

REFUGEE HERITAGE

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PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION LUCA CAPUANO

تراث اللاجئين

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PRELUDE



حركة فتح
مخيم الدهيشة

الاسير المظل
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الاسير المظل
محمود هماش

الاسير المظل
علام الصطفاي

كفارة مجيد
عاشت ذكركم اليا
جربار
لن ننساك يا احمي
صبرك انت حيا في
قلوبنا ٢٣/٤

بفضل الله
والعزيمة
والجهد









في ذكرى
معدن
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مئة ذكراة
ما فلهي
داكنا

الوزر
فلهي

فلهي



***Refugee Heritage* is an attempt to understand and practice refugeeness beyond humanitarianism. Such a process does not just require rethinking the refugee camp as a political space: it calls for the redefinition of the refugee as a subject in exile and an understanding of exile as a political practice of the present capable of challenging the status quo. The recognition of “the heritage of a culture of exile” constitutes the perspective from which social, spatial, and political structures can be imagined and experienced beyond the idea of the nation-state.**

REFUGEE HERITAGE

Alessandro Petti

01. Ruins

Refugee camps should not exist in the first place: they represent a crime and a political failure. For over a century, the existence of camps has undermined the western notion of the city as a civic space in which the rights of citizens are inscribed and recognized. To inhabit a refugee camp means to inhabit the ruins of a destroyed city or village, to live in a space whose origin lies in forced displacement. At the same time, after so many decades, the enforced condition of *permanent temporariness*¹ that characterizes camps has led to the production of a range of social and political structures, which operate beyond the nation-state.

Camps are established with the intention of being demolished. They are meant to have no history and no future; they are meant to be forgotten. The history of refugee camps is constantly being erased and dismissed by states, humanitarian organizations, international agencies, and even by refugee communities themselves, who fear that any acknowledgment of the present may undermine their right of return. The only history that is recognized in such spaces is one of violence, suffering, and humiliation.

How then are we to understand the life and culture that people build in camps and in exile, despite their suffering and marginalization?

After the destruction of the Nahr el-Bared camp in 2007, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon demanded to be able to “return to the camp.” Similarly, in Syria, after becoming one of the most intense battlegrounds in Damascus, Palestinian refugees demanded to “return to the Yarmouk Camp.” The reactions to the destruction of these two camps force us to acknowledge the fact that the camp is not a place without history, but rather one that is rich with lived experiences and stories, which are narrated through its urban fabric.

In seeking to understand today’s refugeeness on terms that exceed those of so-called “humanitarian crises,” this book-dossier aims to reframe refugee history beyond the narrative of victimhood, suffering, and humiliation.

To approach this difficult task, it is necessary to destabilize and reframe the dominant discourse on heritage and refugeeness.

02. Heritage

Deriving from a notion of inheritance, *heritage* is conventionally defined in its modern form as referring to the valued objects, traditions, or practices that are passed down over generations. The modern patriarchal nature of heritage is evident in the origin of the Latin word *patrimonium*, which derives from *pater*, father, and means “duty”—i.e., “the duty of the father” or “things owned by the father”—and as such heritage both denotes a supposed duty of fatherhood and assets that are passed down from a father to his firstborn male child.

This dominant notion of heritage has been adopted, defended, promoted, and scaled up by nation-states, which have also naturalized heritage by claiming that monumental buildings are able to represent the “cultural history of the nation-state” by allowing that history to be passed on from generation to generation.

This westernized discourse on heritage constitutes what the archaeologist Laurajane Smith calls the “authorized heritage discourse,”² which is enforced, legitimized, and globalized via national and international organizations such as UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). This framework roots heritage firmly in a European, nationalist, and materialist set of values that are in turn presented as universal.

What, then, is *refugee heritage*? At the best, it would be defined as “difficult heritage,”³ “dissonant heritage,”⁴ “native heritage,” or simply completely dismissed as “non-heritage,” despite the fact that its very presence and the events that preceded it are historical. We would like to think of *Refugee Heritage* as comprising part of a larger movement that has used heritage as a form of resistance and re-existence in Palestine.⁵ This book-dossier seeks to mobilize the notion of refugee heritage, challenging hegemonic westernized discourses and categories in order to draw out possibilities to emancipate the notion of heritage itself. This double task is approached on the one hand by destabilizing dominant frameworks and categories, and on the other by referring to a pluriversal approach to histories, incarnated in the bilingual nature of the book-dossier, whereby the English and Arabic sections are not translations but are rather designed to argue and flow quite differently, complementing rather than mirroring each other directly. Moreover, the book-dossier is produced in conversation with individuals and organizations in the camp and outside the camp. Fragments of ongoing dialogues and the multiplicity of voices that have together produced this book-dossier are documented in the Appendices, which reveals the collective nature of this work.

2. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006).
3. Sharon MacDonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2009).
4. J. E. Tunbridge and Gregory John Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: Wiley, 1996), xiii, 299.
5. Chiara De Cesari, *Heritage and the Cultural Struggle for Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

1. Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, *Permanent Temporariness* (Stockholm: Art and Theory, 2018).

In Dheishah, in order to be able to bear the pain and suffering, we made the pain look beautiful. We started to say: I am the son of the camp, I am the son of the aid.

03. Refugeeeness

The other notion that is challenged and reframed throughout the book is the exclusive association of refugeeeness with victimhood. Like heritage, *refugeeness* emerges as an outcome of wars and the establishment of nation-states. A refugee is by definition a threat to the nation-state and the camp is the space that modern nation-states create in order to contain, manage, and deactivate the political fallout of a promise that in reality negates the notion of equality among all human beings.

In this book-dossier, *refugeeness* is understood, following Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben's writings, as the radical political figure of the present that destabilizes the nation-state world order as it is understood and practiced in Palestinian refugee camps. The refugee in Dheishah Refugee Camp is *laje'*, a word in Arabic for "refugee" that describes not only the historical injustice committed against her but also her present status of waiting and the active political nature of her subjectivity, which refuses normalization and challenges the status quo. Being *laje'* in Dheishah is also to take pride in being a freedom fighter. Dheishah Refugee Camp is an urban center where social and political structures are invented outside of the nation-state framework. Here, one of the political voids that are created by nation-states in order to "manage" refugees has been transformed by the refugees into an active political space that refuses normalization.

04. Recognition

This book-dossier emerged from the desire to see the culture that is built in exile recognized and celebrated, in spite of its subjection to injustice, suffering, and humiliation.

At the outset, our motivation to nominate Dheishah Refugee Camp as a World Heritage site was mainly one of provocation, but the nomination became an arena wherein dominant notions of refugee camps, refugeeeness, and heritage were able to be radically challenged.

Do refugee camps have a history? Is the camp just a site of misery or does it produce values that need to be acknowledged and protected? What is going to happen to the camp if Dheishah is recognized as a World Heritage site? And how should the concept of *heritage* change in order to acknowledge the camp's condition?

These were some of the questions that sparked the idea to nominate Dheishah Refugee Camp as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Discussions around the implications of the nomination started in 2014; these involved camp organizations and individuals, politicians, conservation experts, activists, governmental and non-governmental representatives, and residents of surrounding areas. The participants in these debates were ambivalent: on the one hand, it was feared that the nomination would change the status quo and undermine legally recognized rights of return; on the other hand, it was understood that acknowledging refugee history as part of humanity's heritage would place the right of return back at the center of political discussions.

From the very beginning, the nomination raised a series of contradictions and impossibilities. The World Heritage Convention states that "Universal Values ... transcend the interests of individual States Parties," yet the right to nominate is reserved for nation-states that have signed the World Heritage Convention.

Who has the right to nominate in the case of the Palestinian refugee camps, which are extraterritorial spaces that have been carved out from state sovereignties? The states in which the camps are located? The State of Palestine? The Palestinian Liberation Organization? Popular Committees within the refugee camps themselves? The Stateless Nation, with a population of more than sixty million?

Since 1948, Palestinian refugees and refugee camps have represented a political exception. Instead of falling under the protection of the UNHCR (the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), two ad-hoc UN agencies were constituted in 1949 with two distinct mandates: the UN Conciliation Committee for Palestine (UNCCP), with its mandate to forge a political solution for the Palestinian refugees, and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which was given an exclusively humanitarian mandate. While the UNCCP, having failed to mediate between the newly established State of Israel, Arab States, and the Palestinians, ceased operations in 1966, the UNRWA has continued its operations up until today, despite its lack of a political mandate. So, might UNESCO be the agency capable of operating in a political landscape where negotiations surrounding the sovereignty and territory of Palestine are increasingly being trapped within colonial echo chambers?

We were never under the illusion that recognition from UNESCO would automatically bring about the recognition and implementation of rights for refugees, yet we also did not underestimate the potential present in the recognition of refugee heritage, which we understood might spearhead an urgent conversation about the permanent temporariness of camps and the connection between rights and place.

An intervention into the political context of the Palestinian struggle for the Right of Return, the nomination also aspired to destabilize dominant western conceptions of "heritage," introducing a richer and more complex understanding and potentially opening up for the abandonment of the concept altogether.

