

Campus in Camps
INITIATIVES



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18.06.2013

07

THE STADIUM

Sustaining relations



كيمبوس في كيمبوس
جامعة في المخيم

Campus in Camps
INITIATIVES

THE STADIUM

Sustaining relations

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AL ARROUB REFUGEE CAMP

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

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Stadium & women

The Arroub Stadium stands on a hill that is facing Arroub camp. It is not far from the camp, maybe 10 minutes walking. The idea of building the stadium had grown from an initiative by the Popular Committee in Arroub refugee camp. They had wanted to build something for their community to respond to the lack of space and activities and the lack of public places. They decided to dig into a rugged hill adjacent to the camp, in order to build a stadium. The hill is categorized as part of Area C, and therefore under Israeli control, making it almost impossible to construct anything there, let alone a stadium. Building on this hill was in clear defiance of these restrictions.

Drilling began during the period of the Gaza War in the winter of 2008-2009. The Israeli forces were thus busy, allowing a certain period for such an action. The construction of the stadium was seen by some people in the camp as 'crazy work', because of the sheer size and



The stadium

The park

magnitude of the hill and the amount of drilling required to create a level ground.

Ahmed Abu Khiran, the Head of the Popular Committee in Arroub camp stressed on this point in a meeting, saying:

“The challenge was launched by the people’s will because, if they were to leave the hill, the Israeli occupation forces would take it over and may adopt settlements or watchtowers. Rather it was us that took advantage of the place.”



The stadium, October 2011

— ph. Haishu Chen



Now, after the near-completion of construction of the stadium, it is the only public place in the camp. Despite the presence of some places for relaxing in the camp, they are not considered as common places, because they are only accessible through paying a small fee.

The idea of public place is very important for people in Arroub camp because it is overcrowded and has a high population density. In addition, the common was a basic concept for building a camp. Beside the stadium there is a wide area designed to be a park for families. It is filled with trees, like a forest. There are a few seats with tables and a small area for children to play, where the shape of greenery and trees are relaxing because such nature and landscape are missing in the camp. This area was built in cooperation with UNRWA’s Camp Improvement Program. Yet, the entire stadium is still under construction. The center of the stadium is still an unfinished dirt area surrounded by a circular paved sidewalk. At first, when you enter the stadium you feel out of the camp’s borders, and in a neutral public



place. Despite the non-completion of the stadium and the lack of public services, the space means a lot to the people of Arroub camp.

“

“Despite three demolition orders, the seating area, surrounding fence and goal posts of the stadium near Arroub are being installed and an adjacent park is being developed. This story goes beyond questions as to who “owns” the land, looking at what kind of actions can be taken to make areas more accessible and enjoyable for the locals. It also demonstrates the power of persistence.”

(Giuliana Racco, *Who owns the hills?*, from the Collective Dictionary OWNERSHIP)

The park next to the stadium gives a chance for families to be in the place for a walk or even to sit down outside the camp. Also, this park helps people to accept the idea of the presence of women in public space, thus opening the way for women to think about the possibility of the use of the stadium in a way which suits their needs. The garden allowed the possibility for children to access the space, and also the opportunity to avoid playing in dangerous plac-



The park

es, such as the streets or even in the alleys of the camp, which restrict movement and where noise could irritate the neighbors. In the beginning, there was an iron barrier between the stadium and the garden. Essentially, they were disconnected. However, the Popular Committee has now connected with the park with the stadium, making it a more attractive place for families and residents of the camp in general.

The view of the stadium distinguishes it from other places, because it is the only place where



The camp

— ph. Dena Qaddumi

you can see the camp. Usually this kind of view is associated and reserved for settlements. Its existence in this place emphasizes the importance of its challenge. When I talked with the people in the stadium, one told me: “For me, return is a big dream, it means continuing life until the return.” Another lady told me, “When I look at the field of the camp, I see the suffering of 65 years; I see Jerusalem and the sea and the villages and all the destroyed villages because the view from the stadium reminds me of them.” This is how the stadium emphasize-

es the importance of reviving place, meaning that there was a perspective from people that improving life in the camp does not limit the insistence of the right of return. Rather, the construction of the stadium emphasizes this desire and determination of people to live in dignity until they return. Other people believe that the improvement of life inside the camp, could be contrary to return. One woman said to me: "When I see the camp from the stadium, I see that this is not where I am, my place is my land and my village and my home, it is not a refugee camp."

