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UNSETTLING CAMP, PRISON, AND COLONY: Italy's Migrant Encampments Between Extension and Capture

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EXTENDING *SUMUD*

December 11, 2023, Apulian Tavoliere (southeastern Italy): On the day of the first global strike for Gaza, when I was supposed to write (or better still, hand in!) a first draft of this piece, I instead found myself accompanying some West African residents from the ever-expanding shantytown of Borgo Mezzanone in a protest that demanded a solution to the encampment's water shortages. In preparing press statements and social media accounts,[1] I and my (white Italian) comrades sought to elaborate on the possible links between the two struggles, which, however seemingly disproportionate, speak of common oppositions to currents of colonial, racialized, and militarized segregation, and to the extractions they make possible and rely on. The fact of finding ourselves at the fenced edge of a militarized asylum-seeker reception center, with aggressive, armed soldiers descending from an armored vehicle, and equally armed law-enforcement operatives from different corps as our first interlocutors, certainly elicits analogies and evokes recursions. While the intensity of the necropolitical forces of capture at play may appear incommensurable across geographies, how

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to quantify and compare is an impossible (and even immoral) question that, I argue, misses the point: we are facing iterations in different combinations, recursions in varying degrees.

Here I take up, again, the challenge of articulating these struggles and their targets one to the other in an effort to foster and multiply liberatory potential, as I sought to do with others after that protest—without necessarily anticipating explicit recognitions and overt solidarities, or mourning their absence. For of course, as per what Houria Bouteldja has recently named “the knot of the false unity of the damned of the Earth,” one cannot expect Blacks/Africans (*Noirs/Africains*, her terms) to engage in solidarity with Palestinians given the almost generalized oblivion to the former’s own plights (which also include mass-scale genocides), “the absence of reciprocity in anticolonial solidarity and the place of Blacks in the hierarchy of dignities” (Bouteldja 2023; translation mine). And yet, talk of and concern for Palestine did sometimes emerge from unsolicited conversations I entertained with shantytown dwellers in the days preceding and following the protest. Concomitantly, the feeling of being robbed of one’s resources and recourses, in Africa as much as in Europe, surfaced once again through the recent cuts to the encampment’s supply of running water and accompanied the frustration of not being able to fully express and realize one’s potential—indeed of not being able to have a place one can call home, neither here nor there. Awareness of the sheer disproportion between the labor provided, the resources and surplus extracted, and the returns was underscored by what I translate as an anticolonial sentiment: an acute sense of the colonial matrix of dwellers’ struggles, never missing among the protesters I and others accompanied in that forsaken corner of southern Italy, one freezing morning like many others. It is this consciousness that grounds my efforts at creating analytical connections across geographies and temporalities, thereby addressing some of the imbalances, erasures and disjunctures noted by Bouteldja.

Campization, with its carceral undersides, might be one (admittedly clumsy) moniker for these processes of capture that cut across borders of different sorts and varying intensities: the one that I can help untangle, hopefully as a small contribution towards its undoing—an undoing which powerfully if often surreptitiously happens already, every day, in the “extensions” (Simone 2020, 2024; Simone et al. 2023) to those militarized-humanitarian camps, across latitudes, from Borgo Mezzanone to Gaza, and more generally Palestine and its diaspora, however ludicrous the connection may feel at first. If, with Nasser Abourahme, the camp “is materially and politically installed at the center of the *ongoing* history of colonial struggle in Palestine” (2025, 2; emphasis in the original), this centrality

extends, in more senses than one, at planetary scales. Abourahme himself identifies conditions of landlessness and displacement as paradigmatic of global politics today, achieved and dealt with by way of mass encampment in "networked sites of legal abandonment, temporal suspension, and disciplinary transformation [...] only shades removed from the carceral" (2025, 165). I believe what Abourahme calls encampment is better captured by the notion of *campization*—for encampment's substantive and agentive qualities can range from sheer containment to at least partial autonomy (see Peano 2021a, 2024a, cf. infra). Encampment is a forever contested terrain of and for struggle, often waged by means of extension.

Indeed, extension—that "prolongation of life—which anti-blackness acts to foreclose" and which "gives way to an accentuation of 'life's priorities'—its wayward, open-ended trajectories and dispositions," as Simone (2023) puts it—is what *campization* is up against, and has been for centuries. Encampment extensions such as Borgo Mezzanone's *ghetto* (as its West African dwellers call it and all the spaces of this sort) are those which resist—and exceed—the evacuation of home from housing, that the camp seeks to enforce by turning housing into *ware*housing, and people into numbers: disposable, interchangeable, fungible (cf. Tadiar 2021). Extensions' modes of life and relationality are provisionally grounded on temporariness, movement and interconnection. "The extensions are at the fulcrum of an intensive and oscillating process of unsettling and resettling anchored in a systemic process of depletion and devaluation" (Simone 2024, 369–371). Such oscillation invests and perturbs the chimerical "Home" itself, replete with its own violent extractions and exclusions (Lancione 2023). Hence extension also implies going "beyond inhabitation," i.e., beyond what is normally expected of residency, in what Simone's conceptual work has further specified as "the surrounds": "spaces, times, and practices within and beyond capture" where "detachment from the predominant forms of accumulation and dispossession" is ever shifting, ephemeral, and undefinable (Simone 2022, viii).