UNESCO emerged from the horrors of World War II as an organization dedicated to world peace through education. Nearly three decades later, in 1972, the World Heritage Convention was adopted by UNESCO, with the aim to protect natural and cultural sites of exceptional importance to humanity. The Convention is built upon a Eurocentric understanding of heritage—over half of the sites currently inscribed on the World Heritage List are located in Europe and North America. Over time, the nomination process and the Convention itself have been transformed into a public forum in which received understandings of heritage, culture, aesthetics, and authenticity are actively debated and reshaped.⁶

In 1994, for instance, in the context of a conference jointly organized by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), and UNESCO, the Nara Document on Authenticity was drafted in order to address the different ways in which cultural and social values are manifested, which has led to the acceptance of alternative conservation practices. In the same vein, UNESCO has come to recognize how "local people are a primary source of information about local values," and recommends that the identification of "Outstanding Universal Values" is based on "wide participation by stakeholders including local communities and indigenous people." As a result

6.

Lynn Meskell, *A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

of these and other initiatives, expanded categories for recognition—such as “cultural landscapes,” “cultural routes,” and “intangible heritage”—have been developed, and UNESCO has come to recognize the need to engage and support local stakeholders in the protection, conservation, and management of heritage.

Indigenous people, minority cultures, and sometimes even states have begun to nominate sites where crimes such as slavery, genocide, and colonization were perpetrated.

Those working to nominate such sites have been accused of politicizing culture and criticized for undermining the very existence and purpose of the World Heritage List. What critics fail to understand is that the World Heritage List has been politicized from the beginning, insofar as it has, in a single gesture, glorified the presence of sites built by colonial networks of exploitation while simultaneously erasing their history. The nomination and inscription of sites where human rights have been violated should thus be seen as an acknowledgment and acceptance of the historiographic and epistemological power commanded by heritage. Refusing to shy away from politically charged nominations can open up a political arena for the reconfiguration of marginalized histories.

We used the Annex 5, the official document template required by UNESCO in order to nominate a site to be listed as World Heritage, as the structure for this book. We approached the chapters of the nomination dossier as if approaching an inherited monumental building built during a colonial era. In filling out the Annex 5 form, we saw ourselves as new inhabitants entering an old colonial architecture—sometimes accepting existing frames, other times radically transforming them, sometimes omitting them altogether—and transforming it to adapt it to a different form of life.

The guidelines presented by the UNESCO framework use terms and concepts that are founded in a decidedly modern understanding of cultural heritage; they work to naturalize this worldview, framing it as concrete and omnipresent. By re-examining, rejecting, subverting, and re-appropriating these guidelines, this book-dossier envisions new uses for the nomination dossier in establishing a more critical, inclusive, and diverse understanding of heritage, including the complete abolition of heritage. By occupying the index and architecture of the nomination dossier, we aim to challenge conventional modernist understandings of heritage.

We acknowledge, as Walter Mignolo has suggested, that it is not enough to change the content of the conversation: we must change its terms.⁷ *Refugee Heritage* attempts to produce cracks within and to thereby reframe common conceptions surrounding heritage. We hope that by destabilizing the categorizations and values contained in the nomination, it will be possible to open up to a pluriversality of narrations that are emancipatory, in that they are delinked from western modernist categories that pretend to be universal.

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the concept of *heritage* change in
order to acknowledge the camp's
condition?**

But are we not still living here? For the camp to become a heritage site, should we not return first?

05. Universalism

The concept of universalism cannot be separated from its colonial and imperial ambitions and the homogenizing rationales of Eurocentric doctrines. Modernity, like its imperial histories of colonialism, is founded on the claim that its system of organizing the world is universal, inevitable, and unchallengeable.

The contradictory and paradoxical conception of universalism that is embedded in European enlightenment thinking forms the basis for the World Heritage Convention. It is not a coincidence that the Convention, which overtly promotes a universal approach to heritage, emerged at the time when European countries were losing their colonial hold on vast territories across the world. The Convention aimed to perpetuate, quite simply, cultural domination through other means; nominations made under the Convention became a way to set universal standards, taking European history as the main, and often sole, point of reference. It is also not a surprise that half of the world's listed heritage sites are in fact located either in Europe or in North America.

The foundational principles for inscription on the World Heritage List contain a series of unavoidable paradoxes and contradictions—for instance, demanding that sites be at the same time “universal” and “unique,” despite the fact that if they are unique, they obviously *cannot be universal*; or stipulating that only nation-states can nominate a site, effectively embedding nominations in that state's national rhetoric, which is the opposite of universal. These contradictions are made invisible by normalizing principles that are integral to the local history of Europe, and of France in particular. As nominations for World Heritage status are required to be approved and submitted by state structures first, the narrative and perspective of history that such nominations endorse must cohere with and uphold that state's official discourse.

