



Campus in Camps  
INITIATIVES

FINAL DRAFT  
18.06.2013

05

# THE SUBURB

Transgressing boundaries



جامعة القادسية  
UNIVERSITY OF AL-QADISIYAH

Campus in Camps

INITIATIVES

# THE SUBURB

Transgressing boundaries

CONTRIBUTORS

Qussay Abu Aker, Ahmad Al Lahham

---

DHEISHEH 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

12 Notes  
– Ahmad Al Lahham

15 On the ground

## **01 | INTO THE SUBURB**

35 Who owns the land?  
– Qussay Abu Aker

## **02 | QUESTIONS**

68 The questions I have  
– Ahmad Al Lahham

80 My relation with the camp  
– Qussay Abu Aker, Ahmad Al Lahham

Suburb

Dheisheh



– ph. Matteo Guidi

Irtas

*After the 1948 catastrophe (Nakba), Palestinian refugees found themselves gathered in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the other host countries. At that time, refugees were weak, marginalized, tired, and lost. But through the camp life, and continuing until now, they have changed their destiny and their circumstances from being weak to being strong, from being marginalized to leading the society, and from being restricted within the camp boundaries to building new cities and suburbs. There is a new suburb – Dahiyat Al Shuhada [The Martyr's Suburb] – next to Dheisheh camp which is a very clear example of this building.*

*My family has bought a plot of land in the suburb and we are now building a house there. Personally, as a refugee currently living in the camp and moving soon to live in the suburb, it is crucial for me to understand what is happening on the edges*

*of the camp. These boundaries represent a space where we can learn about the camp itself and also about the refugees. Or in other words, it is the mirror of the camp. Through this mirror we can understand both the camp itself from its outside and the new camp societies that are being created in these outside places. In the case of the suburb, for example, 89% of its population are refugees, mainly from Dheisheh. This new refugee gathering outside the camp represents the life of refugees beyond the physical space of the camp.*

*As someone who will soon be leaving the camp to live in Al-Shuhada suburb, this movement is making me think a lot about my refugee status.*

*A key question that comes to my mind is: how can we define the borders of the camp?*

*– Ahmad Al Lahham*

## On the ground

Interview with an inhabitant of Dheisheh refugee camp who is building a new house in the suburb.  
(Dheisheh. December 21, 2012)

**AHMAD** *Why did you decide to live outside the camp?*

F. First of all the family is now bigger and we don't have space to expand inside the camp. We do not have any other space except the house we are living in now. So we could only enlarge outside the camp. This is the fundamental reason.

---

**LEAVING THE CAMP**  
For a lack of space inside the camp

**AHMAD** *Why you did not try to re-build your house here in the way you wish instead of buying land outside?*

F. There is no land to build on here. And whatever I do here, it will remain the same space. I can change something inside the house, but there is no opportunity to enlarge the outdoors.

**AHMAD** *In regard to the political and social dimensions, what does it mean to you to live outside the camp?*

---

The camp as the political ID of refugees

F. The camp should not be the refugees' ID. In the end the camp is only a place like any other: there are refugees living in Nablus, Ramallah, and Hebron and they still keep the refugee status that the international community gave them in 1948. The refugee status came because we left our land and ran away to another place. This place might be Bethlehem or Beit Jala and not Dheisheh. The camp has become the political ID of refugees, but practically, it's like any other place. I mean that if you move outside the camp, this does not mean that you are no longer a refugee, because you are still away from your original land.

**AHMAD** *You are going to be a refugee living in a villa outside the camp. Does this mean anything to you?*

F. What is the problem in that? Now, let's speak about the refugee living in Amman and owning real estate in Amman street - the finest place in Amman. He might own shops there and still remain a refugee. There are refugees in France and Rome. They are refugees despite the place they are living in Europe. There are

refugees in Lebanon, Beirut and at the same time, there are refugees in Sabra and Shatila camps. The place has nothing to do with assigning refugee status to anyone. This is a fundamental status connected to people forced to leave their homeland.

---

Refugeehood as a status despite the place you are living

**AHMAD** *In this regard, which is the difference between living in the Al Shuhada Suburb and living in Doha City?*

F. There is no essential difference. 80% of Doha's population is made up of refugees from Dheisheh, Aida and Al-Arroub camps. If you ask me why I chose the suburb, I would say because the land there is cheaper. If I could afford to buy land in Doha I might live there. There is no big difference, neither from a political perspective nor in the daily life. There might be a difference in term of the services (Doha is a municipality in itself), but your belonging to any municipality does not deny your refugee status.

**AHMAD** *Does the fact that 90% of the population of the suburb is made up of refugees living in villas and very nice houses have any relation to the concept of normalization or tawteen ?*

---

**NORMALIZATION**  
To stop  
suffering does  
not mean  
normalizing

f. Palestinians have been refugees for more than 60 years and on the political horizon as I see it, there is no close perspective to return. Now, in their minds many people associate refugeehood with the camp and suffering. Which means that you have to suffer in order to be a refugee? I suffer then I am a refugee? This does not have any connection with refugee status or to their political situation or position. Anyway the refugee has the right to live as a human and to raise his children up, and to live in a suitable place, in addition to having suitable services. As I told you, here in Bethlehem we have many refugees living in palaces, like the palace of Al-Jirashi who called himself by this name because the name of his original village is Jirashi.

**AHMAD** *Speaking of social relations and the privacy dimension, what is the difference between living in the camp and in the suburb?*

---

**SOCIAL RELATIONS**  
Camp social  
relations as  
a form of  
protection  
and solidarity  
but also  
irritating

f. In the camp there is no privacy, because of the nature of the relationships among people. These relations have been established during the last 50-60 years and are characterized by openness and are irritating to the current generation. These relations created a kind of a social protection and a kind of social solidarity for the old generation, because of the poverty.