"I was talking with my neighbor, and she decided to go with me to the stadium. I could walk fast there, which I can't do in the camp, due to the lack of space. In the beginning, all people started talking about me, because they thought it was not good practice in the camp. But I began to convince my neighbors of the importance and beauty of the place and their ability to make sport and walk in it. The first few times I went to the stadium, I would take my neighbors with me, Then I took my girlfriend and my girlfriend brought her friend until we became 10 women who went every day to the stadium for walking."

– Hanan



Women began to use the stadium January 2013.

This idea came from Mrs. Hanan, 33-year-old who suffered from overweight that had impacted on her health. Her doctor had asked her to walk to try to alleviate the weight.

When discussing this topic with women in the stadium, they spoke about the importance of the place for them compared with men, Women have less chance than men to sit in public space in Arroub camp. Mrs. Fatima, 40 years said,

"I felt when I started to go to the stadium that I liked it very much. It is like sitting in paradise, but I felt like I will lose it because I can't be here permanently. Lots of people speak about us, but we continue this sport. We have no right to walk or go out, but men can come out wherever they want."



– ph. Giuliana Racco

01

REFLECTIONS

Stadium as potential

When we mention a stadium, the first thing that comes to our minds is a group of young men playing football or another sports in it. The women of Arroub have been able to reform and question this idea, using the stadium in a way that is commensurate with their needs and circumstances. They refused a stereotype, which only focuses on the presence of men who would use the stadium for sports and hiking. Through their strong will, these women have been able to find a fertile ground for many ideas that attracted me to work with them, to exchange our knowledge and work for a common vision that we share.

Before I arrived to this conclusion I was thinking to apply my initiatives anywhere. I was not as interested in the

character of the place and its impact on everything around it. The idea itself was what I was most concerned with. Then, during my research and visits to study the situation in Arroub camp, I discovered that before applying the ideas that I believed in, I would have to find the appropriate environment commensurate with it, in order to reap the fruits of ideas on the ground. When I met with women in Arroub, I felt that there was a significant correlation between the story of building the stadium and the story of women to challenge the environment.

During the first meetings and discussions we were able to exchange the experiences of this matter. We needed to experiment, to get out of the daily routine. The idea of building the stadium is a bold action, which came out of common and collective will, and women in the camp are a part of its significance.

Linking ideas and action. Knowledge, participation, sustainability

The first year of Campus in Camps greatly impacted me, both in terms of research and questioning everything that surrounds us, as well as at the level of exercising the ideas in which we believe. When we started to think about the initiatives and how they should be applied in the camps, many projects came to my mind, which stemmed from dreams based on my life in the camp that I had wished to work on since childhood.

As I got older my dreams changed with my studies, but when became a part of Campus in Camps my thoughts returned to activate my dreams on the current reality. Through my research in the terminologies of the Collective Dictionary, I learned and discovered a lot of stuff with my colleagues, which made me discover the reality around me in a deeper way. Through this work on many terms evolved the idea of reusing, linking this term with the refugees'

life. I found that many of the habits and beautiful things started to disappear from the life of the camp, things that were considered the basis of its construction and existence. From this I developed the idea of my initiatives to focus on enhancing all that is beautiful and useful both in terms of the tangible and non-tangible (such as good habits that have ceased to exist).

Through the Collective Dictionary, I worked on 3 other terms - *knowledge*, *participation*, and *sustainability*. This work was not limited to the language, but was an act connected to the community through visits and interviews.

Through research on the term "knowledge" I thought of the sources of knowledge for people. Generally I discovered that knowledge comes through experience. The sources of knowledge inside the camp that I found the most important was that of the first generation of refugees. They lived the experience and they lived the story. They are the first generation in the camp, the generation that built the camp, and the generation who lived together through practicing the communal habits and culture that have later disappeared.

The second term, "participation" or *Al-O'una*, was one of the most important foundations and sources

of the camp. It is a term that people previously built their lives and realities on. People used to share sadness and happiness together. When a woman had given birth, the other women in the camp used to divide themselves into groups to support her. One group would prepare food while another group took care of the mother and another group took care of the newborn. Still another would clean the house. Men and women cooperated in all events; they used to meet in the yard and cook and arrange for weddings or for condolences.

All of these habits always linked with the common places and the terms I looked into. They expressed the ideas that were the basis for the existence of the camp. The ideas that no longer exist.