This nomination-dossier cannot even exist in the framework of UNESCO, because only states are permitted to prepare the nomination. The Annex 5 should have been prepared and commissioned by a state. But which state is interested in recognizing refugee heritage, since states continue to negate refugee rights?

06. Authenticity

Another pillar in the dominant understanding of heritage that underpins the World Heritage List is the conceptual category of “authenticity.” Authenticity is defined in UNESCO's guidelines by recourse to four criteria (materials, workmanship, design, and the setting of the property). It has been mainly understood in terms of the preservation of an alleged “original status,” thereby invoking a purist origin based on authorship and calling for the preservation of the object in the “original style.” This is an ideological point since buildings arrive to us always already manipulated; authenticity is also particularly challenging to prove in cases where additions and reconstruction radically changes the use of buildings.

Authenticity is yet another concept invented by modernity in order to present itself as new. In the modernist logic, authenticity enabled buildings from different historical periods to be perceived as emblematic of particular styles, freezing them in time and embedding them in a sequence able to demonstrate the impact of modernity's rupture with historical continuity through its introduction of a new, better style. It is noteworthy that the most represented typology in the World Heritage List comprises of places of worship in Europe. This not only shows how Christian theological concepts that originated in Europe have been framed as universal values, but also how authenticity has been mobilized in order to erase long, organic processes—such as for example the construction of churches that took centuries—and replace them with simple categorizations of style and epoch: Gothic, Roman, Byzantine, etc. Since modernity constructs itself in opposition to the past, it cannot be subsumed in any temporal continuum; authenticity is the cage used to lock historical processes into definitional stasis. Similar cages have been applied to indigenous populations that have been compulsorily subjected to essentialist notions of indigeneity in order to erase the claims and rights that they might assert in relation to their land.

Since the camp is a self-organized built environment, how does the perpetual organic transformation performed by its inhabitants constitute a right that can be preserved through strategic recourse to the notion of *authenticity*? And how can the notion of perpetual transformation, and not the freezing of time, be used to redefine authenticity? The Nara Conference in 1994 marked a point of rupture in the “material fetishist” understanding of heritage. Is a Buddhist temple that needs to be rebuilt every hundred years with new wood not authentic and therefore not recognized as cultural heritage? At the conference, participants from East Asian countries challenged the prevalent European understanding of heritage by defending different systems of values.

The camp should never be part of our identity, it is a place where suffering and misery exist.

08. Trajectories

This book-dossier is not a definitive “document” so much as the *documentation* of an ongoing process of transformation. Instead of erasing the different phases of the process, we left intact texts and materials in order to preserve self-critical reflection on the project and to acknowledge its never-ending character. This book-dossier should not be understood as an attempt to capture and freeze the living culture of Dheisheh Refugee Camp, but rather as an exercise in acknowledging the cultural values of Dheisheh and challenging dominant notions of heritage. Above all, we hope that the book-dossier will be used as a concrete instrument in the task of making the right of return a political practice in the present.

Refugee Heritage is an attempt to understand and practice refugeeness beyond humanitarianism. Such a process does not just require rethinking the refugee camp as a political space: it calls for the redefinition of the refugee as a subject in exile and an understanding of exile as a political practice of the present capable of challenging the status quo. The recognition of “the heritage of a culture of exile” constitutes the perspective from which social, spatial, and political structures can be imagined and experienced beyond the idea of the nation-state.

After more than seven decades, the right of return is no longer simply the right to return to the village of origin—rather, it implies a radical call for an extended freedom of movement. If the “camp form,” the most extreme border device ever created, was conceived to strip people of their political subjectivity and transform them into bare life, our task is to reunite biological life and political life not by calling for the canceling of borders but rather by multiplying the forms of transgression and profanation performed in relation to these lines of separation.

This nomination dossier focuses on Dheisheh, but we hope that this approach and spirit could be extended to other refugee camps and expanded to include other forms of minority and subjugated heritage.