Today, all this started to be irritating more than useful. My personal opinion is that having a bit more privacy enables you to live your life as you want and to raise your children up wherever you prefer. And this is definitely better than what we have in the camp. In the camp many social relations and behaviors are imposed to us because of the stressed social situation. Here, you cannot open a window freely because if you might be bothering your neighbor. In the suburb you can open your window!

**AHMAD** *Regarding the suburb, where did you buy the land from?*

f. I bought it from my cousin, but the land in this area has always been disputed. During the occupation Israel said it is state land. Then rumors started about the land being owned by a person from Beit Jala. But I am talking about rumors because until this moment no one has shown real ownership papers of the land. After that, when the people of the camp started to build there, we discovered that this land belongs to Al-Husseini family from Jerusalem. This caused a big fight between Al-Husseini family and the people. Then a committee - made up of Faisal Al-Husseini, the Housing Ministry and the camp - has been established to solve the issue and they reached an agreement. After that

---

**THE LAND**  
Disputed land  
owned by  
Al-Husseini  
family

people's presence in the land could be legalized by paying a symbolic amount of money.

**AHMAD** *Which kind of papers do you have?*

**F.** I have a power of attorney, and according to Palestinian law, it does not mean complete ownership.

**AHMAD** *What would you do if someone with a full ownership papers showed up?*

**f.** Theoretically we might be sued as happened in Doha, where many people built their houses and then other people showed up with the *Tabu* (the full ownership papers), and some issues are still in the courts. In some cases, the Palestinian Housing Ministry paid compensation to the owners of the land in order to keep the houses as they are.

**AHMAD** *What about the infrastructure there?*

**f.** There is no sanitary drainage infrastructure. Streets have been designed by people based on understandings among the neighbors. I am not talking about a modern urban plan, it was just a spontaneous action among people. And until now not all basic services are available. The private electricity

---

**OWNERSHIP**

Suburb residents do not own *Tabu* but a right to use the land



---

**ELECTRICITY GRID**

In late 2012 a private company provided the suburb with electricity. So far wires are extended directly from the camp.

company agreed to establish an electricity network there only two weeks ago. People used to exploit illegal methods to have electricity by connecting to existing electrical wires.

**QUSSAY** *Wires from the camp?*

F. Absolutely. Most of them used to bring electricity and water from inside the camp to the suburb, which is an illegal action. Recently the electricity company started to deal with the facts on the ground, because the suburb is becoming bigger and bigger. There is a project to bring water to the suburb but it not yet completed.

**AHMAD** *Are you going to lose UNRWA's services because you are moving out of the camp?*

F. No, why might I? Officially, UNRWA recognizes the suburb as an area outside the camp, which it is not responsible for. But actually what does UNRWA provide? It is not providing any service that could be lost. It provides the clinic, and any refugee can go to this clinic despite the place he is living in. I think the same happens with UNRWA schools.

**AHMAD** *Are you a member of the local committee of the suburb?*

F. No.

**AHMAD** *What do you think about the request of the local committee of the suburb to be part of Dheisheh Popular Committee?*

F. This request has been made not only according to the local committee's desire, but after discussing the issue with the majority of the residents of the suburb. Most of the people of the suburb want to be a part of the camp, or at least to have part of the services the Popular Committee provides to the camp. That guarantees not having an official municipality or the status of a city, and this has a strong political dimension. In addition, services might be integrated with the services in the camp, for instance the electricity grid and the water network could be integrated with what is existing in the camp now. So far the absence of the electricity network forced people to connect their wires with the camp's network.

**AHMAD** *From your point of view, is the request made by the local committee to the Popular Committee of the camp a matter of political representation or just a matter of services?*

F. Both, because actually we could get our services also from Irtas' Local Committee

---

**SERVICES**  
The camp  
as a service  
provider

---

**POLITICAL  
DIMENSION**  
Not belonging  
to any  
municipality  
allows  
refugee  
identity

(a village next to the suburb). The Irtas city council proposed that we become part of their village, but we refused because of our political concerns which compel us to insist on being part of the camp and its political umbrella. Actually the Popular Committee's capabilities in term of services are not as good as any municipality. Doha Municipality for example has much more capabilities than the Popular Committee. But the suburb is definitely a normal expansion of the camp which UNRWA should have been responsible to deal with instead of the people.

**QUSSAY** *In regard to the services aspect, which place do you prefer: the camp or the suburb?*

f. We have to distinguish between two kinds of population settings: let's take Doha and the suburb. Doha for example cannot be considered as a margin of the camp, because of its geographical position. The suburb is a margin of the camp's margins. The land of the camp has been rented by the UNRWA for 99 year in 1951 or 1952. The UNRWA should have the responsibility to extend the borders of the camp in order to fit with the increase of the population and to respond to the natural needs of the refugees. Then, the



---

**ROADS**  
In the suburb  
there is only  
one paved  
road. People  
still walk  
through steep  
slope to reach  
houses or the  
camp

---

SERVICES  
Against  
the idea or  
dealing with  
the suburb as  
a city, because  
most like part  
of the camp

suburb is geographically connected with the camp and its population is mostly from the camp. Therefore, I think the services in the suburb should be provided by UNRWA as the responsible organization in this regard, or at least be provided by the Dheisheh Popular Committee as a representative or a body that provides services. Or there might be a cooperation between them. But I am totally against getting these services from any municipality; I mean I am against dealing with the suburb as a city. Because it is almost a part of the camp. This suburb has to be considered as a normal extension of the camp, in which UNRWA should have rented new lands to enable people of the camp to expand.

QUSSAY *But, in fact, the laws of the UNRWA and the Popular Committees obliged them to work only inside the borders of the camp.*

f. The question is: who determined the borders of the camp? UNRWA did it more than 50 years ago. You said that the population 50 years ago was 3-4 thousand. Today it is four times more. The camp cannot handle this population. Even the basic services cannot handle this number of people. At the beginning shelters were two-room houses, now there are 4-5 families living in the same space of

these two rooms. This burden should have been carried by UNRWA, not by the people themselves. This growth of population is normal and UNRWA or the responsible parties should take the responsibility to meet people's needs in order to enable them to live. Nobody from outside came to settle in Dheisheh. The population is all from the original refugees and their later generations, that's why UNRWA is responsible to expand the camp instead of putting more pressure to the people. Even the vertical growth – which people have tended to use for more than 20 years – stopped because of the quality of the construction, which is not strong enough to bear four floors.

