

Campus in Camps

INITIATIVES

بلدية الدوحة  
DOHA MUNICIPALITY



FINAL DRAFT  
18.06.2013

08

# THE MUNICIPALITY

Experiments in urbanity



جامعة العلوم التطبيقية  
جامعة في الخيم

Campus in Camps

INITIATIVES

# THE MUNICIPALITY

Experiments in urbanity

CONTRIBUTORS

Naba' Al Assi

---

DOHA CITY

## Beyond the Camp: Into the Common

The initiatives included in these booklets are the result of a collective effort made by the Campus in Camps participants in dialogue with community members, associations and collaborators\*.

They are based on reflections and observations articulated over a year of communal learning in which knowledge emerged not as pre-constituted information but rather as critical understanding of the social and political context. A group of concepts considered fundamental for the comprehension of the contemporary condition of Palestinian refugee camps took the form of what we call the *Collective Dictionary*, the conceptual framework within which the initiatives are inscribed and find their profound and coherent meanings.

\*

The initiatives have been inspired through dialogue with Sandi Hilal, Munir Fasheh, Alessandro Petti and activated with Tamara Abu Laban, Brave New Alps, Ayman Khalifah, Matteo Guidi, Sara Pellegrini, Giuliana Racco, Diego Segatto, Dena Qaddumi.

During the second year, more emphasis has been placed on the kind of knowledge that emerges from actions. Gatherings, walks, events and urban actions are meant to engage more directly with the camp condition. What is at stake in these interventions is the possibility for the participants to realize projects in the camps without normalizing their exceptional conditions and without blending them into the surrounding cities.

After sixty-five years of exile, the camp is no longer made up of tents. The prolonged exceptional temporality of this site has paradoxically created the condition for its transformation: from a pure humanitarian space to an active political space, it has become an embodiment and an expression of the right of return. The initiatives bear the names of this urbanity of exile: *the garden, the pathways, the municipality, the suburb, the pool, the stadium, the square, the unbuilt, the bridge*. The very existence of these common places within refugee camps suggests new spatial and social formations beyond the idea of the camp as a site of marginalization, poverty and political subjugation.

Alessandro Petti,  
*program director*  
Dheisheh, June 2013

11	Introduction
17	Doha: beginnings
	<b>01   THE CITY AND ITS RELATIONS</b>
35	Doha and UNRWA
37	Affiliation and the Social Relations
44	The political movement
48	Representing refugees
	<b>02   REFLECTIONS</b>
55	The Camp and the City, the Center and the Expansion
59	The village, the camp, the city
63	Refugee and a city... refuge and affiliation
	<b>03   OTHER FORMS OF REPRESENTATION</b>
69	Doha as another representation of refugees?



The identity of the camp has always been present in the identity of newly established cities such as Doha, in an unconscious and significant way. This presence is required and important to preserve the national values

**THE IDENTITY OF THE CAMP  
HAS ALWAYS BEEN PRESENT  
IN THE IDENTITY OF NEW CITIES  
ESTABLISHED BY REFUGEES**

of the refugees. It also describes the ability of these new cities to represent these values.

The cities, which result from leaving the camps, are considered to be a natural extension for these refugee camps. The



BETHLEHEM

HERODION

DHEISHEH

From Doha

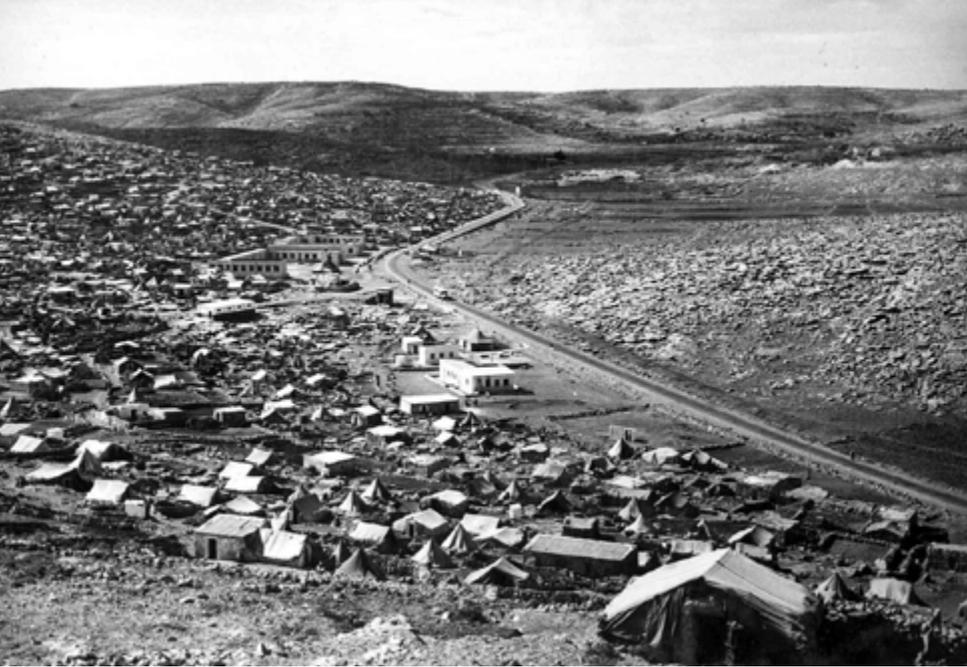
— ph. Naba' Al Assi

reason behind the emergence of these cities could be attributed to the population inside the camps, as the space allocated by UNRWA for the refugee camps is limited.

