

Campus in Camps
Collective Dictionary

COMMON¹

المشاع

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جامعات في المخيم

COMMON ¹

المشاع

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CAMPUS IN CAMPS

Campus in Camps is a two-year experimental educational and project oriented program, engaging the participants from the West Bank's refugee camps in an attempt to explore and produce new forms of representation of camps and refugees beyond the static and traditional symbols of victimization, passivity and poverty. The program aims at transgressing, without eliminating, the distinction between camp and city, refugee and citizen, center and periphery, theory and practice, teacher and student.

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The content of this publication does not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the institutions mentioned above.

The Collective Dictionary is a series of publications containing definitions of concepts.

The terms proposed are those considered fundamental for the understanding of the contemporary condition of Palestinian refugee camps. These words have emerged as a result of actions and active dialogs with the camp community. Written reflections on personal experiences, interviews, excursions and photographic investigations constitute the starting point for the formulation of more structured thoughts.

The Collective Dictionary is both the reference and conceptual framework for all Campus in Camps projects and interventions.

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The camps as Commons

Brave New Alps

Since the West Bank's refugee camps have been established in 1949/1950, and with the influence of a variety of historical events, they have seen a unique social and spatial situation developing inside their boundaries. Today, the main actors defining multiple aspects of the daily lives and of the social dynamics occurring in the camps, are not central institutions as the Palestinian Authority or UNRWA (The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), but the camps' inhabitants themselves.

In a constant, underlying, and informal process of interpersonal negotiation, the refugees "take the matter of their lives into their own hands" (M. De Angelis) in order to make collective decisions and to solve big and small, individual and communal problems. These negotiations and processes of decision-making, steered by the camps' community itself, range from the spatial arrangement and the material

shape of the camps (for example, building new houses, extending existing properties, administering the economy related to the real estate property sector, temporarily blocking streets in order to celebrate wedding parties), over the sphere of services (for example, the sharing of infrastructures for water supply and its storage), to the camps' community's engagement as conflict mediator (for example, if there is a family feud going on, turning to external mediators or even the police is the very last option and in most cases it is the camp's families themselves who try to solve the conflict in the first place). Moreover, in some cases, long-lasting networks of mutual support have been implemented by groups of refugees in order to cope with various kinds of adversities. An example for this is the 'economic safety net' that has been implemented by the families of refugees originating from the Palestinian village of Zakaria, who regularly pay a certain amount of money into a communal fund, which can be accessed in the case a person needs money to send its children to study at university.

Given these conditions of self-organising, we ask ourselves how a heightened attention to the commons, which are grounded and growing – yet are also contested – within the West Bank's refugee camps, could shift the discourse of Palestinian refugeehood. How could a consideration of the commons shift the way the right of *return* is imagined and articulated? But

also, could the camps be considered as “islands of commoning” in the West Bank, in which social modalities are being cultivated, that may have the potential to spill over into the rest of the Palestinian society?

Commons & Commoning

In this booklet we attempt to reflect on the commons and the act of commoning starting from the experiences informed by growing up and living in Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank.

Initial thoughts on the objective and subjective definitions of the chosen terms are followed by a number of contributions that focus on the relationship between Dheisheh Refugee Camp and Doha, an urban agglomerate that was built by refugees on the hill opposite Dheisheh. What are the material and immaterial differences between the two environments? What happens when refugees living in a camp decide to move out of this peculiar social and spatial context in order to carry on with their lives elsewhere? What habits and methods do these families take with them from the camp? How does this shape the new community and its surroundings? What can be learned from these experiences if we try to imagine the way the *return* will be actualised?

Following contributions reflect on the relation between the right of *return* and the commons, on contemporary examples of profit-driven enclosures of commons in the Bethlehem area, and on the voluntary sharing of knowledge as an act of commoning. The closing contribution focuses on the plants growing in Dheisheh as a form of commons.



DEFINITION

OBJECTIVE

The commons are all the non-commodified resources that we share with other people in our lives. Air, water, empty spaces, parks, education, health care, knowledge, information, skills, the internet and much more should be considered commons.

SUBJECTIVE

The commons are everything in life used by the whole community for free. The commons cannot be abandoned, but they need to be activated and taken care of, otherwise they cease to exist. Public squares, for example, can be used and activated by people and are thus transformed into commons, but if they are abandoned someone can come and claim them as private.

Knowledge is one of the aspects of life, which is a common. Knowledge should not be exclusive or owned by anybody in particular.

If we think about the commons we should consider the following terms as their points of definition: trust, shared responsibility, respect, sustainability, equality, participation. These terms cannot be included in capitalist practices since these try to take control of the commons and of commoning in a bad way, following the logic of profit maximisation. For this end, borders are traced and the ways people use the commons are regulated. However, the commons themselves encourage people to practice neighbour-ing* and ways to share things without the need for any division or classification.

In the refugee camp, there are places that are common, such as the streets. People can use them in different ways (children play, parties are celebrated, people exchange ideas or hang out) without being blamed or bothered by anybody. Moreover, in emergency cases, for example if there is an invasion by Israeli occupation soldiers, the common space suddenly expands from the streets to the whole camp. If someone is running from the Israeli soldiers, s/he can enter any house in order to escape, without even knocking on the doors.

Commoning is to do something which is strongly related to sharing and participating, in a way that does not separate us from others. It also lets us recognise that negotiating through neighbouring means to take the matter of our lives into our collective hands. In addi-

tion, we can say that commoning is a way to support the relations between people and things by the principles of responsibility and equality in order to work towards social justice.

Additional thoughts

Common is resistance, struggle and rebellion.

The right of *return* is to reclaim the land for common use.

The camp is the common.

The common exists and you don't always choose to be part of it, especially if it is a "negative common" that affects many peoples' lives, like the Israeli occupation or environmental pollution.