07. Tangible and Intangible Heritage

With the increasing affirmation of the political and economic power of non-western countries, and on the basis of a number of international conferences, a host of new policies and amendments have been implemented within UNESCO to redress the fundamental contradictions and Eurocentric views present in their framework. By emphasizing monuments and masterpieces, the convention has historically promoted an understanding of heritage as *culture embedded in materiality*. More recently, though, as a result of attempts to account for the cultural expressions that are manifest in immaterial forms, intangible forms of heritage have started to be recognized. However, in spite of these developments, the hierarchical dichotomy between tangible and intangible heritage remains to all intents and purposes intact. Monuments continue to be things that exist in western countries, while intangible heritage—which is deemed “second-class” (folklore)—is recognized in the rest of the world. The very separation between tangible and intangible is misleading. In many cultures, this separation is completely artificial. As Laurajane Smith has noted, one can argue that all forms of heritage are intangible, since material heritage is a construction and a “cultural and social process, which engages with the present.” For this reason, in this book-dossier, we insist on understanding refugee heritage as being both tangible and intangible.

The fact that World Heritage status is defined through a framework of universality, authenticity, and tangible and intangible heritage, beneath a veneer of depoliticized language, makes it very attractive to nation-states. Nationalist and political motivations can be easily white-washed behind such initiatives. The act of nomination, which is presented as objective and non-political, has been normalized so as to appear self-evident and remain unchallenged. In reality, World Heritage listings are used to uphold a specific version of national memory, while disempowering and silencing the memories and heritages of minority groups.

This book-dossier attempts to deactivate the claim of objectivity that is present in the concept of *heritage*. By presenting different narratives that do not fit within statist discourse, it seeks to reorient heritage towards non-hegemonic forms of life and collective memory.

09. Positions

8. "Restitution—Making Return a Reality," special issue, *Al-Majdal* 27 (Autumn 2005).

9. Alessandro Petti, *Arcipelaghi e enclave. Architettura dell'Ordinamento Spaziale* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007); Alessandro Petti, "Archipelagos and Enclaves," in *Architecture on the Borderline: Boundary Politics and Built Space*, ed. Anoma Pieris (Oxon: Routledge, 2019).

In *Seeking Locations in Palestine for the Film "The Gospel According to Matthew"* (1965), the Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini discovers that Palestine is not the majestic biblical landscape that he had in mind, but rather "four barren hillsides, an arid and abandoned landscape, burnt by the sun." He remarks that local inhabitants cannot be used for extras because of their "savage faces," and exclaims that "Christ's preaching had not been heard here, not even from afar." The priest who accompanies Pasolini in his journey, comforting him, wonders if at "the time of Christ the Galilee was different; that Palestine, prior to the Arab invasions was a bit more florid, richer."

The film continues on in contrast by documenting Pasolini's admiration of the communitarian life he found when visiting the kibbutz Bar'am. What he failed to realize was that this "freedom, emancipation and model for communitarian life" was built on the ruins of Palestinian villages: Bar'am was built on the ruins of Kafr Bir'im, a Christian village evacuated by Jewish militia in 1948 and demolished in 1953 to prevent its inhabitants from returning. The site today has been declared a national park and is a site for archaeological tourism. However, some of the original inhabitants succeeded in remaining close to their village of origin, and their struggle to return has never ceased.⁸

Pasolini's documentary stumbles from stereotype to stereotype. This continues to the point at which, upon arriving to Jerusalem, a city divided in two, he capitulates in his search. Many before him had the same problem and attempted to redesign the country so that it would resemble its biblical image. Instead, desperate, Pasolini moves the location of his film to the Sassi of Matera in southern Italy—ancient cave dwellings that a few decades later would be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

This story demands that I clarify my own position. By clarifying the perspective and specific point from which I see and speak, and my belonging to a specific cultural geography and local history, I hope to take a distance from the pretentious, universalist, and disembodied European modernist male subject and at the same time to build genuine alliances.

I come from a southern Italian family, from a small region unknown to most Italians called Molise. As a southern Italian, I have experienced a specific peripheral position within the hegemonic idea of Europe. Since my childhood, "the south" was both a political and philosophical perspective and at the same time a specific socioeconomic subaltern condition that I experienced in my body and language.

I emigrated to the north of Italy to study. In Venice, my thick southern-Italian accent marked me quickly as one of the many *meridionali*—immigrant students from the south. Studying became a way to construct my own political subjectivity and I acknowledge the privilege of having access to public education. I graduated in Architecture in 2001 and received my PhD in Urbanism in 2006. The doctoral scholarship gave me the possibility to move, and to live in Palestine in 2002. I did not have a specific religious or political motivation, Palestine was for me first and foremost my new family home after having met Sandi, my partner in life and work. During those first years in Palestine, I learned to connect my personal life with my own research interests, and to make sense of my own experience living under Israeli colonial occupation. The book *Arcipelaghi e enclave*, published in 2007, was an attempt to understand the spatial dimension of the conditions imposed by the Oslo Accords.⁹ The basic idea explored through the book is that the architecture of this territorial model

of control is fundamentally made of the contraposition of a series of connected islands: a colonial archipelago (Israeli towns and settlements), linked by an infrastructure of highways and bypass roads (the sea), which are in turn opposed to a system of disconnected enclaves (Palestinian towns and villages). In my view, those disconnected islands acquired their radical form in the refugee camps, spaces carved out from state sovereignty.

