulars customers; they know each by her\ his name; it is a place where everyone counts, and the priority is providing those customers with constant care and support.

2.5.2. On Habermas and the Habermasian Public Sphere

In his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas describes the development of the public sphere as a notion that he thinks emerged inside saloon rooms and then coffee houses in the 18th century in Europe. Before the French revolution, the monarch had the final say in public affairs. However, this has changed as the bourgeoisie have strongly proved their prominent presence. Bourgeoisies, traders, and businessmen had gained more economic and social rights, which also urged the public to

call for rights of free speech in public spaces. Habermas defines the public sphere, which does not necessarily exist in identified space according to him, as a space "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (Habermas, 1962, p.176). In other words, the public sphere is the source of public opinion that affects the process of decision-making in the state. Jürgen Habermas was born in 1929 in a small town outside of Düsseldorf, Germany. He is the most distinguished philosopher of the Frankfurt School, which was established by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. Habermas' writings cover a wide range of subjects, from social-political theory to aesthetics, epistemology, and language to philosophy of religion. In fact, his elaborations have influenced not only philosophy but also political thought, sociology, communication studies, developmental psychology, theology, and some other fields. One of his most notable works is The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, which he published in 1962. Habermas (1989) understands the public sphere as a "realm which is... firmly situated between state and society" (Susen, 2011, p. 44). Indeed, I think the most basic definition of the public sphere is that it is the realm that exists between the private sphere and the political sphere, as they overlap in the middle, creating the general public sphere, which performs various functions.

Adrian Rauchfleisch elucidates that the bourgeois public sphere was introduced by Habermas as the ideal version of the public sphere. It was presented as a "highly normative concept" (Rauchfleisch, 2017, p.3), while today it is actually a part of everyday experience as it holds practical considerations of the public. Besides, the public sphere is seen as a prerequisite for democracy today. Habermas defined the public sphere for the first time in 1962, focusing on the role that mass media played in modern society; the public sphere was viewed in a specific way back then.

However, contemporary thinkers like Koopmans and Olzak (2004) infer that the public sphere's boundaries do not remain "static" (p. 202), but rather expand and retract throughout time. Both the invention of television in the early 20th century and the Internet later in the late 60th of the same century have played a major role in forming the concept of the public sphere throughout the years. During the last 50 years since Habermas first analyzed the public sphere, several other scholars have coined and developed various

definitions of the public sphere. In fact, some have criticized the Habermasian public sphere, saying it is irrelevant in the present time, not inclusive and that it excludes the uneducated and poor. Even Habermas himself broadened his original theory of the public sphere, adding further elaborations; as he provides a more "functional definition" as Benkler (2006) tells of the sphere in his publication, which relates to the concept of the public sphere.

Habermas remarked that the golden age of the public sphere in Europe transpired during the 18th century. During that time, the public sphere had considerable inferentiality before its decline in the following century. The masses began to discuss not only literary works but also socio-political issues in public places, particularly salons and coffeehouses. The social significance that society's members have come to realize they own has made them strong and effective as opposed to the authorities, who have started to see this sphere as a threat to their legitimacy.

The openness of the concept of the public sphere has been influenced by the constant changes in society over time. For instance, in 2006, in one of Habermas' prominent articles, he mentioned the importance of the Internet in this context. The rise of liberal philosophical thought and capitalism following the industrial revolution broadened the definition of the public sphere as well. The definition of the public sphere has changed constantly ever since the concept's inception, and even before that when the public sphere was defined as a place where the masses gathered, as in the Greek epoch when the Agora was the central public space in the state.

The public sphere has become more inclusive, as a result, the quality of the conversations and debates of the public in this space has also become more diverse and advanced; for instance, the emergence of *penny universities* coffeehouses in the 17th century in London and Oxford. Also, the state of citizens' relationships has changed from vertical to horizontal, this has influenced the existing hierarchy, monarchy, and authoritarian systems as public opinion has become a stronger factor to be highly considered when making decisions. The authentic nature of coffeehouses and saloons has created a larger public space. Attendees in these saloons and coffeehouses raised many moral and political questions as they also discussed the economy and economic interests,

especially with capitalism taking the lead in the modern world, which in turn redefined the public sphere and recreated those vertical relationships between people by adopting a different mechanism.

Habermas believes that the public sphere is a space where people practice democracy. It provides the needed space for rational and democratic debate, where citizens can engage in society's matters and express their views; forming a public opinion. In the meantime, I think the internet is to some extent an inclusive, vibrant public space in which the masses can express their thoughts on various matters, with the presence of fewer agenda-setters. Although this efficiency of the internet as a public sphere is still being studied. Furthermore, I believe that the public sphere of places like coffeehouses is still the foundation upon which the definition of a pragmatic public sphere exists. I think the space offered by some cafes presents an effective public sphere that is not replaceable, even with the internet today.

In brief, the concept of the public sphere is not a static one. On the contrary, it has adopted several models throughout history after bringing it out to the masses by Habermas. In fact, the concept of having a public sphere that gathers people has been present in different civilizations throughout history. For example, the Agora represented the basic public sphere, especially as a political arena in the ancient Greek era. Churches, mosques, temples, and other public gathering places like salons in France and coffeehouses in England in the 18th century. Recently the internet is the most inclusive open public space. In fact, Social media has fostered the return of Habermas' public sphere theory.

3. NABLUS AS A SPECIAL CASE STUDY

3.1. Location and Inhabitants

Nablus lies in the northern part of the West Bank, with a population of approximately 415,000 people. The city is located between two mountains, with Ebal to the north and Gerizim to the south (Figure 3.1.). According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2021, the number of inhabitants in Nablus has reached 415,606

people. Throughout the years, Nablus has witnessed gradual growth in terms of the population because many families who used to live in the surrounding countryside moved to Nablus, either temporarily or permanently, mainly in search of better work opportunities and educational preferences. Nablus has the highest-ranked university in Palestine, along with other prominent schools and colleges. Besides, the successive migrations, mainly after the occupation of Palestine in 1948, have led many people to seek refuge in the West Bank, including Nablus. This growth in the population has resulted in an exodus of the inhabitants towards the foothills.

Also, the amelioration in the medical section in the city has played a major role in this population growth. Youth and teenagers represent the majority of Nablus' population. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2012, people aged between 20- 29 present more than %18 of the population in the city. Indeed, this ratio shows that the city has a major youth population. Presently, the majority of inhabitants in Nablus are Muslims, yet the city is also home to a small Christian community; and the center for the smallest religious community in the whole world, the Samaritans.

On the other hand, Nablus has been a leading economic and cultural center locally and regionally. It has An-Najah National University, ranked the first in Palestine and thirty-seventh in the Arab World, according to the Quacquarelli Symonds University Rankings for the year 2021. Furthermore, Nablus is believed to be the place of origin for the famous Middle Eastern dessert, Kanafeh. The city has also been known for its soap and olive oil industry and white Nabulsi cheese.



Figure 3.1. A view on Nablus from the Top of mountain Ebal, May 2021

3.2. The Changing Urban Context and its Impact on the Public Sphere

Nablus' urban space has been growing gradually. The urban expansion Nablus has witnessed is actually the result of many constituents. One of which is the rapid increase of inhabitants as people migrate from the countryside to the city. On the other hand, some people who live in the city and around the city center have felt the need for expanding outside the city. They sought to settle in less crowded areas that offer a tranquil atmosphere; these areas which the urban widening has tended towards are the governorate's western suburbs and villages.

Due to the geographical nature of Nablus, plain and located between two mountains, the city has mainly been expanding in two directions, east and west, especially the west because the western suburbias are closer to the city center. Also, the western part of the city is provided with essential public services. Public utilities and general facilities, especially health centers and social spaces and centers, are concentrated in the city's western districts, while the eastern ones are prioritized second and sometimes marginalized. Thus, Nablus has become a city with a linear shape; it expanded horizontally and extended lengthwise. Khalil (2005) illustrated that what hinders urban

development in the city's eastern region is the ubiquity of Israeli settlements and the presence of the industrial zone (p.29). Moreover, Nablus' governorate has annexed large areas of several nearby villages to the west of the city. Beit Wazan and Beit Iba, for example, are today considered as part of the city. Furthermore, Hijab argues that Nablus is the commercial and industrial center in the northern province of the West Bank since it supplies a wide range of markets for the agricultural, animal, and dairy products; produced in the near rural areas of the province. Vice versa, Nablus produces and offers different services and goods, which are distributed to the same rural areas of the governorate and to other neighboring towns in the north like Tulkarm and Jenin. Indeed, Nablus forms a central trade center in the northern part of the West Bank.

Indeed, Taking decentralization as an approach in business and trade led people to move or expand their work away from the center towards the city's peripheries. As the center is largely congested, Nablus' merchants, businessmen, and small businesses owners have opted Rafedya's neighborhood in the western part of the city as a second central site for their shops, restaurants, and cafes; especially that the inhabitants of the western area of the city are mainly middle class and high-class. Besides, Rafedyah is not far from the city center; at the same time, it is closer than the city center to the city's nearby western villages. In addition, the western districts of Nablus are supplied with the essential social, educational, commercial, medical services and centers. Actually, Rafedyah connects Nablus with the northern territories of the west bank, such as Tulkarem and Jenin.

There is also another reason behind the vast urban and demographic growth in the western areas of Nablus, especially when talking about opening new restaurants and cafes. The Palestinian visitors who come from "the 48 lands," as they prefer to call occupied Palestine, to Nablus for shopping find the intimate Arab environment they mostly feel nostalgic for in Rfedyah. As a member of the Nabulsi community, I have witnessed that this factor is considerably new in the history of the West Bank. These visitors, "the Palestinians of the 48 occupied lands," as called by people of the West Bank, are more familiar with Rafedyah than the eastern part of Nablus. Consequently, Rafedyah has become a major destination not only for locals but also for visitors. In addition, the

presence of An-Najah National university's campuses in the western part of the city also facilitated turning Rafedyah into a central area in Nablus. In brief, urbanization has been taking place in both eastern and western areas in Nablus; however, it is more vibrant in the west. Among the most crucial reasons behind this expansion is the temperate climate in the western areas, which has also given a preference for urban development.

There have also been several historical and political reasons behind this growth, such as the amelioration of the roads and the transportation network of taxis and buses in the west, which induced inhabitants to build more towards the west. Considering the Ottoman era, the buildings in the city's eastern areas were mostly constructed between the old city and the Turkish army camp; the buildings continued to climb on the slopes of the two mountains, as Khalil (2005) reported. In 1967 Nablus was occupied by Israel after the June war. Subsequently, the urban growth in the city has confronted many obstacles due to the Israeli policy in the region, settlement in particular; Nablus has been an objective for the Israeli colonial settlement. The Israeli occupation has set several plans to attain its colonial intentions in the West Bank in general and Nablus in particular. According to the Palestinian Statistics Center, as of the end of 2019, the number of settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem reached 503; 474 settlements in the West Bank, and 29 settlements in Jerusalem, inhabited by approximately 653,620 settlers. Likewise, today settlements are dilating even more.

3.3. The Complex Reality Palestinian Youth live in Palestine and Nablus

Young people (aged 15-29) make up 30 percent of the overall population in Palestine; both youth and children under the age of 29 make up more than 50 percent of the population, yet these young people are not presented fairly in the Palestinian community. They have been frustrated, disempowered, and deprived of some of their basic rights. As a whole, equal access to opportunities is seldom provided to youth. In fact, there are high unemployment rates in Palestine, which have exceeded 38% amongst the youth in the West Bank, according to The United Nations Population Fund (2016). They also noted that 51% of college graduates are unemployed.

Along with the unemployment challenges, Palestinian youth face further obstacles daily, and the worst one is occupation. According to a report issued by the UNFPA (The United Nations Population Fund) in 2017, young Palestinians can either pose a major chance or a demographic threat for the future of a Palestinian state, especially that by 2030 the Palestinian youth population will rise to a million, according to the same report. If youth are provided with their basic needs for better healthcare and education, empowered and offered decent job opportunities, and are presented fairly in the public and political life, this will diffidently boost their confidence, satisfaction and thus their productivity, which leads the society to a whole revival.

3.3.1. Economic Situation and Employment Status

Following the 1993 Oslo treaty, the West Bank's territories were divided into three administrative areas as follows:

- Area A: under complete Palestinian civil and military control.
- Area B: administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel.
- Area C: under total Israeli civil and military control.

It is important to mention that area C forms about 60% of the overall area of the West Bank area.