Texts we discussed

An Architektur. *On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides*. e-flux journal June-August, no. 17 (2010): 1-17

De Angelis, Massimo. *Reflections on Alternatives, Commons and Communities or Building a New World from the Bottom Up*. The Commoner, www.commoner.org.uk/deangeliso6.pdf

Federici, Silvia. *Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. The Commoner, www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113

* Neighbouring in this case refers to the Arabic *almojawarah* (standard Arabic) or *aljereh* (street language), which indicates how people live together and how neighbours care about each other. It refers to how neighbouring itself makes social relations stronger. In the Islamic world, neighbouring includes the whole neighbourhood, because as prophet Mohammed expressed it, you should care about your 7th neighbour in every direction. This way neighbouring sets the whole world in connection.

Does residence matter when defining the Palestinian refugees' identity?

Mohammed Abu Alia

In 1948, many Palestinians were expelled from their towns and villages by Israeli forces. Among them my grandfather. Now, after 64 years, we still struggle for our right to *return* to the original villages our grandparents were forced to leave. Does the place one lives hold importance in the process of struggling for the Palestinian Refugees' right to *return*? In the following pages, I will try to simplify this question, by beginning with a small journey in search of a realistic and well reasoned answer.

After 40 years of living in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, my family decided to leave and buy a land elsewhere. Why? That was my question to my father. Why does most of our family still live in the camp while we have left?

His answer was simple; he explained that it was a question of money, those who had enough of it and could afford buying land elsewhere did so. "Living

in the camp was not easy for your grandfather" – he said; "he grew up in it but wanted a different life for me and my siblings."

My father was born in 1964, just three years before the 6 day war, the "Naksa", which ended with the Israelis occupying the West Bank, the Sinai and the Golan heights.

These times were hard for the Palestinians in general, but for the refugees the Naksa had a double impact. First, they lost their land in 1948 and became refugees. Then, in 1967, they came under the direct control of the Israeli army occupation forces. Palestinians then had no means to stand against Israel militarily. Many left the West Bank for Jordan, but most Palestinians remained, especially those who lived in refugee camps. They refused to become refugees a second time.

Other than this difficult political situation, living in refugee camps was a constant struggle. My father said that his family used to live in two rooms built by the UNRWA and that they were eight siblings. They had to share the toilet with five other families who lived nearby. The camp sanitation and sewage pipe lines were non-existent; instead the sewage ran in the streets in uncovered canals. The hygienic situation was very bad. Illnesses were widespread; the camp was approaching the brink of an epidemic. Most men

were jobless and families relied on the UNRWA food distribution programme to survive, which often was not enough. My father also said that while growing up the Israeli army would prevent him and his colleagues from reaching school. Israeli soldiers harassed, arrested, or interrogated them every now and again. He explained that reading certain books was prohibited, and if the Israeli army found these books at your house you could spend three to six months in jail. So, on top of the bad living conditions, the Israeli Army's constant presence in the camp turned the life of people into a huge challenge. For many, living in the camp resembled living in an actual jail.

My grandfather was a witness to all of these hardships that his sons and daughters along with all the camp's residents were facing. So he worked hard in order to be able to buy land elsewhere so he could move with his family to a better place. In 1977, he was able to buy a small piece of land just across the road from Dheisheh and started building a new house. In the same year, the mayor of Beit Jala went to Qatar and brought back funds to construct a large street in the area. The place was called Doha because Qataris were the first funders of the project. Therefore, my grandfather was one of the first people to settle in Doha and to start a life there.

My grandfather believed in his identity and that he belonged to his original village Ras Abu Ammar, but he also refused the fact that one needs to live in poverty and in bad condition in order to retain his identity or political standpoint. He was a refugee whether he lived in Dheisheh or in Doha and he died as a refugee even though he completed the house in Doha and moved there with his family.

My grandfather believed his family deserved better and worked very hard to refine his family's status. It was not shame from being a refugee that drove him but his belief that the family deserves sustainable living conditions. He believed that his daughters and sons deserved a good home, better health conditions, and freedom of movement. Doha was better from this point of view, as it was more accessible.

During the first Intifada, Palestinians rose against the Israeli Army occupation forces using the means of peaceful marches and stone throwing against the fully US-funded and armed Israeli forces. The situation in the camps worsened because camps were the hot spot of resistance. At the same time, Doha was growing as a city, more people had the financial ability to leave the camps and left for Doha. In 1996, Doha became a municipality.

Doha – outline of evolution

1960s – Dheishehian families start building houses on the rocky hill facing Dheisheh refugee camp, at that time a part of Beit Jala Municipality.

1970s – A partnership between Beit Jala municipality and Doha, capital of Qatar, is established. The Qataris fund the construction of streets and a sewage system.

1996 – The city's municipality is established. In order to honor the donors of the construction of the first infrastructure of the urban area, the municipality is called Doha. At this time the city counts 5,500 inhabitants.

2007 – Doha counts 9,700 inhabitants.

2012 – An estimated 11,000 people live in Doha City.

After my interview with my father I made a tour in Dheisheh Refugee Camp and in Doha to be able to compare the two to one another.

HOUSING

Doha – Houses are mostly spread far apart. There is enough space to have gardens around the houses. Most are suitable to be built in multiple stories.

Dheisheh – Houses are close to each other, that means little of them have gardens around them. The camp's land no longer withhold population growth.

Houses are built in multiple stories.

Comment – I think that living in Doha is better than living in Dheisheh because I prefer to live in a city where there is space between the houses. You have private life in the city more than in camps. Doha can withstand population growth.

STREETS

Doha – The streets in Doha are wide and well lit. Streets are a public area.

Dheisheh – Small and narrow streets without lighting. The streets in the camp are a common place.

Comment – I prefer living in Doha since its streets are wider and more well lit than the camp's streets.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS

Doha – 90% of the inhabitants are refugees who originate from Dheisheh, Ayda and Alaza camps. Refugees who had the resources to buy land or a house moved to Doha.

