

Living in Palestine

A Virtuous Decision?



By Muna Nassar

When I first read the theme of the TWIP January issue, “Palestine and the Common Good,” I asked myself, “What is the true meaning of common good?” and “What is the common good in the Palestinian context?” As this required some deliberation, I decided to make myself some coffee to help me collect my thoughts. Standing next to the coffee machine, waiting for my coffee, I watched every drop falling, gradually filling the pot. And it occurred to me that there was a resemblance between Palestine and the coffee pot that was patiently waiting for every drop. (So when people say that coffee can make sense of everything, it is without a sliver of doubt a true statement.) At this moment, I truly understood the meaning of the common good, both in the Palestinian context and in my own. The common good is a state of transformation from I to We; it is every drop falling into the pot to form the bigger, prettier picture.

However, on the ground, the picture is not that pretty, and it is definitely not that clear. The Palestinian context is different, and good cannot easily be seen. I began to wonder about every “good” in Palestine. My mind going in circles, searching for a good answer and for the “good” of the answer, I recalled a life-defining conversation I’d had with my father a few years back. I had been trying to figure out the logic behind my father’s choosing to settle in Palestine, coming back after he had

been living and working almost half of his life abroad. His answer was not what I had expected. His actions had seemed as capricious as the month of April, but his words made me shift my whole view of Palestine and brought out an entirely new set of spectacles. He said: “No matter how successful I was and no matter how much I achieved while I was living abroad, I couldn’t rest on my laurels as long as all the work I did was not for the common good of my own country.”


With this response, I had finally been able to fully grasp why my father had chosen roads untaken, the not-so-well-lighted places, and those hilly Palestinian paths when he could have so easily taken the comfortable roads, lived *la dolce vita*, and enjoyed *la vie en rose*. Defining the common good

of Palestine means to choose the well-being of your country, to build your own country, and most importantly, to choose your own country again and again over any other place in this whole wide world. I started to think of all the good things that Palestine had already offered me versus all the things that I could offer. Of course, there will always be the tug of war between what



“The common good and the individual good rarely coincide.”

Sergei Lukyanenko



the mind wants and what the heart feels. To attempt reconciliation is the same as trying to mix water and oil – they will never mix. The oil will climb to the surface of the water, creating two separate layers. In other words, while living in Palestine, a person will always find reasons to be demotivated and discouraged from quenching this thirst for becoming the person he or she wants to become. However, for those of us who have been brought up in Palestine, life has never been smooth sailing; on the contrary, it is tough and unsettling. But then again, as Franklin D. Roosevelt once said “A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor.” Although growing up in Palestine has plenty of disadvantages, Palestinians are always able to find beauty in broken places. Young and bright Palestinians have much beauty to offer to a broken Palestine that aches to become whole and good.

Moreover, as life here in Palestine has taught me, the definition of good is relative and varies from one person to another. Each person must find her/his own definition of the good, choose to be good, and formulate a unique vision of the common good for his/her community. The common good is the overarching goal that we must pursue to benefit society. Such striving involves the belief that we all have a commitment to people and that we all have to give back at some point. It is the belief that the good of each person is tied to the good and well-being of the whole community. To some Palestinians, living a good life may seem impossible in troubled Palestine where lifestyles are

so limited. Why should Palestinians not deserve a lifestyle that offers citizens the opportunity to live freely and abundantly? To others, the definition of good means paying *forward* so that we can together achieve the common good for all Palestinians. We must have faith in Palestine – no matter how difficult it is to hold on to this faith, we must not let go!

Attaining and contributing to the Palestinian common good entails being rooted in this land, being present in this land, and having faith in this land. Therefore, it is only when we choose not to leave that we shall eventually succeed. I always like to think that the people who choose the happiness of their country above their own are the very reason that we might hopefully and eventually realize the positive aspects, achieve the goodness of living in Palestine. Those people are the reason we shall one day obtain the good instead of the bad, the best instead of the worst. It is only then that we can reclaim the beauty of the so-called Palestine of the past. It is only then that we can see beauty in ruins, in destruction, and in the millions of pieces all broken down and shattered.

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