Economic growth in Palestine is hindered by Israel since the Palestinian economy relies involuntarily on its Israeli counterpart; it encounters internal and external challenges that hinder economic sustainability and development. In an increasingly volatile political situation, the economic status becomes unstable and unpredictable, elucidating major strains in the social and political system domestically. Youth are facing economic difficulties as a result of this situation. Thus, having higher levels of poverty, food insecurity, and impairment in the mental health of Palestinian youth. Therefore, this slow-growing economy with few potentials has long-term consequences. As reported by The United Nations Population Fund (2017), the high unemployment rates in Palestine

have forced many young Palestinians to immigrate and get married early, especially women. This has also triggered radical behaviors among some of the youth. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization report of 2020 stated that approximately 23,000 to 34,000 Palestinians worked in Israeli settlements in 2019. Although they are often subjected to human rights violations, Palestinian men, especially youth, seek work in Israeli settlements as they offer them higher wages (Figure 3.2.). Consequently, it is pivotal that Palestinian youth get better empowerment in all fields, and apply better living standards in Palestine.

The same report also mentions that Palestine has relatively high access to education compared to global trends, with 96 percent literacy and almost 100 percent youth literacy. Nearly 95% of children are enrolled in grade school; 41% of young people between the ages of 15-29 are enrolled in schooling. Although, these rates are hugely influenced by the possibility of work and area of residency. Despite the patriarchal order and marginalization of women, which are still practiced in society, they are more highly educated than men, with 13% having a university degree compared to 9% of men, as stated in the UNFPA (2017) report. Nonetheless, good education and literacy rates are not the main indicators of economic growth, as 55 percent of young graduates are unemployed. Furthermore, "Wasta" (nepotism) is prevalent in Palestine, so youth with some "factional affiliation"(UNFPA, 2017, p.7) often find work opportunities easier to get; this also indicates that youth without any Waste are unjustly excluded from the labor market's list.



Figure 3.2. Young Palestinian men stuck for hours behind a turnstile at an Israeli checkpoint. (Source: Paq, 2018)

3.3.2. Youth Social and Political Activity in Palestine: Facts and Limitations

Although youth in Palestine have often been active and involved in politics and leadership in their societies, many young Palestinians are now idle. Years of a schism between the two major political parties (Hamas and Fatah) has ensured that Palestinian youth are seen only as a voting force, not as society members who must engage in the process and be part of it.

Young people in Palestine do not have an active representative voice, which created a vast gap between the Palestinian youth and the Palestinian ruling authority; this explains their need for an alternative public sphere, where they themselves choose to represent their views even if among a few masses, and here comes the cafe's role.

Youth's freedom of speech has been continuously suppressed in public spaces and social media. In fact, some young men and women have already been detained for speaking or criticizing the Palestinian authority; this explains why youth often do not discuss politics in the public sphere. Many youths find cafes like places to escape the

political situation and entertain instead. Even on university campuses, political parties and factions always attempt to encourage university students to be active members of their parties; these factions mainly aim to take advantage of university students in order to satisfy their own benefit. This has consequently paved the way for youths' disillusionment with politics "conjointly with fear and distrust of factional engagement" (UNFPA, 2017, p.9), making it difficult for young Palestinians to participate in the political sphere. I highly believe that the communication gap between the Palestinian youths and their representative government must be minded in order to provide these young individuals with essential leadership skills to take the lead; also motivate them to make a change.

Palestine has a good number of youth and social centers, but they are not fairly present or distributed in all the Palestinian cities. These centers offer various leisure activities. Youth engagement and participation in these centers reflect their significant participation in developing society, yet women's presence in these centers is very low as the previous report stated. The conservative culture and the patriarchal order many Palestinian families have, especially preferring to discourage men and women's engagement, are the main reasons behind this fact. Moreover, they both might not be able to reach the centers because of inadequate transportation or checkpoints. I think that is why some females find cafes more inclusive as their parents accept the idea of the cafe more than going to a center. However, many of those youth centers are not properly functioning, or they do not really offer up-to-date activities. Further, those centers are not present in each Palestinian city.

As far as I see, cultural and youth centers are abundantly present in Ramallah, which is considered the most liberal; Ramallah is actually the center for the main Palestinian governmental institutes. I think youth centers must be considered as essentials when discussing Palestinian cities' development plans. I have actually witnessed this in some of Nablus' youth centers that need to be restructured in terms of the activities they offer and their scheduling. Some centers like Askadar, which is a center of arts and culture in Nablus, and The Edward Said National Conservatory are often active and engaging, but their activities are children and teens-centered as I examined; the offered services and

activities for youths are limited. Thus, the Palestinian social and cultural public institutes must develop inclusive socio-cultural centers and initiatives, which encourage the Palestinian youth to promote the Palestinian cultural identity in all fields within and outside Ramallah city. In fact, there are also Socio-cultural private initiatives that are already working to obtain the same purpose. It will be helpful if they are also functioning within a public sphere. For instance, the cafes discussed in this study and the individuals and initiatives that take these cafes as the place where they hold their activities and make them accessible to other young Palestinians like them, bringing youths' potentials together under one roof.

As for volunteerism, Palestinian youth have always been interested in participating in voluntary activities, especially during and after the first and second Intifada, yet this participation has been running short by time. Volunteer activities edify youths and induce their productivity and engagement in the community, creating a veracious change; these activities provide the young participants with rich cultural and educational experiences. In fact, the authorities must encourage young Palestinians to volunteer and participate in social activities; this will prepare the youths to be the stakeholders of change in Palestine.

As for the presence and activity of young women in the public sphere; after the first Intifada, women's presence and influence in the Palestinian public sphere in general and in the political arena in specific have decreased. Conservatism and early marriage in Palestine are two of the main factors contributing to this diminution along with gender-based stereotypes, according to the previously mentioned report of the UNFPA. Indeed, women and youth are the main two vulnerable groups in Palestine. However, this is not always the case in the Palestinian community as there are also less conservative and secular families.

This situation women experience in the Palestinian public sphere must be challenged and changed. I have encountered many initiatives and activities that involve and empower women in Palestine since I aim to focus on youth activities in several cafes in the public sphere of Nablus city. I have indeed witnessed, especially in the two cafes I examined, engaging inclusive activities by which women speak out, debate, and even help in organizing some of the events, sessions, and workshops, which take place in these

cafes. In brief, the authorities in Palestine must enact equitable policies that guarantee youths' and women's rights and induce their engagement in society.

On the other hand, it is important to mention that due to the dual effect of the Israeli occupation and society's internal troubles, youths sustain several issues in the Palestinian community. One of which is psychological illnesses; depression, anxiety, and stress disorders are all prevalent among the youth in Palestine; this outputs an unhealthy lifestyle as some individuals bring out their bad habits to society, which have been a result of the society's stigmatizing and youths' own suppressed feelings and thoughts in the first place. These young members are unlikely to ask for support or help because they fear being labeled by society that treats social norms as collective concerns while it marginalizes such psychological disorders.

3.4. On Methodology

In his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas described the development of the public sphere as a notion that he thinks emerged inside saloon rooms and then coffee houses in the 18th century in Europe. Habermas understands the public sphere as a firmly situated realm between state and society. Habermas believes that the public sphere is a space where people practice democracy. It provides the needed space for rational and democratic debate, where citizens can engage in society's matters express and exchange their views; forming a public opinion. The concept of the public sphere is not a static one. On the contrary, it has adopted several models throughout history after bringing it out to the public by Habermas. Recently the internet has been the most inclusive open public space. In fact, Social media has fostered the return of Habermas' public sphere theory. In spite of the internet and the various social media platforms that form a new type of public sphere in the 21st century, physical human presence and social interaction are irreplaceable in many cases, which is why cafes remain an active medium in the public sphere. Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative research methodology. The findings are produced during two phases of the fieldwork, aiming to demonstrate and analyze how two cafes in Nablus city in Palestine have created an active public sphere model in each cafe. They present multi-purpose public spaces.

Throughout the first phase of this study I monitored both cafes' activity and their customers, especially regulars, by personally being there for a minimum of four hours weekly for three months, as I was also conducting interviews. In the second phase, I continued the monitoring research process as I observed both cafes' activities and their updates and revisited the two cafes in June 2021. I stayed in touch with the founders of both cafes and most of those I interviewed. The process lasted for around a year, interrupted by the lockdowns in 2020 following the Covid-19 pandemic. So this process started in December 2019 to October 2021. I stayed in touch with those who I interviewed and the founders of both cafes during the Covid-19 crisis until I met both of them again after a year in March 2021, as I asked them to continue the remaining part of my fieldwork in each cafe, where I held the remaining interviews. There, I had to add a couple of new observations. It is important to mention that the process was not conducted continuously. It was interrupted by the lockdown following the Covid-19 pandemic for the whole year of 2020 except January and February as I was still in Palestine conducting interviews. A couple of months later, the lockdown started, I was in Turkey and I could not travel out of it; meanwhile, cafes were closed in Nablus.

Table 1: the interviewees

Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cafe
Abdelatif	Male	32	Civil Engineer	Veranda
Alaa	Male	29	Tour Guide and Horizon's project founder	Antique
Ali	Male	28	Dentist	Antique
Aseel	Female	22	Bank Clerk	Veranda
Aytham	Male	20	Student and Waiter	Antique
Basel	Male	37	Free Business	Antique
Hala	Female	19	Student	Veranda
Hisham	Male	27	Lumper	Antique
Mai	Female	24	Project Manager in an N.G.O	Veranda
Osama	Male	26	Studio owner	Veranda
Owais	Male	21	Student	Veranda

Reem	Female	27	Horizon's project Co-founder	Antique
Saad	Male	23	Student	Veranda
Tharwat	Female	27	Freelance translator and tutor	Antique
Yahya	Male	24	Student	Veranda
Yasmeen	Female	22	Student	Veranda

During the second phase of the research, I revisited the two cafes as I was in Palestine, and the cafes are open again. I spent 4 hours in each as I went around tables, kindly and informally asking random groups of customers what they think the cafe is an alternative for, especially if to choose another public space. These random quick questions with random young male and female and mixed group customers allowed me to gain additional insights on how youth customers perceive the space of each cafe in general.

This study is conducted in Nablus. All of the interviewees live in this city except one from Jerusalem, who actually spoke about her experience in the cafe as she was a student living in a dorm in Nablus for five years. So this interview is intended to broaden the scope of the study. Nablus lies in the northern part of the West Bank. The city has been known as a leading economic center in Palestine. Youth and teenagers represent the majority of Nablus' population, making them the targeted sample in this study. The criteria for choosing the young males and females was limited to those living in Nablus, and no comparison is required. The small sample size is supposed to be sufficient for the study as youth in Nablus are chosen because they are the major group among the population and the most targeted under occupation. Veranda and Antique, the two cafes in the study, present the cafe's sphere in a different way in Nablus; and that is why they are chosen in specific.

After taking the ethical approval from the institute, I conducted sixteen interviews with sixteen regulars. Eight interviews in each cafe, among them were interviews with the founders of each cafe and a waiter. The interviewees were five males and three females in each cafe. The interviewees varied as I interviewed students, employees, and

freelancers. In Veranda, all the interviewees come from middle-class families. While in Antique, I interviewed both people of low income and those who have a middle-class background. I interviewed each regular individually inside the cafe he\ she is a regular customer of. Each interview was an hour-long; two interviews lasted for two hours.

Furthermore, these in-depth individual semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted in Arabic with different female and male youth customers aged 18-30. I had an outline of questions prepared before going to each interview, yet they were flexible and informal because of the open-ended nature of the interviews. I had some concepts centered on what I assumed as prevalent themes, such as the supportive atmosphere of both cafes, regulars' feelings of belonging, and the new creative spaces that provide youth with various activities. Furthermore, the sampling was not random. I chose who I perceived were regulars in each cafe; thus, the sample isn't meant to be statistically representative; instead, the population's features are employed as a selection criterion.

As for the ethical considerations, before each interview, each interviewee was given a short verbal introduction, which explains the study and the reasons behind the interview conduction, recorded on tape. The interviewees were asked to give their approval by saying that they agree to participate in the interview at the beginning of the record. They were also given hardcopies of a consent form to sign. Interviewees are informed that their names and the information they provide will be onymous, obvious, and sharable except for one young woman who asked to keep her name anonymous. The participating interviewees were also told that they have the right to reject answering questions and can end the interview at any stage.

This study focuses on the factors that lead these cafes to form a special case and understand how each space has influenced the conception of a cafe in the minds of the young regulars. I choose Veranda and Antique because of the authentic identity and the characteristics of each cafe which are not likely to be found elsewhere in Nablus. Also, both cafes' friendly, welcoming atmosphere influences everyone, especially the customers, making them very open to interviewees and discussions. In the process of analyzing the data from the audio recordings, I directly jut down notes as I was interpreting the conversations from Arabic to English. After I interpreted the audios, I

classified the findings into subjects and defined several main concepts through a thematic analysis. The key findings that are convenient with this study are discussed, starting from the next page.