Dheisheh – A closer community: people know each other well. Same schools, health facilities, and closer

living space mean that everyone knows each other.
Comment – Doha has mixed community interrelationships and they are still growing. Dheisheh Refugee Camp has existed since 1952, so interrelationships between families are stronger.

ORGANISATIONS (NGOs)

Doha – 8 organizations are working to help the around 11,000 residents living in Doha.

Dheisheh – 45 organizations are working to help the around 14,000 refugees living in the camp.

Comment – I wonder why there are only 8 organizations working in Doha while there are 45 of them working in the camp. Doha needs more active organisations.

PUBLIC SPACE

Doha – The municipality has some public space. However, the park of Doha, which should theoretically be a public space, is outsourced, privatized and under surveillance.

Dheisheh – NGOs' spaces and the camp's streets are public spaces.

Comment – There's not a lot of public space, and the space which is there is not perceived. Better strategic planning in both Doha and Dheisheh is important to be able to activate spaces that are present but ignored.

WATER

Doha – People in Doha pay for their water, which comes from the municipality each 15 days.

Dheisheh – Refugees in the camp don't pay for their water, they receive it from Bethlehem municipality for free, each 15 days.

Comment – People from both Doha and Dheisheh are refugees, but in the case of water supply I would prefer to live in Dheisheh because the expenses are less than in Doha.

ELECTRICITY

Doha – The inhabitants pay for electricity, which is quite constant and powerful.

Dheisheh – The inhabitants don't pay for electricity, but it is rather weak.

Comment – To pay money in order to have good electricity is better than not to pay for it and have a weak supply.

EDUCATION & SCHOOLS

Doha – There are in total seven schools: four governmental schools and three private schools. There are secondary schools.

Dheisheh – There are two UN schools, which reach the 9th grade. After that students will need to go to another city in order to complete their studies, like Doha.

Comment – There are many schools in Doha. This means that each class has less students than the classes in Dheisheh. Therefore, in my opinion studying in Doha is a better option.

HEALTHCARE

Doha – There are three pharmacies and a physiotherapy center, but no health center nor a hospital.

Dheisheh – There are the UN clinic, the Dheisheh service clinic and the Shams Hospital.

Comment – Healthcare-wise Dheisheh is better than Doha but Beit Jala Hospital is not far from Doha, so people from Doha can go there.

Conclusion

The land on which Dheisheh refugee camp has been established is being rented by UNRWA in a contract that lasts 99 years. There are still voices in Dheisheh that wonder what will happen when this lease is over. One might also ask if the struggle for a certain political right is constricted to living in a certain place. Furthermore, is the identity of being a refugee limited to living in refugee camps, and should the struggle for the Palestinian refugees' cause be restricted to refugees living in camps? This contribution represents a beginning that tackles some of my personal opinions along with those of my family. More research is needed in order to tackle these points in a more informed way and to be able to reach a point where one can assert if the term "Palestinian Refugees" is a question of geography, meaning restricted to those living in the camps, or if it is an identity carried regardless of the place one lives in.

Visual investigation Dheisheh / Doha

Following images are a selection from a photographic journey that seeks to enlighten the differences in the urban fabric of Dheisheh and Doha.

Could the two urban agglomerates be considered parts of a whole, in which Dheisheh represents the *qasaba* [old city] and Doha the new city?



Dheisheh (left) and Doha (right) developing along Hebron-Jerusalem Road. Two sides of the same coin?



