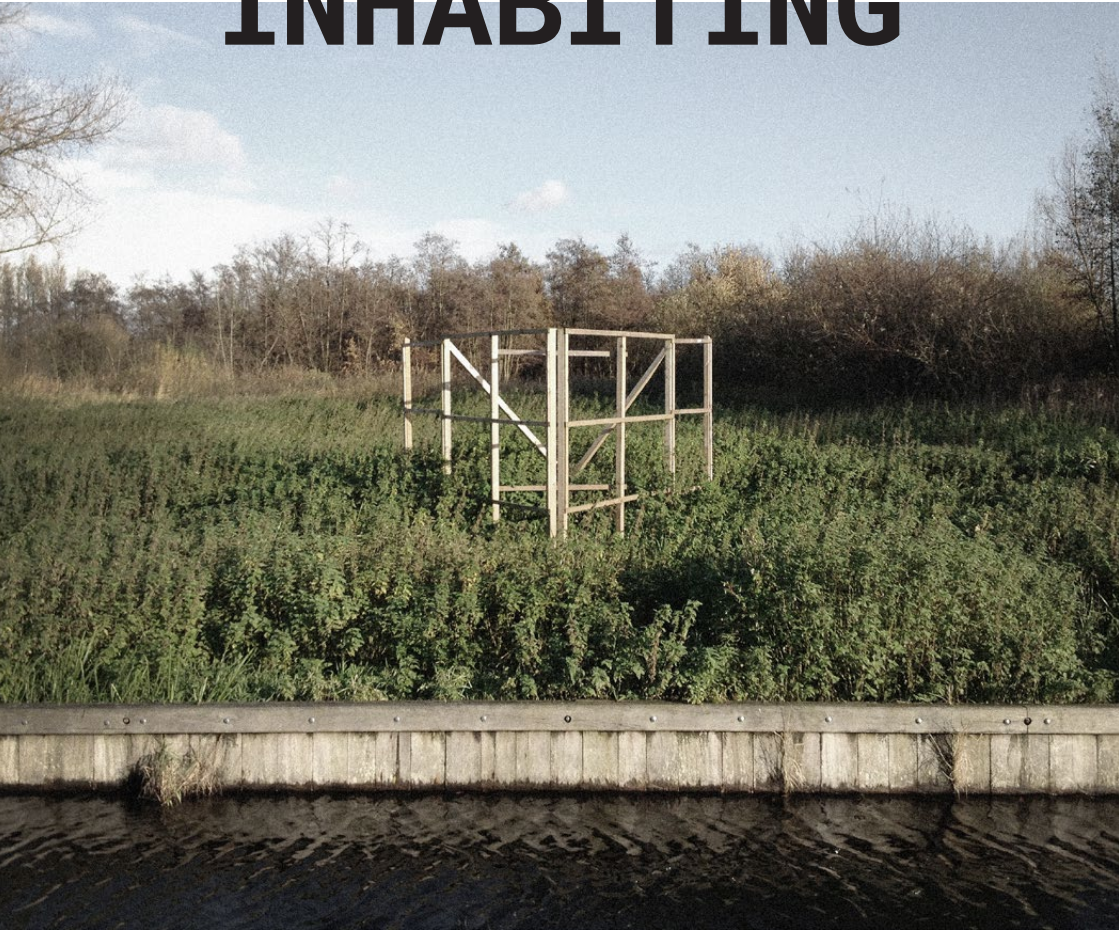


Collective Dictionary

INHABITING



Al Maeishah



INHABITING

Al Maeishah
with
Office of Displaced Designers

Lesvos #2

Al Maeishah (“the living”, in Arabic) is a communal learning environment in which participants explore and practice *neighbouring* and *hospitality* as radical political acts. It creates temporary and critical platforms by engaging in conversation with people of similar social and political urgencies. Al Maeishah tackles these urgencies — related to displacement, diaspora, citizenship — with the imagination of a future beyond borders and the understanding of the challenges in prompting the common.

To convene, we rely on *mujaawarah* (“gathering” or “neighboring” in Arabic). It is an integral part of life, where people converse about actions and experiences, critically reflect on them, and in so doing, gradually and freely build personal and communal meanings and understandings. It requires physical presence and can only happen between *muredeen* and *muraadeen*: between those who want to learn in reciprocal ways.

The *Collective Dictionary* is a series of publications containing definitions of concepts inspired from our background in Campus in Camps. The Collective Dictionary originally considered fundamental terms for the understanding of the contemporary condition of Palestinian refugee camps. As we played a fundamental role in its conception and evolution, now the Collective Dictionary is one of the tools used in a broader way within Al Maeishah to manifest a form of collaborative knowledge springing from the journeys. During each experience a concept is chosen by participants to highlight and collectively assemble personal reflections.

Al Maeishah

Isshaq Al-Barbary, Elena Isayev, Diego Segatto

The Alternative Atlas of Lesbos: an island for the world is the research by the Office of Displaced Designers through which we connected with the island and formed the experience called *Lesvos #2*.

Through collective practices and by intertwining our movements and intentions with the ODD, a group of participants connected to question: how is hospitality made possible and enacted here? Can anyone be an eternal host or guest? What does it mean to inhabit?

BIO–SPHERE

Lesvos (Greece)