3.5. Findings

This cafe model in each of the two cafes appeals to youth in Nablus because it provides them with an inclusive public sphere that respects their particular preferences for interaction while also giving them a sense of ownership as they develop stronger bonds with the place over time. In general, coffee shops in Nablus have similar styles and almost the same functions, but Veranda and Antique present a different model.

3.5.1. On Veranda

Veranda is found in Rafidiya area in the western part of Nablus. Its modern vintage style, gives the customers the feeling of a cozy balcony; it has an interior with large glass windows and plants in the corners at the entrance from the inside, as well as flower pots on the second floor sills, giving the cafe the appearance of a closed balcony (Figure 3.3.). Indeed, in Palestine, people have what I would like to call the 'balcony culture' as the balcony is recognized as an essential part of the house; there is even a common saying that the balcony is the soul of the house. With this structure, Veranda presents a combined identity; it is the cafe that literally forms an inclusive stage for the masses as well as a home away from home. It is a well-lit place and that reflects translucency, which makes it adequate for chilling or studying, especially on the second floor, which also provides the customers with a small library. Furthermore, the cafe's customers, who are mostly youth, are from all social classes, yet most of those I observed were middle class. The founders of Veranda are two brothers, one is 32, and the other is 31. They both work in different companies and have established the cafe for several reasons and not only business as they stated. In fact, they named the cafe *Veranda Lounge & Cultural Space.* As for the menu, the cafe mainly offers hot and cold drinks, Nargile, and some sandwiches and snacks. Music played in the cafe is a mix of Eastern and Western various types such as alternative music, classic, pop music. During my observational process in the cafe, I

noticed that some customers love to visit Veranda because of the music. One customers actually said:

> *One of the reasons I come here regularly is the music. They choose the best of the best music and songs, and this makes this space special. It has a different vibe*. (Hala, 19).



Figure 3.3. Veranda, June 2021

Veranda has adopted a new approach while creating this cafe in Nablus. The owners turned an old garage into the cafe people know today as Veranda. Abdelatif, co-founder of Veranda, says: *We built this place to discover ourselves, express ourselves first, and share our talents*. At the beginning they used the space for their own gatherings with friends, in which they played music and video games, before turning it into a cafe. Veranda is known in the city as "the cafe with events", according to Saad, a 23-year-old marketing student, former waiter at Veranda, and now regular attendee. Most of the regular attendees I interviewed agreed with what Saad said. They strongly think that the events Veranda holds constantly are what makes it unique in the first place. In fact, these events have played a huge role in creating the cafe's special identity, which is why the attendees' demeanors. Veranda has come up with new ideas, which the founders have been applying ever since they opened. Interior-wise, Veranda is the only cafe that has a stage in Nablus. As for the events, it holds various types of them regularly.

> *The maximum of enjoyment or spending good time in the city for young people is either going to a cafe or a gymnasium. My brother and I ourselves felt that this is really boring and we need something new, as most of the guys and girls our age feel.* (Abdelatif, 32)

Mr. Abdelatif added that whoever has an idea and the place helps in shaping or sharing it, is welcome, and whoever has a talent and wants to share it with the masses, is also welcome; this is in fact, Veranda's main mission. It is the cafe where people can drink their coffee, smoke and attend a public speaking session, for instance. It is an inclusive, multi-purpose space, satisfying multiple needs in one place.

3.5.2. The Background Story of Antique

Basel, the co-founder of Antique, who is 37, was born in Nablus to migrant parents from the '48 lands', and he found the cafe with his brother Abdelrahman in 2018. In 2003, they were both detained in Israeli prisons, in which his brother spent four years, yet he was released in 2018. Antique's establishment is an inspiring story on its own. When I interviewed Basel and asked him about his vision for the cafe and the main purpose of creating such a space, he said that this space aims to raise people's social and cultural awareness and support them to achieve self-development, especially young people.

He adds that after 15 years of imprisonment, it was very challenging to get re-involved in society again, but he insisted that it is doable and his will to create social change and empower youth after the ruthless detention experience preceded all his other priorities, and only after two months of his release, he worked on the idea with his brother and brought Antique to life.

He said that "life is owned by those who make it, so we chose to make life in our project." Basel, his brother Abdelrahman, who is now an assistant professor in the Architecture department at Birzeit University, and Abdelrahman's wife, Alessandra Gola, who is an Italian architect, all cooperated to establish The Yalla Project, from which Cafe Antique was born.



Figure 3.4. The Interior of Antique. (Source: Basel, 2021)

Basel explains that they wanted to create a space that functions to disseminate new ideas and initiatives in the surrounding community; a free place where youths can discover and express themselves in a reliable environment where people socialize and exchange thoughts and experiences.

The Yalla Project (TYP) is a socio-spatial applied research center based in Nablus. Through grounded research and learning by actually doing, The Yalla Project addresses the everydayness of communities and their living environments, combining transdisciplinary academic research with social enterprise. The project is self-funded. Basel, Abdelrahman and his wife, Mrs. Gola, work on how academic research can actually cross the boundaries of academia and reach the community. To that end, the project has incorporated a research unit, a heritage hostel named Turquoise, and a social cafe, which is Antique (Figure 3.4.). Both Antique and Turquoise serve as interactive

multi-purpose spaces in which they interface with society, fostering various activities for society while also promoting edutainment and cultural tourism.

Furthermore, the founders of Antique rented and renovated an old house opposite Antique and found a hostel, which has a common area with Antique, so those who visit Antique can also sit on the terrace of Turquoise guest house. The big dining hall of Turquoise is sometimes open for the use of Antique customers, especially if they are in groups and have workshop sessions or other similar activities that need space.

Basel recalls the role of the cafe in making social changes throughout history. It has actually emboldened some of the first opposing motions around the world, which resulted in many social and political changes. During the Ottoman period, for example, the cafe was one of the cornerstones of Nablus social life. Throughout history, cafes in Nablus played a fundamental role in strengthening social ties; they were always present at major events, especially political and cultural ones. As Basel explains, "we wanted to recreate such a space again for those who need it." They rented the place, which was used as a small restaurant before; renovated it, and found Antique in the old city of Nablus. Antique is located in the old city, 10 minutes' walking distance from the city center, which makes it a strategic location.

3.5.3. Veranda and Antique: a Distinct Cafe Model in Nablus

There are several reasons and elements that make Veranda and Antique stand out from the other cafes in the public sphere of Nablus city. They both provide their customers with a multi-purpose space in each. Besides, functioning as alternatives for some public spaces.

3.5.3.1. Veranda: a Platform for Young People in a Friendly Ambience

In Veranda, the main attraction is the stage. It provides the attendees, especially youths, with a recreational substantial space where they can share their potentials with

the masses. Indeed, all of those who I interviewed in Veranda pointed out the stage's significance and how it offers a genuine space for expression. The huge board behind the stage also performs a similar function; it is entirely devoted to every visitor that wants to write random notes, draw, or just leave his or her name, for instance. On one of my regular visits to the cafe while I was interviewing people, I found random notes on the board about how someone felt that day, and the other describing how a good Falafel sandwich should be, while the third one drew some random patterns. Veranda is literally a stage and a humble platform for individual and collective minds and talents.

In Veranda, the stage acts as the cafe's face, which reflects its special identity. Saad says that it is the first thing people usually see or notice when entering the cafe. Indeed, the first time I entered the cafe, the stage and the board both captured my attention, and I felt like the stage is giving a microphone to those who are willing to take it. On Veranda's stage, musical events as well as stand-up comedy shows and other various events take place in the cafe because it offers this platform in the first place. When asked about what she thinks of the stage and the board behind it, and what they add to the cafe, Yasmeen Alsalem, a 22-year-old urban planning engineering graduate, said that both function as the center of the place. She added:

> *The board is something we have been attached to since childhood, and I think it helps us express our emotions freely as we did when we were kids*. (Yasmeen, 22)

Osama Abu Safia, from Nablus, a 26 years old that studied information technology at An-Najah National University, and whose biggest interest and passion since childhood has been music and making music, he improved his talent as he and his cousin found a home studio and called it Stereo Wings, in which they sing, compose music, and make music for beginner singers. When asked why Veranda is special, he said that it literally offers him a stage to perform on.

> *After graduating from university, where I used to perform on stage, the opportunity to perform in other places was limited, and I did not have many options, especially with the limited public stages in the city. And Veranda gave me and my cousin a chance to share our talent with an audience, especially that people here, if they*

want to hang out, they mostly go to a cafe, and that was a good opportunity for us as we started to perform occasionally in the cafe. (Osama, 26)

Osama stated that he generally does not like cafes, and he does not think of them as alternatives to other public spaces, but Veranda is different, as he described. He said,

I generally do not feel comfortable in cafes. A cafe, to me, is just a place where you take a drink, gather with friends, and then leave, but Veranda is different; it leaves you with a new impression.

He added that the vibe Veranda provides is new to Nablus; saying that it is much more than a cafe, it is a cultural hub, and this is an added value to both of the place and the attendees. He says:

We found a place to sing, and to play music, to share our talent with people and hear from them, we felt we found a part that looks like us, where we can be heard and seen. He also mentioned how the cafe helped them and provided them with a space, by which they are able to reach a larger audience as they began to perform occasionally in Veranda. (Osama, 26)



Figure 3.5. While Watching Osama and his Cousin Performing on the Stage in Veranda, February 2020.

Veranda has been able to gather talented young people since it defined itself from the beginning as a place that embraces youths' motions and notions; the cafe's humble facilities sometimes replace, or present an alternative to, a public space that does not exist, or that is not accessible or available to these young ladies and men (Figure 3.5.). In fact, Veranda has played a main role in presenting or encouraging some talents to come to light. Both Veranda and Antique have built a community and a wide network of talented and skilled people from several fields.

3.5.3.2. Antique as a Cultural and Exchange Center

Antique offers its services as a cafe, and at the same time functions as a youth gathering place, where various activities take place, creating Antique's distinctive identity.

> *We wanted the cafe to be a place in which people seek knowledge, not just drink a cup of tea, play cards, smoke, and leave*. (Basel, 37)

> *I find most of my social and even some personal needs here in Antique.*

(Says Hisham Kalbani, a 27-year-old Nabulsi who has a background in English Literature and works as a lumper).

During the interview with Aytham, a 20-year old former regular visitor who now works as a part-timer in Antique while doing his Bachelor in English Language and Literature at An-Najah National University, he illustrated:

> *We try to propose a new experience and create a new perspective on what a cafe in the old city should be like.* (Aytham, 20)

When I asked Basel why they joined a part of the hostel with Antique and allowed the cafes' attendees in, he said that they wanted to take advantage of some unused space, as their intrinsic goal is to create a cultural exchange experience for both the international guests and the local visitors. Indeed, this has brought a new aspect to the cafe as it has created a small community of international and local members.

Ali, is a 28-year old dentist, interested in physics and space, who actually used to lecture other interested individuals on NASA on some Arabic platforms on the internet. He also helped in coordinating some astronomy camps in the Bethlehem district, and he is a regular in Antique. When asked if Antique's space forms a gate by which attendees get to know various people and cultures, he said:

> *The presence of foreigners in Antique has offered a space for exchange, a space where we get to know "the other" while we are actually here, especially since the Palestinian community is literally closed within a closed country because of the occupation's restrictions on movement and travelling. The cafe gave me, if I can say a substitute for the freedom I lost, and allowed me to travel while I am physically in the same space.* (Ali, 28)

Hisham also said:

I met people from all around the world in Antique (Hisham, 27)

He added that the cafe's inclusivity increased youths' awareness and acceptance of others.

Furthermore, Antique functions as a cultural exchange space in which locals meet internationals and vice versa; they get to know each other better as they discuss different topics, share food, play games, and speak different languages in one amiable place. I have witnessed that myself in the café once, as I finished one of my interviews and I was sitting with the interviewee chatting; an American young lady came in and asked to join as the interviewee (Hisham) was her friend, and then we talked a bit and then discussed how and why it is common to have lentil soup in winter in Palestine. So, as simple as that, Antique has offered its visitors a space in which they can also make friends of different backgrounds and have various cultures, just like Hisham and his friend, whom he also met for the first time in the cafe.