It is absolutely unfeasible for these newly established cities to be separated from the camps and be independent, whether on the socio-cultural or political levels, but excluding the service provision. This correlation can be attributed to several reasons. The most important is that the camp has always been regarded as the root for the refugees from their point of view. These cities are not clearly defined in terms of the social relations and the political representation. The majority of

the populations of these cities (like Doha) are refugees, from different camps and cities. Therefore, these cities are a mixed community lacking the social bonds and relations among the people such as the ones available in the camp. This is actually due to the common social, economic and political circumstances experienced by the residents of the camps. Consequently, these cities continued to be connected with the camps, as they served as a political reference.

The reliance on the camps to preserve and represent the national values leads to depicting these cities as rootless and unable to represent the refugees living there. From



Dheisheh refugee camp, 1952. Doha was an empty land.

the point view of the refugee, they have no concrete attachment to these cities as they are not deeply-rooted. As a result, most of them define themselves as refugees from the camps, the place that they are intellectually attached to, though in an unintentional way.

### **PRESERVING THE CAMPS IS A NATIONAL NECESSITY**

Preserving the camps is a national necessity and one of the most important national values of the refugees until they return to the villages they were displaced from. This doesn't mean to neglect the importance of activating these cities on the political, cultural and social levels. This activation also doesn't mean to

exclude the central role of the camp in these representations or weaken the links between the camps and the new cities that emerged from them. The intention is to protect the rights of the refugees in the different areas in which they reside whether in the cities or the camps. It is an endeavor to create a common identity between the people living in these cities, particularly the refugees, and to deepen their affiliation and adherence to their legitimate rights. It might also be a new way of proving that the camp has the potential to produce a cultural, political and economic life without abandoning the spirit of the camp and the national values.

Preserving these values and representing them in a different way, one that is in accordance with the new city is a mainstay to protect the national refugees' values.

The idea of this case study was put forth in order to explore this capacity, specifically how these new cities can represent the national values, especially those values that are related to the refugees. This is relevant as most of the residents in Doha are refugees and they have a strong mental connection with the camp and - from their opinion - it's one of the strengths they have in their

representation for themselves as refugees. This situation resulted as one of the national and important values for the refugees in the new cities - like Doha. The city, as they said, is just a place that can give them more personal privacy and more space.

**DOHA'S ROOTS ARE IN DHEISHEH, AS IN OTHER CAMPS**

And this maybe is what makes the social fabric weak in the city, in one way or another. These newly born cities need their roots, like the branch always needs its root, and the roots of Doha are here in Dheisheh refugee camp, as in other camps. Whatever this need is between the branch and root does not necessarily require that the new city should be limited in the pattern of cultural representation and political situation to that inside camp. Rather, it should be a chance for improving the meanings and the spirit of the camp and present it in a new and different way, not dealing with the camp as just a place but also as a meaningful value and as an incubator for national values and principles related to refugees and their legitimate right.

## Doha: beginnings

Doha is located in the region between the cities of Bethlehem and Beit Jala. It shares borders with Al-Khader City and Dheisheh refugee camp and is 10km away from Jerusalem. The area of the city is 1,900 dunams and the population, according to the latest statistics, is 11,000 inhabitants. It is worth noting that 75% of the city's population are refugees from Bethlehem and Hebron refugee camps (Dheisheh, Beit Jubrin, Fawwar, Aida, and Arroub), and the other residents are from different cities and villages from the south of the West Bank.

After the Palestinian Authority was established at the beginning of the 1990s, they inaugurated the city of Doha formally in July, 1996, and in 2004 the first municipal elections were held in the city. This municipal because of the need to acquire services, because the Beit Jala Municipality didn't support any kind of services for this area. The municipal council came through an initiative by Mr. Ahmad Ma'aly, one of the refugees who live in Doha.

---

**AREA AND POPULATION**  
Doha municipality covers an area of 1,900 dunams and 75% of the population are refugees

---

**1996**  
Doha City formally established in July 1996

---

**ELECTIONS**  
First municipal elections in 2004

As it was the first council, it was appointed, without any elections, by the Ministry of Local Governments.

Due to the lack of services, Mr. Ahmad Ma'aly made this initiative. He first sent an official request to the Palestinian Authority in 1994 but he didn't receive any answer. At the beginning on 1995, he sent another request and got a confirmation about the establishment of the new municipality, which occurred in the middle of 1996.

The city contains a lot of industrial workshops and factories, especially the stone and concrete factories.

The most important challenges are:

**THE LARGE OVERLAP OF THE INDUSTRIAL AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS.** The municipality can't solve this problem because of the small space of the city and the high population density.

**DOHA IS INCAPABLE OF EXPANSION IN THE FUTURE,** because it neighbors other cities from all sides. Thus, it's not able to accommodate the increase of the population.

