

Campus in Camps
Collective Dictionary

COMMON²

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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 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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Introduction

Aysar Al-Saifi, Isshaq Al-Barbary

The camps at the moment live in a state of loss between the idea and reality. The idea is when we look to refugeehood and the right of return as common for every refugee. And those refugees have the right to intervene and give their opinion, even if they are living in America, for example. In reality, camps became homelands to refugees. This is for several reasons, primarily the history and geography, as well as the loss of hope.

We can see this difference in the new generations, who grew up with the growth of the camp. This created within them an emotional attachment, or what we call the familiarity, with these walls, houses and streets. Like the cat that does not allow another animal to enter the house where she grew up because she feels it is her property, this is exactly what happened. The contrast between common and ownership is unseen and unfelt. It is the contrast between the camp as a temporary station to return to a destroyed village and the camp as a village, home, car, and private house for refugee camps.

Definitions

In the camps, we can see a strong connection among the camp and domination, common, and sustainability. But there is also a difference. The difference is between the law of 99 years which does not give the refugees the right to own property and the partial property nowadays. The difference is between the materialistic property and dealing with each other as *Common*. The difference is between knowledge as a definition and how refugees redefine it from their experience.

From here, we decide to look at how people in the camps deal with and understand *Common*.

According to the Lisan Al-Arab Dictionary

1. *Commons is joint everything, and the share of the public domain is a common share, e.g. one third quarter and so on, and the land of any republication is common to all people, not be owned by one.*

2. *Collective is ownership not divided.*

In our opinion

Common is the intellectual fabric resulting from having a shared social and political condition. It is what we own together and how we work together to make innovative things happen that value what we share as much as what we individually possess.

Football Game

Aysar Al-Saifi

I once got invited to drink tea with my cousin at his house. We sat out side at the edge of his door observing his neighbor's children playing football. One of the children was not allowing the others to play with him. This pushed me shout at him, demanding him to allow the others to play as well, but he did not listen to me. So I stepped in and took the ball in my hands, repeated that he must allow the others to play and threw the ball back in between them all. At that time, my cousin told me that perhaps I should give the child a space as he will eventually figure out that such a game is collective and can't be played alone, that sooner or later he will allow the others to play with the ball. After a couple of minutes, the child did actually allow the other children to play with him. Right at that moment, my cousin looked at me and said, the child now understood the meaning of how to play football, and won't be playing it alone anymore.

This is a very simple example, consisting of important messages and values. For the child, he needed to build his own knowledge based on self-experience in order to understand that a football match is about

collective efforts and participation. In my point of view, life is like a football game, it is not designed for one person but for societies and communities. And in the case of life in refugee camps, such examples can reflect and articulate the discourses that have been built by the communities based on strong social fabric, and total absence of private and public ownership.

The true meaning of a football game is complete once we fully perceive its values based on the participation and cooperation, and this applies to the meaning of life.

Right of *returns* and the return to the *commons*

Isshaq Al-Barbary

I have known about the term *right of return* and its sacredness since my childhood in the refugee camp. Ever since then, the term has been rooted in my mind and heart throughout my life's journey. Recently, a wise man told me that each person has the right to be a co-author of the terms he or she uses, and thus define them based on his or her personal experience and beliefs. From this point, I would like to give my personal opinion concerning the concept of *right of return* to then more deeply touch the form of return.

The overwhelming use of the term is linked directly to resolutions issued by states and institutions that consider themselves better than the rest of the world. The former grant themselves the power and continuously attempt to put us in a weak position, in order to have us controlled so that we demand the right to return to where we belong through their sovereignty. The question I ask myself here is as follows: since when are resolutions and states considered as a source of life able to give the right to existence and dignity to the people?

What I mentioned above can be summed up as follows: the *right of return* is the future, rather than a set of demands of a designated authority. Therefore, we have this right and should start designing and forming our return based on our values, principles, culture and social fabric.