QUSSAY *UNRWA dealt with the refugees issue as a temporary situation, but after 65 years of the Nakba it is still dealing with it the same way.*

f. UNRWA is basically a political party, it's a big mistake to deal with UNRWA as only a humanitarian services provider. It has been established by the General Assembly of the UN, the one who declared the Partition Resolution in 1947. I mean that the General Assembly through its declaration knew that this situation would never be temporary or at least that it would probably be a long term

---

UNRWA ROLE  
UNRWA  
should take  
care of the  
camp's growth  
and re-shape  
its borders

situation. They weren't expecting us to return in 1958. They planned for this and were fully aware that the needs of these people will be continuing during the coming decades. As a Palestinian, this is an abnormal, temporary situation and I will keep struggling to return. But them (the UN) know that it is not, or at least they know that it is a long term situation that might remain the same during the upcoming 50 years.

*QUSSAY You said that the suburb should be connected with Dheisheh Popular Committee or with UNRWA or cooperation between them. In case of Doha, nobody discussed this issue. What is the difference between the two cases? Is it just a matter of geographical aspects?*

F. The difference is not only geographical, but the historical periods when the two places have been created and people capabilities to negotiate and to impose their will on UNRWA and to ask it for something. Doha City was established during the Israeli occupation, there were no popular committees but UNRWA. At that time UNRWA was implementing its politics by force because nobody could argue with its work. It was restricted by the Israeli military rule in the camp. Nobody could oblige UNRWA to extend its services. In different



**FACILITIES**  
A mosque is currently under construction. So far this is the only social facility expected

conditions Doha should have been included within UNRWA's services because it is like a refugee camp even if it has better buildings. Today, we are talking about a new suburb that has been established under the Palestinian Authority and with the presence of a Popular Committee which is able to negotiate UNRWA about its responsibility for the suburb. All this was just impossible under the occupation.

**AHMAD** *You said UNRWA should have rented new lands and extended its functionality.*

f. This is part of the services that are supposed to be provided, but regarding a potential political mandate, the General Assembly of the UN declared UNRWA's basic mandate to be about relief. In another words, it has restricted itself within humanitarian and services aspects only. It wasn't able to be a political representative body refugees, because Palestinians have a political representative. Palestinians have their cause before being services seekers. We created what represents us politically by a hard and long struggle with the occupation forces. So I am against giving to UNRWA any political role, despite the fact that the core of UNRWA's mandate was political in addition to the humanitarian side.

---

01

---

# INTO THE SUBURB

# WHO OWNS THE LAND?

Ownership of Khalid Cave Mountain, the land where the suburb is now growing, is a contested and sensitive issue. As is the case for the entire Palestinian territory, this circumstance is a product of multiple changes in regime and the resulting layering of laws from different periods. None of the inhabitants of the suburb holds title to the land, but rather have a “right to use” the land document. The lack of clarity about ownership has not impeded the emergence or the continued growth of this new self-established neighborhood.



Aerial view of Khalid Cave Mountain, 1996

– Doha Municipality

# Historical background of Khalid Cave Mountain

HISTORICAL RESEARCH BY Qussay Abu Aker

PHOTOS AND VISUALS BY Sara Pellegrini

## Ottoman Empire

### 1858-1913

CHANGES IN OTTOMAN EMPIRE  
LAND OWNERSHIP LAWS

In the Ottoman empire Bethlehem was a village in the Jerusalem administrative district (Sanjak). Khalid Cave Mountain (the hill now housing both Dheisheh refugee camp and the new suburb), like much land in Bethlehem, was waqf (Islamic endowment) land.

In 1858 the Ottoman Empire introduced a new land registration law, in part in order to increase the empire's capacity to collect tax revenue. In 1913 a new law allowed the possibility of purchasing waqf lands. Some big and rich families in Palestine were then able to buy huge parcels of lands and get legal documentation of their ownership.

### 1918

JERUSALEM ARCHIVE  
OF PROPERTIES IS LOST

### 1943

PURCHASE OF THE KHALID  
CAVE MOUNTAIN

According to the Ottoman records Al-Husseini family owned vast lands in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, among them the Khalid Cave Mountain.

## British mandate

In 1918 the British civil administration in Palestine closed all Ottoman registration departments. During the Ottoman evacuation from Palestine and Syria a lot of documents were lost. Some of them<sup>1</sup> were recovered by British cooperation with the French, but the Jerusalem archive of properties was permanently lost.

<sup>1</sup> Full archive of Nablus and Gaza ownership. Acre, Haifa, Jaffa, Hebron, Safad, Jenin, Nazareth, Tiberias, and Tulkarm were found.

In 1943, according to the available sources, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) purchased the Khalid mountain cave land.

### Jordanian control of the West Bank

1950

“CUSTODIAN OF ENEMY  
PROPERTY” LAW

In 1948 the West Bank came under Jordanian rule, and in August 1950, Jordan proclaimed the population of Israel (including the Palestinians living within its borders) enemies to be dealt with according to the laws that governed interactions with enemies. Jordan established the “Custodian of enemy property” to manage property that had been owned by these persons.



In this way, the Jordanian Minister of Interior became the keeper of enemy properties and had the

authorization to manage the Jewish (Israeli) properties in the West Bank, including Khalid Cave Mountain. These lands were used for public activities such as establishing refugee camps, military bases, and markets.

1952

THE RIGHT OF USE  
(USUFRUCT) LAW

One of the most important Jordanian laws concerning land was the 1952 law on the right to use. This law states that after 10 years of active use, the ownership of the property passes to the user of the land. Thus, the right of use document can be considered a purchase record.