This traditional culture came with people from their original villages, where the people would use this land for planting and harvest prior to 1948. When the people arrived to the camp they suffered from nostalgia and longing for this land and their villages. They applied this nostalgia to life in the camp, continuing their lifestyle and habits. These important things and the longing that emerged from them built a new world called the camp.

The return is to continue *this* life.

When I started looking for a meaning for the term "sustainability" and how it was used in the camp, I found out that there was nothing truly sustainable in the camp, except the social relationships that were built inside it. For example, traditions and customs associated with weddings, and the relationships that created a special and unique social atmosphere. Unfortunately, even social relationships are not like they were before. They, too, have begun to disappear as life is developing and its style changing.



I started thinking about an initiative that suits this temporary place. Refugees' presence in the camp is not permanent. It also does not mean living in this temporary place without taking into consideration

all of the basics to build it. I linked this initiative with the things that we use in our daily life, as we tend to use these things and forget about them the next day. The "Re-using" initiative focuses on recycling used materials and reusing them in a new way. It will aim to serve the people's needs. However, I used three different concepts: Knowledge, Participation, and Sustainability. These concepts remind us of the first generation and social relationships.

As a result, I felt that it is part of my responsibility to not only create something new, but also to strengthen the basic things that built the refugee community from the start. I chose this idea because I wanted to embody the reality of the rhythm of this temporary place.

But... *sustainability* of what?

1. **SUSTAINABILITY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS**
to build strong and sustainable social relationships

2. **SUSTAINABILITY OF PLACE**
to form an open public place for groups

3. **SUSTAINABILITY OF MATERIALS**
to recycle materials to benefit people's lifestyle and needs

02

ACTIONS

Building relationships between people of Al Arroub refugee camp

At the beginning of the second year of Campus in Camps, I started continually going to the Stadium of Al Arroub camp, talking to people there, getting to know the environment there, and realizing the situation of the women who live inside the camp, the importance of public space, the way people look at the private and the public spaces, and their limitations.

Since the first meeting with the women of Al Arroub refugee camp, I was able to create strong relationships with them, and we began to continually meet and walk in the Stadium. We talked about the different issues that women faced in the camp. They also told me their need to have their own activities, and places in which they can learn, gain

experience, and skills for their daily lives. They talked about their need for a place to gather, meet and talk with each other. We met in the playground and the women felt free and comfortable, but this feeling quickly disappeared when the youth and men started gathering in the playground and harassing the women. Women became hesitant to stay in the playground and from my own experience there, I felt how the community looked at women present in such places or any other places where men are there. I also understood the intrinsic nature of the dialectic issues in the camp. The space is limited to men. The idea of a woman in the space does not fit within the thoughts concerning all aspects of a woman's general life. I remembered my conversation with my grandmother, and even my mother about the life of women and their presence in the public places in the old days. When I heard that the previous generations were able to freely be present in such places, I was motivated to develop my idea even more.

March 20, 2013

A meeting with the Popular Committee

I went to meet to the public committee in the camp to talk about my initiative in the stadium. I showed them that I was excited about the idea. I talked about working in Al Arroub camp and my deep commitment to empowering women to be able to be in the stadium without fear. The public committee, represented by Ahmad Abu Khiran, welcomed the idea and expressed their love and excitement to empower women and end the harassment that women face daily. They said that women should feel free and comfortable.

Ahmad Abu Khiran told me Arroub refugee camp needs such an initiative. He said that he could give the women a space in the playground. I concluded that there is popular energy that does not need external support or international funders. We only need to find someone who truly believes in the idea.

April 3, 2012

We agreed that he would present the background of the stadium in a public session through Campus in Camps. It was entitled *Community Spaces in Arroub: Challenges and Collective Action*. At this event he described how the stadium was created and its importance. Their goal had been to not only create a playground, but also to use it in the best possible way. He concluded:

“This stadium is not only for the residents of Arroub Camp, but it is a space for all people. This place will make the people feel pride and a sense of belonging to the camp. Previously, we used to go to the surrounding villages’ parks for entertainment, and now we have our own.”

A general meeting of women at the office of the Popular Committee



Women were not usually present in the place at the beginning, so I coordinated with the public committee to organize a meeting that included the women of Arroub refugee camp

at the office of public committee. Women came to attend the meeting and we started talking about the initiative. We talked about the main source that made me think of this idea of recycling and reusing. They talked about how women loved the traditions and the ideas of the old days that were used to build the community of the camp. They wondered how the idea had not crossed their minds before.

