

## ON PERMANENT TEMPORARINESS. A CONVERSATION WITH SANDI HILAL AND ALESSANDRO PETTI

JUANA CANET  
GINÉS GARRIDO  
ALEJANDRO GÓMEZ



Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti

*Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti have generously assisted us, remotely, at their homes in Stockholm, where they have lived for six years. Sandi is a professor of architecture at the University of Lund, and Alessandro is a professor of architecture and social justice at the Royal Institute of Art. They have been working together for more than twenty years within the framework of the DAAR – Decolonizing Architecture Art Research – platform,<sup>1</sup> with which they have carried out research and architecture projects that are situated between artistic, pedagogical, architectural and political action. Last year, they obtained the Golden Lion at the XVIII Architecture Exhibition of the Biennale di Venezia with the project Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza that they have underway in Sicily, which is where*

<sup>1</sup> 'The artistic research practice of DAAR is situated between architecture, art, pedagogy and politics. Over the last two decades, they have developed a series of research-projects that are both theoretically ambitious and practically engaged in the struggle for justice and equality. In their artistic research practice, art exhibitions are both sites of display and sites of action that spill over into other contexts: built architectural structures, the shaping of critical learning environments, interventions that challenge dominant collective narratives, the production of new political imaginations, the formation of civic spaces and the redefinition of concepts.' [Consulted on 26.02.2024] <https://www.decolonizing.ps/site/about/>

*Alessandro is from. Sandi is Palestinian, and the two of them, along with their daughters, have been living together in Palestine for a decade, where they have developed many of their projects. Because of these strong personal and family ties with Palestine, in addition to their commitment to their political struggles, the war in Gaza has deeply affected them. Both are in a state of 'shock,' but at the same time, they rebel against the apparent determination of historical events.*

*This way of understanding their political, academic and research activity, in which their professional careers – successes and opportunities – are mixed with their more personal lives – which they narrate with the succession of family events, weddings, and friends – and the two 'lives' are mixed with the political conflicts that they have lived, especially those related to the Palestinian conflict and, in general, with the Middle East, is well reflected in the biography included in the book Permanent Temporariness.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti, *Permanent Temporariness*. (Estocolmo: Arts and Theory Publishing, 2018)

# On permanent temporariness

## A conversation with Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti

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Juana Canet, Ginés Garrido y Alejandro Gómez "On permanent temporariness. A conversation with Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti", *ZARCH* 22 (junio 2024): 176-185. ISSN versión impresa: 2341-0531 / ISSN versión digital: 2387-0346. [https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs\\_zarch/zarch.20242210344](https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_zarch/zarch.20242210344)

**Juana Canet, Ginés Garrido, Alejandro Gómez  
(JC, GG, AG)**

**We would like to know the following: In what way  
are these different facets of life at the origin of  
DAAR? How did you start working?**

**Alessandro Petti [AP]:**

We met in Venice after both graduating from architecture school and beginning our PhD studies. My first trip to Palestine had a profound impact on me, as I witnessed firsthand the colonization and occupation of the region. This experience prompted me to ask many questions, and my doctoral studies became a space where I could make sense of what I was witnessing.<sup>3</sup> Despite carrying with me the knowledge and biases acquired in the 'Western academy,' particularly at IUAV,<sup>4</sup> my thesis supervisor, Giorgio Agamben, directed my attention to the concept of the 'camp' from the outset. When our first daughter was born, we decided to move to Palestine.

This decision was deeply personal. We desired for our daughters to grow up in an environment resembling an extended family. I harboured fears of conforming to the model of the isolated nuclear family prevalent in the West. Palestine offered us a refuge from the isolation we perceived in Western societies. Thus, our move was driven not only by personal considerations but also by intellectual curiosity, particularly concerning the unique issues surrounding the 'camp' as a space outside the sovereignty of the state, with a radically different notion of public space.