Tharwat Aarafat is a Nabulsi, 27-year-old freelance translator and tutor who also has an MA degree in translation and applied linguistics. She visits both cafes, Antique and Veranda; she actually holds therapeutic coloring sessions for adults that Veranda

hosts monthly, but she prefers Antique, as she defines it as her "sanctuary." She explains that Antique is her favorite public-private space in the city. Tharwat goes to the cafe every Saturday, sits by herself, reading, journaling, and listening to music. When asked if she sees Antique as a social and cultural hub that offers a cultural exchange experience, she said:

> *I witness this here, especially when it comes to learning a new language. I have seen people practicing different languages with their international friends when they meet in the cafe.* (Tharwat, 27)

Alaa Al-Hamoz is a 29-year-old community tour guide who created a personal business that he started himself before his wife joined him. The project named "Horizon" offers exploratory tours weekly; they do different activities like walking tours, cycling tours, and hikes all around the West Bank. Alaa is a regular in Antique. He actually volunteered for a month to serve in the hostel. When I asked him what he thinks of Antique and the space it offers for exchanging not only ideas but also knowledge while simply hanging out with friends, he said:

> *If you come here, it is not just for a cup of coffee; it is an inclusive experience if you want to meet new people. Antique is not specious, but it is decorated in a creative way that allows it to be a private-public space that sometimes compels you to talk to the person next to you, and that is good in the context of meeting new people. In Antique, you will also hear people speaking other languages. Through the cafe, I met many internationals who wanted to join us on our tours in the old city of Nablus, as well as on our walking and cycling trails in other cities in the West Bank.*
>
> (Alaa, 29)

3.5.3.3. Antique: a Tourist Destination

The old city of Nablus is a prodigious example of traditional architecture in Palestine. It consists of 7 quarters in which different civilizations have resided and established several cultures and human experiences. According to UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, the Canaanite-Roman-Ottoman sequence in the city resulted in a unique sample of urban architectural complex. Indeed, the old city of Nablus is a historic site that is still vibrant today. In fact, it has one of the biggest and oldest covered markets in Palestine. Despite the many alterations and evolutions in the fabric of society and the city in general, the old city of Nablus is still present. In fact, it welcomes visitors daily in the town's shops, markets, restaurants, cafes, and some social centers, religious sites, and even homes. Since the beginning of the Israeli occupation, the old city of Nablus has continuously faced incursions and demolishing orders, especially from the years 2002 to 2006.

Antique is one of those public places that offers an inclusive space to create a diverse community in a friendly ambience. Antique endeavors to conserve the original identity of the place and encourages Palestinian youth to get in touch with their cultural and ideational patrimony while keeping a modern touch present as well, combining the two aspects in order to create this creative, complex identity of the cafe, which ultimately provides young Palestinians with a platform that can help them put their ideas and initiatives into action. Antique also aims to attract tourists and international visitors to introduce them to the Palestinian heritage and the ancient urban architecture of the old city, starting with Antique itself, which is over 800 years old. In fact, the cafe has become a touristic attraction on its own. It is located in the core of Haret Al-Gharb, one of the most important and oldest quarters in the old city of Nablus. The neighborhood has several ancient buildings such as mosques, churches, and homes that were established hundreds of years ago, and this makes the quarter even more important for tourists as some of them list it as a must-visit site when visiting Nablus, and Antique has become part of this list as well. In fact, I think the cafe and the hostel have both played a major role in making the quarter more vibrant and accessible for visitors.

Indeed, tourists, especially foreigners, have shown a huge interest in the hostel and the cafe. Basel declares that they frequently get good and useful feedback from the hostel's and cafe's guests on the ground and also on travel websites like TripAdvisor. I reckon that Antique and Turquoise have created a community of local and international members that in turn have deliberately or unintentionally promoted them as these attendees and guests share their experiences and appreciation of the creative space they are offered in the cafe and the hostel. I actually noticed and scrutinized how The Yalla Project in general has played a major role in enhancing the old city's presence as it has formed a social and intellectual state that people come to the old city to see specifically. The cafe has revived the old city, particularly with the considerable presence of youth and international visitors. When asked if he thinks that Antique plays a role in making the old city more vibrant, Aytham said:

> *The cafe has done a great favor for the old city by presenting a historical-modern cultural and social experience in a building that dates back to 800 years ago. We get asked a lot about the history of the place here, so we narrate the history of the place and then the old city of Nablus in general, as some foreigners and local visitors hold different conversations with us often.* (Aytham, 20)

I strongly think that the old city needed such a place to make the area more active and more alive and attract visitors, especially tourists, since Nablus is not a popular tourist destination as much as, for example, Bethlehem city in Palestine.

3.5.3.4. Challenging Norms and Building Trust

The residents of the old city's quarters had ties of kinship. They also had separate committees that aimed to develop solidarity among the neighbors of these quarters. However, as a result of many social, demographic, and economic changes in Nablus throughout the past years, the old city's social fabric has significantly changed; many of the old city's inhabitants have left and moved to the city's outskirts. Indeed, in the course of time, many changes have been seen in the old city, except for its conservative characteristics. Nabulsi society in general follows a conservative manner, and in the old

city it is even more so, which means that patriarchal behaviors, male dominance, gossip, and shame culture are more to be found in the old city. Thus, the presence of places like Antique in the old city exposes it to alteration and variation, making it more flexible and accessible to more people.

I can tell that Basel and his brother have succeeded in building trust with the mostly conservative inhabitants of the neighborhood and the old city as a whole. Mixed gatherings were nowhere to be found in the old city, and the culture of shame was a major concern. This has totally changed nowadays. Although the shame culture is still present, it has been lessened. Antique and other similar projects have distinctly helped not only in reducing censorious conducts in the surrounding community of the old city, but also in challenging these attitudes by creating a place with value. In fact, they inspired other young people to establish similar creative projects to fulfill similar and other purposes.

Aytham thinks that the cafe has shaken up the traditional fanatic thought of the surroundings, which is considered a significant challenge.

> *Now some people from the neighborhood itself allow their kids to go to the cafe because they trust the place and what it offers*. (Aytham, 20)

Alaa also mentioned how he thinks the renovations the founders have made in the cafe play a huge role in building this trust with the surrounding community of the old city, as the place had a bad reputation before them. He elaborated more by describing his notices:

> *The better lighting, the glass and wooden entrance door, and the seating near the entrance changed what the cafe look like on the ground and in the mentality of pedestrians. It is obviously a cafe, and people can see who is sitting and what they are doing, and this is important because the place was previously labeled as the one with the bad reputation; if you look inside, it is so dark and the lights are dim, and the inhabitants of the quarter always questioned the place, which was a restaurant back in that time till Basel and his brother came and transformed it.* (Alaa, 29)

Alaa says that these renovations played a role not only in manifesting the place's authentic identity, but also in satisfying the pedestrians' curiosity, especially the inhabitants of the old city.

While in Veranda, the conservatism of society is also an issue, but in a different context since the surroundings of Veranda and Antique are actually not the same. Owais reckons that Veranda presents a middle road between the conservative precepts and the liberal ones of Palestinian society, specifically the Nabulsi community. Owais Slibie, a 21-year-old young man who studies management information systems at An-Najah National University and also works as a television host on an English program for the university's channel, is a regular weekly customer in Veranda, where he finds a good studying space and is also interested in the events that the cafe hosts occasionally.

Osama also added that the society of the city is generally conservative and "fears change". He believes that establishing this cafe has been an audacious step as it offers an independent space, especially for youth, as it satisfies some of their social and intellectual needs on a daily basis.

In Nablus, society's fabric is generally conservative; even the families that are not religiously conservative are culturally conservative as they are committed to maintaining traditionalism and social norms. It is very important for them to keep their families committed and attached to these norms as they also act on preforming them, so it is not a matter of conservative religion, it is the collective culture and mindset on different social issues, like: what is considered as shameful, and what to do or not to do, and whom to go with or sit with and at what hour when going out into the public sphere, a cafe, for example, in this case.

Yahya, a 24-year-old Veranda regular, studies medicine and lives in Nablus, specifically in the city's eastern outskirts. He said he is glad he was born and raised in the eastern side of the city, since this, as he describes it, was his "opportunity" to live in an area with mainly low-income people. It was an opportunity because, he argues, he got to know them better, how they think, and what their needs are. This environment made him more sympathetic and critical; it has actually had a huge long-term impact on his

character. He is a very active and social individual, and in Veranda he is the vice president of the Toastmasters club in Nablus, which Veranda hosts weekly.

3.5.3.5. Holding and Hosting Activities and Events

Veranda is the only cafe in Nablus that presents and hosts various activities.

(Mai, 24)

Mai Shaheen, a 24-year-old regular attendee at Veranda. She worked as a researcher for a consulting company for Non-governmental organizations projects. Now she is a freelancer in the same field, along with translation. Mai comes twice a week to Veranda. She is also the second vice president of the Toastmasters club, which Veranda hosts weekly. She recommended Veranda and encouraged Toastmasters' club members to start meeting in the cafe, which is what actually happened later. She told me that the club encountered a problem in finding a convenient place where they could hold their sessions, as their weekly meeting lasts an hour and a half. She adds that Veranda has been very welcoming from day one, and that the place is always available for them when they have sessions.

When I asked Veranda's interviewees what they think of the activities the cafe holds and hosts, most of them used the words "new and interesting" to describe them. For example, Yasmeen thinks that the concept of Veranda by itself is new to Nablus, and the same goes for the activities and the special events the cafe offers. She says:

> *Veranda's activities are unique and new to the city. My favorite activity here is Quiz Nights. They are very fun, and you feel like you are playing with your family and friends in a cozy environment. They enrich the crowd's general knowledge. Veranda is the place where new entertaining, informative, and motivational events take place.* (Yasmeen, 22)

According to the interviewees and my personal observations, Veranda hosts and holds various activities frequently, one of which is the Toastmasters club. (A non-profit

educational organization that runs clubs all over the world to promote public speaking, communication, and leadership.)The members of the club meet once a week in Veranda. Mai actually said that it was hard to find a place in the city that could meet the club's needs, yet they found it in Veranda. From my point of view, one of Veranda's best features is how accessible the staff and the founders are, which plays a big role in making the cafe's attendees feel connected to the place; in fact, they feel they have become part of it as Abelatif and his brother consider them their friends. Abdellatif and his brother Baraa are usually in the cafe in the evening after they finish work; they are always around people, and when there is a certain activity or an event and they are available, they will be the first to join.

I have witnessed that myself as I asked the vice president of Toastmasters to allow me to attend a couple of their weekly meetings as a guest in order to monitor how they act and feel as they practice communication and public speaking skills and moderate conversations in this space that was offered to them for the sake of attaining entertainment, youth's social and intellectual needs, and inspiring reformation in society. During one of those meetings I attended, Abdelatif was present and asked to join the meeting as well if possible. It was as if he was like a member of the group; he argued and elaborated on the topic at hand exactly like everyone else in the meeting.

> *I benefited a lot from the Toastmasters' club as I joined some of their sessions in Veranda. I actually found out about it for the first time from my friends who also come to the cafe regularly. As the club meetings take place in the cafe, some attenders like me get involved in and learn more about self-development programs that improve communication skills, such as Toastmasters.* (Aseel, 22)

Aseel Abu Asaab, a 22-year-old young lady from Jerusalem, who now works in a bank in Jerusalem, got her education in Nablus and has been a regular in Veranda since 2018. She told me that Veranda is her first choice whenever her friends ask her to recommend a place for them in Nablus.

Another activity that Veranda has supported is a weekly gathering for entrepreneurs. Every Saturday, a group of entrepreneurs gather to convene in the cafe from 9-11 am. They discuss and exchange varied opinions and ideas and brainstorm together.

Furthermore, Veranda holds and hosts book discussion evenings, where the participating attendees discuss and debate the books they read. The cafe posts and shares their suggestions with their followers on their pages at their different social media accounts like Instagram and Facebook to keep them updated on everything, especially the activities and events in the cafe.

Furthermore, they also hold movie nights, Karaoke nights, and quiz nights. Also, they sometimes set creative plans for other entertainment activities like theme nights. For example, the 90s theme night they once had in the cafe, where they had played 90s English and Arabic music; added a special dish to the menu and decorated the cafe to fit in with the 90s theme they prepared. In Quiz Nights, for example, Veranda holds a quiz night where a presenter starts asking questions and the audience has to answer, and there are simple gifts for those who get the correct answers; speaking of which, a quiz night is an equivalent for a pub quiz, which is a quiz held in a bar; it is actually prevalent to see especially in Britain. The cafe also holds several Game Nights, where the masses play different games, especially with cards or group games such as building structures and shapes using skewers and toothpicks.