In the effort to relate struggles happening in different contexts of colonial, racializing *campization*, and thereby enhancing all, here I seek to make extension resonate and articulate with what Palestinians (and others enduring Israeli colonization) have termed *sumud*: perseverance, steadfastness in the building and rebuilding of lives and spaces, even through their undoing, despite colonial displacement and its various forms and degrees of violence; a refusal of the colonizer's terms and a constant re-making of the self-in-common. It is an assemblage of multiplex, emergent and open-ended, collective and relational, de-individualizing and undefinable practices outside the space of normalized politics, when the latter fails or ceases to be possible (Meari 2014). Likewise, protest in the

extension takes many forms, from the organized and singular, event-like, to the everyday. ("Blackness here extends itself across uncertainties, founds its solidarities in both visible struggle and more indiscernible ways of being together, dependent on tacit recognitions and coordinations," writes Simone [2023]).

Given the implicit solidarities and evanescent acknowledgments that more often than not characterize it, extension is also a form of fugitivity. And indeed, in the extensions I am familiar with, self-organized, direct action is sporadic and often hard to achieve, especially of late, though invigorating and necessary at times given the forces one is subjected to. It took months before we could gather enough of ourselves to face the soldiers and the police at the camp's gates. But after that protest in December, at least for a few months the water tanks in the *ghetto* were again filled every day, as they used to be the previous summer. No mention was made, by those in charge, of fixing the pipelines that had earlier provisioned the settlement and mysteriously stopped working. Yet, being able to rely on a daily supply was an improvement, if compared to returning home after a day's work in the farms to find the tanks empty and having to do without a shower, or to wrestle with fellow shanty dwellers to fill a 10-l jerrycan worth of water to cook and wash with for three days. However, the threat of institutional abandonment always lurks, and attention must be kept sharp to make sure that the hard-won, bare minimum of infrastructural support is not progressively, surreptitiously withdrawn, as it happened again at the beginning of 2024. Another similar protest had to happen the following May so as to ensure daily water provision up until the time of writing.

In Italy, from southernmost Sicily to Piedmont, at the extreme northwestern end of the country, *ghettos* have grown in number and size, especially since the early 2010s, together with other forms of encampment, with the same people often circulating between them. From self-constructed settlements made of wooden, plastic, asbestos and cardboard shacks and, increasingly, of brickwork and corrugated-iron structures, or abandoned and then re-occupied, derelict buildings (often with no facilities) to institutionally managed container or tent camps, an archipelago has formed housing migrants—predominantly from across West Africa, and less frequently from Northern and Eastern Africa, Eastern Europe, and South Asia—many of whom are employed in agriculture. These are forever dynamic spaces, whose proliferation follows oscillatory rather than linear trajectories—the *ghetto* may turn into a camp and vice-versa, in a never-ending process that entails violent erasures. While often represented as suspended in a timeless state of emergency, frozen in an eternal present or stuck in "backwardness" (like many of the districts they are part of), *Made-in-Italy* encampments are highly fluid places with complex histories.

Furthermore, if at a first glance the encampment archipelago's capturing mode may appear merely as the spatial effect of zoning and containment produced by agribusiness in its articulations with the border regime, and hence recent in its genealogy, it in fact bears the traces of multiple pasts, which affect the present in different ways. It is on those recursions that I want to focus. Like labor recruitment and organization, worker accommodation in such encampments also responds to logics of racialized and ethnicized segregation, resulting from the intersection between longstanding forms of colonial violence and processes that have unfolded in the last four decades: most notably, a logistics-driven restructuring away from individual farms, which gave way to production districts and corporate distribution platforms along global supply chains, outsourcing several aspects of the farming cycle that in turn heavily modified the very nature of the work. The globalization of agribusiness thus spurred a race to the bottom, enforced by means of heavy reliance on international migrant labor, disciplined and governed through ever more restrictive, criminalizing policies (for a thorough discussion of these processes, see Peano 2020, 2021a, 2024a).

Yet, if all such encampments play a role in channeling labor and/as migrant mobility for Italian agribusiness, they most often lie not only within, but also beyond capture. Indeed, the *ghetto* (as much as other encampment forms) is many things at the same time—it has a labor-camp function (Peano 2024a), acting as a reservoir of cheap workforce and a space of containment, abjection, abandonment, but it is also an autonomous infrastructure of reproduction and fugitivity, and thus an extension—where these dimensions coexist in perpetual tension. The encampment extensions—of which Borgo Mezzanone's *ghetto* is today the foremost instance on Italian territory—are, among other things, nodes in an intricate, ephemeral network along multiple, fractured and ever-shifting, underground migration routes spanning from West Africa to the English Channel, tracing neither linear directions nor coherent trajectories (Peano 2021a). Across geographies, *ghettos* index places to make friends and enemies (one potentially and quickly turning into the other, and back); to find work; to buy food and clothing, but also alcohol, narcotics, and cheap sex—where other opportunities, threats and/or harms of various sorts (where it may be difficult to tell one from the other) can arise at every turn, suddenly but not quite surprisingly: the unexpected is normal here.