The 'camp' is a space carved out from the city, where residents are deprived of basic rights. This experience challenged the paradigms instilled in me by Western academia. Upon arriving in Palestine, particularly in the Dheisheh refugee camp, I realized the necessity of unlearning certain concepts that hindered my understanding of the situation. I had to question and discard previous assumptions. For instance, conventional categories such as 'private' and 'public' spaces were irrelevant in the context of a refugee camp. In these environments, rules differ significantly from those governing traditional cities.

This realization necessitated a complete reevaluation. I embarked on the task of first unlearning and then relearning a

3 Alessandro Petti, *Arcipelaghi e enclave. Architettura dell'ordinamento spaziale contemporaneo* (Milán: Bruno Mondadori, 2007).

4 Università Iuav di Venezia – Instituto Universitario de Arquitectura de Venecia.

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new vocabulary and conceptual framework that better aligned with what I observed. As architects, we engaged in theoretical discourse rooted in practical experiences, leading to initiatives like *Campus in Camps*.<sup>5</sup> This endeavour allowed us to engage directly with the reality of refugee camps, recognizing their significance in urban theory. Subsequent projects, such as “Refugee Heritage”,<sup>6</sup> stemmed from this initial exploration, which we’ll delve into further later on.

**Sandi Hilal [SH]:**

This is a question that we always ask ourselves: What is DAAR? ‘Daar’ means ‘home’ in Arabic. In other words, what does our work entail? Many young architects, particularly in Palestine and across the Middle East, often ask us, ‘How did you manage to build such a robust practice?’ I find it challenging to respond without emphasizing the pivotal roles that love and friendship have played in this journey. Without our collective bond, DAAR would not be what it is today. We made a conscious decision to establish DAAR as a family, driven by the strength of our friendships. Despite dedicating considerable time to analyzing power structures, we questioned whether we could truly effect change within these systems. Could we move beyond mere analysis and take tangible action? How could we subvert these structures?

When we reflect on our personal journeys, it’s because I, for one, felt compelled to push my own boundaries. I engaged in extensive self-examination and self-critique, taking distance from the categories imposed by modernity such as public and private.

**(AP):**

We aimed to challenge modernity in this regard, which led us to contemplate decolonization<sup>7</sup> within the field of architecture.

5 ‘In 2012, we established an experimental educational program in Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Palestine, *Campus in Camps*, engaging young participants in new forms of visual and cultural representation of refugee camps after more than seventy years of displacement.’ [Consulted on 22.02.2024] <https://www.decolonizing.ps/site/campus-in-camps-2012-2015/>

6 This refers to the project published in the book, Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, *Refugee Heritage. World Heritage Dossier*. (Estocolmo: Art and Theory Publishing, 2021)

7 ‘Decolonization is the starting point to understanding the globalized present and the associated conditions of exile, displacement, migration, revolt, and struggle against oppression, with which a convincing conceptual vocabulary can be produced and exercised in today’s struggles for justice and equality.’ Hilal, Petti (2018): 7.

It’s impossible to discuss colonization without considering the role of modernity. Modern architects often collaborated closely with colonizers in their efforts to ‘conquer’ the world, effectively beautifying and whitewashing the colonization process. However, these colonizers purportedly sought to civilize rather than solely introduce modernity, and architects played a significant role in this narrative.

We must confront this notion of modernity and begin by decolonizing ourselves. It’s easy to compartmentalize our identities, behaving one way at home and adopting a different persona as academic researchers or in our writings. However, to authentically embody a practice labeled ‘Decolonizing Architecture, Art, and Research,’ we had to undertake a process of self-incorporation.