> *We hold and host various types of events and activities, from the musical (singing\ playing) ones to the weekly sessions of Toastmasters. We do not pay any performer, and they do not pay us either except for some events that need pre-booking, as the cafe gets very crowded and the seats are very limited. For example, New Year's Eve.* (Abdelatif, 32)

One of the most distinctive activities that Veranda hosts are Mrs. Arafat's coloring sessions; Tharwat says her interest in coloring started as she was searching for a therapy to deal with stress, and she found out about coloring. In fact, the action of coloring offers plenty of mental advantages, according to Marygrace Berberian, an art therapist and the

Clinical Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator for the Graduate Art Therapy Program at New York University. "Coloring definitely has therapeutic potential to reduce anxiety, create focus or bring [about] more mindfulness" (2017, para. 5)

Thrwat's interest in coloring has altered and developed into a hobby and then a skill that she masters. Tharwat has wanted to benefit others from her therapeutic experience with adult coloring books, so she started holding coloring sessions in Veranda. Now her coloring sessions are pretty much like a workshop, where they gather once\ twice monthly. She said:

> *Coloring has helped me a lot to deal with different issues, like stress, and it was beneficial, so I decided I can also help other people out.* (Tharwat, 27)

Tharwat chose Veranda in order to start her coloring workshop for adults; the reasons behind choosing Veranda are the welcoming, collaborative, and supportive founders, especially when it comes to hosting activities or events. Secondly, she explained that the cafe's location is very convenient to her and the other group members; it matches their timing better as most of them live in the city's Western area.

Tharwat is 27 years old; she is a Freelancer translator and tutor, got her Master of Arts degree in translation and applied linguistics from An-Najah National University. Currently, she is working in Ramallah as well.

In fact, Tharwat goes to both Veranda and Antique, but she is a regular in Antique as she prefers it. She goes to Veranda mainly when she has a session there; that is why she was specifically asked about her experience in Antique and the sessions she holds in Veranda. I noticed during the interview that Tharwat mentioned how much she is interested in phycology. One of her ultimate aims is to reach inner peace and help others attain it as well. She believes that the coloring sessions present a good environment to achieve that.



Figure 3.6. From Tharwat's Coloring Session in Veranda, January 2020.

Furthermore, I joined one of Tharwat's coloring session after asking for her approval, and she was very welcoming; she was actually the one to invite me first (Figure

3.6.). Owais, who is a regular in Veranda, told me he is a regular in Tharwat's coloring sessions as well and that he really benefited from them. “No one in Nablus does what they do in Veranda” (Owais, 21) emphasizing the fact that the activities Veranda presents form the place's authentic identity in the first place.

As for Antique, the activities that Antique offers played a huge role in getting people's attention to the old city. Also, I think the nostalgic feelings Palestinians have for old vintage buildings and pre-occupation times play a role in attracting more people to come and visit the cafe. Basel adds that they work hard on maintaining the place's authentic identity and present a good model in which social work and economic benefit cooperate without any corruption.

> *Antique functions as a meeting place, especially for the youth, It offers its services as any other cafe, but what makes it different are the various entertaining social and cultural activities and events we have often.* (Basel, 37)



Figure 3.7. Watching Al- Hakwati in a Ramdan’s night in Antique.

In my opinion, what makes Antique extraordinary is those activities along with the fact that it forms a meeting point for locals and foreigners. The cafe offers several activities occasionally, such as: Languages' Table, through which those who play exchange different words from different languages as locals meet with foreigners, who might be the hostel's guests or just visitors in the cafe. Furthermore, the cafe occasionally holds and hosts musical and poetry evenings, like playing Oud and Qanun. Also, several workshops and Fine Art related activities have taken place in the cafe. They also hold movie nights occasionally on Thursdays in Antique. Besides, they have Hakwati nights (Figure 3.7.) in the month of Ramadan (a form of oral art and storytelling that emerged in the Levant in the 19th century).

3.5.3.6. Supporting Potentials by Building a Community for Youth

1. Antique acting as a community center:

According to Basel, social service is a priority in Antique, just like serving good drinks; it is actually their ultimate aim. And that is why the founders decided to have a hostel opposite Antique because they wanted to expand their primary objective, which targets promoting the old city by restoring its old buildings and houses to bring back the local and international community's attention to its historical importance.

Besides being a cafe in the old city of Nablus, Antique has become like a community center. It has created a community where potentials and talents are supported and connected in a space that embraces them all, motivates their performance, and boosts their vitality. The cafe invests these energies and ideas in the project's ultimate aim, so these collective efforts integrate to create a reconditioned surrounding and better social and financial conditions for the families of the old city, especially those in need (Figure 3.8.). Indeed, the founders work on this by themselves, using the financial revenues they get from the cafe and the hostel to perform this renovation process. On the other hand, they steer youths' individual and collective endeavors in the same direction, especially those who have promising potentials, ideas, and initiatives. For instance, in the summer of 2019, the cafe founders dedicated a small space, which was still under construction,

for a girl who takes painting as a hobby. They allowed her to set her paintings and drawings there without any financial refund for the first two months. The space functioned as an alternative for an exhibition, and Antique's customers would see the paintings as they visited the cafe.

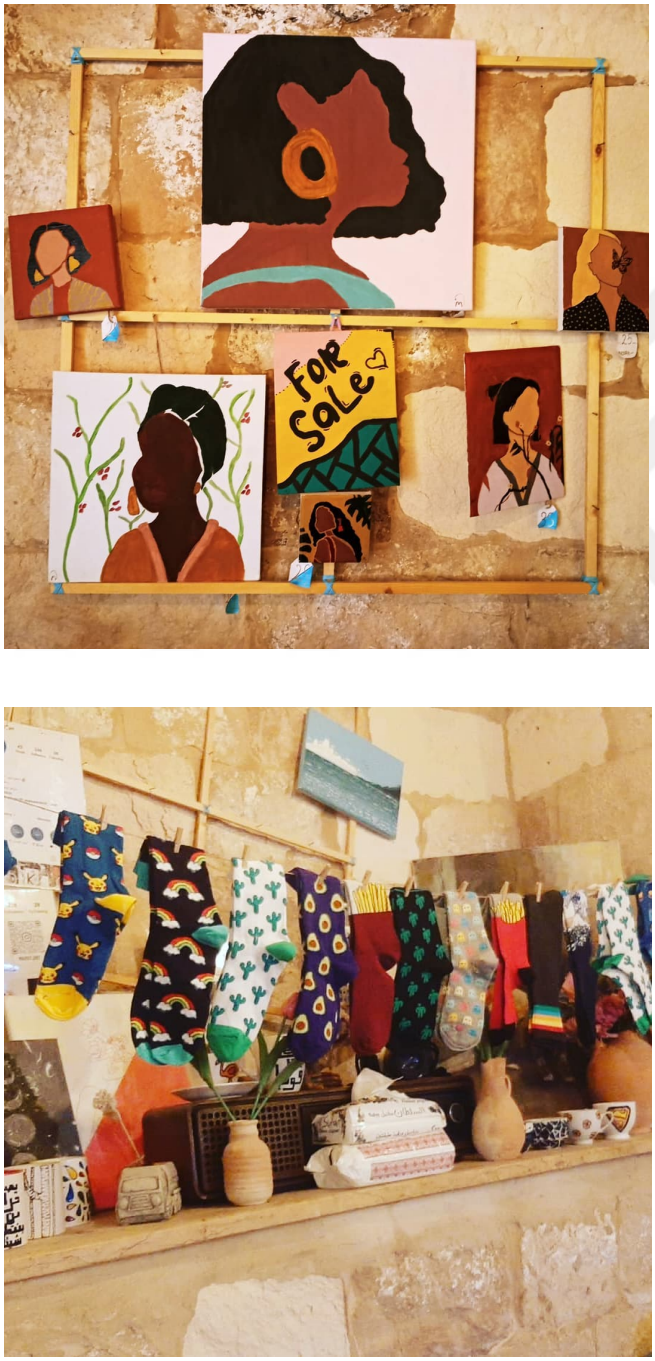


Figure 3.8. Antique Selling Products That Some Regulars Made in 2021.

Another example, Basel met a regular female attendee in Antique and realized that she knows the old city's history and is highly interested in this subject. He encouraged her by giving her an idea to start holding tours in the old city with small local and international groups; thus, she shares her information with others and gets benefits if possible. She indeed initiated a touring project in the old city, promoting herself in the cafe and using other means, so those interested would know about her activity. Along with her friend, they started regular tours in the old city. This individual-motivated initiative does provide not only social services but also disseminates social work by helping indigent families that reside in some of the old houses in the old city. Tourists and foreign guests especially are very concerned about visiting these homes as they reflect the old city's unique architectural and historical identity. These buildings have witnessed mutable heritages and cultures during different historical eras. The guests who accompany the girls on their tours are requested to pay a small amount of money to the families living in the houses they visit like a fee entry. Also, the girl gets half of what they pay (paying what equals 3 dollars as an overall fee for the tour guide and the house entry). This humble idea they initiated helped several low-income families in the old city; those families are supported with little money each time visitors come; the girls also get a financial benefit. I have witnessed how Antique benefited individuals, which in turn helped other people. It has built a solid network and a small community that shares interests and aims for similar objectives. Same as Veranda Antique hires university students, which means that they offer job opportunities for young Palestinians as well.

Antique and the hostel attached to it function similarly to a community center (Figure 3.9.) especially for those who need a space, like Alaa and his wife Reem from Horizon. Alaa and his co-worker and wife could not find a suitable meeting place for them and their fellow members and guests, so they asked Basel if they could use the hall in the dining area in the hostel once or twice monthly he agreed.



Figure 3.9. Antique collaborating with a restaurant in the Quarantine to help in donating meals for low-income families in the old city of Nablus. (Source: Basel, 2020)

The founders did a great job in bringing the place back to life, especially since it is in the heart of the city. I have witnessed the development of the place and decided to volunteer in my free time and do something as I also needed a space to work on my website, and they needed someone to help. I choose Antique because I like its vibe; it inspires me while working. (Alaa, 29)



Figure 3.10. Alaa serving Food for Some International and Local guests on the Terrace of Turquoise. (Source: Basel, 2019)

Alaa adds that choosing Antique and Turquois in specific is not entirely selfless as they use the space Antique and Turquoise offer for their work and pre-trips meetings since they do not have an office of their own. Also, Alaa says that he wanted to practice English with the hostel's guests, and it was also a good chance for him to promote his work and himself as a tour guide in Palestine (Figure 3.10.). In fact, I saw his posters and brochures at the information desk and in the dining hall of the hostel.

> *Personally, it offers us in Horizon a friendly environment for meeting people. Because we can ask Basel to use the total space of the hall in Turquoise when we have a meeting, we book it in advance, of course, without paying any extra money; this is not possible in other cafes. (Alaa, 29)*

Reem, as well, has elaborated on how Antique and Turquoise benefit Horizon. She thinks the space they are provided with in the cafe and the hostel's dining hall presents an alternative to a meeting room or an office because it is a cordial gathering place for their

official meetings. She also demonstrates that the high walls and the high ceiling of the hall in Turquoise make it look bigger and more spacious; this allows the sound to reach everyone without using microphones as the room echoes the sound. (Figure 3.11.).



Figure 3.11. University Students Using Turquoise's Dining Hall as a Meeting Place for Their Workshop.

Alaa added that he often sees the place as a community-serving space as it assists some low-income families in the old city in different ways. For instance, the cafe used to sell sweets and meals made by women from the old city. They also launched a couple of fundraising campaigns that aim to renovate old houses in the old city. The attention and support Alaa and his project Horizon got from the founders of Antique is not exclusive; many others have benefited from the cafe individually and collectively. (Figure 3.12.).



Figure 3. 12. A Fashion Show event That Took Place in Antique. (Basel, 2020)

2. Veranda building a strong network of youth:

Same as Antique Veranda has established a community where youth, especially those with talents, are supported and connected with each other inside and outside the cafe. Veranda works on providing good services to achieve benefits, as well as offering the cafe's space for those who have talents and creative ideas. The cafe supports the youth's skills and talents, offering them a space that functions similar to a stage, reading and studying area, or a meeting venue.

> *They support many young talents, ideas, and recreational activities, offering them an inclusive place, and that what makes Veranda unique.* (Mai, 24)

In my opinion, Veranda has established a good network for youth, especially the regulars in the cafe, by creating a community of music makers, beginner singers, clubs coordinators, and others. This friendly environment that leads youths to connect to the place has played the leading role in building this community in the first place as it has brought regulars together and gotten them to know each other better. This friendly atmosphere is clearly reflected in Figure 3.13, Figure 3.14, and Figure 3.15.