ARRIVAL

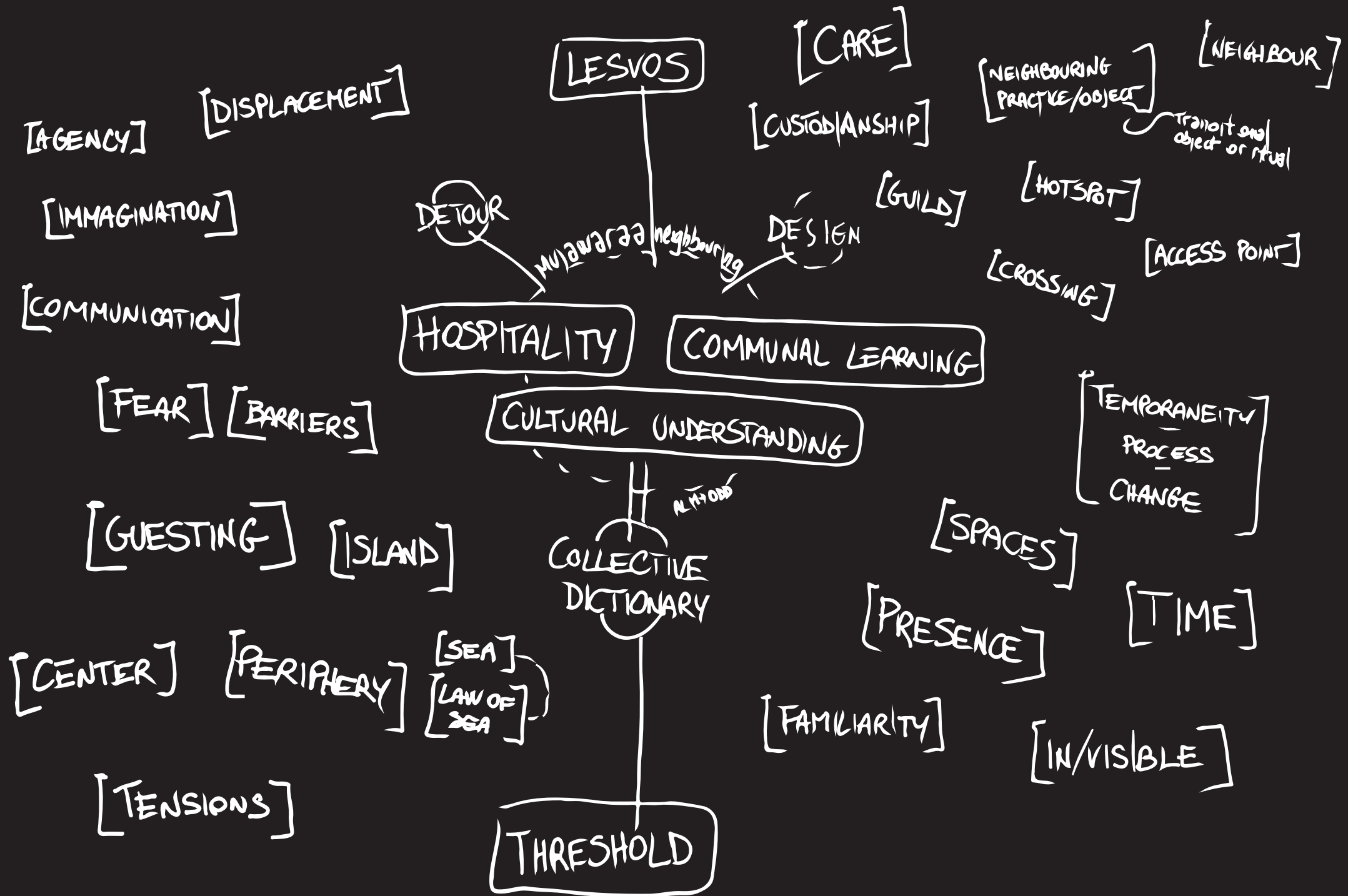
20th February 2018

DEPARTURE

4th March 2018

GATHERINGS

Office of Displaced Designers
from Moria refugee camp to ODD
from ODD to Mytilini amphitheatre



10	Whirls in relation Diego Segatto
28	Questions Mahran Johaana
40	Changing impossibility Hassan Tabsho
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62	Inhabiting Sappho Elena Isayev
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74	Dynamic, Presence, Light Enayat Foladi
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108	Inhabiting the Al Maeishah Process Shareen Elnaschie

Whirls in Relation

Diego Segatto

That is very much the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation. Because the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related. The thought of errantry is a poetics, which always infers that at some moment it is told. The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation.¹

— Edouard Glissant

SCATTERING, TIME, COALESCENCE

In a passage of their documentary concert *Island and Dream*², the artistic group Ateliersi (Bologna, Italy) performed through the words of Giusi Nicolini, mayor of Lampedusa from 2012 to 2017:

*Lampedusa has to become the centre of the youth of the Mediterranean, in order to train, to study the sea, the nature, the climate, the desertification, immigration, to meet the people of Lampedusa, to create volunteer organisations. Let them come freely, the young Tunisians, the young Somalis, the young Eritreans, to know the young Greeks, Spanish, Turks. Because the need of encounter and contamination is not only necessary for the people of Lampedusa and the migrants, but for all the youth of the Mediterranean. I would like Lampedusa to become like this and I will continue fighting until it is no longer a prison island.*³

After attending the show, on a way or another, it's hard not to take these words to heart nor to feel curious and to search for resonance

in a place where local actors were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.⁴ Such an attitude is not only extraordinary for those who are sympathetic, but it's also not in favour to state policies. As Brunilda Pali remarks, "all the intentions to frame acts of solidarity as 'crimes of smuggling or trafficking', the framing of these crimes as 'crimes of solidarity' on behalf of scholars and civil society is the most important battle of representation vis-à-vis the state's framing".⁵ What is left to such kinds of actors is the agency and the continuous interrogation about which kind of presence and quality to bring along to an always entangled existence.

Within Al Maeishah, we have been reflecting for a considerable time about the host/guest (power) and the space — both physical and symbolic — of the *threshold*⁶, to offer a first launchpad for conversations through *mujaawarah*.⁷ So we did this in Lesvos. As a sort of toolkit, we started relying methodologically on the production of the *Collective Dictionary*, the act of walking together in the land (*detour*) and the use of *design practices*. We had expected to also run a design workshop and to build objects able to describe the qualities of a threshold.

After a few meetings at the ODD, the participants unanimously decided to change the criteria and, even if fostered by such concepts, nevertheless to step into a more tangible idea. By mutating from the term *neighboring*, we tried to understand the different ways of *inhabiting* the island from all of our points of views. Then the important questions emerged. Are refugees inhabiting Lesvos? Are the international volunteers? Are we? Who are the inhabitants of a place? Those rooted? With a transitory population (including the islands of Chios, Samos, Leros, Kos, Rhodes and Kastellorizo) of more than 1 million refugees since 2014⁸ and of around 50.000 volunteers (according to data in 2016) among a local population of around 87.000, it could be a worthless challenge to clinically separate this meshwork into categories of value.

The critical situation is tangible, palpable and visible. The question is: beyond using local resources, could the “unexpected neighbors”, people that are conveying experiences and proposals in exile, also build new frameworks of sense? Katrin Kremmel and Brunilda Pali argue: “The political is thus constituted when those who are not qualified to participate in politics presume to act and speak as if they are. By acting as if they have the rights that they lack, the refugees actualize their political freedom and equality. Even if the public sphere has been defined through their exclusion, they act.”⁹

Staying aligned with this thought, a further articulation is possible. The intertwining of a common ground of *precariousness*, together with the drive and specific *precarity* of those displaced, creates new spaces for experiencing and collectively re/building a sociocultural meshwork beyond borders. These are opportunities in the present days to unfold and acknowledge the meanings of our *inhabiting*, not only in a political but also in a poetic way, an effort to fabricate, manoeuvre and weave relations out of doomed one-directional politics.