**(JC, GG, AG):**

**However, how can we define ‘decolonization’? You propose that colonization is a frame of reference to understand the political reality, particularly in Palestine. Therefore, would ‘decolonization’ be the appropriate term to challenge that frame of reference, linking it to a specific space or time, as if it were an exercise in continuous activation and reorientation? You also employ Agamben’s concept of profanation,’ adapting it as a strategy to return things to their ‘common use’.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, according to the definition of decolonization that you have made, we would like to know, how has the concept of ‘decolonization’ evolved in your work? How would you define it today?**

**(AP):**

I want to emphasize the importance of avoiding the notion that decolonization has a single, universally applicable definition or approach. Its understanding and implementation are deeply intertwined with context and individual perspectives within specific geographical and social settings. Therefore, it’s crucial to begin by questioning what decolonization truly means and what it entails as a task. However, we must be cautious not to respond with the abstract vocabulary of modernity, which is often detached from specific contexts and counterproductive to decolonial efforts.

8 ‘Giorgio Agamben proposes the idea of ‘profanation’ as a strategy to restore things to common use. To profane does not simply mean to abolish or cancel separations, but to learn to make new uses of them. [...] Profanation, instead, manages to deactivate power and restores the space that power had confiscated to common use.’ Hilal, Petti (2018): 21.



Decolonization must be contextualized and grounded in a specific position. Only then can we earnestly address the question: What is decolonization? Decolonizing requires situating ourselves within a particular place and grappling with its complexities. For me, this question became profoundly relevant in my own career and life trajectory. Yet, it's essential to acknowledge that we are deeply entrenched in the Western knowledge production system, which can lead to uncritical adoption of fashionable ideas. Moving to Palestine over a decade ago was a pivotal step for me to understand its conditions and, in essence, to decolonize Palestine, which entails challenging Israel's colonization, occupation and apartheid.

However, this question took on new dimensions when circumstances compelled us to leave Palestine and confront the issue of decolonization in Europe. In responding to this, I had to mobilize different ideas and approaches. My understanding of decolonization is inherently limited by my specific perspective as a southern Italian. To me, decolonizing in Europe largely involves dismantling the myth of modernity.

Upon returning to Europe six years ago, discussions on decolonization were met with confusion in Sweden. However, over time, it has become increasingly central to political discourse. For instance, in the Swedish context, there's recognition of the historical exploitation experienced by the northern part of the country as a form of internal colonization, including the oppression of the Sami indigenous population. This underscores the varied meanings of decolonization within different historical and geographical contexts.

This complexity was evident in our work in southern Italy, where we engaged in projects such as our recent one exhibited at the Venice Architecture Biennale, which received the Golden Lion award. This project delved into the history of the *Ente di Colonizzazione del Latifondo Siciliano*,<sup>9</sup> established during the fascist regime to colonize Sicily under the guise of imposing a civilized modernity. It's essential to recognize that the narrative of progress and modernization perpetuated by modernity can mask inherent violence and suppress critical inquiry.

9 'Its function [*Ente di Colonizzazione del Latifondo Siciliano*] was to reclaim, modernize, and repopulate Sicily, which the fascist regime considered backwards, underdeveloped and "empty."' Hilal, Petti "Ente di Decolonizzazione — Borgo Rizza" in Lesley Lokko (ed.) *The Laboratory of the Future*. (Venecia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2023) 143.

Decolonization is not about rejecting modernity outright; rather, it's about deconstructing the binary oppositions inherent in modernity and embracing the complexity of our existence. Therefore, our understanding of decolonization in Europe should extend beyond a simplistic anti-modern stance and delve deeper into processes of desegregation that challenge binary conceptions.

**(SH):**

Modernity and colonization are inherently intertwined. They progress hand in hand as modernity unfolds, shaping the organizational structures of Western states. Upon returning to Europe after a decade of contemplating decolonization, I found myself needing to rebuild my self-esteem and confidence. I refused to conform to a "migrant" as defined by European standards - the expectations of 'integration' and the behaviours one must adopt to be accepted. These expectations dictate how one should behave, whether it's defining motherhood or academic success, and impose conditions for inclusion. While inclusion may seem progressive, it often results in perpetual subjugation. Thus, I rejected the notion of being included on such terms.