The main entrance of Dheisheh refugee camp



The main entrance of Doha City



Looking from Dheisheh towards Doha



Looking from Doha towards Dheisheh



Empty space in Dheisheh



Empty space in Doha which previously was occupied by an Israeli military base



Empty space in Dheisheh



Empty space in Doha



Street in Dheisheh

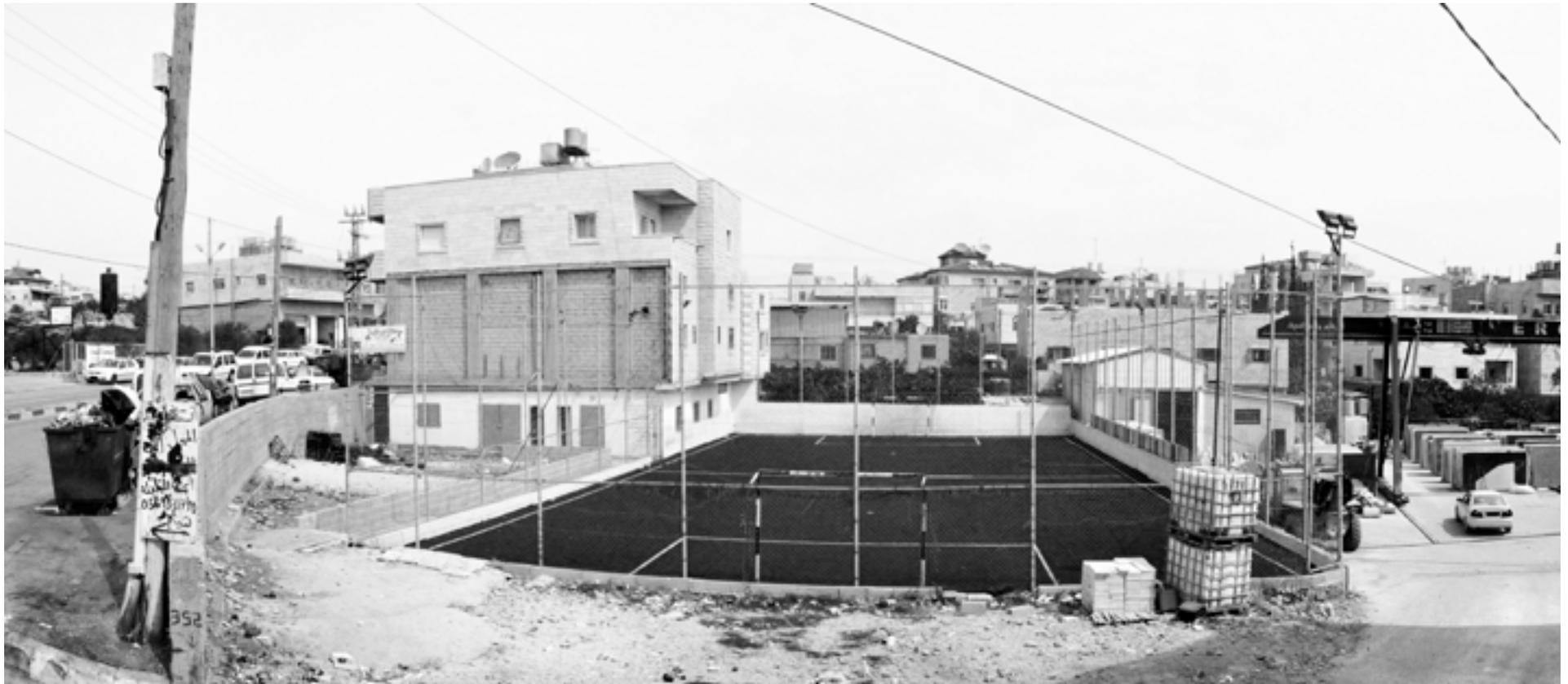


Street in Doha



Gated public park in Doha





Gated football field in Doha

The *refugee camp* and the *refugee city*

Naba' Al-Assi

My experience may be strange to you. It's well known that to live in a city is better than to live in a Refugee camp. But it's also something strange that for me to live or to be in Dheisheh Refugee Camp is better than living in Doha City. And below, I'll try to explain why that is and also the differences between Doha & Dheisheh at the social level and the social relations.

When we think about the differences between these two places, we should think about the soul of the camp which the city lacks. And what is the soul of the camp? We can say it's how the camp became the symbol of struggle and how it declares the right of *return*. In the camp you can feel this warm condition with the people.

Also something missing in Doha especially in my neighbourhood is that we can't sit on the street freely like when we sit in the camp. Somebody will come to you and ask: what are you doing here next my home, but in Dheisheh all the people know each other and they are sure that there is no place for us to go.

So the street in Dheisheh has social life and relations between the people. On the other hand, in Doha, even though the Municipality builds covered bus stops for the pedestrians, the social connections are so weak that a guy came to one of the stops because it's in front of his home and poured dirty car oil on it to prevent people from sitting there.

Also in the term of the soul of social life, Doha lacks the social relations between people as in Dheisheh camp. We can see that in the social occasions in the camp, like if you have a wedding party or a funeral or party for the tawjehe students there are hundreds of people who participate even if you don't invite them. In Doha, only the people invited to a party will come.

When we think about good relations between neighbours, we can see the crowded homes in the camp and I think that homes crowded next to one another improve the neighbourly spirit in the camp. I miss it in Doha very much, because by being an active neighbour you can integrate with the people easily without any borders. The relations between the people in the camp are stronger than the city. And I think this absence of good relations between neighbours began in whole Palestinian community when the British mandate made the division of the holy days between Christians, Muslims and Jews in Jerusalem. That really affected the relations between people.

In my case, my home in duha is like a hotel. It's just a place where I can sleep, because I spend my whole days in the camp with my friends and my relatives. In this way, I can feel like myself because I can see that we are all at the same level, not like what happens in Doha. In Doha, there's always talk of luxuries, like fancy homes or fancy cars etc.. In Dheisheh, even if they have these things inside the camp they rarely speak about that.

For me, I can only describe the life in Doha as a new city missing the common traditions and habits because there were no original Dohians people there. They are all new residents and they don't know each other very well. Because Doha is a mixed city, it contains a lot of people from many camps in the West Bank, especially the camps in Bethlehem. And it's just an industrial area for factories and small garages of mechanics, car painting, carpentry, and iron works.

So I can't feel like myself in Doha. Even if I have a lot of friends, but most of them also goes to the camp every day. So why I should stay there?

I think that there is no social life in Doha like there is in Dheisheh. Also there is no free social movement in Doha, no strong relations between people like the relations in Dheisheh. And also I don't know a lot of people in Doha because we have new neighbours every week or sometimes every day.

It may be familiar to you that life in a city would be better than in a refugee camp, but to me, because of the camp's social relations, I prefer the camp. Perhaps that is strange to you.



View of a concrete factory in the centre of Doha

A testing ground for the *return*?

Brave New Alps



Could Doha, as an urban agglomerate built by Palestinian refugees who left their camps, be considered a sort of testing ground for the *return*? Considering that the spatial arrangement of the living environment influences social dynamics and vice-versa, what does Doha's layout and mode of construction tell us about its social structure?



What imaginary is driving the way Doha is built? What practices of commoning do the camps produce? How can the refugees imagine to take these practices with them in the moment the *return* will be realised? These images were produced by superimposing the current urban situation of Dheisheh and Doha onto a historical photograph taken in 1952.

A conversation about “generational commons”

On Thursday, 4th October 2012, we went for an excursion to the area of Solomon’s Pools, south of Dheisheh. The idea of the visit was to walk around the more than 2,000-year-old water reservoirs that through a complex network of canals and tunnels provided the Bethlehem as well as the Jerusalem area with water. The walk was planned in order to reflect on physical commons that take the form of human-built structures or environments that are passed on from generation to generation over long periods of time. Arrived at the pools, we realised that they were in a process of being privatised by a foreign investment company. Neglected over the past decades, and potentially a dangerous place for children to play at, they are now fenced-in and watched over by a security guard. The proposed “development project” for the area foresees an architectural complex containing a convention centre, a shopping mall, a hotel and a historical museum in the refurbished Ottoman castle next to the first pool. The convention centre, the shopping mall and the museum are about to open to the public, while the hotel is still in the planning phase.