They talked about how the community looks at their presence in public place, and how they can't go to such places because their husband, father, brother or family rejects such an idea. Women were divided to two groups. The first group encouraged the women's presence at the stadium and its park, stressing the importance of this idea. They encouraged the idea by saying that the men who were present in the playground were also their brothers and relatives and they have the ability to take on the challenge. The second group disagreed with the idea of their presence in the stadium. They refused the idea due to the harassments they faced there and because they were scared of the general look others gave them. After a long and deep discussion about the solutions to avoid this problem, we agreed to write a

formal request to the popular committee and the Director of the refugee camp, expressing the women's need and right to be present in the stadium, and the need to dedicate special hours for families, if necessary, so women can sit and exercise sport freely.

April, 2013

Women`s organizing *Mujaawarah* (neighboring)

In later meetings, women started convincing each other of their need for the stadium, especially after discussing the issue with the UNRWA social workers in the camp. These social workers stressed the women's need to have such a place for their physical and psychological health. UNRWA social workers gave examples about women who suffered from diabetes and blood pressure because they don't exercise, or do sports and go to such places.

During these meetings, we decided to do some various activities that each woman can benefit from. Suhaila, 30, who works on recycling materials that are often thrown away, talked about her experience. Her speech helped the other women to know more about the idea. Suhaila brought material that she recycled and showed women how she did her work. She encouraged women to



do something similar, and we decided to have more meetings to learn the skills that we all can use in our houses.

It was inspiring to organize with these women because they needed space to sit and talk with each other. Women were able to realize their abilities and gain a higher



self-esteem. They discovered that they could cooperate and strengthen their relationships with each other. In addition, these activities and new ideas helped them to reduce the amount of waste, especially since the camp is overcrowded and there is not enough space.

These actions are a step towards preserving the environment and raising public awareness of its importance. These skills and ideas have impact on our personal lives because through meetings, a woman can do something different from her daily routine. This will reduce the pressure on her and on her daily responsibilities. A woman said to me,

“I am so excited to learn how to recycle some materials because it helps relieve some of my home’s obligation. I can make gifts for my friends and family without the need to pay money. It’s closer to the heart as well because it is done by me.”

Four meetings were held with the Arroub *Mujaawarahh*, and what encouraged me is how the women loved and became passionate about the subject of re-using.

May 6, 2013

Connecting Camps, Fawwar and Arroub

During my participation with the women in the camp, I worked with them to go out from private to public places. Through their presence in a public place, women were able to communicate and do activities with each other. During one of the meetings, I suggested the idea of going to al-Fawwar refugee camp.

The idea was thought of through discussions on the importance of having connections with women from other camps in order to learn more about their experiences, and talk about issues concerns in their daily lives. Women of al-Fawwar refugee camp had participated in previous activities in the public square in the camp. These activities broke the ice and the fear of being in public space. They cooked maftoul (a traditional Palestinian food) in the square and they all had the time to sit and talk with each other in a public place.



On May 6th, we went to al-Fawwar camp to meet with women there. Several issues were discussed. Some of the Fawwar women talked about their experiences in the square in a way to convince other women at Al Arroub refugee camp to take up such a challenge, and have such an experience in a public place. They discussed the meanings of public and private places, the importance and the beliefs surrounding the idea of public spaces. Old

women said that restricting women is not from their traditions; women in the old days were able to do activities in public places, and it was not normal. They used to do mass breakfast meals where women sat and shared foods.

The meeting focused on the idea of linking the initiative with the place, material, sustainability, and social relationships. Women agreed on the importance of this

experience, and to try to dissolve the “taboo” culture. One woman from Al Arroub said,

“This meeting clarified for me that I should not be scared of being in a public place. Public places are important to us in the camp, as there are not enough places for women. We should be united and achieve this goal.”

One of the al-Fawwar women said,

“I never tried to even think about communicating with other women in the camp; I was communicating with women in other places, but this is the first bold experiment that allowed me to understand the circumstances of women in other camps.”

03

THINKING OF THE FUTURE

When I started thinking about the future of this initiative, I found that the path will be long, but there is a possibility to focus on those ideas in the short-term which can pave the way forward. These ideas can be understood as the following:

1.

Sustainability of social relationships

2.

Sustainability of place

3.