Sometimes we refer to this fabric as *shabaka* or *naseej (ejtimaei)*, which in Arabic stands between the meshwork and the social bond, something not just given nor unchangeable, but rather to consider with art: to take care of, in *relation*, with persistent imagination.

It's all condensed, even if sometimes invisible, in this booklet, after inhabiting Lesvos for two weeks as the centre of our world. It was through intensive and generous conversations, or by experiencing together a few walks suggested and guided by the participants, that the ODD space was transformed into an exhibitory threshold filled with multiple and collective interpretations.

Walking to explore and to know a place, to find familiarity with a land, to find a relation between body and space. Inhabiting and being inhabited. Being out of the camp. Stretching beyond help, even when it sounds ODD, even if it takes time and patience.

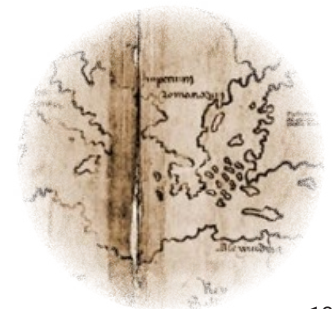
TO A ~~GOOD~~ APPROXIMATION

This journey started with an invitation Al Maeishah received to implement *The Alternative Atlas of Lesvos: an island for the world*¹⁰, the long term research by the ODD – Office of Displaced Designers. The atlas aims to intersect with those forcibly displaced, with the global web of volunteers, with the cultural history, the inhabitants and the nature of Lesvos. In so doing, it exposes the island in its importance and its values. Beyond numbers and the legitimate humanitarian discourse, whoever the *inhabitants* are, they deserve otherwise.

Two or three years before, I remember when a friend, expert and research professor in international relations was particularly irritated because some of his colleagues were going to participate in a major international academic conference taking place in Turkey. He erupted: “They should boycott that! And move all to Lesvos, where the serious things are happening for real, instead of being comfortably hosted by those Turkish compromised institutions!”

Before Lesvos became a notorious island in the Mediterranean, together with Lampedusa, where people fleeing from places like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other ravaged countries seek refuge, I just knew about the poet Sappho, who was born and lived there in around 600 BC. Her alleged, though proverbial, lesbian love relationship and suicide brought to my mind as a youth a site of essential poetic fabrication and of dramatic intensity, despite ignoring completely, for a very long time, where exactly the island was.

Dispersed in the clustering
of the Peloponnesian archipelago,
to later disappear
again from my mind
for about two decades.



Once contacted by the Office of Displaced Designers, there was the need to get to know about the place with more dedication: an umpteenth disaster was happening since the closure of the Balkan route and the infamous deal reached between the European Union and Turkey.¹¹ But this time the gaze concerned something far beyond such data as the island's size, its population, or the number of arrivals, starting from the premise that, for anyone escaping across Turkey, Lesbos provides the shortest journey into Greece and, so, the EU. Maybe surprisingly, this is no less feat than approaching the coasts of Lampedusa or Sicily from Libya.

As a matter of fact, if we play it in reverse, it sounds like the EU deals with a doomed country at its periphery, which includes an island at the frayed ends of its archipelago, 25 km from and surrounded by the Turkish coasts.

From Mytilini, where we were based, you easily see the coasts of Turkey and can feel a Greece under pressure. Indeed, it is Fortress Europe's perfect prison. With the EU's financial aid to reinvigorate the island stuck somewhere¹², it is also a perfect collective punishment.¹³

This creates an image of "prison island" reinforced by the presence and the traits of Moria's *hotspot*¹⁴, previously a penitentiary and now the main refugee camp in the island, troubled by inhuman conditions.¹⁵ "Welcome to Prison Moria" is the graffiti inscribed on the main wall close to the street. "Welcome to Europe", whispered a volunteer accompanying us in a visit.

There is a sense of danger and confinement that derives from the tales of those who reach Lesbos by boat struggling against the attacks of Turkish border patrols in open sea. The Greek police, visible when not undercover, with "anti-terror" plates on their cars, chase anyone looks like a migrant without permission papers to exit the camp.¹⁶ An efficient, prolific underground international business of people smugglers have a sticky hand in the situation.

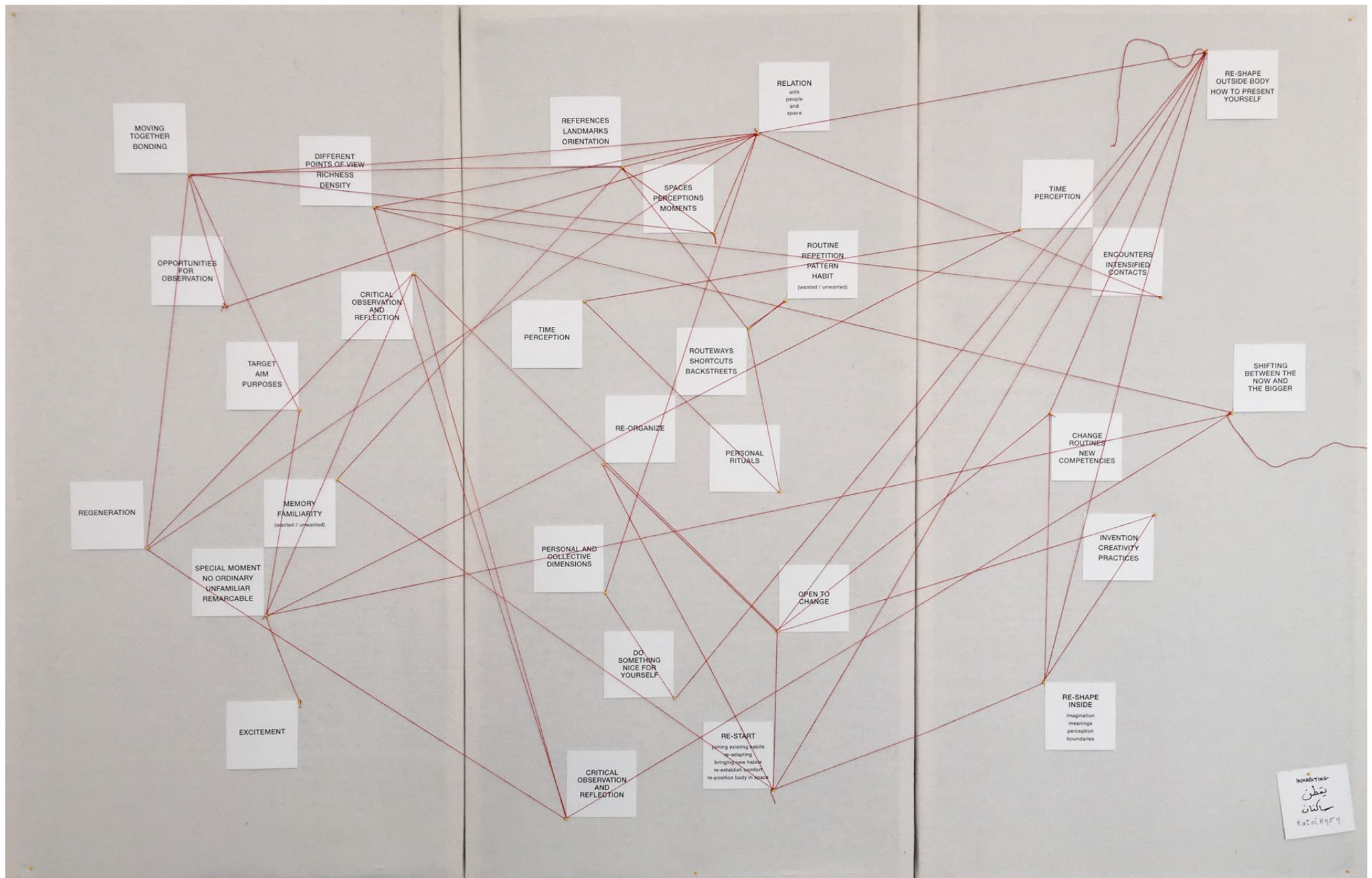
Who gains from this? All the "newcomers" are here after running away and however no one is here to remain. Still, once landed, checked and registered, new uncertain journeys begin for the *displaced* before being shipped into the future.