The model of the complex being built at Solomon’s Pools.

source: the Solomon Pools Resorts presentation book



The already built and soon to be opened convention palace and shopping mall – October 2012

This visit spurred a discussion in the group about the dynamics surrounding “generational commons” and their enclosure. Following, there are experts of the discussion.

FABIO The pools are now being fenced-in by the company that is renting the area. For us, this is quite a violent operation that reminds us very much of how things work normally in the capitalist system: there is a place that is owned by people in a collective way, but some people own it ‘in a bad way’ – they neglect the space, they trash it. And then suddenly a company comes from outside proposing to clean up the place, to make it into some sort of tourist resort and make it profitable. As making profit out of it is the whole point, the investors try to find some evidence that can justify this kind of operation that subtracts the resource from the people. Very often a narrative is constructed that justifies the enclosure through discourses of so-called sustainable development, of regeneration: “thank god the investors came and cleaned up the mess!” But, nevertheless, a piece of land that previously was owned and accessed by all kinds of people is taken away almost over night, becoming accessible only for people who have the money and who stick to the behavioural code of the enclosed space.

[...]



One of the pools trashed with cars before the start of the “development” project. source: the Solomon Pools Resorts presentation book



Fenced-in pool – October 2012

NABA' (Showing a photo on the computer) I have a picture of the model that shows also the hotel that will be build on the other side.

(Someone in the group sighs)

NABA' If we compare this plan of the hotel [top right] with the picture I recently took of the Israeli Betar Illit settlement [bottom right], we cannot find any difference.

ISSHAQ Yes, seriously what is the difference? What did they call it? "Proposed hotel design"...

FABIO It is stunning that the form is the same, but what is more is that the process it represents and embodies is very similar as well. You start with a fence and you end up with an architectural monster. Flipping through the book of Solomon's Pools Resort, I find the computer visualisations, depicting the future use of the pools and the kind of people that are projected into them, especially interesting.

ISSHAQ I went with my father once there for a barbecue picnic and we sat freely under the trees next to the pools as so many other families, but after this fencing-in I could just imagine that I won't be allowed to enter anymore.



Visualisation of the hotel to be built opposit the convention centre. source: the Solomon Pools Resorts presentation book



Settlement of Betar Illit, October 2012

– ph. Naba' Al-Assi

NABA' You will be allowed, but you will need to pay fees.

ISSHAQ Fees for whom?

NABA' Fees for CCC (Consolidated Contractors Company).

ISSHAQ Did they buy the land?

NABA' I don't know.

MURAD Maybe they rented it for 100 years from the ministry of endowment [*waqf*]?

FABIO Anyway, it is interesting that you and others were already playing in this area and the proposal of the development company is again showing people playing in the area. So something is happening in-between, the place is transformed for a use, which is almost equivalent to the use it had before, but with a completely changed situation and premises for access.

[...]

MURAD I have some experience about Solomon's Pools because there were political actions taking place. If you remember, there was a time when a lot of settlers with the army went there each day, each



Dheisheians freely accessing the pools prior to their enclosure, 2008

– ph. Naba' Al-Assi



People using the area of Solomon's Pools as envisioned once the "development" project will be completed.

source: the Solomon Pools Resorts presentation book

week, because they planned to take over all that area. So our action was to realise a project there in order to make it a free place, connected to the idea of the common. The project is still existing – the architectural plans were presented by the students of the Berlage Institute – but we found that the people who rented that land wanted a huge amount of money in order to realise it. So it seems they have a special strategy to work with that place and to control it.

ISSHAQ I don't see much difference between what the settlers do and these actions done by private companies.

NABA' I just want to explain something for Isshaq and Murad: when we went there yesterday, we asked the people of the company if we can enter the old castle, and they say that we could, but that we were not allowed to take any pictures – and we were being watched all the time by the security guard. So that makes me angry like hell. This was a common place: everyone could go and maybe even sleep there, and now you are not even allowed to take pictures. But when the director of the location came and saw Fabio and Bianca, he allowed us to take pictures because they are foreigners.

[...]

ISSHAQ At the end of the day they want to convince

us that this development is a needed and good action. And I think they are convincing us with these pictures (showing the pictures in the Solomon's Pools Resort book that make a comparison between 'before' and 'after' CCC cleaned the pools).

FABIO This reflects the kind of language or narrative that Murad was referring to by talking about the videos made by the Israeli Ministry of Media when they speak about the conflict. They are selecting a few powerful things and just project those to the people in a clear and direct way. So how can we respond to this narration? We don't have any material evidence of how much people enjoyed going there freely to play football, have barbecues and so on, but they have material evidence of people trashing the place with broken cars.

NABA' I think if we discuss something like that we should think more about the place, how people were going there and spending their time, because it is maybe the only place in the area where Palestinians were spending their free time outdoors. And now it will likely be something closed for which you should pay. But I am paying taxes to the government, and I am a good citizen, or pre-citizen, for the government – if there is a government. Why should I pay to enter places like the pools or the "public" park in Doha? I think these projects should be for free for the people. If the Palestinian citizens (or pre-citizens) are

paying taxes to the government, why is the government intending to gain money through these projects? Why are they subtracting huge portions of the commons and occupying them to gain profit?

[...]

MURAD When people here in Palestine see projects like this their eyes shine. They see a beautiful project that lets them say, “Yes, we are developed. We want to be developed, we want to see Palestine become like this.” But they are just missing a lot of points in this case. They are thinking individually, not collectively. If, for example, you consider Rawabi, it is very much destroying the Palestinian mentality: to be a citizen in that city will be crazy for the Palestinian traditional way. But the people here in Palestine are shocked with the new system and they want to look at Palestine as a very beautiful country, while deleting and cancelling all the other elements. I am sure, if we now take these images of the Solomon’s Pool Resort and go in the street 100% of the people will like it.

ISSHAQ Perhaps they don’t know the hidden message behind this. What you said about these images is exactly what we can call the occupation of the mind, which we are subjected to in every moment of the day and which seems to work very successfully.