In Arab culture, hospitality is valued, but it comes with a limit - hospitality lasts for three days, beyond which it becomes charity. So, I questioned my status after the third day in Europe. I refused to be a perpetual 'guest' and instead aimed to become a neighbour - someone who contributes to the community while also seeking inclusion. The prevailing message was clear: conform or face rejection.

True democracy involve a reciprocal exchange of hosting and being hosted, inclusion and inclusivity. We should navigate between these roles rather than being fixed in one as dictated by European-centric modernity. Furthermore, modernity should not be imposed as the standard for all cultures; each culture is valuable in its own right. However, upon arriving in Europe, I felt my culture was devalued - a stark contrast to the principles of modernity. This is where the process of decolonization begins - dismantling the hierarchy and valuing diverse cultures.

In Palestine, our understanding of decolonization differs. We thrive on mutual support and recognize the interconnectedness of struggles, whether for indigenous rights, environmental justice, or Palestinian sovereignty. The recent events in Gaza underscore the connection between environmental justice and the decolonization of Palestine, offering a glimmer of

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hope amidst adversity. Our struggles are interconnected, defying binary divisions.

As architects, we must question whether a modern worldview is still relevant when confronted with the interconnectedness of contemporary struggles. Can we exist on the ‘thresholds’ rather than within the ‘boxes’ constructed by modernity?”

**(JC, GG, AG):**

**Going back to October 7. Is there something hopeful for you?**

**(AP):**

Before October 7th, there was an October 6th, and an October 5th, and an October 4th... It's crucial to understand the context, to grasp the rhetoric the West employs to evade commitments to human rights. How many UN resolutions have been passed? Where is the so-called ‘international community’ now? In Western parlance, ‘international community’ used to refer to Europe and the United States. However, today, it encompasses the rest of the world, which voted in favor of the UN ‘ceasefire.’ Meanwhile, Western nations engage in deceit and warfare. Unfortunately, this is the reality of the West at present. Indeed, they exhibit the ‘dark side’ we’ve always discussed. We were aware of its existence, now in full evidence.

**(JC, GG, AG):**

**This could be placed in a broader context that incorporates the social and economic conditions in which we live. Can a relationship be established between decolonization and the idea of ‘degrowth,’ which involves questioning the economic processes on which modernity is founded?**

**(AP):**

Sandi also highlighted the intertwined nature of colonialism and modernity as a European project, which presents a daunting challenge. As a European born and raised in Europe, I feel compelled to dismantle the modern mythology that governs our lives. This mythology perpetuates the notion of endless growth and consumption, leading us into an irreversible environmental crisis. We need to foster an internal movement within Europe and connect it with broader struggles. It remains to be seen if younger generations will succeed in bridging various struggles together.

When we consider Palestine, we often think, quite rightly, within the framework of national liberation, particularly within activist circles where all grievances are interconnected, and participants acknowledge each other's struggles. However, Westerners often struggle to empathize with Palestinians due to the dehumanizing portrayal they receive in the media. Conversely, outside of Europe, people understand the indignity of oppression because they've experienced it firsthand. How can Europeans continue to cling to feelings of superiority in the face of such realities? We are witnessing a moment of rupture where cherished ideals like freedom of expression are faltering, as evidenced by recent developments in American universities. Furthermore, in Germany, any criticism of Israel is often misconstrued as anti-Semitic, revealing the depth of contradiction within Western societies. The recent events in Palestine have shattered any illusion that Western institutions stand as champions of freedom or oppose war and violence.

As we reflect on these developments, we've encountered the hypocrisy of Western institutions. In Palestine, it's become clear that Western society can no longer claim any moral authority

**(SH):**

We are currently facing an historical moment, and it's imperative that we challenge the status quo by fostering alliances between various struggles. I'll illustrate this point with two examples. Firstly, let's address the relevance of architecture. Architects often compartmentalize issues into neat categories like ‘public,’ ‘private,’ and ‘green.’ This approach, ingrained in architectural education, fails to acknowledge the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues.