### Israeli Military Occupation

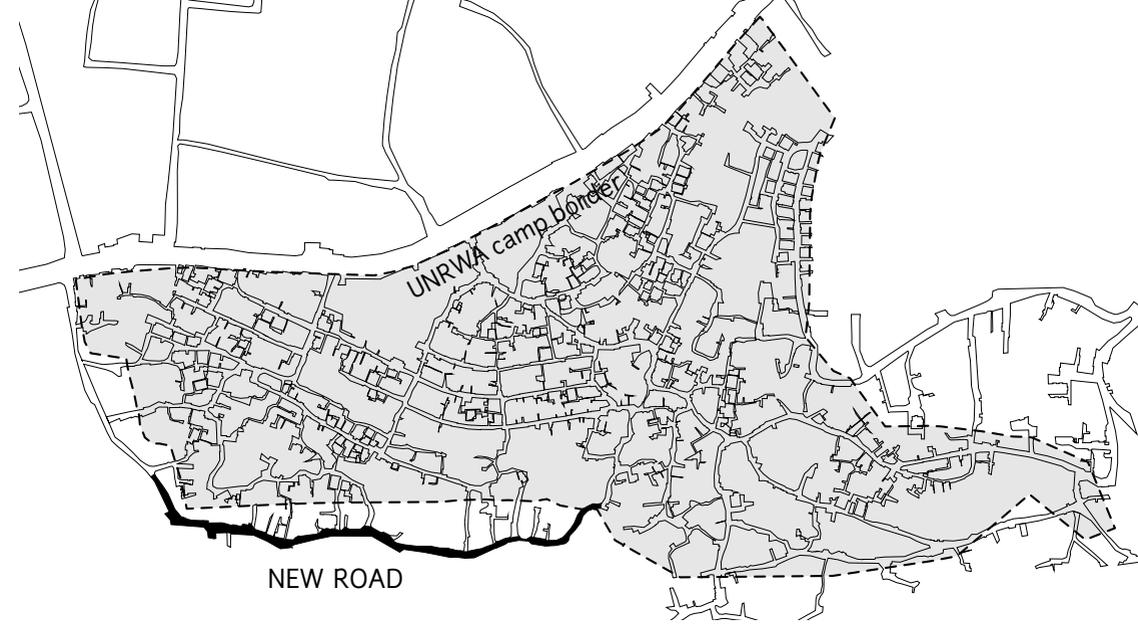
1967

ISRAELI LAWS ON LAND  
OWNERSHIP

With the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, the Bethlehem area came under Israeli military administration. Israeli military order 42, promulgated in 1967, stated that property belonging to by people who left the West Bank during the war, or who were away at the time and not permitted to return, was considered “aban-



done” property and could come under military control. In addition, between 1981 and 1994, the Israeli occupation administration established property taxation laws to increase revenue from privately-owned lands.



### 1987

PERMISSION TO USE  
THE LAND FOR  
AGRICULTURAL PURPOSES

In 1987 the first Intifada started, creating a difficult economic situation for the community of Dheisheh. A group from Dheisheh went to meet Faisal al Hussein at Beit Al Sharq (Orient House) in Jerusalem to ask for permission to use the land in Khalid Cave Mountain for agriculture to support Dheishehians. This request was accepted.

After people began farming the land, the Israeli military administration forced them to leave and not to use it. However, Israel did not claim the land as state land.

### 1988

OPENING A STREET CONNECTING  
THE CAMP WITH THE MOUNTAIN

In 1988, a street was established on top of the hill on the south side of the camp. There are no details about who took this action

or what its original purpose was. Its effect was to enable people to reach the southern side of the hill, the current site of the suburb. Although the street is technically outside the formal borders of the camp, in practice it became the new border. This shift gave families living in that area of the camp the ability to expand their property boundaries up to the new street.

### Post Oslo Accords

The Palestinian Authority's first declaration in 1994 regarding



**1994**

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY LAWS  
REGARDING LAND OWNERSHIP

land ownership affirmed the applicability of the laws which existed before 5 June 1967. Of key importance here is the right of use law. In 2005 the PA declared that “Waqf properties which were not registered and have been used for 10 years are considered the property of the user.”

**1995**

35 PLOTS OF LAND  
IN THE MOUNTAIN SOLD BY  
AL-HUSSEINI TO FAMILIES  
IN DHEISHEH

After the first intifada, when people began to build again, there was a growing interest in the Khalid Cave Mountain land. This land was very attractive because its proximity to the camp and because the unclear ownership situation could allow free use or appropriation of the land.

In 1995, a group of people from Dheisheh established a committee to meet with Al Hussein family and their lawyer in order to discuss the possibility of using the land as an expansion of the camp in order to reduce overcrowding in the camp.

The meeting was held in the former Youth Program Center of Dheisheh

and an agreement was reached. The settled agreement was to have 35 plots of land sold to families from Dheisheh at the cost of 2500 Jordan Dinar each. After a first payment of 500 JD each family would receive a receipt and after the rest of the payment they would get the full document of ownership.

**1996-1997**

AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
INDIVIDUALS AND AL HUSSEINI  
FOR THE MANAGEMENT  
OF THE LAND

As the meeting was about to end, three people from the camp came in, accusing Al Hussein family of selling what they did not own because nobody could prove their ownership of the land due to the loss of the Ottoman land registry records.

The group who entered the first meeting and stopped everything organized a meeting with Al-Husseini family to take responsibility for managing the land. Al-Husseini family agreed, with several conditions: that the 35 sale contracts already made be honored, and the purchasers retain their land; that the streets in the area be 10 meters wide; and that the streets should be constructed so as to



Al Shuhada Cemetery, established in 2000 on a donated plot, is the located at the southern border of the suburb.





The cemetery hosts martyrs from Dheisheh refugee camp and gives the name at the entire suburb.



maintain the connection between the Khalid Cave Mountain and Dheisheh refugee camp.