In this undefined, expanded temporariness¹⁷ there should be no mystery then as to why in the meanwhile meet at the *office* and converge under the guise of *designers*.

On an island
where nature grows
in large spaces
bred by
the Mediterranean.

- 1
Poetics of Relation, Edouard Glissant, University of Michigan, 1997
- 2
http://ateliersi.it/ateliersi/en/portfolio_page/isola-e-sogna/
- 3
Lampedusa. Conversazioni su isole, politica, migranti, Giusi Nicolini with Marta Bellingreri, Edizioni Gruppo Abele, Torino, 2013
- 4
<http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2016/10/57f7732d4/volunteers-saved-lives-lesvos-nominated-nobel-peace-prize.html>
- 5
<https://securitypraxis.eu/terraferma-solidarity-not-crime/>
- 6
<http://www.displaceddesigners.org/thresholds>
- 7
Mujaawarah ("gathering" or "neighboring" in arabic) is an integral part of life, where people (participants) converse about actions and experiences, critically reflect on them, and in so doing, gradually and freely build personal and communal meanings and understandings. It requires physical presence and can only happen between muredeen and muraadeen: between those who want to learn in reciprocal ways.
- 8
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>
- 9
Refugee Protests and Political Agency: Framing Dissensus through Precarity, Katrin Kremmel and Brunilda Pali, Leuven Institute of Criminology, Green Harms and Crimes, 2015

- 10
<http://www.displaceddesigners.org/alternative-atlas-of-lesvos>
- 11
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/04/turkey-illegal-mass-returns-of-syrian-refugees-expose-fatal-flaws-in-eu-turkey-deal/>
- 12
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/09/how-greece-fumbled-refugee-crisis>
- 13
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/06/aid-groups-warn-of-looming-emergency-at-greek-asylum-centres>
- 14
<http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/asylum-migration-borders/fra-work-hotspots>
<https://reliefweb.int/report/greece/migration-hotspots-are-working-critical-issues-remain-say-eu-auditors>
<https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HOTSPOTS-Report-5.12.2016..pdf>
- 15
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/22/this-isnt-europe-life-greece-worst-refugee-camps>
- 16
This happened in front of our eyes the very first night of our arrival. More news about police violence <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/maya-thomas-davis/on-lesvos-police-violence-crushes-refugees-resistance-justice-f>
- 17
<https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AIDA-Brief-DurationProcedures.pdf>



The three panels collect and connect the salient outcome from a collective thinking about *inhabiting*. It tells from left to right about 1) the collective walks in Lesbos; 2) an everyday walk; 3) what changes have emerged since being in Lesbos. The following are some moments in the making:

[NEIGHBOUR?]

[INHABIT]

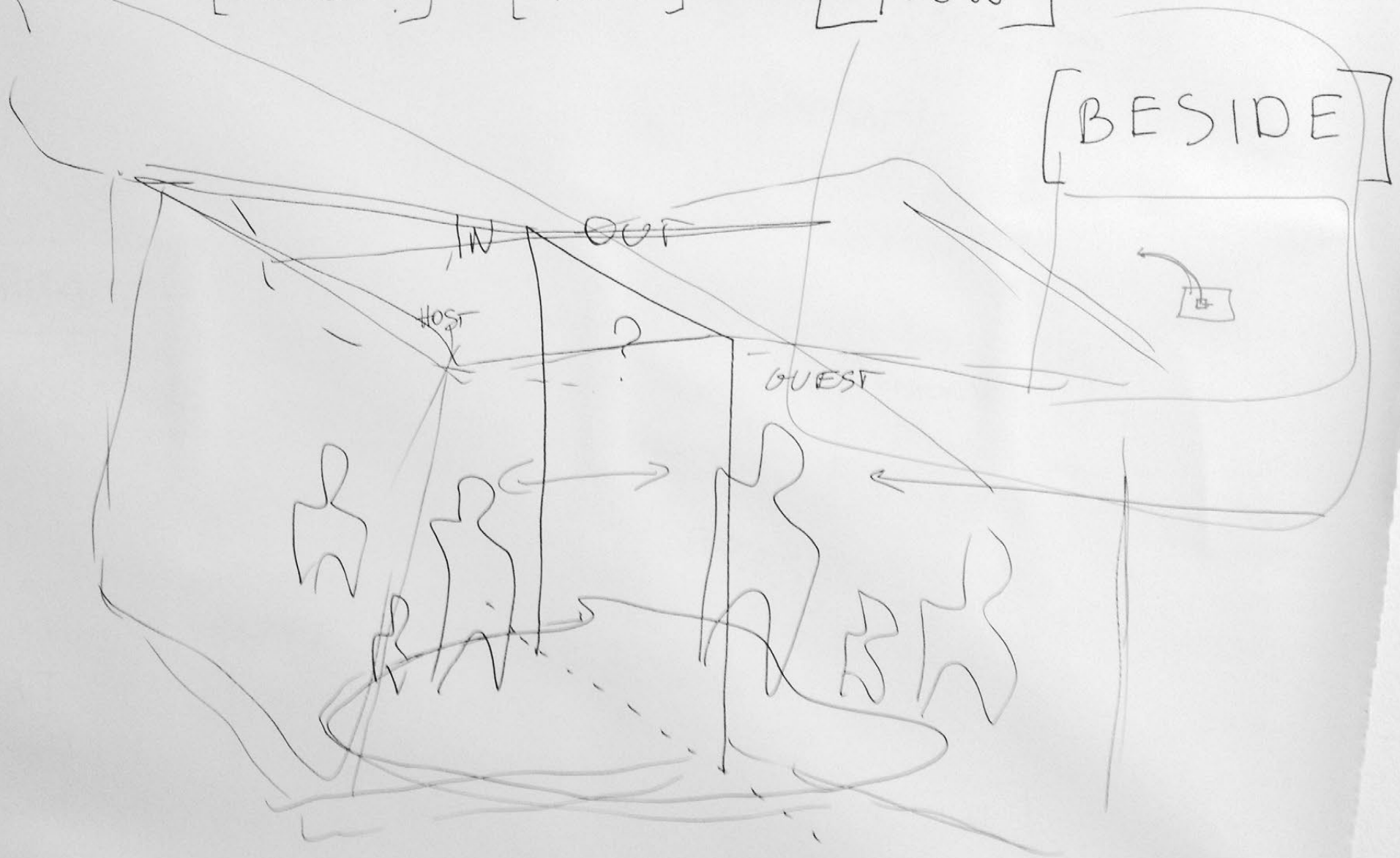
[RESIDE]