Consider Greta Thunberg's experience. Initially celebrated for her environmental activism, she was silenced when she dared to connect environmental justice with broader political issues. This incident exemplifies the modern tendency to compartmentalize problems and divorce environmental concerns from larger socio-political contexts.

Secondly, I'll share a personal story about my grandmother. Despite facing adversity, she worked tirelessly for twenty years to purchase a small piece of land in Beit Sahour, a town south of Bethlehem. Her goal was to create a sense of rootedness and belonging for our family. This house, built on her land, became a sanctuary for our extended family, embodying our connection to the land and our ancestors.

As architects, we often wield our 'modern' tools to label land ownership as 'private property.' However, this simplistic categorization fails to capture the nuanced differences between my grandmother's land and the speculative real estate holdings of a wealthy investor in New York City. These two entities cannot be equated under the same label, yet modernity oversimplifies complex relationships.

To truly challenge the colonial and modern paradigms, we must reconsider our understanding of geography and the history of places. My grandmother's transformation of 'private property' into a communal space demonstrates that such changes can originate from grassroots efforts, not just state intervention. We must acknowledge the wisdom and agency of individuals like my grandmother, challenging the notion that only the state can create communal spaces.

In Palestine, as in many parts of the world, educational curricula often reflect Western models, perpetuating modernist perspectives. It's crucial that we disrupt these patterns and encourage critical thinking within architectural education. We must unlearn outdated paradigms and embrace a more holistic approach that considers the complexities of human experience and social justice.

**(JC, GG, AG):**

**We would like to return to talking about the 'camp.' We can say that the refugee camp is a 'space in suspension,' a space in which the 'state of exception' prevails, in which only 'naked life' can develop, according to Agamben.<sup>10</sup> You, however, see the Palestinian camps as urban environments in permanent temporality, as fragments of a city under construction, with its social culture, with political value, as spaces of belonging and identity for refugees, where their history and their culture materialize. They are not only places of poverty, misery and suffering but also places of vigilance and control.**

**In relation to this, we would like to mention your project 'Nomination of the refugee camp as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.'<sup>11</sup> That is, for you, is the refugee camp a place with a social and cultural heritage that must be preserved, remembered and recognized by UNESCO? How can a space that should not exist and that is destined**

**to be temporary become a heritage site? And linking it with the camp improvement works, what does it mean to normalize the camp? We know that this is very important in Palestinian camps and that it is linked to the 'right to return.'<sup>12</sup> Doesn't improving the living conditions of the refugee camp mean losing the 'right to return?' Does this 'recognition' normalize the condition of the camp, or does it simply demand the integration of the camp with the rest of the city? There are many questions at the same time!**

**(AP):**

We encounter a contradiction in understanding the refugee camp as a product of state violence, where people are deprived of their basic rights, yet over decades, the camp has evolved beyond mere suffering and humiliation.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly evident in Palestinian camps, though it's essential not to generalize as camps vary across the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon.

After many years, the camp has developed distinct social and political structures, organized outside the framework of the nation-state. This has been particularly inspiring for us. Initially, our exploration of the refugee camp served as a provocation, highlighting its paradoxical nature. We questioned whether we should 'nominate' the refugee camp and treat it seriously. This initiated a process involving refugee communities, associations, and individual Palestinian citizens, encouraging participants to see the camp from different perspectives.

The notion of 'nominating' a camp as a 'World Heritage' site prompted reflection on the format and criteria for such a designation. In the case of Palestine and its refugee camps, discussions primarily centered on their exceptional urban and social structures. Moreover, there was recognition that the demolition of the camps would entail not just physical destruction but also the erasure of lives—a potential second Nakba.<sup>14</sup> However, this is not to romanticize the camp; its origins are rooted in violence.

10 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*. (Turin; Einaudi, 1995)

11 Hilal, Petti (2021).

12 'The notion of "return" has defined the diasporic and extraterritorial nature of Palestinian politics and cultural life since the Nakba. Often articulated in the "suspended politics" of political theology, it has gradually been blurred in the futile limbo of negotiations.' Hilal, Petti (2018): 25.