Once the three men were in charge of the rest of the area, they adopted their own procedures. They raised the price of each plot to 5000-6000 JD. They insisted on full payment at the outset. They limited the width of the streets to 4-5 meters to create additional plots. They divided the land into 70 plots and determined who could buy each plot by lottery. Apart from the initial 35 plots which were sold by Al Hussein family, all new sales were through a “wikala dawriya” (power of attorney) document. Al Hussein family was not involved in any of these sales.

In 2000, the second Intifada started, which created a very complicated economic, social, and political situation throughout the Palestinian territories. In that year, a plot of land in the Khalid Cave Mountain area was donated to the popular committee of Dheisheh for use as

**2000**  
ESTABLISHMENT OF  
“AL SHUHADA CEMETERY”

a cemetery, because of the difficulty of getting to the Rachel’s Tomb cemetery because of curfews. This cemetery was named “Al Shuhada Cemetery” [the Martyrs Cemetery].

After the second Intifada, and as the economic situation improved, people started building on their plots and slowly moving to Khalid Cave Mountain.

Seeing the increase in new dwellings and inhabitants in the area, the council of Irtas village became interested in annexing it to its municipal boundaries. The council prepared a dossier, including a field survey, maps, and statistics and officially requested that the Residency Ministry change the land’s status from an agricultural area to a residency area.

Irtas survey reported 210 plots on a total area of 162 dunam. At that time 71 buildings had been built.

However, the owners of the area did not agree to be part of Irtas.

**2003**  
BUILDING ACTIVITY STARTS  
ON THE LAND

**2005**  
IRTAS INTEREST IN ANNEXING  
THE LAND TO ITS MUNICIPAL  
BOUNDARIES

This refusal led to the area not belonging to any municipality (such as Doha or Bethlehem), or village council (Irtas). This situation means that infrastructure services are not provided for the people who are living there. To get electricity, residents rely on cables strung from Dheisheh camp all the way down to the area.

**2012**  
ESTABLISHING A LOCAL  
COMMITTEE OF THE AREA AND  
NAMING IT DAHIYYAT  
AL SHUHADA

Ten years after the first houses were built in the area, the number of residents (people currently living there or still constructing and moving there soon) reached 1000. This number created a need for management, both of practical matters such as services and infrastructure and broader administrative issues. If the land is not part of any municipality and is not fully owned by the residents (see their power of attorney documents), who will manage and represent the suburb?

On October 28, 2012, residents of the area established a local committee of nine members and offi-

OFFICIAL REQUEST TO BE PART  
OF THE DHEISHEH POPULAR  
COMMITTEE

cially named the area Dahiyat Al Shuhada (the Martyrs Suburb), in honor of the Martyrs cemetery in the southern portion of the land.

On November 26, the local committee made a formal request to the Dheisheh Popular Committee to include the suburb within its jurisdiction. The committee asked for an official document from the popular committee stating that Dahiyat Al Shuhada is connected to the Popular Committee of Dheisheh refugee camp in order to help the suburb committee in addressing the official authorities in anything related to the suburb.

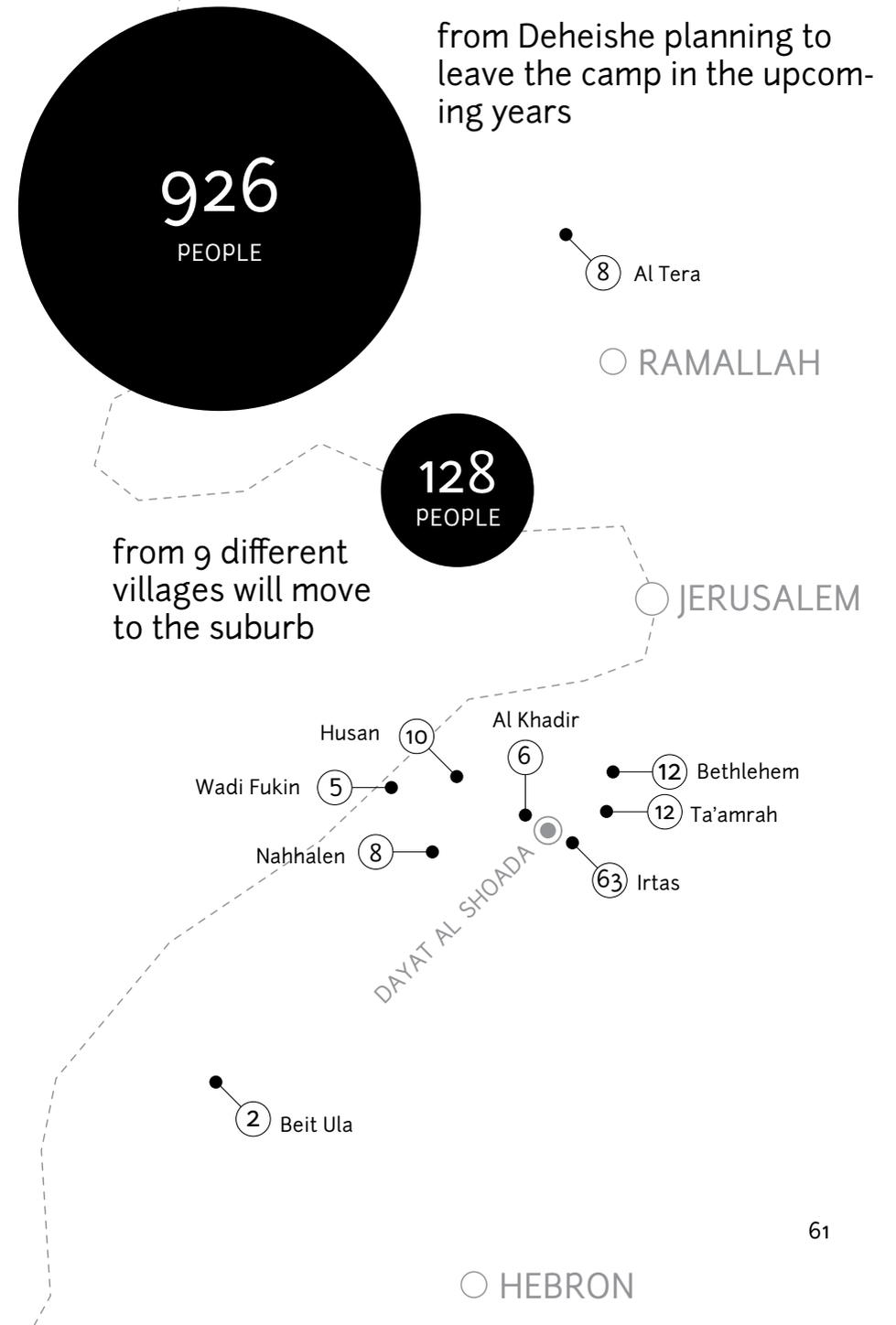
The request of the suburb's local committee most likely cannot be granted, as the Popular Committee does not work outside the borders of the camp. It is difficult to make the suburb officially part of the camp. But, the popular committee will support the suburb in its requests of official authorities, requests which are related to services and infrastructure.