> *Veranda is not a typical cafe; it invites you to meet different people and join the cafe's community. The cafe's friendly atmosphere is an attraction factor, and the founders themselves are real supporters.* (Yahya, 24)

When I asked Yahya why he and his group chose Veranda as their meeting venue, he said:

> *Because it is easy and very flexible to reach the founders and coordinate with them, the setting of Veranda is very cozy and suits both the themes and vibes of our activities. Veranda embraced our ideas and what we do; they hosted us and offered us a comfortable ambiance where we could hold meetings and discussions without any financial demands except for our individual orders.* (Yahya, 24)

Indeed, the founders and owners of Veranda (Abdelatif and his brother) played a significant role in establishing Veranda's community. They are permanently present in the cafe in the evenings, roaming around the tables, talking to the people in the cafe, greeting them, asking them what they like, or dislike, and then asking them for recommendations and suggestions. During one of my interviews in the cafe, I saw Abdelatif joining a Toastmasters' session. The founders' attention and care for the attendees and what they do reflects that the owners themselves, as Yahya and other regulars have pointed out, have contributed to creating such a cordial environment that resulted in the birth of a small community.



Figure 3.13



Figure 3.14



Figures 3.15. A weekend night at Veranda, October 2021
(Source: The cafe Owner, Abdelatif, 2021)

3.5.3.7. Feelings of Belonging and Liberty in the Cafe Space

All those I interviewed in both cafes agreed that, either in the case of Veranda or Antique, the welcoming and cordial environment of both have played a substantial role in making both cafes two of the most favorite destinations that youths seek in Nablus. During some interviewees, I noticed a use of repetitive words when I asked about how they feel while in the cafe, and is it the place where they feel they are themselves freely?

The majority of the interviewees said they feel at ease acting freely if in Antique or Veranda. Actually, some of them have elaborated further on that saying that the friendly founders and the waiters; the inclusive space both cafes offer; and how this space is created and used to perform an important social role and not only to make financial profits like most of the other cafes in the city. Each of the two cafes has a specific vision, but they both have several mutual interests through which their visions overlap. This offered space is not only where people get to socialize, but also functions as a multi-activity space.

At Antique and Veranda, I have noticed and examined how some young customers, especially regulars, have developed a special bond with the cafes. They feel they are part

of the place as it has also become part of them. I argue that both cafes are highly flexible and accessible, which makes these young people feel connected to them. They feel they belong as they are allowed to express themselves freely and speak out without feeling observed or restricted.

As I perceived during my visits to both cafes for three months and through the interviews that I conducted with regulars, they find themselves feeling comfortable and progressive whenever they are present in this space. In some cases, this space created by both cafes acts as an escape from gossip, parental authority, and society's intrusions into one's own lifestyle and decisions. They both focus on satisfying the needs of the customers and offer good services. It is important to mention that this is not always the case in Veranda or Antique, as some customers feel passive and that neither Veranda nor Antique offers them anything special or adds to their perspective on cafes. However, those who I interviewed mostly elaborated positively on the inclusivity and influential ness of both cafes.

Abdelatif expounds that in Veranda, for example, there is no implicit dress code or anything that makes Veranda's goers feel they should dress, talk, or behave in a certain way. Only the staff are committed to a uniform (Figure 3.16.). Furthermore, there is no certain dress code in any other cafe in the city, yet it is implemented indirectly. For example, I will feel judged if I go to a fancy restaurant while wearing a training suit in Nablus, for example. These cafes also expect and actually target people of the middle and upper class or those who have a good income. As for Veranda and Antique, they are both mostly inclusive. In fact, I think Veranda has succeeded in creating a small community and a strong network, especially among the young regulars; at the same time, the founders and the waiters make sure that no one disturbs others or invades their privacy, since the cafe offers a private space as well as a public one, in which people come and gather in groups or sit by themselves individually.



Figure 3.16. Veranda's Staff together with the two founders on the left
(Abdelatif, 2021)

During my regular visits to both cafes, I have noticed how regulars recognize each other and greet each other as they have developed a good relationship with each other and with the cafes' crews who initiated this cordial ambience in the first place. Actually, regulars in both cafes always feel that their presence matters as the cafe's community they're part of checks up on them often, and the staff and other regulars notice their absence if they are not there.

> *We do not even have a uniform in Antique. That is on purpose because we do not want to be distinguished or referred to as those with higher ability or command of the place. We have become friends with the regulars; we usually sit with them if we do not have work to do. We are like the cafe's customers; the difference is that we make orders, serve them, and manage the financial affairs.* (Aytham, 20)

When I asked Tharwat why she prefers to sit by herself in Antique, and what connects her to this place specifically, she said:

When I go to Antique, I feel human. I do not feel judged at this place. It reminds me of my humanity, and that I belong with all the different others, without being categorized. (Tharwat, 27)

Tharwat says she uses the spaces cafes offer, especially Antique, as a working or reading space, away from the parental gaze in the house, as she describes it. She claims she gets distracted a lot in the house, and does not study properly as much as she does in a cafe. Besides that, Tharwat feels more judged and watched while being in the house, especially if she is just procrastinating or even daydreaming, particularly by her mother, so she prefers the cafe as a space to work, or just think and sit freely.

I usually go to Antique on Saturday mornings. It is my weekly off day, off from everything and everyone, and I feel less judged here. I am bad at communication and socially awkward, but I like to observe how people act and react in different situations, and I always enjoy that. Over time, this has helped me figure out how to deal better with people. (Tharwat, 27)

On the other hand, Antique functions as a private-public place that offers the same space for both individuals and groups as well. Tharwat, for instance, states that Antique is part of her self-care routine. I saw her taking a corner in the cafe, sitting by herself, reading, journaling, and listening to music. Obviously, she does not dedicate her time in the cafe to socializing on this day or generally, and even the staff know this well, so they also try to offer her this environment without interruptions as much as possible. They know that this place is like her "sanctuary".

Tharwat elaborated further on why Antique is special to her, saying:

People here do not stare, they do not judge, and I feel comfortable sitting here, and that's because of the place's atmosphere in general. The place here gives you the vibe that many people are here to read and to learn new things, and that is why I feel motivated to do what I am doing here. Antique inspires me to write as I encounter people closely and I can overhear their conversations often. It is a good place to narrate stories. Actually, I do not really like restaurants and cafes generally, but in Nablus the choices when hanging out are very limited; it's mainly

a restaurant or a cafe. In Antique, I can spend long hours without feeling awkward or that I must, for instance, place a new order later on. In other cafes, some stares would tell you to leave to give your seat to others. Antique is not just a cafe where you get served and then leave. There is no pressure like that here. In other cafes, I mainly go to eat or drink something and chat a little with a friend, but here in Antique, it is different. It is my sanctuary. (Tharwat, 27)

Here are some of the regulars' other elaborations on why they have developed connections and feelings of belonging in the two cafes:

It is an alternative to the house. Personally, I felt this here, as I used to come here daily for a period of four months. I have seen, heard and encountered people from Nablus and outside Nablus spending time here regularly as they find Antique "different," as they described it. (Alaa, 29)

I find freedom here. In Antique and Turquoise, I wash my cup and make tea myself if I want. Nobody says no. I do not feel that I am restricted in any way, or that I have to behave in a certain way with the staff, or that my space is just my table and where I sit. This cafe offers a cozy environment while at the same time a space that is very open and inclusive. (Reem, Horizon's co-founder and Alaa's wife, 27)

As for Aseel, she said:

In Veranda, I find a middle road. It is neither too loud nor too quiet, so if I want to study, I go upstairs, and if I want to socialize, I can also do so. Most of the other cafes in Nablus are either fancy, where you feel that you have to dress in a certain way and sit for a short time, or too quiet, as if it's only for studying, as is the case in some new study-themed cafes in Nablus such as Dr. Coffee. In Veranda, this is not the case. The environment is friendly and accessible. The owners and the staff are actually friends with almost all the regulars. For me, the cafe presents an alternative to the cafes in my city, Jerusalem. I think because Veranda's ambiance is more of what represents me as a person, it is closer to my background. Since a lot of Jerusalem's cafes, which are outside of the old city, have Israeli goers and different vibes, and as a conservative hijabi who does not

drink alcohol, these cafes and bar-cafes make me uncomfortable. I also know other friends from Jerusalem and the 48 occupied lands that love to come here, especially when it is an event-day, because they like to be surrounded by an Arab vibrant community that resembles their identity and makes them feel that they belong, and this is what they feel in Veranda. (Aseel, 22)

When I asked the regular interviewees what they think the cafe is an alternative for, they gave various answers, as demonstrated in the study. They all agreed upon the point that there are many cafes in Nablus, but they mainly function as businesses and places of entertainment. At Veranda and Antique, objectives and priorities change. Their aim is not only to make money, which makes them alternatives to cafes that do not offer the inclusive space they both offer and the multiple activities they both have. The second matter that all the interviewees agreed on is that the lack of other public places, especially youth centers and spaces in Nablus, is the fact that made cafes the number one youth space in the Palestinian public sphere, especially in Nablus. Moreover, some members of the same youth community decided to establish cafes that would meet the customers' needs; and fulfill other social and cultural necessities, like Veranda's and Antique's founders. Veranda and Antique go beyond the definition of typical cafes aiming to provide youth with an alternative space, even if partially, for those public places that are unavailable or inaccessible.

3.5.4. On the Requisite Improvements of Public Places in Nablus

- Green areas:

On a daily basis, the Israeli occupation controls and confiscates massive amounts of land in the West Bank and annexes them to the Israeli settlements there. This situation left Palestinians with fewer lands, especially green areas. According to Yasmeen's study, the percentage of green areas in Nablus, for instance, declined to 3% in the year 2019; this has contributed to the decline of the public sphere as well as the increase of random construction and vertical buildings. (Figure 3.17.).

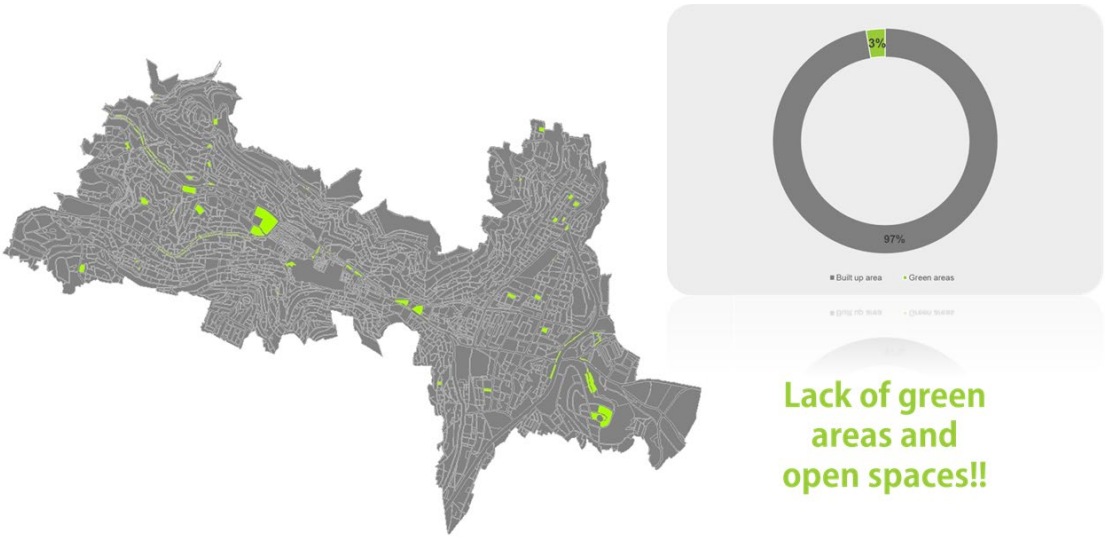


Figure 3.17. Lack of Green Areas and Open Spaces in Nablus, 2019.
(Source: Alsalem, 2019)

- Parks:

Yahya, Tharwat, Hisham, and Yasmeen agreed on the importance of having better public parks for the public in Nablus. When each was asked about what they think the city lacks or needs as public places in order to have a better social and cultural public sphere, they mentioned Nablus' public parks, and especially Jamal AbdulNaser Park, since it is the biggest in size and the municipality could invest in it better. Yasmeen's main criticism of the park, for instance, is its design and how its areas are not connected, and also that the park and its facilities are not interconnected with each other. She suggests adopting a redesign for the park that includes two courts, more playing areas, walking trails, and a skateboarding area. As for Hisham, he thinks that having a basic outdoor gym is very important, especially in the park, and since Nablus has none, Hashim suggests that the municipality start by creating one in one of the city's parks. So the outdoor gym will be accessible to everyone. Unlike private sports centers, which are only accessible to

those who can afford to pay, Hisham contends that exercising and doing sports is a public health matter and should be prioritized by the municipality. Moreover, Yasmeen recommends investing more in the Roman Theater, which actually lies in the park, to hold regular shows and events because she believes that enlivening the place and arranging it better by further efforts from Nablus' municipality will make it an ideal open public area where various events could take place.