Sustainability of material

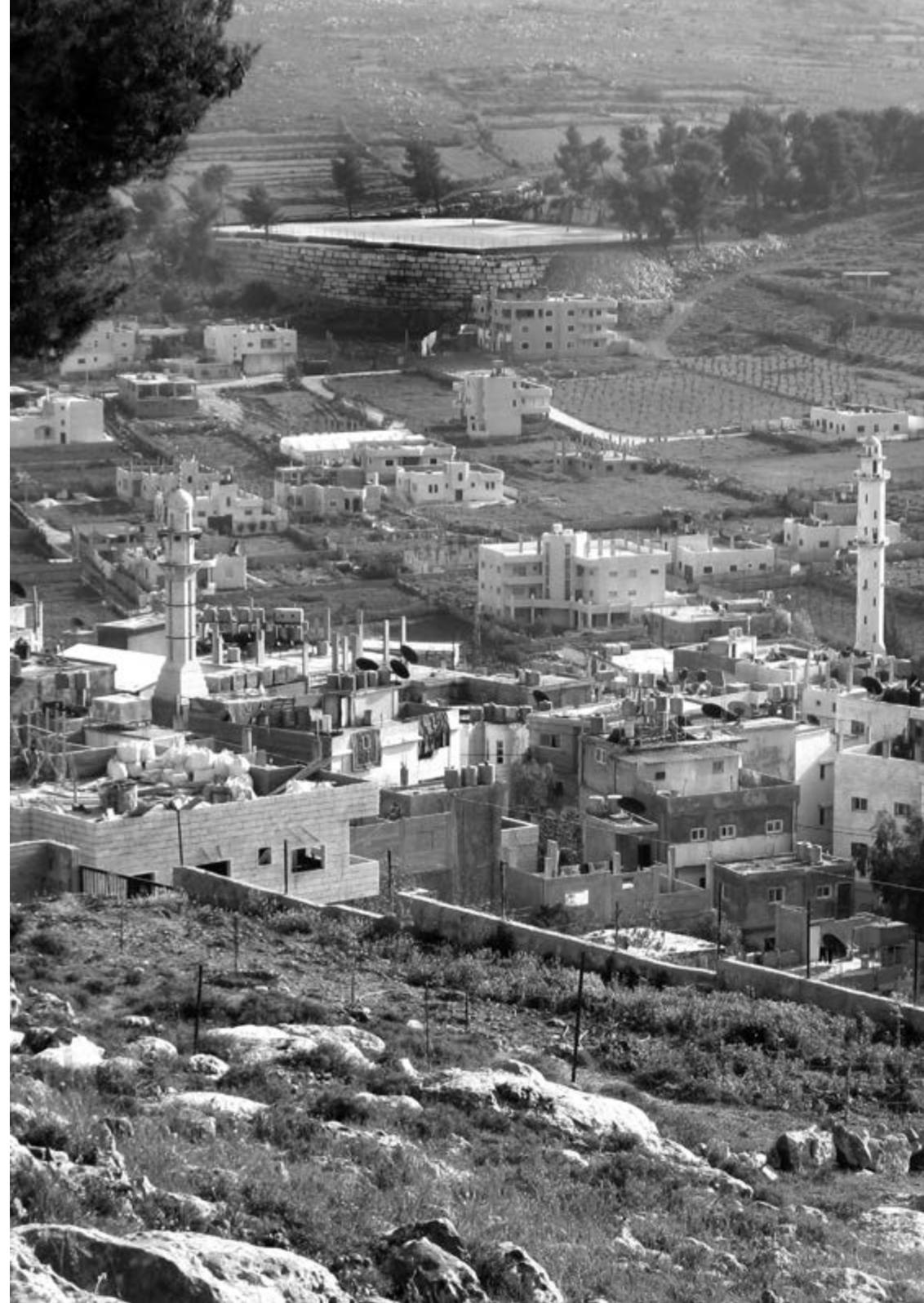
01 | Sustainability of social relationships

As Palestinians, we experience various kinds of occupation: military, political, economic, financial, cultural, and knowledge. We are aware of all except for the occupation of knowledge; in fact, we embraced it and still embrace it. One way to heal from this occupation is to live by the conviction that every person, through our *Mujaawarah* with Muallem Munir Fasheh, is a source of meaning and knowledge; every person is a co-author of meaning. Co-authoring meaning is a right, duty, and natural ability. Like many things that we have faced in our life, such as the Nakba, we implemented what we knew from our time in the village. Similarly, people would sit together to discuss a lot of issues people faced in the camp and through these mujawarat, the people learned more from each other. When I say every person is a source of knowledge I mean here that when we started *Mujaawarah* in Al Arroub I felt that each woman had a different knowledge in different things and that they would like to share this with us.