# DEMOGRAPHY

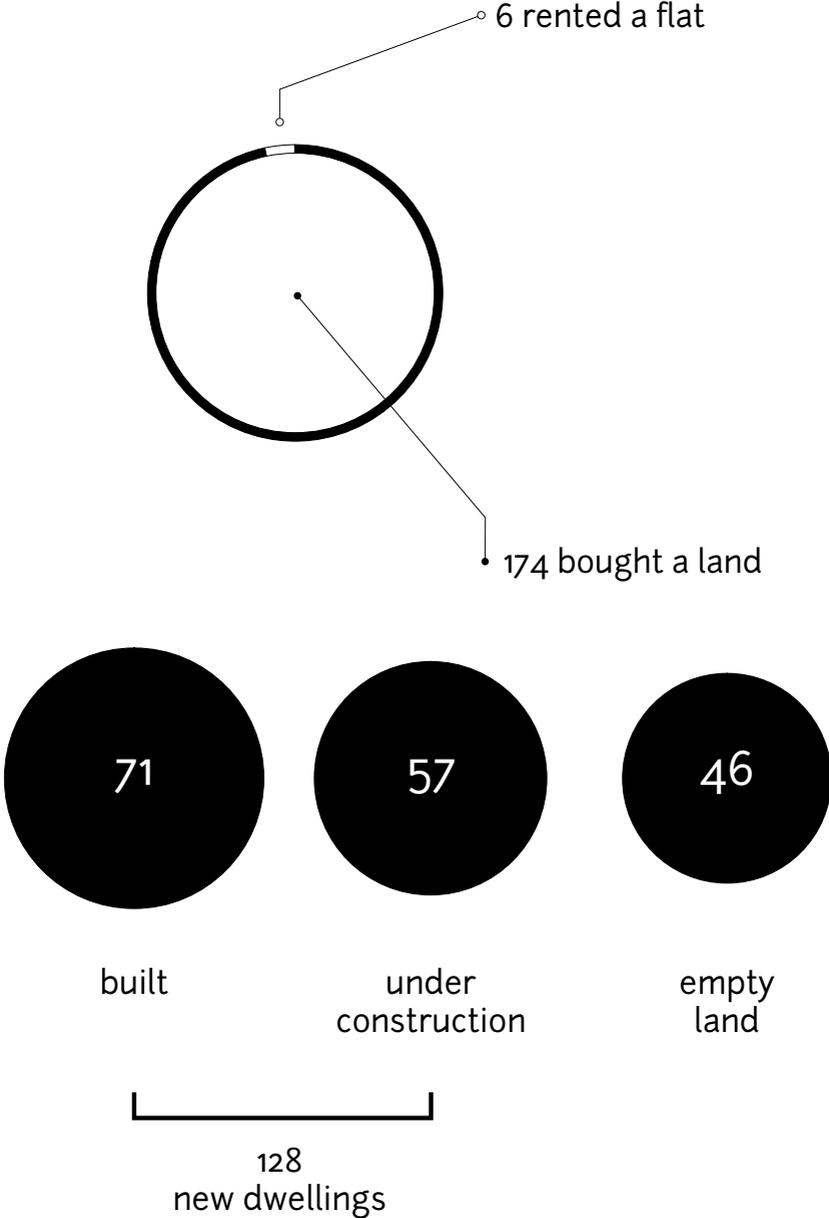
180 families

1054 people involved



# REAL ESTATE

128  
new dwellings



# COMPARING

# DENSITIES

THE SUBURB  
162 dunams

DHEISHEH  
162 dunams



---

**02**

---

# QUESTIONS

# The questions I have about the consequences

of moving to the suburb motivate my personal desire to understand and study this case as a laboratory of the camp itself. During the 65 years of the Nakba, the Palestinian official discourse in general and the refugees' discourse in particular have usually highlighted and brought to the surface only the weaknesses of refugees. This is because of the belief that this kind of discourse keeps the Palestinian refugee issue alive and that it grabs the attention of people all over the

world and makes them be in solidarity with the refugee issue. This discourse is, in fact, an unfair representation of the refugees achievements and transformations and ignore the many strengths of refugees and the positive changes they have achieved over these 65 years.

The study of the suburb is an occasion to highlight some of these strengths and achievements so that we can use these accomplishments in the narration of our story. In proving that refugees have the right to return we can show everything they have achieved in exile, rather than only showing ourselves as weak, poor, and victims.

— Ahmad Al Lahham

**IS IT OKAY  
FOR A REFUGEE  
TO LIVE IN  
A VERY NICE  
BIG HOUSE?**

*Normalization* has been always a very problematic term when it comes to talking about the camp and its political exceptionality. This word has been used in refugee discourse to try to keep refugees restricted within the camp boundaries and within narrow concepts and ideas. For me personally, it is very hard to write about the normalization issue because of its sensitivity. Addressing it is sometimes considered to be taboo. But I think that we have to think about everything regarding our lives, status, and situation and not be stopped by any taboos.