Doha has become the first city **THE FIRST CITY** which has been built by refugees, **BUILT BY REFUGEES** leading it on the political and social levels. **LEADING IT ON** The refugees from **THE POLITICAL AND** Dheisheh camp started to move **SOCIAL LEVELS** to Doha during the 1970s. Before, Doha had been a part of Beit Jala, until 1996. The refugees or other inhabitants who lived in this area got the building permits from the Beit Jala Municipality.

Hajj Nemer Abu Aker who was one of the first people who lived in this area said that there weren't so many residents living there. He explained that there were ten houses at the most. The residents were originally from al-Jora, a destroyed village. Other people, whether from Beit Jala or Bethlehem were only coming to the area to spend summer vacation, building some houses or small rooms only for this purpose. He said:

*"When we were displaced from our village in 1948, we had some livestock. We asked where we could leave these livestock. My father - God blesses his soul - said at the night we have to go to Irtas village as it has a water spring. We went there and stayed for 2 years. We did not find lands for grazing and thus we sold them. Then, we came here with my father and uncles and found a*



Doha, 1970.



Doha, 2010

maps by Liesbeth Hautekiet

*house here. We rented this house for 20 JDs per year. It consisted of 3 rooms and a well. There was a land of 3 dunams planted by olive and fig trees. Each one took one room and we stayed there until 1967. At that time, the Israeli military forces invaded this area. People started to belong to the Fatah movement, and my uncle was imprisoned for 2 years. Thus, we were forced to move to Dheisheh camp, as we have relatives there. We bought this land at the beginning of seventies and built the first floor with garages, which we are still living in. Then, I brought my sons to live here at the beginning of 1987. My oldest son, Mohammed, got married in 1988 in this place too”.*

People wanted this area to continue to be a part of Beit Jala so as to receive services, including water, electricity, sewerage, paved roads, etc. In addition this connection would provide a legal entity to protect their properties.

*“The borders of Beit Jala reached until Al Quds - Hebron Street, next to Dar Alyahod. Sometimes we made mistakes. When the municipality detected illegal construction, people did not accept this. The Beit Jala Municipality was afraid that the majority*

*of the people would be Muslims and they would control the municipality, as what had taken place in Al Karak in Jordan. The Beit Jala Municipality looked far and they wanted to keep the Christian character of the city. The street in front of my house was made by the Beit Jala Municipality, and it was a narrow street. We formed a committee and talked to the municipality about the issues. They said that they wanted to decrease the borders of the city to the water reservoir. They also said that this place would be part of the Israeli government lands.” (Hajj Nemer)*

Through comparing the quotations of Hajj Nemer with the current Mayor’s explanations, we can notice that there is a difference between the public and official discourse regarding separating Doha from Beit Jala.

As the Mayor explained:

*”The frequent public discourse thought that the separation is due to the fear of the Beit Jala Municipality that it would be controlled by the Muslim majority. According to the municipalities that are particularly Christian, such as Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and Bethlehem, there is a clear system protect-*



Dheisheh.

*ing Christian representation. The mayors of these cities are Christians and there are a limited number of Muslim members. Thus, the fear was unjustified as the system protects their representation. Farah Alalarj, Beit Jala mayor at that time, said that he wanted to separate this area in order to decrease the responsibilities. Indeed, he got rid of it. It is not a Muslim-Christian matter. It was an industrial area in the structure and created a lot of burdens. The separation has given him opportunity to organize Beit Jala. All the difficulties and barriers faced in Doha are due to its classi-*

– Brave New Alps

*fication as an industrial zone whereas Beit Jala is more organized in comparison with Doha. All the industrial establishments are stacked here while in Beit Jala they are far away from industrial establishments. This is major cause behind the separation from Beit Jala.”*

Doha lacked services from 1977 to 1996 whether in sewerage, sanitation, or other services. Garbage collection was a personal initiative made by one of the city’s residents for a small wage. Building permits were granted by Beit Jala Municipality despite not offering services

Doha

to the area.

The name of the city was not always Doha, according to the statements from people who have been living there since the 1950s. Some of them said it was called Dheisheh, others said it was called Beit Jala, while some people said it was supposed to be called the Hussein Suburb, as an attribution to King Hussein, the King of the Jordanian Kingdom at the time. An amount of money was granted by King Hussein to the Palestinian-Jordanian Committee to pave some roads in the city. Dispute regarding the name continued until 1977 when a donation was granted by Qatar to pave the main street connecting Beit Jala with Doha. This was in cooperation with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Thus Doha is named after the capital of Qatar.

Hajj Nemer said about that:

*“It was Dheisheh, because when the people from Bethlehem were coming here they were saying that it is an amazing place and it has great weather during the summer. Do you know the main street which connects Beit Jala with Doha? It wasn’t a street, but they opened it when they got the donation from Qatar. And so they named the*

*street, Doha Street, after the city of Doha in Qatar, and then the name of the city became Doha according to the name of the street. And when they opened the other street which came from the other side of the city, they brought some people from the mental hospital to work on it. My uncle was responsible for watching them and the whole work. One of them said to him: Doha will be an Empire.”*

But this information, which claimed that Doha was called Dheisheh, wasn’t accepted from the Mayor and the Chief Financial Officer. As the Chief Financial Officer said:

*“This rumor came from people who are from Bethlehem, and for sure this is not right. This land was a part from Beit Jala city, and when the people wanted to build their homes they were taking the building permits from the Beit Jala Municipality, and the Municipality refused to give these permits because it was an agriculture land as they regulated, and it was an empty mountain. Though some of the rich people were getting these permits through an illegal ways. And about how Doha became a municipality, that was through an initiative from Mr. Ahmad Ma’aly, one of the residents in the city. It was the first municipality estab-*

*lished in the West Bank, and I'm working here since the beginning of the municipality."*

– ph. Brave New Alps



The Mayor added:

*"If you want an oral history, anybody can tell you anything, but there is an official history. We lived in Dheisheh and there was nothing called Doha. There was Beit Jala, Irtas, Al-Khader and Bethlehem until 1977. Before that year this area was almost empty except some families were living here, they were people from al-Jora village and from the Zawahara family, also some people from Ras Abu Ammar village. They were very few people living here."*

Here we notice that people in Doha are trying to find any way to link the city with the camp, which represented them first and foremost. At the official level, there is a dispute on this idea of linking and this is what I noticed through the interview with the Mayor, as he is a refugee that lived in Dheisheh camp.

*"If you want the etymology of Doha, it became known as Doha in 1977, officially the Beit Jala city borders were until Irtas, Al-Khader and Bethlehem. And until now the name of Doha in the structural plan of the Palestinian Authority is Beit Jala, when they send an official paper for us as a municipality they write Doha – Beit Jala. And this area was named after Doha City in Qatar, because they donated to pave the main street which connects Doha with Beit Jala. Before that it was supposed to be the Al-Husain suburb. But 1977 Bshara Dawod, with cooperation with the PLO, went to Qatar and they got \$500,000 as a donation and they used it to pave the main street as I said before. Doha was supposed to be an industrial zone for Beit Jala, and in 1978 the municipality of Beit Jala started to open the streets which are connecting Doha with*

*Beit Jala. This area stayed until 1996 without services...until the Doha Municipality was established through an initiative by Mr. Ahmad Ma'aly."*

---

01

---

# THE CITY AND ITS RELATIONS

## Doha and UNRWA

Since most of the residents of this city are refugees, most of them are also from Dheisheh refugee camp and other camps. What is the relation between them and UNRWA and does UNRWA provide any kind of services to them similar to the other refugees who live in the refugee camps? Answering such questions is necessary to complete this case study and to know more about the presence of the identity of the camp in the city's, and also to know more about the ability of the new city to represent the national values that have been protected and defended by the camp.

As the Mayor said with regards to this subject:

*“There was an attempt in 1992, and it was about trying to build a school for our students in Doha since we didn't have a municipality to do that for us. Our children were going to the UNRWA schools in Dheisheh, and they were big numbers. And the UNRWA should serve the refugees wherever they are, also they give services for Al-Ramaden village and Bat-tir, not only in the refugee camps. From this point*



*of view we tried to contact with UNRWA, and they refused to help us in any way. And we didn't receive any kind of services from them."*

Additionally, Hajj Nemer said:

*"We were taking our services from the UNRWA office in Bethlehem, and after a long time we moved to take these services from the UNRWA services in Dheisheh refugee camp."*

## Affiliation and the Social Relations

Affiliation is a major issue that emerges from the extent of our association and our love of Palestine, and the extent of our connection with our usurped land and territories. With regards to the refugees who live in Doha, their affiliation to the city should also be considered. The response about this question was varied, but most of the answers attributed the move to and life in Doha to special situations. It was afforded no meaning on their history or their main status as refugees.

Some of them said that Doha is a place which has more privacy, in contrast with the houses in the camp that are overcrowded and contiguous. Someone else said that his relationship with the city is the dead part of his day; he goes to it at the end of the day only. Another said he was born in the city and his friends are in the city and this is his relation with city, and he adds that the camp is his authority, not because it's the camp, but because it is the place that represents the continuing case of the refugees. In this case the existence of the camp as a reference does not detract from the value of the city of Doha.

The social relations between the people who live in Doha and the city does not appear strongly, and there were no indications of links between refugees who live in the city itself also. They consider the city as a transitional phase - not more than that - and they are waiting in the city of Doha as their current situation, as they wait for another phase, which is there right of return.

*The angry driver replies: We are close to our last stop, get ready to leave...  
They scream: We want what is beyond the station, so go...  
As for me, I say: Drop me here. I am like them, nothing impresses me. But I am tired from traveling.*

– Mahmoud Darwish

**THE REFUGEES WHO LIVE IN DOHA VIEW THE CAMP AS THE REAL PLACE AND AS CLOSER TO THEIR HOMELANDS AND THE RIGHT OF RETURN THAN THE CITY.**

As I mentioned before, the refugees who live in Doha looking at the camp as the real and the closest point to the

right of return and to their homeland than the city -Doha- , the city it is the transitional state of mind, which they live by being refugees coming from this or that camp. Doha is another place where the refugees have moved to search for privacy and a better

way of life than the situation in the camp. Perhaps they didn't find any place to go, or they wanted to stay close to the camp.