[CLOSE?]

[MOVE]

[NOW]

[BESIDE]



- PRACTICES

① ROUTINE / REPETITION / PATTERN / HABIT (WANTED / UNWANTED)

TIME PERCEPTION

ROUTEWAYS — SHORTCUTS — BACKSTREETS

SPACES — MOMENTS PERCEPTION

REFERENCES — LANDMARKS — ORIENTATE

RE-START

- joining existing habits
- re-adapting
- bringing new habits
- re-establish comfort
- re-position body in space

RELATION

- people
- space

PERSONAL + COLLECTIVE DIMENSIONS

~~T~~HREAT YOURSELF

OPEN TO CHANGE

RE/ORGANIZE

PERSONAL RITUALS

CRITICAL OBSERVATION AND REFLECTION

②

SPECIAL MOMENT — NEW — NO ORDINARY — UNFAMILIAR (SHINY)

MEMORY

INHABITING

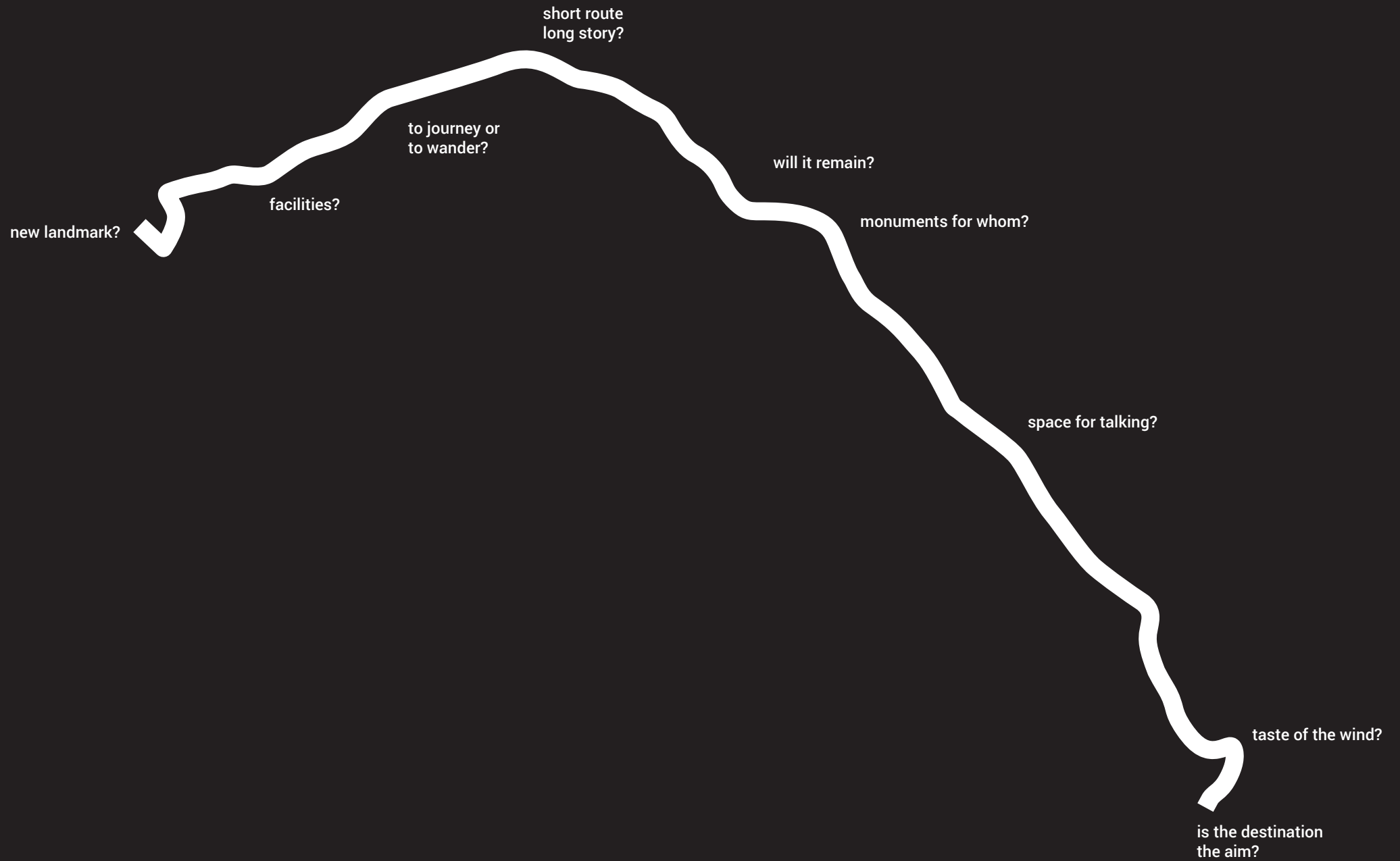
SITE-SPECIFIC?

UNIVERSAL?

WELL-BEING

REMARKABLE

First walk
from Moria refugee camp to ODD
25.02.2018



Questions

Mahran Johaana

in conversation with
Isshaq Al-Barbary

In the first place. We don't like to be called "refugees".