**Am I normalizing  
my refugee status by  
building a new house  
in the suburb?**

At the beginning of the camp's establishment, people hesitated even to build a sewage network inside the camp because they thought that in doing so they would be normalizing the camp. The impulse to preserve the temporary life was very strong. With the passage of time, people in the camp started to recognize and be aware of their political status, and to understand

what affects this political exceptionalism and what does not. They came to understand that many things can be done inside the camp while still keeping the camp as a place that has its distinctive personality. Thus, they started being rebels towards the very static idea of normalization.

People started building their houses and improving their lives by developing things in the camp. But unfortunately, until now, their own common narrative does not match what they have accomplished. In other words, people in the camp are still talking about and expressing concern about the normalization issue, even though in their own practices they have deconstructed it. I believe that the camp should keep its special personality and identity, but I also believe that this special quality does not mean that we have to avoid any kind of practice.

## Does where I live have an impact on my refugee status?

Regarding the fact that I am going to live outside the camp: I believe that the place where I am living does not have anything to

do with my refugee status. I can keep my status as refugee no matter where I live. In the interviews we conducted, I found that most of the interviewees are fully aware of these political issues. Most of them said that they are not normalizing their status as refugees by moving to the suburb because they have the right to have a good and comfortable life and this will not affect their status as refugees.

*F.L. In their minds many people associate refugeehood with the camp and suffering. Which means that you have to suffer in order to be a refugee? I suffer then I am a refugee? This does not have any connection with refugee status or to their political situation or position. Any the refugee has the right to live as a human and to raise his children up, and to live in a suitable place.*

*M.Q. We have been forced to live in a refugee camp. When the camp was established it was nothing compared to what it is now. A lot of people have moved out to many places such as Doha. And now, the population of the camp is much more the initial population when it was established. The camp cannot handle this population. So don't ask me to keep living in*

*poverty and deprivation in order to remember my land. I will not ever forget my land that I love.*

M.R. *Me, if I even have an entire big building I will keep having the refugee status*

Y.H. *I want those who think this is normalizing our status to come and live for a month in Dheisheh. I want to see how he is going to deal with it. I lived in the camp for 40 years and when I moved to the suburb I didn't find a difference in the residents, but in the ability to breath. My my name is Yakob from Zakareya [the original village] no matter where I am living".*

M.F. *This is only expanding [the camp] because the population of the camp today is different than in 1948 and 1967. It doesn't affect my status of being refugee.*

**HOW WILL I BE  
REPRESENTED  
AS A REFUGEE  
AFTER MOVING  
TO LIVE IN THE  
SUBURB?**

During the year 2012, the people of the suburb created a local committee to manage life there.

This committee, as the body representing the resident of the suburb, has officially requested to be directly connected with the popular committee of Dheisheh. We wanted to understand the motives behind this request.

What makes someone living in a nice villa want to be connected to a place – the refugee camp – which supposed to be temporary? Why would someone choose to be represented through a place – the camp – that is perceived as weak and poor?

I started asking myself what sort of representation is at stake in this request. Is it about services only or something more?

F.A. *"This request has been made not only according to the local committee's desire, it came after discussing the issue with the majority of the residents of the suburb. Most of the people of the suburb want to be a part of the camp, or at least to have some of the services the popular committee provides to the camp. This guarantees that the suburb would not have an official municipality or the status of a city, and this has a strong political dimensions".*

The idea that not having the status of a city or municipality would help maintain refugees' political identity was mentioned frequently in the interviews. In many cases they explained their desire to be considered part of the camp as connected to keeping their political identity and making it stronger. I can also connect this desire with the fact that people want to be attached to the strongest side – which here is the camp and not the city or municipality. In addition, there are other reasons such as the social dimension and networks that they have built during their lives in the camp.

## **As a refugee, does the place where I live have anything to do with my political representation?**

There is no doubt that the camp has a distinctive political status that represents the refugee status. However, I think the idea that the camp is the primary guarantee that maintains this status has dissipated a long time ago. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees are living in big cities

all over the world, and they still have their refugee status.

Nonetheless, the idea of refusing to become a city or municipality is a very revolutionary idea that deconstructs the template of the city as the model in which all the other spatial practices should be measured. This revolutionary idea introduces the camp as a possible different model that can radically change the criteria which had made the city the model.

## Do camp residents have a distinctive form of representation?

Regarding the issue of representation, the popular committees that were established in the mid-1990s were meant to be considered as service providers for the refugees in camps. But in many cases these committees took on the role of being the representatives of the camp to, for example, the Palestinian Authority, the PLO, or nearby municipalities. In the case of Dheisheh, the popular committee of the camp has always been strong and has been considered the leader

of the other West Bank camp committees. Moreover, the popular committee of Dheisheh does not only have influence inside the camp. Rather, this committee has transgressed the boundaries of the camp to act as an effective body in the surrounding municipalities, such as Doha city. The strength of the popular committee has played an important role in making the camp special and in making it attractive for people from the camp who now live outside it. In principle these committees were meant to be only service providers, but in practice they have taken on the responsibility to politically represent the camp at the local level.

On the national level, officially, there is no special body that is representing the Palestinian refugees politically. The PLO (the Palestinian liberation organization) is considered to be the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people (all of the Palestinians). Palestinian refugees are being represented in the same way as non-refugee Palestinians. In this sense, living in the suburb or in the camp has nothing to do with how Palestinian refugees are being represented.

WHAT IS MY  
RELATIONSHIP  
TO THE CAMP  
GOING TO BE  
AFTER MOVING  
TO THE SUBURB?

AHMAD Me personally, I am entering a new stage of my life by going to live outside the camp. There are a lot of things I am wondering about and would like to know from someone who lives outside the camp and has a strong connection with the camp. What is it to live outside the camp?