There are several explanations and arguments about this correlation between the camp and Doha. Living in Doha or any other place outside the camp do not make the refugees forgive or forgot their refugee status or their identity. The social relations in Doha city are somehow weak relations. They are not strong like the social relations in Dheisheh refugee camp due to several reasons. The most important of these reasons is the social mixture present in the city, which consists of several categories. The refugees are the majority, coming from several camps, namely those camps in Bethlehem and some of the camps in Hebron which is adjacent to Bethlehem. There are also people who came to live in the city from several cities and counties in the West Bank. They are mostly businessmen and shop owners, and they have commercial interests in Doha because the city classified as industrial zone, as mentioned previously in the historical narrative of the city.

Maybe the poor relations in the city can also be ascribed to the lack of neighbors. This doesn't mean that there are no neighbors but the idea is that the neighbors do not know each other very well. If there are neighbors, they will be as new neighbors, every week and every month, there are new dwellings in this city.

This social mixture has not formulated a social fabric in the city. There are no memories of place attached with the streets and neighborhoods as has taken place in the camp. This does not mean that there are no relations between the residents of the city. However, these relations, despite their existence, are few and limited. They are inadequate to form a common identity inside the city.

## **The social mixture has not formulated a social fabric in the city.**

“

*Also in the terms 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 the 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.”*

(Naba' Al Assi, *The refugee camp and the refugee city*, from the Collective Dictionary COMMON 1)

One person interviewed said, “Each one of the residents of the city is living independently and there is no social gathering such as the camp.” Some other respondents said that Doha city is a “big garage” which combines all industries. In the city there are a lot of industrial workshops, factories, and shops. It is a good place for commerce and investment for many businessmen and investors. When you go around the city particularly in some neighborhoods, you cannot differentiate between the residential and industrial areas - between each house and the other, there is a car workshop, carpentry, etc.



– ph. Brave New Alps



Doha

— ph Brave New Alps

Dheisheh

## The political movement

Doha is like any other city or village. In the city there are people, individuals, and groups formed by all the Palestinian parties and there are municipal elections. The difference here is the majority of the residents in the city are refugees, so it is these refugees who live in the city that lead the political process.

Perhaps it is important to say that the political movement in Doha is not that strong in terms of interaction with the national events. The only days that you can see that there is a real movement are only during the elections days, when the electoral competition is more about representing the refugees politically in the municipality and to show their power in the city.

The Director of Dheisheh camp, in an interview about the city, told us that during the days of the elections in Doha, he goes to support and to encourage the

candidates there, especially as his brother was one of the candidates. This applies not only for him but also for many refugees who live in the refugee camps, especially Dheisheh camp. There is a form we can describe as a network that interconnects between the camps and Doha. The candidates in the city have relatives and friends in the refugee camps, and this is what makes these relatives and friends go to the city in the days of the elections. Even though they cannot vote, they are going to boost morale and encouragement. I believe that this concern by the people of the camp in the days of the elections is a kind of determination and illustrates that refugees are able to lead themselves, creating various forms of leadership in all areas. It shows that they are not weak at all.

As for the interaction with national and political events inside the city, here the process becomes inverted. Inhabitants from the city go to the camp to express themselves and to participate in these events, on the grounds that the camp is a real body that represents them and that the camp is the custodian of the refugee concerns. On the other hand it is kind of supporting the camp at the political level, which

should appear in a strong way towards the Palestinian community. It should show the representation of the refugees in the street and the extent of their ability to make the political decisions at the national level. Dheisheh refugee camp has always been characterized as a source for political decisions in particular way as the other big camps in the West Bank and those in exile.

## Representing refugees

There is no popular committee in Doha, as in the camps, and there were many attempts to create such a committee in Doha. There were also many attempts to build an UNRWA school for the students in Doha, but nothing happened according to the laws of the UNRWA and the PLO.

The mayor said, “We are trying to create this committee like the other committees in the camps, 70% from the population in Doha city are refugees. Why don’t they have such a committee? The PLO and the other popular committees are against this, and as I said we are still trying to do it but we haven’t succeeded yet.”

We can see here that the refugees in Doha still cling to the idea of representing themselves in the same ways like the refugees in the camps. The question here is why the refugees in Doha want to create the popular committee? And is this a kind of separation between the city and the camp?

What is behind the claiming to establish a popular committee in Doha? Is it just a way to represent the refugees in Doha? As the Mayor said, “Establishing