— Hannah Arendt, 1943

How am I perceived as a refugee?

Why am I being treated as a number?

How are we represented as refugees?

And by whom?

How has time affected the treatment
of refugees on this Island?

What is the ~~refugee~~'s first feeling
when he/she arrives on land?

Who am I now?

Who will I be if I get accepted as a ~~refugee~~ in the EU?

What will happen to me if I get rejected?

Is the border between the ~~camp~~ and the rest of the city
a physical ~~border~~ only?

Is it a ~~border~~ between misery and tragedy
and the rest of the people of the city?

Or is it in-fact a painful social separation?

Will we, the ~~refugees~~, continue to maintain
our cultural ties and our desire to return to our homeland?

Or will the notion of the homeland itself
change to be synonymous with every land
that embraces us and provides us with shelter and safety?

What is the status of Moria ~~refugee camp~~?

Is it temporary?

And if so, how could we interpret its current development
that is manifested in the presence of
barbershops, grocery stores, cafeterias and much more?

Will Moria ~~refugee camp~~ continue to exist
and transform its current cruel inhuman conditions?

Will it produce Artists, Doctors, Professors..etc,
to change the situation of their families
despite all these difficult circumstances?

Changing Impossibility

Hassan Tabsho

with photographs by

Aref Hussein and Enayat Foladi



Useful
Electricity, light, clean water.

...

Damaging
Smoke – Smog – Pollution.

...

Is it more useful than damaging?



The scenery around us.
The surprise – not a scene in a museum
but in real life
taking the best view on the hill.

...

Can this scene cause more damage to people
who have already been exposed
to war or other suffering?

...

These remains could still benefit.
But not here.
Maybe inside a museum
or special place for them.
So that the story – not forgotten
helps to remove it from real life.



There is a lot of this house.
This house has little monetary value
but a lot of moral value.

...

It needs people, materials,
stories for those
who inhabit and visit.

...

This house should not
be left to crumble.
But we can help.

Feel Free to Inhabit

Aref Hussein

in conversation with
Elena Isayev and Paul Magee



Whatsapp Msg:

Every House is a story

Whatsapp Msg:

Entry points – shut out.
Let's fly in (or out).
Closed – keeping the stories in.
Escape is only into a future.

Whatsapp Msg:

Every House is a story

Whatsapp Msg:

of place never before
seen / touched / heard
 to someone
 to anyone
nevertheless sensed as Home

a word portrait is not enough.





Whatsapp Msg:

Every House is a story



Whatsapp Msg:

If we want to live some place we will know how:
patience.



Whatsapp Msg:

Every House is a story



Whatsapp Msg:

Transformations
From domestication to
Gourd vines.
Trained to create blind spots
for a good view.



Whatsapp Msg:

Every House is a story

Whatsapp Msg:

That catches
the ear
invites retelling

with a stranger never met
chanced on.





Whatsapp Msg:

Every House is a story

Whatsapp Msg:

Old / New
Soft / Hard
Black / White
Separate / Together
Absorbed / Reflected

Whatsapp Msg:

Every House is a story

Whatsapp Msg:

Resonating Presence



Inhabiting Sappho

Elena Isayev

Sappho used to inhabit the island. At first some 2700 years ago, then on and off. She was still on Lesbos a quarter century ago.

But now?

In Mytilene a sculpted figure looks out to sea, as the wind catches in the folds of its stiff dress.
Her name inscribes the square which it commands.

But Sappho?

It is not, she can not be so captured. She chooses how to inhabit.

Does she?

Others decide whether her voice is to be carried on the winds, through whispers, skimming laughter, lodged in the palpitations of broken bodies.

Do they?

Is it not her voice carrying them on winds, through whispers, skimming laughter, lodged in their palpitations?

So islands are unmade...

*He seems to me to be equal to the gods, that man,
whoever sits opposite you
and listens to you speaking so sweetly
and close to him,*

*and hears too your tempting laughter.
Truly that makes the heart in my breast pound,
for when for a moment I look at you,
I cannot speak at all;*

*my tongue breaks, and a subtle
flame instantly runs beneath my skin.
My eyes see nothing at all and a roaring
fills my ears.*

*Sweat pours down me, and shaking
seizes me all, paler than grass I am
and little short of dead
I seem to me.*

But all must be endured since...

A fragment of Sappho's poem, known as 31.
A translation adapted from: Clark, C.A. (2008).
The Poetics of Manhood? Nonverbal behaviour in Catullus 51, Classical Philology 103: 257–81,
259-60.

Second walk
from ODD to Mytilini amphitheatre
27.02.2018



Inhabiting Exile

Isshaq Al-Barbary

I went to Lesbos in mid-February, 2018 with my colleagues for the purpose of conducting Mujawarah (a gathering) and engaging with the work of the Office of Displaced Designers (ODD). I had never been to Lesbos before, so I had no image whatsoever of what it was like there. Lesbos is Greece's third biggest island and the closest one to Turkey. You can clearly see Turkey across the Aegean Sea, from the east coast of the island. During my time there I stayed in Mytilini where ODD is located. I always tend to judge a place by the first feeling I encounter. In this regard, I was able to sense confusion and despair on my first night of arrival. I woke up the following day and was ready to leave the place already. It was like there was something in the air making me want to leave but I did not understand why! Looking back now, despite the cruel and brutal reality of the island, I spent some times of hope and joy with my new friends from ODD and the amazing refugees who lived the Mujawarah with us.

During the first week of Mujawarah, we decided to take a walk from Moria camp to Mytilini to understand the connection between the camp and the city as well as experience and enjoy the beautiful nature of the island. Hassan, a Syrian refugee and one of the first people to arrive in Moria camp upon its establishment, planned the walk for us and agreed to meet early in the morning outside Moria, where he currently lives.

While we were waiting for Hassan outside Moria camp to start the walk, I recalled many childhood memories. The way Moria camp is wire fence and is controlled reminded me so much of home: Beit Jibrin refugee camp in Palestine. During my childhood, the camp was completely fenced in by the Israeli occupation. I still remember vividly the long big metal container filled with cement installed in every alley of the camp, creating a barrier and separating it from the main street. People weren't allowed to exit and enter freely but rather only by permission and through a revolving gate that was entirely controlled by the Israeli occupation. Almost 20 years later, here I was confronting almost the exact same reality, this time outside Moria refugee camp in Greece.