After these *Mujaawarah* I felt that the women appreciated this interaction, through their asking for the next date for the next *Mujaawarah*, in order to know new things and to have time to speak with people. This includes having meetings with women in other refugee camps like the camps connection with Fawwar camp. This event allowed women to experience different traditions that emerged from the same condition. These women asked me to meet women from other camps as it was the first time in their life to do so, to sustain relationships and share knowledge that has emerged from similar, yet different experiences.

02 | Sustainability of place

For the Palestinian people, place carries a special meaning. It is where we can connect with people and sit freely, something that has been denied us. In Arroub there is a possibility to use the space in the stadium in a way that encourages people to take what they have and re-use and re-form it in other ways. My focus in the next phase is to further this idea in the stadium, to investigate what changes could be made to allow for other activities. One such activity could be a 'marathon' for women in the Bethlehem and Hebron districts, thereby not limiting those that use the space just to women in Arroub or even just refugees.



Sustainability of material

A. CLOTHES AND GARBAGE

As is known the camp is a crowded place, yet it is common to see garbage thrown in its common spaces, making them not clean. In addition the economic situation is very bad for people, so sustaining materials should be in the best interest of the camp. Using these materials can not only be a way to reduce the thrown garbage in the camp, but also a way to save money and possibly even generate income.

Through workshops in Arroub we began to learn about the idea of re-using materials from a woman from the camp. This work came out of her passion and belief in this work. We will follow up from this initial workshop with other activities.

However, more work is needed to integrate these workshops with young men and women. Already there is a small team of young men in the camp who work on the issue of littering under the motto: Trash the Occupation, Not Our Land. We also need to try to invite families to share with them this concept and to help preserve the environment and to make them aware of the importance of recycling such materials.

B. FOOD

Food in the Palestinian community reflects our culture, particularly through the way of cooking. There is an attitude that cooking must happen everyday, so that the food is fresh. This, together with the great amount of food that people cook, in order to be generous, results in a lot of food being thrown away. Due to this there is a preliminary idea to use this material to make a sort of collective compost. One person doing this activity alone would be difficult so it is important to find a way to have a group learn to manage it together. The compost could also be used to beautify the environment through agriculture and vegetation, either in the stadium or in the camp.

The focus on agriculture can even lead to further possibilities to link to organic food production and further awareness on healthy eating and exercise. The stadium seems an appropriate place to hold discussions on this topic.

C. MUSIC

Words in Palestinian songs generally explain a story of Palestinian life and the details of Palestinian history. Music encompasses all of the stages and processes in Palestinian life, including songs about weddings and the time of harvest. Many songs refer to the Nakba in 1948, they speak of about what happened to the refugees and their struggle. The songs give power to people and are able to cross borders, reaching Palestinians everywhere. They are a way to reflect people's sense of themselves.

The method of singing usually has one person repeat a part of the song, interlinked with a group of people another part. Singing is a collective activity that is interactive. One day when I was with some women in Al Arroub, they started singing. I met an older woman who was singing a song about the prisoners. The other women would repeat after her. She would insert names in the song and when I asked her about this she replied:

"I have two sons in Israeli prison and every time when I go to visit him I just sing to myself about this bad situation. One days when I was on the bus going to visit my son in al Ramlah prison, I said to the other women on the bus that we must compose a song for this situation. We spent the whole journey of 4 hours crying for this suffering. After our visit we continued to sing about our feelings

for the prison and those that suffer there. We use this song when the prisoners are on hunger strike, for every occasion about the prisoners. Each time we were just sitting on the street and crying but now we sing a song and we express our feelings about our sons and our suffering from the Israel prison."

In each meeting, women dedicated time for singing. I noticed that all the songs were traditional songs that no one sings these days. This interested me. During one of the meetings, a woman suggested making a music group to revive the traditional Palestinian songs, and rewrite them in a new style that suits the current situation. Today many people like international songs and have forgotten the originality of our songs and their beautiful tune. It is very important for our history to archive this art because it embodies many elements that we need for today.



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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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INITIATIVES

The Stadium. Sustaining relations

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