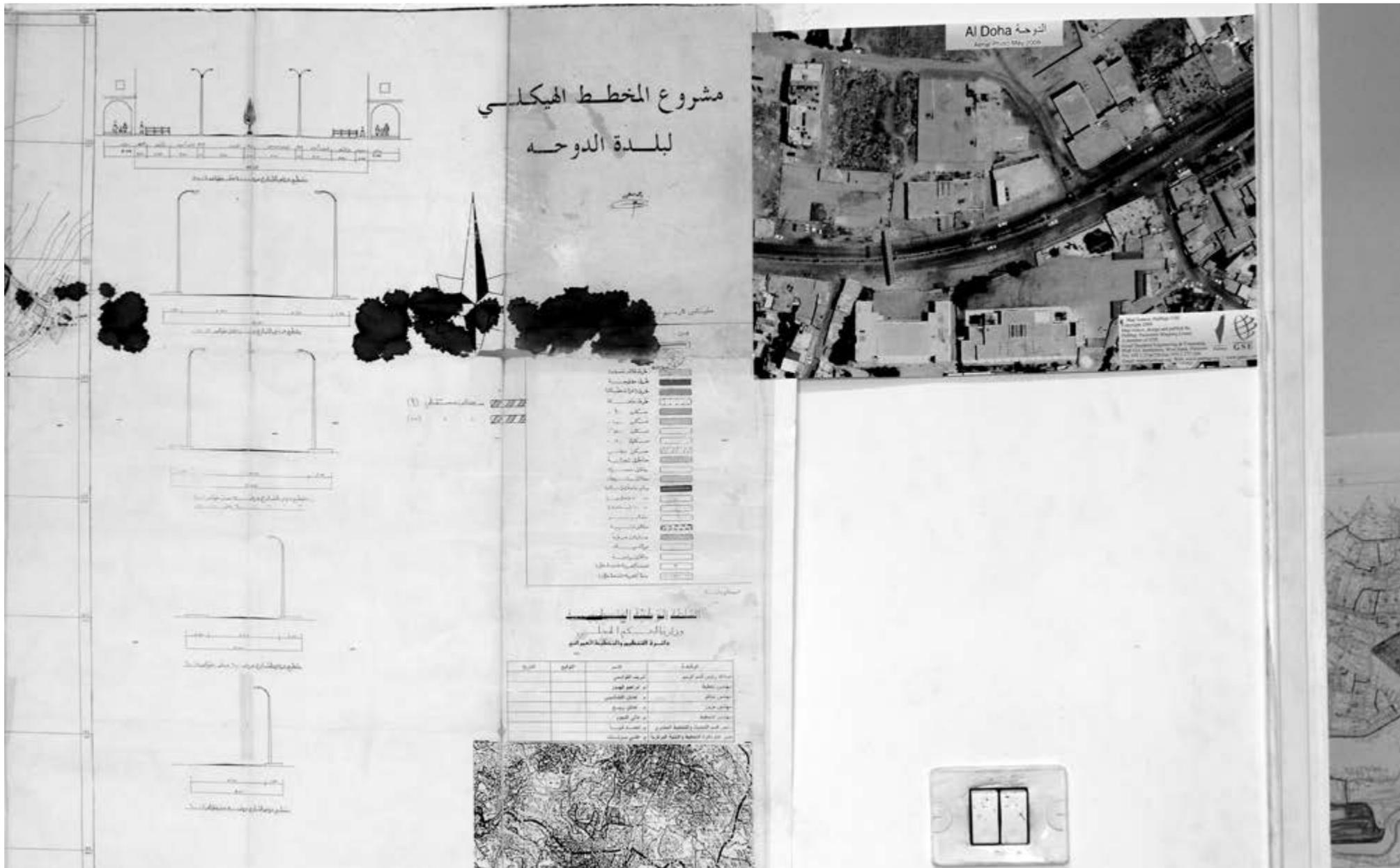
a popular committee in Doha is not about getting services, because we have the municipality which provides the services. What we need is to show the refugee identity of the city, and to represent the refugees in the city.”

I believe that establishing a popular committee is just a way to resemble with the camp, and to deepen the common factors with the newly born cities, like Doha, and the refugee camps. My point of view and according to the law and the definition of the popular committees in the camps,

### **WHY THE REFUGEES IN DOHA WANT TO CREATE A POPULAR COMMITTEE?**

are that these committees are for providing services only.

There is no role for it in the political representation for refugees. There were many suggestions and discussions about how to show the refugees as founders of this city.



Doha Municipality office

– ph. Sara Pellegrini

---

02

---

# REFLECTIONS



## The Camp and the City, the Center and the Expansion

*“For sure, I cannot forget Dheisheh camp. The camp has many advantages and disadvantages. You all know about the mess there, but Dheisheh is the first place we lived in after the Nakba and we had a lot of memories there. Even though we left the camp, we still have strong attachments to the place, and we have relatives, and friends. We share with them happiness and sadness.”*  
(Haji Nemer)



Doha from Dheisheh

— ph. Brave New Alps

For some people the relationship with the camp has shrunk. I think that every one of them has a job or a business. Some of them managed to form new relationships. Even so, the relationship with the camp is stronger than the one in the city.

The Doha Mayor pointed out:

*“The connection with the camp gradually regressed as new opportunities and relationships*

*have been formulated in this city. However, I feel comfortable when I go to Dheisheh to visit my family and friends. When I walk through its alleys, I feel completely different. The living memories and stories always come to my mind. I am more attached to Dheisheh camp than Doha, although I have been living here since 25 years. The wide social bonds extending from Dheisheh have helped me to be elected as the Mayor of Doha city. When I go to Dheisheh, I feel the difference. For example*

*if someone dies or gets married, people in Dheisheh stand beside each other and help each other more than here. People who lived in Dheisheh are the same ones who are living in Doha; but the only change is the place and the life style. My behavior changes when I am at Dheisheh. I deal with people in a different way. Until now, Doha has a defect in the relationships and harmony between people. The interaction with the daily events is stronger in Dheisheh than in Doha.”*

The refugees living in Doha still belong to their camps more so than the city. This affiliation is seen in certain aspects. As someone said,

*“Doha is better in terms of space, but it is without the spirit I feel in the camp. The camp gives me a sense of the refugees’ issue. I cannot sit in the street as I sit in the streets of the camp. I don’t know a lot of people who live in Doha. It is a city of refugees, but without the spirit existing in the camp.”*

Thus, living in Doha city, or anywhere else outside the camp, does not make these people forget the refugee issue and status.