This scene of Moria camp took me back in time and put me in a real struggle between escaping and remaining. The memories of the present past that burst strongly into my mind made me nervous. I figured this cruel, strong image of Moria was forcing me to try to understand my past trauma through the lens of the present of others. But how could one understand trauma? One of the most important challenges for me has always been being able to think about my past and my future at the same time. As a refugee I carry a traumatic past that is part of my identity but that I have to be able to incorporate into my future. However, the past is as complex as people experience the present. So, if we can live the present in a different way then we can have a different understanding of and relationship to the past that can let it be lurid and complicated, while imagining possibilities for the future.

Before starting the walk we stopped by an extension of Moria refugee camp called "The Olive Grove". The space was constituted of fabric tents and had an open-air cinema, which was a project of the ODD. This land was apparently first squatted by a group named "Better Days for Moria". It was then leased from its owner by the Danish Red Cross and turned into a sheltering space (camp) to host those refugees who were authorised by the government to move freely

within Lesvos only. This is similar to the way that Beit Jibrin camp was established in 1949. A private land of 0.02 square kilometers was leased on a contract for 99 years between the land-owner, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Jordanian government at that time. Currently, there are almost 2,200 inhabitants living in Beit Jibrin camp in concrete houses. This reality of the present and the past, left me confronting questions: What is a refugee camp? What is it as a social space, as an emotional space, as a political space? What is it as a temporary space? What are its limits and what are its possibilities? These questions were the centre of the conversation between Hassan and I during the walk.

Hassan talked me through his time in Moria, describing the cruelty of living in a fabric tent in winter and his hope to leave the camp as soon as possible. His words were familiar. My family had to live in a fabric tent at the early time of the refugee camp and had longed to leave it for many years. I belong to the third generation and have never lived a tent, but was born and live in a house made of concrete that I identify as home. Hassan found it strange that I consider a refugee camp to be home, something that of course I understand when I look at his life in Moria camp.

When looking at the Palestinian refugee camp, it has always been considered to be either a promise for liberation or a problem for the surroundings (Israeli occupation, the host states and the Palestinian state project). However, being born and growing up in that space has always put into question what kind of place a camp can be for the inhabitants and for the people from the same community outside of the camp. When the camps were established in 1949, they first emerged as humanitarian spaces. My refugee community was brought to the camp to move them away from the massacres that were being conducted by the Zionist paramilitaries, but also to protect them so that they could get humanitarian assistance such as food and medical care. Some would even argue that refugee camps are partly for the convenience of humanitarian workers, simply because it is easier to

deliver aid when you gather people together. Then you put them in camps to count them and control them.

Hassan conceives and experiences Moria camp as a closed detention facility. He said: "It exists in order to prevent us from moving freely within Lesvos, but also from reaching out to the mainland and other European cities". He continued, "Every part inside the camp is sectioned off and guarded by military and police. Even the people are sectioned off, segregated by nationalities". However, he also clearly stated that he witnessed Moria going through rapid transformations. "I came here at the very beginning and there was almost nothing here, but now because people are being stuck, they had to invent ways to survive. People are building barber shops, small cafeterias, selling food and whatever comes into your mind".

It is in my experience and the experience of the Palestinian refugee camps that humanitarian providers meant for the camps to be limited spaces. They are meant to be temporary, not places where people live out the light of their lives and certainly not where they engage with politics. Very quickly inhabitants of refugee camps live in a very different way than was intended for them by the designers. And the camp very quickly moves beyond the limits that were intended for it.

Over time, new social relations developed in Palestinian refugee camps and then, very significantly, the camps became spaces for political life. This was a natural development of the camp because people felt they were left alone and that their political situation of refuge was going to be longer than they had ever expected it to be. They had to reconsider how to live the space because the world failed them in finding the political solution to their catastrophe. Although they still understand this as a temporal relation, they acknowledge that they are together today and that they need to understand what can their life be. In Palestinian refugee camps, there is political life where people organize political movements and do political work like no other places I have ever been to. In fact, every thing is always politicized

no matter how small or big that thing can be. They are also spaces of political thinking about how the future might be lived in a new way. In fact, most of the Palestinian political movements started in refugee camps and that is a very important part of their history.

Camps are also very important in that they are spaces on the ground questioning past, present and future. For instance, what does it mean to be Palestinian? What does liberation mean? What does return mean? What is the future of Palestine going to be? And, if there is going to be a Palestine, what is that going to look like? These questions are very important because they are much more alive in the full sense of living spaces. To elaborate a little more, my grandparents experience of and relation to the camp was very different from mine. Prior to their forced displacement from their places of origin, they were farmers. Yet, Return for them has always meant going back to that kind of life and to their private property. However, I was born to a different social, cultural and political life. This culture that was produced in exile (the culture of exile) had put into question returning to private property as well as many other things like our relation with the camp. It has encouraged me to question what it means to return to a private property once owned by my grandparents, a property that I have never even seen before. I certainly don't mean to underestimate the importance of the private property, but I mean to question the extent this could be of a neoliberal and Zionist discourse. It is true that some people imagine returning to the village as going to build villas with swimming pools and have that luxury of living. Yet, how does this imagination relate to our present political and social reality?

Ironically, the public and private in refugee camps has no meaning on the social and political level. Legally speaking, 70 years has passed since the camps' establishment and refugees still don't own their own houses, although they buy and sell houses in the camp. As for the public, it has no meaning because the camp isn't part of the state, but rather a extraterritorial space that is curved away from it (though the state takes part in managing and conceiving the camps). This re-

ality of the camp as well as the violence and wars taking place around the world, particularly the Arab world, challenges the very idea of the nation state. Simply, it makes me wonder why people should fight for this failing model of a nation state while we are witnessing its collapse in this very moment. Why shouldn't we look into different possibilities that are more grounded in our present political practices and reality as political communities?

I personally hate all forms of nationalism and patriotism. I believe that we should look for alternatives other than nation states and closed borders in order to achieve genuine emancipation and self-determination. The history of national liberation in the Arab world as well as globally has taught us that once independence is achieved, the all-too familiar modes of exploitation, domination, and injustice will be reproduced by the new ruling elites under the guise of nationalism and protecting sovereignty. In fact, the Palestinian Authority and their illusional state-building project, is already doing that to the Palestinian people. It is in this regard that I see hope in political communities such as refugee camps. Since the relation between camps and the Palestinian Authority is based on a host-guest relation, they look at refugee camps as places of troublemaking. Simply put, refugee camps put their illusional project into question, just like the presence of the camps in Palestine continue to threaten and call into question the Israeli state. It is important to understand that I don't intend by any means to say that we should create refugee camps. On the contrary, their inception is linked to the occurrence of a crime. However, their history of transformation and political, social and cultural productivity can teach us a lot and be very useful in imagining a better political future.