Still common water spring at Solomon’s Pools, October 2012

The era of “Corporate Commons”

Mohammed Abu Alia

A few days ago we went on a trip to Solomon’s Pools. This area in our opinion used to be an example of common place. During our visit I was overwhelmed to realize that in order to enter the area we needed permission from the Solomon’s Pools Resorts tourism company. It was surprising that the place now has limited access to the public. I asked the security guard about this, and he (Mahmud) explained that the whole area was leased to the Solomon’s Pools Resorts tourism company for the purpose of “development” and to initiate projects that can benefit the area. We obtained the verbal permission but we were told that we were not allowed to photograph certain parts of the property. Only because I know the guard personally he allowed us to take a few pictures.

The place, which previously hosted meadows and trees, has now turned into a beautiful architectural complex containing an area designated to become a shopping mall, a museum, and a restaurant.

Two out of the three pools were built around 2 BCE (Before Common Era). During the Turkish domination over Palestine a third pool was constructed and the whole complex of water reservoirs was called after the name of Solomon, the Turkish governor of Palestine. The three huge pools were used to collect water in winter and to store it in order to supply the Bethlehem and Jerusalem area. Close to the pools a small Castle was built for the Turkish guards who protected the pools. It is called Murad’s Castle.

CCC (the Consolidated Contractors Company), which is renting the area for 100 years, has turned the Castle and the area around it into a historical museum and a restaurant. They are planning to construct a hotel close to the pools area. This means that the area will not be completely open to the public anymore. The plan is to “develop” the area and construct projects for the means of tourism that will yield profit that benefit the investors. In my opinion this is a clear example of privatization. One can define privatization as the domination over the commons that transforms these into portions of land under the ownership of individuals – amongst others, like in this case, using the excuse of “sustainable development”. In this paper I will try to understand this transformation in the light of what we have been discussing at *Campus in Camps*.

The whole idea of the commons is that they should be available for everyone but without any ownership

label. Solomon's Pools used to be an example of a common – the place used to be used for water collection and storage to supply Jerusalem and Bethlehem. So the whole project was originally established as a common (or at least as a fundamental piece in the water supply system, which as a whole is a common) – the quality of life of many people was depending on it – and then, when the water storage ceased to function, the area became a public getaway spot, an open park used by people in the area and not restricted or limited to anyone. I remember that while growing up we had many family trips to the area. We spent the day there, played, barbequed, and enjoyed the natural beauty of the area.

This change which is happening now, the restrictions and the limitations that I have noticed in my last visit only shows me the ways in which this place will be transformed into an enterprise that will mainly and hugely benefit the few investors. These investors will keep the area somehow accessible as long as this will yield more profit. So the area is being turned from a common into a private park owned and run by a private company. By all means, the restrictions imposed on the use of the area represent a problem if we want to continue to call the area a common and use it as one. The privatization process has some advantages, though. The whole area is now extremely cared for – the pools themselves were cleaned from a lot of waste, which had accumulated over the years. Moreover, the

modernisation and constructions did not make the area lose its natural and historical taste. The company argues that it was for the purpose of “sustainable development” that they took over. So one could say that the “sustainable development” of the commons should be taken care of by private entities, which are able to pay the high costs of maintenance but which in the same time benefit from their ability to establish economically profitable projects.

The privatization of commons, in which they become owned by corporate entities with the excuse of providing them with a better maintenance and development on the long run, leaves big questions unanswered – to begin with, is this privatization a fair process or not? Why did we reach a point where the ability to perform community tasks was taken away from the community and given to private companies? Where should a community draw a line between those places that can be left to be dominated by companies in order to sustain them and those places that a community should not bargain? Let's imagine places such as the Midan Al tahrer in Cairo, Almahd Square in Bethlehem, the Eiffel tower in Paris are being privatized, restricted, and were transformed from a common, used and shared by everyone, into areas that are owned and run by companies that possess total control. And as we are discussing places and areas, shouldn't we try to examine the ways in which privatization of educational and healthcare system can affect us?



View of Murad's Castle's courtyard with the soon to be opened historical museum on the right-hand side and the restaurant on the left – October 2012

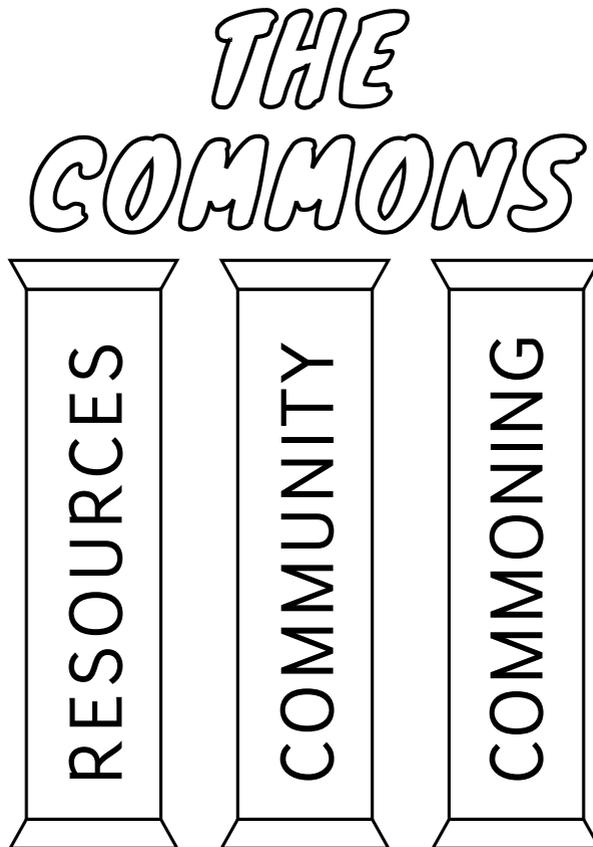
The Gate and the Commons

Brave New Alps

Commons, in order to continue to be commons need to be preserved, taken care of, maintained, protected. But they also need to be activated by people – in a sense, they need to “function”. The community and its activities of commoning are key to the creation, conservation and expansion of commons of any sort.