## The village, the camp, the city

In the beginning of this study, there was a perception that Doha is a new city and perhaps the first municipality that received recognition after the existence of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. This city is a special case and carries a special status in many ways. We wanted to go deep through our study by conducting several meetings and interviews with the inhabitants of the city. Particularly, this city can be considered as refugee-made city, which was built by the refugees coming from Dheisheh camp and other camps. Then, many people started to move towards it from different places in the West Bank particularly from the surrounding areas.

What caught my attention during this research is that the refugees in this city are still linking themselves to the camp. They continually present themselves as a refugees from this or that camp and they live in Doha. At the beginning of this research, there was a hypothesis that there existed a kind of ingratitude from the people who moved from the camp to



Dheisheh

— ph Brave New Alps

Doha

live in the city. However it was later seen that the relation between the people and their camps is not only present, but is still an essential signifier of their identity. This made the hypothesis mistaken.

For some of the people who live there, Doha is the second point of proximity to their destroyed villages and their national values. Therefore they associate themselves to the camp as the first point, which is closer to the country and the right of return, Their status as a refugee did not part from them. Even if they moved to the city, they are still connected to the camp, despite the fact that the camp is still suffering from a lot of problems.

I may here refer to my personal experience toward the camp. I am a refugee from a village called Ajjour, occupied in 1948. I wasn't born in the camp, but my family lived in the camp before I was born. I used to go to the camp with my family. There, were my relatives, friends and the homes of the families of my friends.

Most of the time for me was in the camp. I studied in UNRWA schools in Dheisheh refugee camp. Every morning I carried my heavy bag and went to school. Afterward I returned to the house of one of my relatives in the camp waiting there and playing with my friends. Then I would go back to the house in Doha.

This situation and the daily practice made me close to the camp more than my connection to the city. In the city I did not have friends and, if I did, they were mostly originally from the camp anyway. Every time there was a political event or anniversary of a tragedy of the Palestinian people, I did not see an interaction or reaction by the people in the city. Rather, the momentum was in the interactive camp –Dheisheh camp. It was there that we went to participate in these events.

This condition persists with me until this day. What I see in the city is a good place to live. But it is without a spirit and has less social relations between the residents there. The spirit of the camp does not exist in the city, despite the fact that most of the population lived in the camp before they moved to the city. However, they didn't use the city as a place to meet, on the contrary, the camp was still considered the space for socialization.

In one way or another, the spirit and the values of the camp are still present in the hearts of those who live the city of refugees. But this does not show in their behavior in the city; it appears strongly in the camp.

## Refugee and a city, refuge and affiliation

Doha city as a place to live did not change the status of the refugee and make him forget his about belonging to his origin and the right to return. It also did not separate him from his camp where he grew up and spent his childhood days.

The common conception of Palestinian refugee is that they reside within refugee populations in Palestinian refugee camps located inside Palestine and in surrounding countries - Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. But in fact, there are large numbers of Palestinian refugees who have moved to live outside the camps and there are those who have never lived in these camps whether there was a move outside of the camp or not. These two cases did not affect the refugees' right of return and their status as refugees.

A change in the lifestyle and conditions of the Palestinian refugee did not make him forget his identity as a refugee. It did not encourage him to lose his rights to struggle and demand his return to his

original land from 1948 or 1967. It is known that there are Palestinian refugees deported every day as the process of displacement and exile did not stop in 1967. There are numerous cases that continue as a result of Israeli practices. For example, is the situation of Palestinians who live in Jerusalem. Every day there are demolitions of houses and/or forced evictions from houses. Also, this pattern is seen in the lives of the Jahalin Bedouins and others, expelled and chased, displaced and humiliated by the Israelis.

The Palestinian refugees have developed themselves and their lifestyle. They move everywhere in the world,; they build their own houses, they establish their own business projects, and sometimes there life conditions are better than the people who didn't left their villages and lands. One such example are the refugees that live in Doha city. It is the first city that was built by the refugees, and now they are leading the city and the municipality.

What is the identity of the refugees who lives outside the camp? Are they citizens? Or refugee citizens? Or are they are in a transitional phase to determine their fate and their identity embodied by their own spirit that is far away from those strange definitions imposed on them as Palestinians? The refugee who has moved to live outside the camp - he has his own identity and his own existence, represented in the ongoing case for refuge until the right of return and self-determination.

---

03

---

**OTHER  
FORMS OF  
REPRESENTATION**

## Doha as another representation of refugees?

This is the main question that we should try to answer and in a way that corresponds to the existing reality in the city. We must take into account all the circumstances and the specific situation that has prevailed in the city. For example its unique social mixture as residents are from different refugee camps and different cities of the West Bank, they are refugees and non-refugees. The economic, social and political situation of the city should also be considered.

A walker in the streets of Doha and its neighborhoods cannot find something that really reveals that refugees living there. Even at the level of those writings that we are used to seeing on the walls in the camps; they are almost hidden in the city. As I mentioned earlier the political movement in the city is somehow is weak.