13 The Palestinian refugee camps were founded in 1948, and this condition has been maintained for more than seventy years.

14 *Nakba* is the term used to designate the Palestinian exodus that occurred during the Arab-Israeli war, when an estimated 700,000 Palestinian Arabs had to flee or were forced to leave their homes. It is also used to refer to the war itself. In Arabic, it means 'catastrophe' or 'cataclysm.'

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In the early 1950s, Palestinian camps transitioned from tents to permanent structures, raising significant architectural and political questions. The decision to replace tents with buildings represented more than just an architectural change—it symbolized acceptance of a certain level of standardization and had implications for the ‘right of return.’ Every architectural decision in the camp holds political significance, emphasizing the importance of preserving it as a material expression of Palestinian identity and the right of return.

Paradoxically, improving or constructing the camp does not negate the right of return; rather, it reaffirms it by maintaining a tangible link to the original homeland. Hence, nominating the refugee camp for UNESCO World Heritage status,<sup>15</sup> along with forty-four towns in the region, carries broader implications. It challenges the traditional notion of who has the authority to nominate a space, particularly one outside the sovereignty of the state.

**(SH):**

I want to clarify our focus on the camps, specifically the Dheisheh refugee camp. When I participated in the camp improvement program, spending two years in Dheisheh, we engaged in extensive political and social discussions with the community about what improvement meant. The residents were understandably skeptical. They questioned why we were seeking to improve the camp now, given its political significance and the ongoing struggle for the right of return within a colonial framework.

Our intention was also to document the history of certain houses and communities within the camp. The community was wary of any initiatives that could be interpreted as undermining the right of return or normalizing the camp’s existence.

Attempting to integrate the camp with the city was met with resistance, as it would blur the boundaries of the camp and potentially jeopardize the refugees’ claims to return to their original villages. The camp was initially built with the understanding that refugees would return home within weeks. However, returning now would require sacrificing the homes and stories that have become integral to their identities.

I remember a conversation with the mother of a friend, who had built her house while her husband was in prison. She

expressed her love for every wall of the house and her reluctance to entertain the idea of its destruction. I proposed the possibility of preserving both the camp and their original homes, but she found the notion incredulous. Yet, this is precisely what we advocate for with our World Heritage Site nomination—to affirm the right of return while acknowledging the significance of the camp as a home for generations.

The destruction of the camp would amount to another *Nakba*—a denial of seventy-five years of history and displacement. The Palestinian right of return necessitates recognition of the homes and stories of all refugees, as they form the foundation of their identities. We must imagine a world where individuals can belong to both their current residence and their ancestral homes.

Our nomination, ‘Nomination as a World Heritage Site of the Dheisheh Refugee Camp and the Forty-Four People of Origin,’ aims to assert the dual belonging of camp residents—to both the camp and their places of origin. It encapsulates the essence of our campaign.

Additionally, I would like to discuss *al masha*.<sup>16</sup>

**(JC, GG, AG):**

**Well... let us talk about the ‘common’ in the ‘private.’ What can we learn from the concept of *al masha*? What does it mean? Is it truly a way of activating space?**

**(AP):**

We can tie this discussion back to our earlier conversation about the camp itself. We noted that traditional categories like ‘private’ and ‘public’ are insufficient when trying to understand the dynamics of a community sharing a space. The concept of *al masha*, originating from the Ottoman period, was a method of land distribution among farmers. During that era, there existed a variety of land categories beyond just ‘private’ or ‘public,’ with land usage often tied to labor. *Al masha* was a specific way for farmers to collectively cultivate and share land, decoupling land use from individual ownership.

16 As they themselves say: ‘The Arabic term *al masha* refers to communal land equally distributed among farmers. *Masha* could only exist if people decided to cultivate the land together. The moment they stop cultivating it, they lose its possession. It is possession through a common use.’ Hilal, Petti (2018): 1.