- Public libraries:

Ali, Yasmeen, and Yahya mentioned the importance of having a public library that works conventionally. Furthermore, Ali thinks that the public library in Nablus should reschedule their working hours and have an evening shift so that it is convenient for those who come after their working hours. He also recommends the library update their management system because it is still "complicated," as he described. In the same context, Yasmine objects to the university's library's early closing hours and demands that the university reschedule the library's working hours. Flexible working hours are essential for students who seek a place to study, especially in the library and during exams. And this is what Yasmeen has found in Veranda: a comfortable, flexible space where she can study. She says that Veranda sometimes acts as an alternative to a library as it provides a good working space. Yasmeen explains that she works long hours and needs a place in the evenings that offers a good space for studying; Veranda has a desktop and good lightning on the second floor, and she finds it convenient there.

- Cultural centers and sports centers:

Nablus has five main local cultural centers; the most well-known one is Hamdi Manco’s center. Through their programs, they provide a variety of services and activities to the general public, particularly for children and youth. They play an important role in empowering youth by addressing their social and cultural needs. Yet the main issue when dealing with these centers, as I witnessed throughout the years as an active member of this community in Nablus and according to the majority of those who I interviewed, is the bureaucratic system they follow and their poor promoting system. For instance, to book the small conference room in one of these centers, the person has to ask for official

approval and signatures every time they have an activity. People today go for quick solutions, especially young people, so this dilemma of inaccessibility or unavailability that they often encounter in these centers drives them to look for alternatives, so these social and cultural centers should consider setting new plans to improve the performance of these centers.

As for advertising and drawing the public's attention, I believe the municipality should work on updating these centers' presence on the various social media platforms in order to keep people updated on their activities, workshops, shows, etc. They should enhance their communication with the public and act on and react to their feedback. As for sports centers, the city does not really have any, yet it has many private ones that not everyone can afford. So, as Hisham proposes, the municipality should prioritize erecting a public sports center, especially in the eastern part of the city, as it is generally marginalized with regard to public facilities.

On the other hand, there are many challenges that face the social and cultural centers in Nablus. The most notable one is the need for financial support. These centers need to agree on a specific and effective mechanism for work and search for new sources of support. Also, I believe it is important to keep empowering these social and cultural centers, focusing on marginalized areas, emphasizing the decentralization of work, and supporting the establishment of social and cultural centers in the city. In fact, the municipality should consider reducing the taxes that cultural centers pay in order to help them improve their working mechanisms.

Indeed, there are challenges when it comes to improving urban schemes in general and the public sphere in particular, especially third places in Palestine. Yet I think there are basic steps to begin with, which are actually doable in the case of Nablus, in order to have a better public space that aims to satisfy the community's needs.

3.5.5. Veranda and Antique in the Time of the Pandemic

Gathering and meeting others have almost become impossible all around the world as public places were closed temporarily for several months in the year 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown that followed the crisis. According to Professor Jonathan Morris, who is the author of the book *Coffee: A Global History*, cafes' goers especially regulars will be keen to reclaim coffee shops as active viable third places when they return to function right again. Professor Morris thinks that there is still a future for coffee shops as third places after the pandemic. He actually says that He believes cafes will become more local, and they will continue to grow, especially if there is a shift in the working behaviors.

Mr. Morris assumes that if more people continue working remotely, they will consider the cafe as an alternative space for their homes. For years, coffee shops have provided far more than just the beverages they serve; since the emergence of coffee houses following the discovery of coffee, to the penny universities of the 17th and 18th centuries till the contemporary rise of third wave coffee culture and coffee shops, where they offer a neutral space for both individuals and groups to socialize, debate and get entertained as they drink coffee. As a result of the Covid-19 outbreak the role of the cafe as a gathering public place in the society has been affected and changed significantly; however, it appears that cafes will remain popular as third places in the public sphere for several upcoming decades.

Antique and Veranda closed their doors in the year 2020 except for the first two months and the partial openings they had after the lockdown. Like everyone else, the pandemic decreased the performance of both cafes. It resulted in financial regression, but both cafes can manage the crisis as each of the founders does not depend on the cafes for income because they have other sources of revenue. At the beginning of 2021, many people were still scared and hesitant to gather in public spaces, especially cafes, and strict social distancing rules were still active. But starting from May 2021, cafes almost went back to normal in Nablus, and social distancing rules have become more flexible. In fact, wearing a mask in public is now a personal choice in Palestine in general.

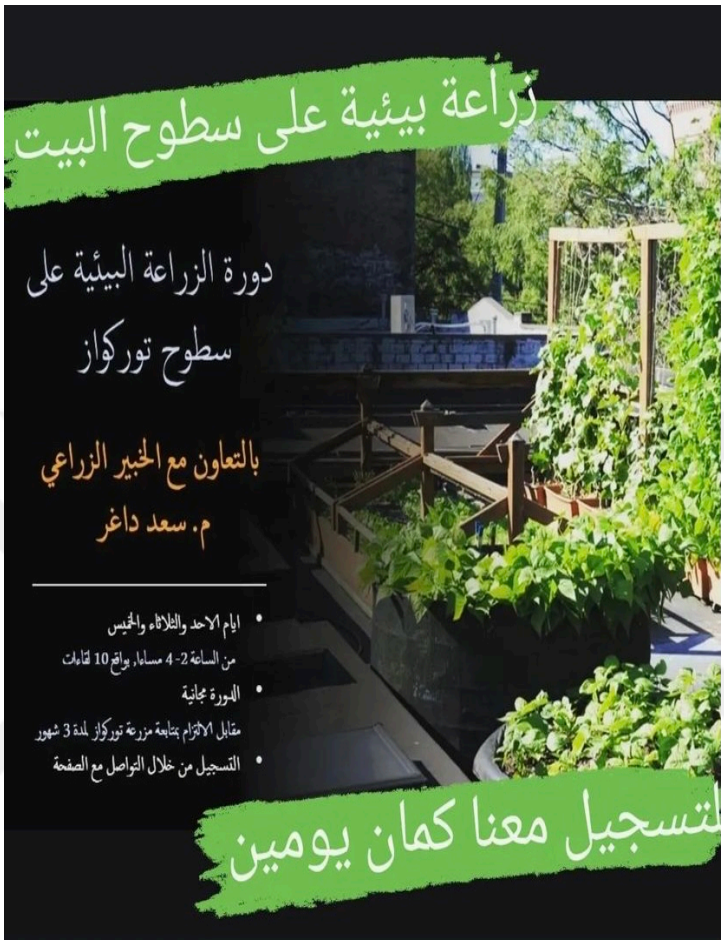


Figure 3.18. Announcement of a free 10-day ecological cultivation training course. (Source: Basel, February 2022)

This course will be taking place on Antique's rooftop in exchange for a three-month commitment to follow up on the roof garden the participants create.

Veranda and Antique have not only resumed their activities but also started new ones as shown in Figure 3.18 and Figure 3.19. For instance, in February 2022, Antique announced a free 10-day ecological cultivation training course on the cafe's rooftop in exchange for a three-month commitment to follow up on the roof garden the participants create.Veranda has also made some new decorations to make the place more interactive.



Figure 3.19. A Yoga Session that Antique and Turquoise Hosted During the Partial Opening after the Quarantine, November 2020. (Basel, 2020)



Figure 3.20. Two of Antique's staff with Basel, the owner, in the middle.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to demonstrate how two recently established cafes in Nablus city act as substitutes of other unavailable or inaccessible public spaces for the city's youth, as they provide those young people with a space where they are not only served drinks and food, but also protected, accepted, supported, entertained, and motivated. Furthermore, the study aims to show that unlike most of the other cafes in Nablus which only care making money; these cafes work to satisfy the social and cultural needs of their customers within the distinct ambiance of the two. The objective of the study is to recognize the significance of the coffeehouse in the public sphere in Nablus and the impact it leaves on the community, especially the youth. These coffeehouses motivate the community to perceive the influence that they have had in adding to the concept of the cafe and coffeehouse in the city, creating a new definition of the word "coffeehouse" in the minds of the Palestinian youth who are the major attendees of these cafes.

Moreover, the study aims to show how this cafe model offers the customers a different experience. It offers them an open space, which is not only a place where people socialize but also a place where they study, hold meetings, run workshops, play music, and many other things. For instance, the following are usual activities that take place in Veranda and Antique: language icebreaking workshops, public speaking clubs, and training sessions on different topics, musical events, poetry nights, and book discussions.

Veranda has established a good network for youth, especially the regulars in the cafe, by creating a community of beginner singers, workshop coordinators, and others. Not to forget that the friendly environment of the cafe that leads youths to connect with the place has played the leading role in building this community in the first place, as it has brought regulars together and gotten them to know each other better. Like Veranda, Antique has found a community where youth, especially those with talents, are supported and connected with each other inside and outside the coffeehouse. One of the cafe’s regulars explained how Antique and Turquoise helped her and her husband with their work as the cafe cooperated with them. She thinks the space they are provided with in the

cafe and the hostel's dining hall presents an alternative to a meeting room or an office that they actually do not have. Furthermore, through qualitative research, I put Habermas' theory of the public sphere into practice throughout this study. Weekly thorough observations and in-depth interviews were conducted in each coffeehouse for three months. As for the overall time of the fieldwork and the observation process, it took around a year.

At the beginning of this study, the concepts of coffee and coffeehouses are introduced. In the second chapter, the study provides a historical overview of coffee and coffeehouses, as well as the evolutions and transformations that both have undergone throughout history to the present day; the study focuses on Palestinian cafe culture, particularly in Nablus, as it is the case study. Also it gives detailed examples of previous cultural coffeehouses that presented a similar model to the model this thesis introduces, during the modern history in different geographies.

In the third chapter, this thesis explains the urban nature of Nablus and how it influenced the cafe culture in the city till the model the city has today. Moreover, this chapter presented and discussed the main social, cultural, and political problems and other issues like unemployment in the Palestinian youth community, which also impact young people as they usually frustrate them. Hence, they tend to seek places where their needs are satisfied, even if partly. Later, in the same chapter of this thesis, the opinions of regular customers in both cafes are stated and analyzed thoroughly. They were asked about their personal experiences in each cafe as they elaborated on how the cafe model of Veranda and Antique presents a functional public sphere where they discuss and exchange various ideas and matters, influencing social change in the community.

Throughout the first half of the second chapter, the concept of the coffeehouse and the discovery it was named after, coffee, are discussed. It explains the different changes, transformations, and the phases coffee and coffeehouses went through since they first emerged till the present time. The journey of coffee and coffeehouses started from the Arab world until it reached many communities worldwide. Yemen is believed to be the first pioneer that spread coffee beans after it was discovered for the first time in the 15th century in Ethiopia. Coffee appeared in Yemen and then was carried to Mecca, Cairo, and

Damascus and to everywhere else in the world from there where it has later become commonly bought and drank as a beverage. The debate over whether to reject, legalize, or welcome coffee raged throughout the two centuries that followed. On the other hand, some people argue that Sufis are the ones who discovered coffee in the first place, playing a major role in spreading it.

The cafe notion has likewise gone through a long journey of five centuries until it reached people today. It has roamed many geographies, which influenced both the cafe notion itself and the changing culture of the various communities that adopted the cafe culture, as Fjal, 2019 stated. The cafe's presence has changed the community's social habits and created new norms. It has initiated substantial social, cultural, and political changes in society. In the beginning, cafes customers were mainly men with high status, called "elites," but this has changed over time as coffeehouses have become less male-dominated and more inclusive. Coffeehouses have become linked with social and cultural aspects, where customers spend their free time as a poet recites his poems in the cafe simultaneously, for example. In Egypt and Damascus, coffeehouses played a huge role in society's cultural progress. Some of the regular cafe goers in these cafes were the city's prominent poets, teachers, and intellectuals. The Nobel Prize winner, Egyptian writer, Naguib Mahfouz, described the essential role that coffeehouses played in intellectuals' lives, saying that some of his novels were influenced by his presence in cafes on an individual level.

One of the famous cultural practices that have become a norm in the cafes of Damascus is storytelling, especially in the month of Ramadan. In fact, in the Arab world, especially in the Levant area, oral storytelling was an effective medium; it was mainly presented in coffeehouses as people would gather to listen. As in Iraq and North Africa, coffee houses played such a significant role in enhancing the intellectual presence in the country. Also, they were present in the resistance movement against the French colonial force. In England, cafes were known as "penny universities," and cafe attendees drank coffee for a penny. While in Paris, the first spark of the French revolution started in a cafe.

The evolution of the cafe sphere continued worldwide; movements like the third wave of coffee and specialty coffee companies have greatly influenced cafes' structures and visions as capitalism already did previously. Besides, today people have cyberspace that everyone easily accesses; this space has created cyber communities, thus cyber cafes.