When in 2012 I started working in Dheisheh, it became clear to me that camps and refugees were not simply passive victims of state violence. The social and urban structure of Dheisheh Refugee Camp in particular shows the multiplicity of ways in which space and society can be reorganized outside of the nation state and modernist principles. I had to unlearn and relearn what my western education had taught me about architecture, heritage, aesthetics, public and private property, and democracy and forms of government. In Dheisheh, it became clear that radically different concepts and words were necessary in order to make sense of an urbanity of exile, built over more than seven decades, outside of state control. For this reason, in 2012 we established Campus in Camps, a university in the camp, where new forms of knowledge production could engage with the reality of the camp beyond the humanitarian paradigm.¹⁰

What emerged through years of studies, discussions, and actions were a series of spatial interventions and a *Collective Dictionary*,¹¹ made up of terms that try to engage with the reality of the camp and give meaning and reference to actions. The knowledge and forms of life upon which the *Collective Dictionary* and the interventions were built are the object of this book: they are described in the following chapters and they in turn describe what we aim to preserve.

This book-dossier emerged from a conflictual and imperfect situation. It concerns and engages Dheisheh's inhabitants as well as activists, NGOs, professionals, and cultural producers. The assemblages of all these different groups and geographies constitute for us "the community" and include us as well. I do not see myself as detached from the camp. I cannot see myself as disconnected from the people with whom I shared these moments of learning. I miss starting my day in Dheisheh. The smell of coffee and laughter. Some of us still live in Dheisheh, others (luckier?) left or had to leave: Aysar is now in Italy, he has just published his new book *foglie di Gelsò*, a stunning account of prisoners' stories from Dheisheh.¹² Isshaq is in the Netherlands and is developing an engaged artistic practice. Munir continues to enrich the Arab world with his wisdom from Amman. Our dispersion reflects the dispersion of millions of Palestinians, but Palestine and Dheisheh in particular remain our center of gravity: central to the ways in which we understand the world, Dheisheh is a place that we come back to when possible. I am not sure if these experiences make me part of "the community" or not, although I do know for sure that I do not write here as "the expert" nor as the "observant researcher." I'm writing this last note from Stockholm, where I currently live, after spending more than a decade in Palestine with my family, in precarious conditions deprived of the right to stay, despite the fact that my wife and two daughters are Palestinian. Often banned by the Israeli authorities from using the airport, I was only able to re-enter Palestine from the Allenby crossing (the only border crossing for Palestinians) after being interrogated for hours and randomly subjected to decisions to grant or deny a visa, sometimes for three months, sometimes three weeks, sometimes three days, and sometimes I was simply denied the ability to re-enter at all. These experiences of dehumanization when crossing the border, alongside the humiliations of everyday life living under Israeli occupation, taught me important

10. Alessandro Petti, "Campus in Camps: Knowledge Production and Urban Interventions in Refugee Camps," in *The Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South*, eds. Simin Davoudi, Richard Cowell, Iain White, and Hilda Blanco (Oxon: Routledge, 2017).

11. www.campusincamps.ps

12. Aysar al-Saifi, *Foglie di Gelsò* (Milan: Prospero editore, 2020).

lessons; they led to a sense of disgust at the fallacious freedom of movement granted to Europeans and their descendants but denied to the rest of the world. Injustice is a bodily experience: it stinks. The border is not only the space that divides imagined nation-state territories, it can also be found within national territories. The camp is the most extreme materialization of a border regime, a void in which to lock people who do not belong to a nation-state. Thinking from the camp means thinking from the border—inhabiting at least two spaces at the same time, the inside and the outside, the normal and the abnormal. It means seeing more than one thing at the same time, recognizing separations, and witnessing the aberrations of nation-state.