Observing the protests in Arab cities, we noticed a transformation of the public sphere into a 'common' one. This distinction between 'the public' and 'the common' is becoming increasingly apparent. More spaces now require active community involvement, and this sense of common space, akin to *al masha*, can only emerge when individuals come together voluntarily to collaborate, irrespective of public frameworks. This dynamic is particularly evident in refugee camps, where the Israeli army can demolish a house overnight, only for the community to rebuild it the next day. Why? Because the house belongs to everyone, not just its inhabitants. This reflects the essence of 'the common' and *al masha*.

This investigation into *al masha* began with a historical reevaluation of its significance. We are exploring how it is continually reactivated, and how communities forge shared lives beyond the conventional boundaries of private and public. This inquiry has led us to explore alternative models of sharing common resources, particularly within the Anglo-Saxon tradition where such resources are typically tied to the public sphere. Our interest lies in activating common resources from a private perspective, and we are currently engaged in experimental projects in this area.

**(SH):**

I will talk about an experiment, maybe two. What does it mean for us and our projects to think about sustainability through *al masha*? Beyond other questions, how can we solve the financing and the necessary funds or the search for participation?

The history of the *Ente di Colonizzazione* is short. We were looking for an *Ente* building. That is what we were looking for when we first went to Sicily on a field trip. Then, we found an abandoned building that had been built as part of the fascist colonization of Sicily that we discussed earlier. We went to City Hall to tell them what we wanted to do. We did not immediately speak of the *Ente di Colonizzazione*. We had the idea to activate the place. We were looked down upon. It was an abandoned town for years that had been restored with European funds. However, they were not able to activate it; they did not know how to do it. It is at the top of a hill. We proposed organizing some summer schools, and the municipality immediately told us, 'Where have you been?' In Italy, everything is very bureaucratic, very slow, but at that moment, we looked at each other and thought, in ten minutes, we will come out with the project. Then, they said, 'Take the

building of the *Ente di Colonizzazione*. Do what you want.' They were open to the idea of handing over the building to us for ten years.

However, the question is how can we maintain it? Should we stop, do nothing else, and just take over the project of the *Ente di Colonizzazione* building because we are so excited? However, none of us are willing to do so. We do not want to be held hostage to a single project. We think that the first thing to do is build an *al masha*, the common, in that public building. However, how can we keep the project running all year round? Can we build what we could call a 'decolonial house,' incorporating the wishes of those who want to have a second home in southern Europe and, in particular, in Italy? It is an incredible place where many people wish they had a second home. What is the point of owning two houses? Can we try to get a hundred people to use it? This is our idea of sustainability. We are working on it now together with the municipality. However, we have to find the funds. We thought, why don't we bring together a hundred people, as funders of the *Ente di Decolonizzazione*? People who are interested in decolonization think about Europe differently.

Thus, each one contributes five thousand euros, and together, we collect half a million euros. With the idea that money is not enough, since to be part of the project, it is necessary to sign a demonstration against borders, we would like to create an environment for political research in which we can meet to learn from each other. We already did a similar experiment with ten other people, we bought the land, and we wanted to do it in a participatory way, planning it together, but in three years, only once did we get to meet six of the ten people.

We realized, later, that this space can be produced only in second homes. Therefore, in principle, no one can live in this house as a first house. It is just a second home, which you go to because you want to spend time with other people, your free time or your research time. This will attract a community of people interested in others. This is how the activation of the place begins. This second residence is maintained with a contribution of approximately twenty euros per month. However, perhaps, in January, February, March and April, for a long time, the house is empty. The problem is that the house is empty instead of activated. We have to work and think about that. The house will be ready in 2025, and even so, you can stay in your tent. This is an experiment related to the idea of *al masha*. *Al masha* has to do with participating. Participating is free, but you have to contribute to the community in a



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complete way. We hope this happens. The municipality wants to participate and wants to be a member. There is no property; although everyone can stay in the house at any time in their life, this right cannot be inherited.