Cafes emerged in Palestine in the sixteenth century, and due to the importance of their cultural and social role, they were exempted from paying taxes in Jerusalem. They spread from the coastal areas to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to the rest of Palestine, thus Nablus. As cafes emerged in Nablus, traders, visitors, and wayfarers sought rest and entertainment in the space they offered, especially when the city was a leading economic center in Palestine before the Israeli occupation. Alhamouz, for example, is one of Nablus' most renowned cafes. Prominent authors like Ibrahim Toqan used to attend the cafe constantly. At Alhamouz cafe, some activists discussed and supervised the leading steps for instituting an Arab committee to run the great strike of 1936 for the first time. Alhmouz also acted as a gathering venue for university students, who used to take their lectures in the cafe during the Israeli siege on the city in 2002.

Furthermore, the cultural revival has declined for several reasons after the Intifada in Palestine generally and Nablus specifically; social and cultural needs come later on the priorities list. This reality influenced the citizens' lifestyle in the city and hence the public sphere. As a response to the local stagnation in social engagement and political activism after the Intifada, investing in cafes has increased. Today, Nablus has many cafes, yet they are mostly considered businesses, where people eat, drink, smoke, talk, and leave. In fact, in Palestine, the changes the coffeehouse has gone through are evident; from a place where workers meet for a lunch break at the coastal provinces and a meeting point for poets, artists, and scholars later, to a place where university lectures are held in siege times, to the cafes we have today.

The second half of the second chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the study. Throughout the years, many scholars, thinkers, and researchers have studied the concept of the public sphere. Some opposed while others agreed with Habermas and somehow identified with his theory even in the time of the internet today. Although many social and political theorists agree with Habermas on the significance of public debate for

a robust democratic base, many others are skeptical of his specific definition of the public sphere; criticism comes from a wide range of theoretical and political views.

On the other hand, this overview discusses the transformations of the public sphere concept in the 21st century. Amosin (2017) argues that the concept of the public sphere is crucial to understand, especially in this present century, emphasizing the value of public social life. He demonstrates that the concept of the public sphere is still relevant today. Amosin sheds light on the huge influence that new technologies, particularly the internet, have on today's social life and the public sphere as there are cyber communities on the internet today.

In spite of the internet and the various social media platforms that form a new type of public sphere today, physical human presence and social interaction are irreplaceable in many cases, which is why cafes remain an active medium in the public sphere. Indeed, the findings of this thesis go in line with this. I think the space offered by some cafes presents a pragmatic public sphere that is not replaceable, even with the internet today. Veranda and Antique present successful models of which.

The first half of the third chapter introduces primary information about Nablus city in order to understand the context of the study. It describes the geographical location of the city, the population, and inhabitants' societal and religious fabric. It also explains how the changing urban lineaments of the city highly influence inhabitants' lifestyles and the characteristics of the city's public spaces, especially the public sphere of the coffeehouse and what it represents today. Moreover, this part of the thesis elucidates the reasons behind Nablus' urban sprawl towards the west and how it affects the Nabulsi's community life on social, political, and economic levels. It also mentions that the ubiquity of Israeli settlements and the presence of the industrial area in the eastern region hinder urban developments and reformations in the city's eastern regions, along with other reasons.

Moreover, in the third chapter, the most common challenges and obstacles Palestinian youth often encounter are explained. Young people (aged 15-29) make up 30% of the overall population in Palestine; both youth and children under the age of 29 make up more than 50 % of the population. They have been frustrated, disempowered,

and deprived of some of their basic rights. First, youth are facing massive economic difficulties as the economic growth in Palestine is controlled almost completely by Israel since the Palestinian economy relies involuntarily on the Israeli side. Furthermore, youth's unemployment rates are high; nepotism and corruption are also common especially in the west bank. The International Labour Organization report of 2020 stated that approximately 23,000 to 34,000 Palestinians worked in Israeli settlements in 2019. Although they are often subjected to human rights violations, Palestinian men, especially youth, seek work in Israeli settlements as they offer them higher wages.

In addition, young people in Palestine have no real representative voice, which created a huge gap between the Palestinian youth and the Palestinian ruling authority. This explains their need for a plural public sphere, where they themselves choose to represent their views, even if among a few masses, and here comes the cafe's role as an active public sphere where youth enjoy democracy and practice free speech. The Palestinian Authority has been suppressing freedom of speech, not only in public spaces but also on social media. In fact, some young men and women have already been detained for speaking or criticizing the Palestinian authority. Due to the dual effect of the Israeli occupation and society's internal troubles, youths also sustain several psychological illnesses and several trauma types.

Some of the Palestinian young women's difficulties are also discussed in this chapter. For instance, women's presence and influence in the Palestinian public life in general and the political arena in specific have decreased after the Intifada; conservatism, early marriage, and gender-based stereotypes are some of the main factors contributing to this diminution. Therefore, genuine empowerment efforts are required to protect the Palestinian youth and act on the facts to find solutions.

The second half of the third chapter states the study's findings and the methodology conducted. I applied qualitative research methodology. Thorough observations and a number of in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted in two cafes in Nablus city; one in the eastern part of the city, in the old city, while the other was in the western area. I observed and examined both cafes' by personally being there for a minimum of four hours weekly for three months in a row, along with the observation process that lasted for

around a year from December 2019 to October 2021. During these two months (December 2019- January 2020), I held interviews with a number of youth regulars ages 18-30 in each cafe. Furthermore, I stayed in touch with the founders of both cafes during the Covid-19 crisis until I met both again after a year in March 2021, as I asked them to continue the remaining part of my fieldwork. There, I had to add a couple of new observations after the lockdown of the year 2020. It is important to mention that the field work was interrupted by the lockdown following the Covid-19 pandemic for the whole year of 2020 except January and February. A couple of months later, the lockdown started, and I could not travel out of Turkey; meanwhile, cafes were closed in Nablus.

As the findings demonstrate, this cafe model presented in Veranda and Antique appeals to youth in Nablus because it provides them with an inclusive plural space. The two cafes respect youth's preferences for interaction while also giving them a sense of ownership as they develop stronger bonds with the place over time. Multiple reasons make both cafes ideal public spheres.

The first one could be the youth's desire for a new cafe experience which would bring back the atmosphere of the cultural Nabulsi coffeehouse, as it was highly connected with poetry events and political debates. This experience could, at the same time, be a nostalgic one as it re-brings the image of the pre-Nakba and post- Naksa Palestinian coffeehouse to a generation that was not born back then yet. Also, because the present cafe culture is mainly limited to tangible materialistic matters, the cafe would be recommended or not according to how fancy the cafe's interior is, the quick service of the cafe, and other things in the same context. Antique represents this image, as Veranda reflects a more modern experience.

In Veranda and Antique, the customers would drink their coffee, eat, smoke, and maybe join entertaining, educational, or art and culture-related activities. For example, attending a public speaking workshop. It is an inclusive, multi-purpose space that satisfies multiple needs under the roof of one place. Furthermore, satisfying the youth's need for a warm place and relaxing ambiance which let them be themselves and also triggers their creativity is also seen in both cafes.

In Veranda, the cafe's interior design has played a considerable role in making it a favorite destination for youth in the city. The main attraction in the cafe is the stage. It provides the attendees, especially youth, with a substantial recreational space to share their potentials and talents if they have any. Actually, Veranda is the only cafe that has a stage in Nablus. As for the events, it holds various types of them regularly. Osama, who occasionally sings on the cafe's stage, said:

Veranda's vibe is new to Nablus; it is much more than a cafe; it is a cultural hub.

As for Antique, the prime purpose of creating such a space is, as the cafe founder states, to raise people's social and cultural awareness and support them to achieve self-development, especially young people. Antique and Turquoise serve as interactive spaces where they interface with society, fostering various activities for their customers while also promoting edutainment and cultural tourism. The Yalla Project, which Antique is part of, has played a significant role in enhancing Nablus' old city's presence. It has formed a social and intellectual state that people would specifically come to the old city to see now. Furthermore, Antique sometimes functions as a community social center. It invests in youth's energies and ideas in different ways. Hence, their collective efforts integrate to create a reconditioned surrounding and better social and financial conditions for the families of the old city.

In addition, the presence of foreigners in Antique has offered a space for cultural exchange. One of the cafe's regulars said:

> *It is a place where we get to know "the other," especially that the Palestinian community is literally closed within a closed country and that because of the occupation's restrictions on movement and travel.*

Furthermore, holding and hosting various activities and events that aim not only to entertain the customers but also educate them and trigger their debate skills fosters the viability of both spaces. Moreover, both cafes support those with ideas or talents which they seek to share with the public. The founders and both cafes' workers are very flexible and reachable, making the customers, especially regulars, feel that they belong.

In both cafes, regulars have developed feelings of belonging and liberty in a friendly ambiance that accepts the diverse fabric of these young people; the presence of this atmosphere results in a solid community of youth who care for the place and each other. Besides that, both cafes indirectly challenge some rigid inherited traditions of the society, which also makes each cafe an active public sphere as the customers and those who observe from the outside discuss, criticize, or complement the space that this cafe model offers, especially for youth.

In the last part of this chapter, the study gives examples of public spaces that Nablus' city lacks. It elaborates further on their significant role in the lives of the city's citizens and how to improve the performance of these public spaces in order to have better ones that aim to satisfy the community's needs.

In brief, the findings of this thesis explain and discuss how cafes such as Veranda and Antique form a resurgent kind of public sphere in Palestine, especially in Nablus, as it endures a shrinking public space for multiple reasons. This study mainly adopts Habermas' theory of the public sphere. The concept of the public sphere is not a rigid concept. On the contrary, it has adopted several models throughout history after being introduced by Habermas. I argue that the cafe model I am showing is one implementation following the original concept of the public sphere. However, it does not necessarily induce people to take political action. In fact, after examining and analyzing on-ground facts and youths' lifestyles in Palestine, Nablus specifically, I argue that Veranda and Antique have succeeded in creating active multi-purpose public spaces; acting as alternatives to some other public spaces.

I think addressing this topic would make people in the Palestinian community more aware of the importance of the public sphere, especially cafes in this case. Since the public sphere influences the daily life of youth in Nablus. Therefore, the community should gather their individual and collective efforts to foster a better public sphere and improve public places' performance. Indeed, these cafes have created a considerable change in some cases, even with all the challenging circumstances Palestinian youth encounter under the occupation on a daily basis.

This thesis could help those who study the Palestinian public sphere, especially Nabuls city. It discusses public spaces' significant presence in the lives of Palestinian youth; the public sphere in the cafe as a model in particular. I also discussed the topic with some cafe owners and active youth members in the Palestinian society, who already have their initiatives and startups. They use the cafe's space to support and widen their activities at times. They said that this study would motivate cafe owners and some active youth members to involve similar activities in the cafes. In fact, I discussed with some of the young initiative establishers that I met in both cafes and along with the cafes' owners, taking this study to an advanced level of practice by forming a network between the concerned cafes' customers and cafes' owners, to set a joint program that offers several entertaining, social and cultural events during weekdays and weekends, with a structured plan to follow their progress. Furthermore, I expect people to realize that this kind of cafe, which functions not only to earn financial benefits but also to benefit the surrounding society on different levels, should be invested in more and supported more. Also, the ruling authorities should consider giving public spaces more attention and care.

For future research, I recommend studying other public spaces that also influence the Palestinian social and cultural life tendencies, which could include other Palestinian cities such as Ramallah, the administrative capital of the Palestinian authority. Internationally, I believe researchers should study the shift several public spaces have been witnessing as the world faces the Covid-19 pandemic. And how the pandemic affects and will keep affecting and changing how people act in public spaces now, especially in cafes, and the social impact it leaves.

This study’s argument presuming the cafe as an alternative place for other unavailable or limited public spaces in the city of Nablus is a topic that has not really been discussed in previous studies considering the public sphere and cafes’ social role in the community in Nablus. I think this argument in itself is a new implementation of Habermas’ theory in a Palestinian context in the 21st century.

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APPENDIX

Consent form Sample:



Informed Consent Form

Finding an Alternative Multi-purpose Space for Palestinian Youth in Modern Cafes

The Case of Nablus, Palestine

A master thesis in Cultural Studies

Institution: Marmara University

Supervisor: Alparslan Nas

By: Rawan Alameya

- I am ……. I agree to participate in this research project
- The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve
- I agree that my participation will be onymous
- I agree that the researcher may use quotes linked to my name in her research report

- I agree that the interview may be audio recorded

- I agree that the researcher may take photos of me

- I agree that the information I provide may be used by other researchers in future research following this study

Signature ……

Date ……