Decolonization in Palestine is essentially the practice of opposing Israel's regime of occupation, colonization, and segregation. Moving back to Europe, via Palestine, I started to understand the "Italian southern question" more clearly as a case of internal colonization. Needless to say, this connection is not new—in writing the *Question of Palestine*, Edward Said was influenced by the Gramscian conceptual categories of subalternity and hegemony developed in relation to "the Italian southern question." Is it for this reason that I find the voiceover of Pasolini's documentary so disturbing and patronizing when he encounters people in Palestine. Commissioning Luca Capuano, the photographer that produced the photographic dossier for the Italian UNESCO heritage sites, to document Dheisheh Refugee Camp with the same care and search of monumentality he used for the Italian sites, was a small revenge against the intellectual and emotional blindness of Pasolini. What does decolonization mean now that my body is in Europe? It means fundamentally decolonizing knowledge production, by undermining particular modernist mythologies embedded in western education. The Orientalist description of Arabs, descriptions that Pasolini continued to perpetuate, resonate with the description of southern Italians as backwards, underdeveloped, uncivilized, lazy, and slow in catching up with modernity. These tropes and characterizations became the ideological justification for legitimizing the invasion and occupation of Libya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Paradoxically, Italian settler colonialism was justified by the need to find land and work for poor southern Italian settlers. If Gramsci was hoping for alliances between the industrialized proletariat of the north and the farmers of the south, today in a similar spirit we might call for a new alliance between southern people and immigrants. In a modest and intimate form, the work that Sandi and I have been doing together is also the result of an exploration of this possibility.

In exploring a new direction in our work, moving from *Refugee Heritage* to the *Afterlife of Colonial Fascist Architecture*, in the summer of 2020, we established a new initiative called *Towards an Entity of Decolonization*, in direct opposition to the so-called "Entity of Colonization of Sicilian Latifundia," which was established by Italy's fascist regime in 1940 following the model of the "Entity of Colonization of Libya" and colonial architecture in Eritrea and Ethiopia. These territories were considered by the regime to be "empty," "underdeveloped," and "backward," and therefore in need of being "reclaimed," "modernized," and "repopulated." For this purpose, the Entity of Colonization inaugurated eight new rural towns in Sicily, many of which remained unfinished. Today, most of these villages have fallen into ruin.¹³ However, what does not seem to be in ruin in Italy is colonial and fascist rhetoric, culture, and politics. Despite the fall of fascism following the Second World War, Italy's *defascistization* remains, unfortunately, an unfinished process, which can be seen in the visible architectures, monuments, plaques, and toponymy that celebrate the fascist regime in Italy. Furthermore, Italy—having lost its colonies during the Second World War—never embarked on a real process of decolonization. In 2017, the nomination of Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its fascist and colonial architecture, which was built during the period of Italian occupation, posed a series of fundamental questions for both the ex-colonized and the ex-colonizers, including the question: who has the right to preserve, reuse, and re-narrate fascist colonial architecture?¹⁴

We initiated *Refugee Heritage* before the advent of the so-called "refugee crisis," when millions of refugees fled the western-fueled war in the Middle East, arriving in Europe. At the time of writing, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of refugees seems to have faded from the public discussion. We continue to cultivate the ambition to work on subjects that we deem politically relevant, regardless of whether such subjects are part of mainstream public discussion or not. Finally, it should not go unnoted that we are each using a non-native language in writing large parts of this book. Beside the personal struggle to reinhabit a new language, the use of English brings a whole set of colonial and hegemonic references with it. We only hope that in sum some of the ideas and discourses prevail, despite linguistic limitations.

13.

"Towards an entity of decolonization" (*Verso un ente di decolonizzazione*), 2020, is a project by Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti (DAAR); photographic dossier by Luca Capuano. Shown at the "Quadriennale d'arte 2020: Fuori" at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, October 30, 2020—January 17, 2021.

14.

Emilio Distretti and Alessandro Petti, "Afterlife of Colonial Fascist Architecture," *Future Anterior* XVI, no. 2 (Winter 2019).

10. Acknowledgments

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www.campusincamps.ps

16.

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This book-dossier is a result of long-term collaborative efforts. It is essentially built on the knowledge and legacy of Campus in Camps,¹⁵ an experimental educational program that Sandi and I established in Dheisheh Refugee Camp in 2012.¹⁶ It would not have been possible without the commitment of various DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Research) fellows that contributed to the project at different moments: Elsa Koehler, Isshaq Al-Barbary, Sandy Rishmawi, Husam Abu Salem, Mark Romei, Omar Hmidat, and Ayed Arafah.