Perhaps one of the reasons why I understand refugee camps as spaces of possibilities (and I mean not only for the refugee inhabitants but for everyone to think politically), is precisely because they can't be utopian. My life experience in the camp has taught me that it is impossible to believe that a day will come where everything will

be new and that we will have a perfect future. Many family members of mine were born and died inside the camp with these beliefs and thoughts. This is how some refugees picture their life when becoming citizens; that once they become citizens then everything will be good, if not perfect. I am skeptical about that for a number of reasons, most importantly, because it deals with refugees as if they are sick people who can only be cured by becoming citizens. This thinking is sick itself because it tells us that those who believe it have no political imagination whatsoever. Contrarily, the fact that refugees are not normal 'citizens' means that there is hope and possibilities left in this world to imagine a state of life beyond the toxicity of nation states. Life in the camp can never appear utopian because the camp itself is confronted with the fact that the present is part of a history of dispossession. That its existence and continuation in some ways is a symbol of a lack of resolution that the future has not arrived.

Like those who live in Moria camp, the first generation of the Palestinian camps lost all they had once owned and enjoyed. They lost their cities, villages, private lands, houses and their belongings and lived in fabric tents at the receiving end of humanitarian assistance. These conditions have made the camps even more powerful in terms of possibilities, because they start with an understanding of the full complexity of life, not from a fantasy of a perfect politics, or a perfect future, or a fantasy of being together as only good. Not at all. Being together involves politics, it involves hierarchy, it involves differences of opinions that are always resolved in complexity. People in refugee camps are always reminded that they are together today and that the present is about re-thinking and figuring out what the relationship to the past is: what our community can be for us now in its current practice.

Hassan once said to me: "I live my day to kill time. But Alhamdulillah (thanks to god) I am now in a better position because I have made friends with strong bonds that I can trust and rely on. I feel confident leaving my personal belongings, including money, knowing that they

will take care of it for me. I do the same for them. We've got each other's backs. I speak my mind and my political opinions over Syria without fear. We joke and love each other more and more. No one from this group is Syrian like me but they are like brothers to me. I don't know what would we do without each other in this situation. I am happy that I am not alone."

In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, the Palestinian thinker Edward Said quotes a 12th century monk from Saxony, Hugo of St. Victor. He explains the expedition of the exile from his native soil to the world:

For said exile first becomes tender then strong and finally perfect: - the person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner, he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong, but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place.¹

It is within this context that I understand inhabiting: as a re-making of social and political life and as a natural transformation and regeneration and the production of the 'culture of the exile'. And since exile and memory go together almost identically, what one remembers and how he/she remembers is what determines how one looks to the future. Inhabiting is a reconsideration of the idea of place, and puts forward a new idea — 'exile'.

— 1
Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said. London, Vintage, 1994.

Dynamic, Presence, Light

Enayat Foladi





















Light.











In Relation with a place

After the last three days of the design workshop, publicly exposing the collective work at ODD became the pretext to transform the space into a premise for the Collective Dictionary. It was also the opportunity to connect with a larger and mixed audience.

We then realised that the *threshold* was the place and the experience that hosted us along the two weeks of observations, encounters and a wealth of critical considerations.

The *threshold* is Lesbos itself, crucible of questions, expectations and astonishment between extreme care and abandonment, interconnection and isolation.

Inhabiting the Al Maeishah Process

Shareen Elnaschie

After almost one year of sporadic discussions expressing a desire to collaborate, Al Maeishah arrived during a particularly dreary week on Lesbos with the intention of initiating a process of discovery to develop a collective dictionary. Our original point of departure and term for the dictionary: Thresholds.

Al Maeishah make a point of differentiating between facilitation and initiation, that they are equal participants. I felt at times that perhaps Al Maeishah were unnecessarily afraid of this term “facilitation” and I found myself often wondering about the thresholds between these two approaches — where does initiation end and facilitation begin? When the moments of a journey are unpicked — are they not a continuous series of initiated discussions, shared experiences, and people facilitating the understanding of their perspective?

For ten days we came together to explore and share, following an almost invisible path to an undetermined destination. The questions we were asking ourselves along this journey are big questions. The idea of social thresholds quickly evolved into ideas of community: What does it mean to be a part of a community? How do communities identify? How many communities can you really be a part of? Ideas of community evolved into ideas of neighbouring: How does someone actively neighbour? And eventually, we settled on collec-

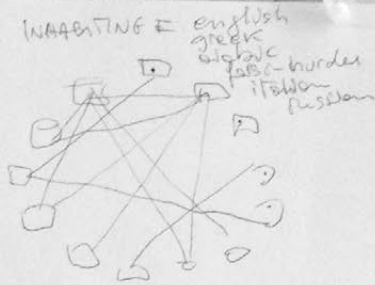
tively defining ideas of inhabiting. Questions included: How do we inhabit? What does it mean to inhabit a place? How does temporariness and permanence affect inhabiting?

As an observer, it seemed to me that Al Maeishah, also known as Diego, Isshaq and Lena, are on a quest for discovering a shared understanding of unanswerable questions. And this is the obvious revelation. When you are focused on the journey and not on the end result, are willing to share your time, donate your thoughts and be open to new ideas, new understandings and questions can emerge without the pressure of a conclusion. For as many people as there are in the world there are equal, if not more, ways of inhabiting.

Walking is a key element of the Al Maeishah process. Walking as a way of inhabiting, as a tool for communication and of creating shared memories. And we also processed our experiences and created collective work — shared at an exhibition — an attempt to continue the discussions. Once again we were lucky to experience an openness and generosity of individuals sharing their visualised thoughts — inviting others to positively engage.

Al Maeishah initiated a process that created new points of departure for endless conversations, though they will likely not end in concrete answers. There is certainly a lot left to journey together.

PRINT - ^{Lozans} Canon copy print
 Threads -
 LADDER -
 ELECTRICAL TAPE



prints, ~~maps~~ plaster, remove screws
 HAMMER
 screwdriver
 STAIR

DIAGRAM

words, nails, ropes

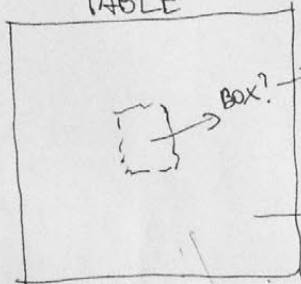
CARDS STORIES

hier of images

nails

plates

TABLE



Box? → eventually Marha's and Asson's stories

→ Collective Dictionary in progress

print & box

WALK 1

black chalk

PROJECTION

Enayat photos

projector

Black chalk

WALK 2

chalk
fixing spray



colophon

DESCRIPTION

print









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Collective Dictionary

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displaceddesigners.org