To the vast majority, the notion of “return” is linked to the first generation, which suffered the crimes of 1948, as a return to the destroyed villages. Thus, the relation between the person and the return is limited to a single house or private property. In an interview, Al Haj Abu Atiif, who was born and lived his childhood and part of his youth in the destroyed occupied village of Beit Jibrin - like millions of others who ended up living in a refugee camp bearing the name of their native villages – said: “ I want to go back to Beit Jibrin, I want to return to the lifestyle I had there, the life where I sent food to my neighbors and they returned the plate filled with food, I want to go back to the land that I used to cultivate and die there”.

Based on what Al Haj said, which parallels my true beliefs regarding his right to define the return the way he sees it, I can only interpret the concept of “return” in this sense, based on the idea of one community (Beit Jibrin's community), referring to an entity, mainly a homogeneous group of people, and thus implying an insular, closed off group.

From this point of view, I would like to link what has been said before, with the symbolic key of the Right of Return. From my point of view, the notion of the key is directly linked to the idea of single, isolated properties, so it appeals to individualism and enclosure.

In this context, the key and the first generation of the crimes of 1948 are linked to each other and related to private property, perhaps due to nostalgia and limited connection with the new evolving culture that has been developing in refugee camps over the past 64 years. However, linking the *return* to groups of (similar people) and the village could lead to the danger that closed communities might emerge, and thus establish their privileged commons by excluding all the others, which can be seen as fragmentations of Palestine.

The surrounding nature of life in today's refugee camps is totally different from its shape forty or fifty years ago. I was born, in a refugee camp that consists of and descends from multiple generations of refugees, a father and mother who come from two different destroyed villages, and generations originally belonging to the communities of Beit Jibrin, Beit Attab, Diraban, Beit Nattief, Haiffa, Jaffa and so on. Gathered together on a small piece of land due to an exception situation where private property is totally absent, they created and developed a new culture

and established a new political discourse built on people and which helps to articulate the type of life we share in common.

The implication of the relations between the different communities inside the camp can be heard in the almost united accent of the people, as well as the established ground of negotiation between the people themselves. It can be seen through my belonging to Gaza, Jaffa, Beit Jibrin, Safad, Ras Abu Amar, all together as a coherent homeland. Thus, as a third-generation refugee, considering the strong relationship that combine me with my friends from the different villages in the refugee camps, the notion of return takes different patterns and dimensions than being limited to single private property. This, of course, is without undermining the importance of the private aspect of such a right.

This belonging that I have emerged from the culture of the refugee camp, not from earlier generations' conceptions of the *right of return*. And because of this, I would like to support the previously mentioned with the following example.

When my refugee friends had the chance to go to the occupied territory of forty-eight, their priority was to see the Mediterranean Sea rather than the villages of their origins. Such an act explains and reinterprets the third generation's notion of returning to the

common, while reflecting the spirit and idea of the evolving culture within refugee communities in the refugee camps.

In order to see how this culture evolved, I want to look at this example: Deheisheh Youth Centre was established in 1969/1970, to play a major role in the social and political life of the refugees' communities. Major Part of the center's activities was focusing on the sports field as a tool rather than a purpose. Thus, the three refugee camps in Bethlehem district established a football team, component of the three camps, to embodied and reflect the issues of the refugees' communities as one body.

The Idea of *Mata"m*: a case of moving from a movement to an act of society and community

Aysar Al-Saifi

We should try to look back to 1948 and what happened after that and especially to the first generation of refugee camp who lived in a period of rebellion against any law because of the circumstance where refugees were forced to live in camps. This circumstance forced them to not trust or deal with any person or any direction because of what happen with them. So they became participants in sadness and experience. And this is what it led them to share water, food, and even clothes with each other. Today we can see another thing we haven't stopped to consider, which is 'common' in the camps.

At the beginning of the camp, UNRWA directly responsible for refugees in camps, from food to shelters and so on. For example, the first camp restaurant was created by UNRWA to serve the people. This restaurant gave one meal a day for all refugees in the Dheisheh Camp.