QUSSAY The easiest answer could be: living outside the camp is like living in a hotel. I spend my life in the camp, because most things don't exist in Doha. On the personal level – the neighbors, I don't know them very well. I don't recognize them even. There is no conversation between us except for on the social occasions when you have to invite the neighbors. I don't spend time in Doha. When I leave home I come to Dheisheh.

*Living outside the camp is like living in a hotel.*

AHMAD What made the camp attractive? There is Bethlehem city that has attractive things, why do you stay in the camp?

QUSSAY I don't know, maybe because of the relationships I established when I lived in the

camp – through school, Ibdāa, Feneiq, and working in the camp. My relationship network is in the camp. In Doha I feel that everyone is living on his own to a certain extent – not totally alone, but not as it is here in Dheisheh. I could talk about a falafel place – there isn't one in Doha, not a single one. And one that opens would work for two months then close. No one goes to buy from it. Even non-refugees they come to Dheisheh.

AHMAD Is there are something emotional in this subject? Or is it just to find things in the camp?

QUSSAY Of course there are emotional aspects. When I introduce myself, I say I am from Dheisheh refugee camp even though I am living in Doha. People know Dheisheh: *sumud* [steadfastness], a highly aware camp, you feel you are coming from a strong place. The problem is if I introduce myself as coming from the camp and someone says to me “no you are not living in the camp” – I perceive it as humiliation.

AHMAD Why? You don't live in Dheisheh.

QUSSAY I am not living in Dheisheh, but I am from Dheisheh.

AHMAD I don't get it.

QUSSAY The Dheisheh style, the way things move. For example in Doha, since I have been living there I never saw a demonstration against anything. They couldn't gather about anything except the demonstration about the rise in prices. Even for this, they walked toward the main entrance of the camp.

AHMAD Would you also say that the camp is an idea and not only a place?

***The camp is an idea, not only a place.***

QUSSAY Yes of course.

AHMAD The idea isn't limited. It is open. Would someone live the camp way of living in Paris? The camp idea in Paris?

QUSSAY Yes he can.

AHMAD These are things I wonder about, as I am going on an adventure.

QUSSAY What are you afraid of?

AHMAD It is not about being afraid, it's something about memories. The human being in any place in the world, not only a Palestinian, his memories are his homeland. That is, the place where you have memories is your homeland. And my memories are only in the camp, not in Beit Etab (my original village), not in Bethlehem, not anywhere else.

***Who am I  
after I leave  
the camp?***

And so I am afraid about these memories and how they would affect my life, either positively or negatively. Who am I after I leave the camp? I mean my personality – a cornerstone in building my personality was in the camp. I am not here talking about refugee status, I talking about the social circumstances. It's like a black screen in front of me that I can't see beyond after I leave the camp, and it's the reason for my questions.

QUSSAY Do you expect that your connection with the camp will be affected? Will it remain the same or will there be a disconnection? And what would you prefer?

AHMAD It's a very difficult question and very early stage to answer, but I don't think there will be a big disconnection. If the camp is an idea - and anyway I am going to a place where 90% of the residents are refugees - it means

that the life of the camp is being built there. This could be my answer now, but you can ask me again after five months I might have different answer.

QUSSAY In Doha, there are different things that do not even exist. There is a street going up, and a mountain. There isn't anything you could identify as a center or a point where everything could meet. Its important that you know the people around you there. Because, on a day when you decide not to go to the camp, but to go visit your neighbor – such as when there is a social event – you won't find anything in common to talk about. You will just be general with him. And sometimes you will be afraid of sharing some of your opinions because you don't know who he will turn to be.

***There isn't  
anything you  
could identify  
as a center.***

AHMAD Even if he is a refugee? If he is a refugee, won't there be many things in common?

QUSSAY I don't think so. Maybe you want to talk to him about the refugees' circumstances, not because I know more,

but he doesn't have the information. He considers that he is in Doha: he has his work, a municipality and other commitments and this issue is someone's else responsibility. Since there is no relationship in Doha, you don't know the context for your conversation – where it is going and even when you will meet again.

AHMAD I feel that Dahiyat Al-Shuhada is different from Doha, in the geographical aspect and the demographic components. In Doha, it's not 90% refugees. And the proximity to the camp – it will be difficult for someone who doesn't know the camp to recognize that it's not part of the camp. Forget the buildings, I mean here the geography. And also, I have childhood memories in the area. There was nothing built there. We used to go play *Qanater* (Palestinian game). I had memories there. As for Doha, no. I always see it as something separate from the camp.

***It will be difficult to recognize that it's not part of the camp.***

AHMAD Is the fact that Dheisheh is where politics is produced related to your attraction to it? I mean, in Doha the political practice isn't as strong as in Dheisheh. Is it related?

QUSSAY The desire to be part of this strong political frame, movement - in Doha there isn't anything. The only thing I would call political there, in the essential meaning of politics, is when there are elections, otherwise there isn't. I am telling you I didn't notice a demonstration except about the rise in prices – and they came to the entrance of the camp as there is no place in Doha where you can gather. So, if you want an active political movement, it has to be in the camp. In Doha – it is the camp who decided how the elections would go there. The idea that Dheisheh is weak and the city is strong – this is wrong. In Doha there isn't any movement. The real movement is in Dheisheh.

AHMAD Another question, what's the different between the camp and the city?

QUSSAY *The municipality.*

## How to get involved

### THE SUBURB. TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES

[www.campusincamps.ps/projects/05-the-suburb](http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/05-the-suburb)

[qussay.abuaker@campusincamps.ps](mailto:qussay.abuaker@campusincamps.ps)

[ahmad.allahham@campusincamps.ps](mailto:ahmad.allahham@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 Quiquix, 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.*



جامعة القدس  
جامعات في الخيم

INITIATIVES

The Suburb. Transgressing boundaries

TEXT EDITING

Ilana Feldman

BOOK DESIGN AND PHOTO EDITING

Sara Pellegrini

COVER PHOTO

Sara Pellegrini

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)