The spark to initiate *Refugee Heritage* came from the invitation extended by Tirdad Zolghadr to participate in the 5th edition of the Riwaq Biennial. The framework of a research-led art project allowed a political discussion that would have otherwise been impossible to conduct. The team of the Riwaq Center for Architectural Conversation in Palestine, and Khaldun Bshara in particular, played a very important role in legitimizing this initiative within the framework of architectural conservation in Palestine. The collective meetings held inside the Concrete Tent, a space of gathering that we built in the garden of the Al-Feniq Cultural Center in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, constituted the foundations for thinking through the nomination. The nomination was prepared in dialogue with members of the Dheisheh Camp Popular Committee, the Al-Feniq Cultural Center, the Ibdah Cultural Center, and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Bethlehem. We are extremely grateful for the time these groups dedicated to together thinking through the implications of nominating the camp as a heritage site. Fragments of these conversations can be found in the Appendices. We would like to acknowledge in particular the generosity of the Odah and al-Saifi families, who opened their houses and spent hours tracing the history and evolution of their family homes. Special thanks go to Naji Owdah, former Director of the Al-Feniq Cultural center and the current Director of Laylac, with whom we shared hours and hours in conversation about Dheisheh; Abu Khalil Al-Laham, Head of the Popular Committee, for his support and courage in taking risks that have been fundamental for all our initiatives; and Foad Al-Laham, Nasser Ramadan, and Osama Jafari, for their support and enthusiasm. Nada Al Atrash, former Director of the Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation in Bethlehem, has been a great source of inspiration in mobilizing heritage as a political agent.

After more than three years of meetings and discussions in Dheisheh camp, we felt we were ready to bring the conversation to contexts beyond Palestine. In collaboration with *e-flux Architecture*, in 2017 we published the first three parts of the nomination dossier, the interventions, and the responses and organized the first public forum outside of Palestine, in February 2017, in which Suad Amiry, writer and founder of Riwaq; Thomas Keenan, Director of the Human Rights program at Bard College; and Jorge Otero-Pailos, Director of Historic Preservation at Columbia University, all participated. We offer them many thanks for their insightful responses, which are included in this publication. A special thanks goes to *e-flux Architecture* for publishing an early version of the nomination dossier and in particular to Nikolaus Hirsch and Nick Axel for their skillful editorial support, commitment to the project, and friendship.

A second fundamental public discussion was organized in August 2017 by Rasha Salti and Paul B. Preciado, as part of Documenta 14. Titled “The Parliament of Bodies: A Century of Camps: Refugee Knowledge and Forms of Sovereignty Beyond the Nation-State,” this discussion included Abu Khalil Al-Laham, Head of the Dheisheh Popular Committee; the Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury; Lorenzo Pezzani, architect and researcher at the Centre for Research Architecture; Eyal Weizman, Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths; Isshaq Al-Barbary, researcher and former Campus in Camps participant; and architect and urban planner Jad Tabet, former member of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. On this occasion, Jad Tabet generously responded to the first draft of the nomination dossier, suggesting that we make a serial nomination by including the villages of origin. His suggestions and comments had a fundamental impact in shaping this nomination dossier, and we are extremely thankful for his generosity.

A third round of public discussions took place in Abu Dhabi on February 25, 2018, on the occasion of the retrospective exhibition *Permanent Temporariness*, organized by the New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery and curated by Salwa Mikdadi and Bana Kattan. The two-day symposium brought together Leila Shahid, former Palestinian Ambassador to the EU; Ilana Feldman from George Washington University; Zaki Aslan of ICCROM-ATHAR Sharjah; Zina Jardaneh of the Palestinian Museum; Deepak Unnikrishnan, May Dabbagh, and Nathalie Peutz of NYU Abu Dhabi; Charles Esche and Diana Franssen of Van Abbemuseum; George Katodrytis of the American University of Sharjah; Kieran Long from ArkDes, Stockholm; Salwa Mikdadi of NYU Abu Dhabi; and architect and an urban planner Jad Tabet, former member of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

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In our practices, art exhibitions are both sites of display and sites of actions that spill over into other contexts: built architectural structures, interventions that challenge dominant narratives, and the formation of critical learning environments and public forums. We are extremely grateful to the curators that have invited us to develop the project as an art exhibition: Salwa Mikdadi and Bana Kattan, Maya Allison, Charles Esche and Diana Franssen, Paulo Tavares and Sepake Angiama, Maria Lind, Beth Hughes and Francisco Sanin, Rasha Salti and Paul Preciado, Nora Razian, Magnus Ericson, and Tirdad Zolghadr. Art installations and public discussion of the *Refugee Heritage* project (2015-2021) have been presented at the New York University Abu Dhabi Gallery (2018), Van Abbemuseum (2018), Chicago Architecture Biennial (2019), Art Jameel in Dubai (2019), The Art Encounters Biennial in Timisoara (2019), the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism (2019), and the Venice Architecture Biennale (2021).

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This book is dedicated to all the people that have not given up fighting for their rights.

This book-dossier attempts to deactivate the claim of objectivity that is present in the concept of heritage. By presenting different narratives that do not fit within statist discourse, it seeks to reorient heritage towards non-hegemonic forms of life and collective memory.