In the moment in which a common is being fenced-in – both in a literal as well as in a figurative way – in order to prevent people from accessing and potentially ruining it, there is a sort of enclosure happening and the common is being downgraded to a lower level of property. Through physical barriers, the resource is being prevented from being activated. Rather, it is being dis-activated – entering a state of suspension, which only puts off any further “confrontation” between the resource on one hand and the community on the other. Moreover, the act of limiting access to an area, more often than not being an imposition on many by a few rather than a collective decision, is a typical utensil in the capitalist’s toolbox. It prevents communities from becoming aware

of their responsibilities and it is just an easy solution to make sure that “stuff doesn’t get broken”. However, who decides to fence-in the commons, is often just a tick away from deploying other known utensils conceived to safeguard private property: regulation, surveillance, punishment.



Unforgettable experiences about the Commons

Nedaa Hamouz

“Knowledge has no price” is one of the beliefs that I really mostly appreciate. The first time I realised that was when I started giving English lessons for the children of our neighbourhood; Tal-Al Safi neighborhood in Al Fawwar camp south of Hebron city. I felt I had many things to give for nothing, but my own passion and internal peace. I realised also how much better life is when people share whatever they have without the exchange of money.

In October 2011, a bunch of children came to my house for asking me to give them English classes for 50 NIS per month. I had never thought that I would do tutoring, but after a long thinking I decided to teach them English for no money, since they were orphans and my neighbours. They were five children of different ages, the eldest was fourteen and the youngest was ten. I thought it would be really difficult in the beginning since they had different levels, but I was wrong – we had rich classes full of different ideas and capacities. We used to focus on the four linguistic competences – listening, reading, writing and

speaking. Some joy was also included in the lessons since the pupils were funny and full of energy. For example, one day, we were explaining some meanings and suddenly one of the males brought a funny Arabic word which has the same rhythm and all of us fell in laughter. We did the whole work in a friendly atmosphere; we were friends more than a teacher with her students. We had two classes of two hours per week for the whole year and the summer holiday.

It was a rich experience that affects me positively. I learnt how to deal with the pupils and how I can vary my methods for giving more knowledge. I used this gained knowledge in my work later on since I've worked twice as an English teacher. One negative thing is that some of the children were not committed – they were present for one day and absent for a couple of days. I think that is because they did not pay for the lessons. I was thinking how I could motivate these kids for such an experience in which knowledge is shared for free, so I decided to have a conversation class about the concept of giving, so that they could appreciate what we were doing.

Another experience is the drawing lessons I gave to my relatives and neighbours when I was 13 years old. I draw well since my early childhood, so I wanted to share this talent I have with the other kids. I was so motivated! We held the sessions in an abandoned room in our garden. We were all happy for having

such experience full of imagination, cooperation and ambition. This experience taught me how passion can be a motivation into success and information sharing.

These two experiences are not different from my experience here in *Campus in Camps*, since knowledge here is shared freely and without any condition. One of the classes we have in Campus in Camps is a perfect example about what I am talking about: “House of Wisdom” by Mu’alim Munir Fasheh, as he likes to be called. I learnt from Al-Mu’alim that my knowledge should come from my personal experience rather than books or other academic resources.

My personal initiative in teaching English is totally different from any experience that could be held by an NGO since I have no reason behind what I’m doing except my personal passion. I have no conditions on the learners, they are here as my partners, my companions. It’s an experience that grows the concept of cooperation and friendship. It motivates the learners and their teacher to work hard in order to put in the light the knowledge they can share. In addition, these learners will appreciate the importance of this experience of sharing and will apply it in their personal experiences when they grow up.

This past experience will have a great effect on my future project as a participant in *Campus in Camps*. There I’m working on creating a language and culture

centre were different ages, including mothers and their children, can learn English in a communicative way. In this project, I will share again my knowledge in the language for more people, but with the same principle: “knowledge has no price”.

The women, the first category targeted in the project, will get English lessons for free. I really admire their passion for the learning of a foreign language. When I and my partner, Ayat, asked women about joining the sessions they were really motivated. Their passion touched my heart, this was the first time I saw housekeeper women longing for English. I even felt that they are more motivated than their kids! Regarding the school children of the two genders, their learning will also be for free since we are not doing tutoring. As we noticed, the majority of the kids take private lessons to improve their performance in English, but most of them can’t pay, so they stop. Because we believe that English is for everybody, we are thinking of other solutions that guarantee their right of learning, but make them partners in their learning too. If they don’t have the money, they can help, for example, in arranging the plaza for each cultural activity. By this, we achieve a kind of barter where everybody gives as he takes and becomes part of the learning process of the cultural center. Now, I believe that their kids, motivated by their mothers, will be happy for this experience and that their satisfaction will affect their commitment positively.

All in all, sharing knowledge is a precious value which is included in the concept of the commons since it can't be measured by any materialistic price. When you are giving without asking anything in exchange, you will do the work from your deep heart since passion and cooperation will be your motivation to work. However, a process of commoning need to be established in which everyone participating is giving and taking.

Baking bread with Rebhea Abu Alia

A communal experience

On the 2nd October 2012 we all gathered at Mohammed Abu Alia's grandparents' home in Dheisheh for a baking-skills-sharing-session. We in turn baked traditional tabun bread with Rebhea Abu Alia in a typical electric oven.





Dheisheh's Common Green

Brave New Alps



One of the first and best known historical photographs of Dheisheh Refugee Camp was taken in 1952 from the eastern side of the camp looking north-westward in the direction of Jerusalem-Hebron Road. In that photograph – at the time Dheisheh was mainly constituted of tents with the first UNRWA concrete shelters appearing here and there – we cannot spot a single tree growing within or beside the already neatly defined plots into which the area designated to the camp had been divided.