The second is that six citizens of the Carlentini community, where the house is located, want to be members. We asked them, 'Why do you want to be members?' The answer was, 'We want our sons and daughters to live together in an international community. We feel isolated in Sicily. It would be great for them. It is as if they went to university for a year and lived with researchers.' Many people have expressed interest in participating and would like to be part of this community; there are already thirty of us.

We want to see if it is possible to sustain the project from the private rather than from the public, bringing together a hundred people who are willing to rethink and discuss decolonization and modernity in a place like Sicily and who want to deal with that difficult heritage. To do so, the community would also give us another building. Thus, university professors or anyone who wants to use the house can continue to come, and that is how the community itself, the hundred people, become those who are truly building the house in some way, the project of reflecting on decolonization in Sicily.

We have other similar projects, five more. I have talked about only the most recent one, which we are very excited about. We are experimenting with different forms of collectivity, of people who come together, becoming activators of those places, people who will also form an autonomous community capable of producing independent research, which can put pressure on institutions. In Germany or the United States, people are not allowed to think about decolonization. The moment communities such as this are created, they will because those debates cannot be censored if they take place in other places. With this independent investigation, we will remove the monopoly that Western universities and those of the 'Western peripheries' have.

**(JC, GG, AG):**

**We began this conversation by mentioning the desire and the ambition of Sandi and Alessandro to live with coherence with the personal and the public or the academic and the professional, which, in reality, for them is simply 'life,' an *al masha* that gathers them and that also gathers others, like this Sicilian house in Carlentini. We would like to end by highlighting the extraordinary**

**internal cohesion of all the work that they have developed in these twenty years that they have been working together. Each of the projects, publications, exhibitions, artistic and architectural or academic actions and studies are, in reality, different pieces that, from varied visions, are forming a great project linked, above all, to ambition and, again, to the desire to know and propose practices so that we can all live together with dignity and equity.**

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**Juana Canet** is an architect and PhD candidate currently working on her thesis: 'From emergency to permanence. An atlas of refugee camps and nine case studies'. She holds a master's degree in landscape design and is an expert in cooperation and development for human settlements. She has been an associate professor at the European University [2007-2013] where she directed cooperation programmes, and since 2017, she is currently associate professor at the Department of Architectural Projects of the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid [ETSAM, UPM]. She is founder of Juana Canet Arquitectos and co-founder of Studio SPN, whose work is based on bamboo development and construction in Colombia. She is an active member of the UPM Cooperation Platform where she has led different projects related to the integration of refugees in cities and settlements with their host communities.



**Ginés Garrido** is an architect and holds a Doctorate in Architecture (cum laude) from the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid [ETSAM, UPM]. A professor at the same school since 1991, he currently heads his own teaching unit in the Department of Architectural Projects. He has also been a visiting professor at several international universities, including the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University, the Ecole d'Architecture Athenaeum in Lausanne and the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis. He has also written and published several articles on urban design and landscape interventions, and has directed a number of public space and environmental sustainability projects, such as the Rio Park in Madrid and the Reclamation of the Tagus River in Toledo.



**Alejandro Gómez** holds a PhD in Architecture from the UPM since 2002. He has been a University Professor since 1989, first at CEU Architecture until 2001, then at San Pablo CEU University until 2017 and currently at the School of Engineering and Architecture of the University of Zaragoza. He teaches the subjects of Architectural Composition, History of Modern Architecture, Introduction to Architecture and Intervention in Historical Heritage. He has been visiting professor at several foreign universities (Venice, Edinburgh and Moscow) and Principal Researcher of the Contemporary Architecture group of the USP-CEU. As an architect, he has won several first prizes in Ideas Competitions and won the COAM Award 2013. His projects have been published in books and international magazines and have been exhibited in various forums, including the Venice Biennale and the Lisbon Architecture Triennial.