Through several discussions, attempts were made to find an optimal way to show a new identity for this city that embodies its situation, namely that it is a city where the vast majority of the residents are refugees. Thoughts converged on two issues and two initiatives.

## 01 | Renaming the streets

The first centers on renaming the streets in Doha, where the streets in the city have names, but these names are unrecognized by the people. Most of these names don't have a direct relation with the national values or the refugees. The idea is to rename the streets with the names of the cities, villages and monuments, which were occupied in 1948 or with some of the famous Palestinian Martyrs. Further, it was thought to make consultative meetings with the people who live in these streets and discuss the most appropriate and best name for each street.

People did not settle in Doha according to their village of origin, or even to their camp. Rather each street includes a mix of refugees from different camps and villages. This situation suggests it is better to consult and meet with people, to make them agree on the name of the street in a way that suits all of them on a common basis of cooperation and mutual understanding.

Another idea is to place a picture for the name of the street in the same label. The thinking is that this might be a new way to represent the national values of the refugees in Doha.



The main entrance of Dheisheh refugee camp

– ph. Brave New Alps



One of the main entrances of Doha

– ph. Brave New Alps



Street in Doha



Street in Dheisheh

– ph. Brave New Alps

## 02 | Activating Nawras Center

Nawras Center is a huge building which contains several departments, like the public library, computer lab, and the big hall. There is no activities which take place there from the people in Doha. The idea is to richen the social fabric and the social relations between the people in Doha through activities held at the Nawras Center.

Through the interviews that we made with people in Doha, we discovered that they want to meet and have forums which could give them the opportunity to get together and discuss their issues and their situation.

This desire was evident especially from the youth level in Doha. Some of them complained about the lack of space or common and public spaces. Yet, some of them do not know about Nawras and that they could go and meet there.

The idea now is to intervene in the Center with a group of people, making it a space to meet and discuss the possibility of creating a forum. Nawras could be a place through which to create a forum, to be activated by the power of the people themselves. Those people who now reside in the city.



Nawras Center

— ph. Brave New Alps



Gated public park in Doha

— ph. Brave New Alps



## How to get involved

THE MUNICIPALITY. EXPERIMENTS IN URBANITY

[www.campusincamps.ps/projects/o8-the-municipality](http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/o8-the-municipality)

[naba.lassi@campusincamps.ps](mailto:naba.lassi@campusincamps.ps)

for any information

[info@campusincamps.ps](mailto:info@campusincamps.ps)

## 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.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR  
Alessandro Petti

IN COLLABORATION WITH  
Sandi Hilal (UNRWA, Camp Improvement Program)

PARTICIPANTS  
Qussay Abu Aker, Alaa Al Homouz, Saleh Khannah, Ahmad Al Lahham, Aysar Al Saifi, Bisan Al Jaffarri, Nedaa Hamouz, Naba' Al Assi, Isshaq Al Barbary, Ayat Al Turshan, Murad Odeh

MENTORS  
Munir Fasheh, Michel Agier, Ilana Feldman, Tareq Hamam, Ruba Saleh, Thomas Keenan, Ayman Khalifah

PROJECT TEAM  
Dena Qaddumi, Yasser Hemadan, Ala Juma, Tamara Abu Laban, Diego Segatto

PROJECT ACTIVATORS  
Brave New Alps, Matteo Guidi, Sara Pellegrini, Giuliana Racco

ENGLISH AND ARABIC INSTRUCTORS  
Tala Abu Rahme, Thea Piltzecker, Daniel McKenzie, Iman Simon, Samih Faraj

VISITORS  
Sari Hanafi, Khaldun Bshara, Vivien Sansour, Linda Quiquixiv, Manuel Herz, Beatrice Catanzaro, Basel Abbas, Ruane Abou-Rhame, Gudrun Kramer, Wilfried Graf, Tariq Dana, Felicity D. Scott, Mohammed Jabali, Moukhtar Kocache, Hanan Toukan, Shadi Chaleshtoori, Jeffrey Champlin, C.K. Raju, Fernando Rampérez, Emilio Dabed, Samer Abdelnour

GIZ TEAM  
Gudrun Kramer, Jonas Geith, Thomas Ernstbrunner, Rola Tamreh

Al Feniq Cultural Center, Dheisheh Refugee Camp  
Bethlehem - Palestine

*Campus in Camps is a program by Al Quds University (Al Quds/Bard Partnership) and hosted by the Phoenix Center in Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem. It is implemented with the support of the German Government through the GIZ Regional Social and Cultural Fund for Palestinian Refugees and Gaza Population, in cooperation with UNRWA Camp Improvement Program and in coordination with the Popular Committees of Southern West Bank Refugee Camps.*

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



المدينة في المخيم  
جامعات في المخيم

INITIATIVES

The Municipality. Experiments in urbanity

TEXT EDITING

Ayman Khalifah, Dena Qaddumi

BOOK DESIGN AND PHOTO EDITING

Sara Pellegrini

COVER PHOTO

Brave New Alps

EDITION

Printed in June 2013

COPYLEFT

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported

Used fonts: Junction by Caroline Hadilaksono

(The League of Movable Type - distributed under Open Font Licence)