What was this area before the refugee camp was established? It is said that the name Dheisheh (literally *the forest* in Egyptian Arabic) was given to the camp because a forest originally grew there. What kind of forest? One of those pine tree groves planted during the British colonial mandate by the Jewish National Fund and which can still be found here and there in the area? Or, as some people say, were fig and other fruit trees growing there? Or was this place in reality as rocky and arid as the hill opposite the camp, which can be clearly seen in the photograph and which today hosts the “refugee city” Doha?



Looking at the very first photographs of the camp taken in 1948, with the first Red Cross tents erected on a desert hill, it is hard to believe that this area was previously covered with trees.



The only evidence we could find during our research of a forest-like assemblage of trees in the area of Dheisheh is depicted in a tiny reproduction of a photograph that is part of the UNRWA photographic archive in Gaza. Probably taken in the 1950s or '60s, the image shows a group of pine trees growing in the eastern side of the camp, where today Al-Feneiq Cultural Centre is located.



Interestingly, some neatly defined parts of this rocky landscape on the other side of Jerusalem-Hebron Road are today still in their original state and do not host any construction. Here, the landscape is composed of wind-shaped boulders with little vegetation growing between them, mostly thistles and other small spiky bushes.



On the ground floor of Ibdaa Cultural Centre in Dheisheh, a small selection of historical photographs illustrates various stages of development of the camp. One of them, taken in 1959, shows us a camp that has a radically different shape than the one depicted in the 1952 photograph – almost all the tents have been replaced by concrete UNRWA shelters, tidily aligned along the northern side of the hill. Still, it is hard to spot any kind of green between the constructions.

Nevertheless, the fact that we cannot recognise any developed tree in the picture does not mean that trees had not already been planted.



In fact, taking a look at a third photograph, shot in 1968 from a similar position and from the very same angle, we see a slightly more built-up environment with a great number of well-developed trees rising between the buildings.

This is confirmed by yet another picture taken inside Dheisheh in 1973.



If trees were really growing on this land before the camp was established, these are the first images we could find documenting their *return*.



Fast forward to the present. Can we see the architectural shape of Dheisheh evolving over time? The concrete shelters disappear one by one – destroyed in order to give way to much larger and complex structures, or absorbed into them. The number of floors increases and buildings grow in size, beginning to intersect with each other. The little available space – mostly in the centre of the camp, where the majority of shops, schools and other institutions are located – is exploited as rationally and efficiently as possible. The space of the street, arguably the only physical common space in the camp, is increasingly eroded as an effect of the self-negotiated expansion of the refugees' properties. Step by step the camp becomes greener. The spread of the vegetation almost seems to go hand in hand with the architectural evolution of the camp. Trees and bushes – many of them producing edible fruits at different times of the year (figs, prickly pears, loquat fruits, olives, lemons, oranges, walnuts, grapes, red mulberries, almonds etc.) – are now cultivated in gardens annexed to houses and predominantly enclosed by walls that hide their trunks. Bushes and branches spill out from between houses or from behind property walls, sometimes in a glorious explosion of colour and scent. Various vegetables for personal consumption are grown. Climbing plants take over entire unfinished buildings, while potted ones are filling windowsills and wall tops. Plants of different sizes grow in big and small improvised beds built out of bricks or concrete along the

streets, outside peoples' homes. Vines grow on the shade-providing pergolas of the flat rooftops. In more than one location, the green spilling over completely covers the narrow streets, creating emerald tunnels over the pedestrians' heads. Therefore, in many ways we might say that

Dheisheh, the forest, must be a name that was chosen to honour the future of the hill on which the camp was erected rather than its past.

Common Green

Although refugees living in the centre of Dheisheh often complain about the density of the built environment, the lack of space and the compulsion to build vertically when people need to expand their homes, a large amount of square metres is dedicated to plants of various sizes and uses. It almost seems that these plants enjoy a special status here and that nobody would ever dream of getting rid of green spaces for the purpose of extending a house. It feels as though plants have been planning their *return* and conquering their ground bit by bit. Interestingly, the habit of cultivating plants is seemingly equally distributed within the camp – humble homes have gardens and green areas as much as richer and more extravagant houses do. On the part of the Dheishehians, possibly due to the fact that their ancestors were mostly farmers in their villages of origin, they

show a great respect and care for their green. All the plants that can be found in the camp are kept inside private properties or are, in any case, associated to a specific house or family. Within the camp, there is no “public green” in a conventional sense, with a central authority taking care of it. Rather, it is the Dheishehians themselves who take care of the camp’s green in general – each family contributing privately to its well-being and preservation. If the lower parts of the trunks and the root systems of trees and bushes are always located inside the borders of private properties, very often huge portions of the plants are shared with the rest of the community. This is the case not only for gardens that spill over from behind walls into the camp’s streets but also for the plots of green that are more hidden from pedestrians, yet which nevertheless enhance the lives of people living in nearby houses. Aside from visually enriching peoples’ perception of the built environment, the large amount of plants growing in the camp also plays a fundamental role in maintaining a cooler climate during the hot months. Without their presence, the camp, mainly built of reinforced concrete, would probably be much less pleasant for the greater part of the year. Therefore, if some people complain about the fact that there are no “public green areas” in Dheisheh in the form of a public parks or gardens, we would argue that instead of one single public park in the midst of a concrete jungle, in Dheisheh there is a vast common green, homogeneously spread throughout the camp.

In this regard, an interesting phenomenon is the construction of spaces to grow plants (varying greatly in size, from a few centimetres to a few meters in width) outside of peoples’ homes, predominantly next to the main entrances, technically invading the common space of the street. However, in this case it is hard to speak of erosion of the common space, but rather of an attempt to improve and diversify it, of paying homage to it.

And finally, considering the amount of food that such vegetation produces inside the refugee camp, we can begin to speculate on how less dependent from the market this green renders refugees or on the informal economies of exchange it nourishes among them.







COMMON 1
Collective Dictionary

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