The idea was not only that the restaurant was a place where refugees share eating and drinking, like fish oil or eggs or even lunches, but in being a place to meet and talk. Maybe the only thing that they owned at the time was gathering, feelings, emotions, beliefs and the idea of their return. But from the other side it was more participation and common.

What I want to explain today is the connection between communality and return in terms of the idea. The idea of returning to their homes still passed from one generation to another. They pass it with the legacy of life to the new generation. And the idea of a restaurant or common and a lot of habits and events is also a common practice, despite their adherence to the ownership of the camp.

What we are debating is that the services that were provided to refugees unintentionally confirmed feelings of *assembly and collective mind*. So the practice of *common* has been elevated to the idea of and *return to commons*.

The first common *hamam* and the theory of moving from *we* to *me*

Aysar Al-Saifi

Sadness and suffering were not the only things that refugees had in common at the very beginning of the camps establishment, but much more than that. Refugees were forced to live in pain and difficult situations without rights. From these memories, we can see the formation of the first common bathroom. In the mid-fifties, began the of construction of housing units or what we called “shelter rooms”. These small rooms were 3 x 3 mt for each family, and one shared bathroom for all the families in the neighborhood street. It means that more than 15 families shared one bathroom. The idea of participating was clear between the people of camps through eating, working, clothing or even group activities such as weddings.

What we are trying to explain in this theory is the idea of common or participation, “we”. Participating was an important factor in maintaining patience for the people of the camp under the pressure of cruelty and suffering. This participation played a good job to



The *hamman* / Deheishe refugee camp

– ph. Matteo Guidi

unite the people of the camp and keep the hope of return. Later we can see the change that began occurring in the case of the camp. This shift in thinking from collective to individual thinking was the result of time and geography, a melting hope of return, which led to the imposition of other concepts such as ownership and domination, which we can see in the new generations.

Today, we can see conflict and contradiction, in emotions, dealing with others and some of the activities that still exist in common among the inhabitants of the camps- between reality and the circumstance that has imposed itself to grow with the same development of cities in terms of property and ideas that are no longer exotic within the development of the cities.

This theory does not exist only in camps, but has spread through the areas of Palestine and even in systems and institutions to replace the concept of individual “I” instead of the commonly understood group “we.” For this, we can today say that the camp lives in a state of loss between “we” and “I”, between the common participation and individual ownership.

The school of the camp

Aysar Al-Saifi

There are two UNRWA elementary schools with more than 2,500 students. The number of students in the classroom might exceed 50 students. There is a small and simple playground and simple water fountains. UNRWA oversees the decisions related to the school in co-operation with the parents' council of the school. The local community associations have significant contributions to the school and to its academic structure.

The question is: if we take the community contributions to the school in consideration, then, can we include the school within the concept of *common* and participation or not?

Common or private water?

Aysar Al-Saifi

Can we consider the sea or the water as common for everybody?

Can we consider the idea or the action in which the people of the camps refused to pay the fees of the water or electricity as approval of the idea of common?

How can we consider the fact that some people are sharing water tanks as a common action while we don't consider the water itself as common?

What is the political rule in changing the concept of common?

Is it time to re-define common with all its meanings and concepts?



Ancient roman pool / Arroub refugee camp

– ph. Sara Pellegrini



The plaza / Aida refugee camp

— ph. Lisa Bergmann



The Stadium / Arroub refugee camp

– ph. Brave New Alps



Al-Awda building / Azza refugee camp

– ph. Matteo Guidi



The Community Plaza / Fawwar refugee camp

— ph. Livia Minoja



The Pedestrian Bridge connecting Dheisheh camp with Doha city

– ph. Lisa Bergmann



The walls of Dheisheh camp have been used to express, educate and tell the story of camp.

– ph. Aysar Al-Saifi

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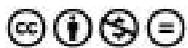
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