These spaces of circulation imply a "profusion of itineraries, multiple times, disjointed places and ways of doing things [...] in an attempt to be attuned to the shifting templates of opportunity, a willingness to upend entrapment in the normative confines of a human form" (Simone 2020, 1140)—in this case the

diminished humanity of camp inhabitation, and more generally of segregated differential inclusion by means of migration governance and racism in all its many guises. Living in the *ghettos*-as-extensions is for many preferable to inhabiting sanitized and warehoused camp spaces, however more equipped with basic amenities the latter might be, at least in their early days. From the military-humanitarian asylum complex to institutional labor camps—peddled as the "solution" to rid Italy's agro-industrial enclaves of unsanitary, unruly *ghettos*—the carceral qualities of camps are exceedingly clear to those destined for such spaces. Curfew hours; few if any chances to cook one's food; a ban on external visitors and on tinkering with buildings according to their inhabitants' needs, creativity and fancies; bureaucratic barriers based on immigration and work status; poor and ever-decaying infrastructure, and multiple forms of surveillance (all ultimately premised on institutional racism) are the cipher of camps, if often circumvented by way of extension.

The specter of the prison haunting labor/humanitarian camps, and migrant/Black/colonized lives in general, further points to the fact that, if the notion of *campization* may capture some of the stakes in this extending struggle, the camp is never just that: perseverance and extension happen in the face of complex and morphing concretions of power. As I will show in the remainder of this essay, the stratifications of forms of capture that have resulted into today's segregation techniques lie at the intersection of prison, camp, settler colony, and special economic zone. All these (ultimately impossible, ideal-typical) structures, at once material, affective, and symbolic, have been the weapons of a proactive and reactive war against extension that recurs throughout the ever-unfolding history of enclosure and primitive accumulation. In the becoming-capitalist of Italian agriculture, settler colony, prison, and camp (in different combinations) have been idealized and designed as antidotes against the horror projected onto slums-as-extensions by the powers that be.

The urbanization and *campization* of those made into a landless, dispossessed class by metamorphosing systems of property, modes of production and forms of extraction and control reverberates across continents throughout the contemporary era, affecting patterns of mobility and un/settlement from Africa to Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. We do not face simple repetitions, but we're up against eerie recursions of the attempt to channel, stifle, and bridle movement—to curtail extension. As in many other readings, from this perspective also the Palestine-Israel context can prove paradigmatic, condensing the violence of processes of colonial accumulation and dispossession in distilled form. If Zionist settler colonialism is indeed a version of processes of enclosure (Fields 2017), an analysis of the ways in which the latter have unfolded in the history of Italian

agrocapitalism returns, I believe, a pattern of spatial capture that relied on projects of settler colonialism streaked with carceral and military dimensions, which in turn resonate widely across time and space. Prison discipline (including the systematic torture that *sumud* resists against) and camp biopolitics are the necessary undersides upon which settler colonialism grafts itself as violent affirmation. If there is no place like occupied Palestine, the latter is everywhere in myriad shards and exploded forms.

In order to extend *sumud*, a more attentive look at what happens in extensions closer to another impossible "home-land" is in order. In the next section, I focus predominantly on encampments located across different parts of Tavoliere (the flatlands roughly comprised within the district of Foggia, in northern Apulia), and of the Plain of Gioia Tauro, at the southernmost tip of the Italian peninsula, in the region of Calabria. These are some of the most important nodes in the archipelago of encampments scattered across Italian territory (and beyond), where centuries-long processes of capture and extension have left significant, if largely unacknowledged marks on the landscape. Taking cue from those, and starting from my own thirteen-year-long solidary engagement in today's encampments, I seek to further excavate the (anti)colonial matrix of contemporary struggles.

THE MULTIPLE PASTS OF TODAY'S ENCAMPMENT ARCHIPELAGO

Springing from the ruins of projects of settler colonization, land reclamation, penal reform, and military concentration that unfolded throughout the contemporary era, today's encampments bear witness to the ongoing saliency of spatial techniques for the government of mobility, but also to their failures and to various forms of resistance and fugitivity. In its materiality, the spatial dimension immediately summons non-linear temporal recursions, as perceptible stratifications of containment forms are engraved on agribusiness enclaves' landscapes, where abandoned or repurposed ruins and rubble, as much as newly built spaces and places, reverberate (cf. Navaro et al. 2021) an always racialized violence. Here I am concerned with the active, ongoing making—and unmaking—of encampments, as processes that have played a central role in the development of "*Made in Italy*"–branded agrifood production, and which are inserted into the very construction of Italy itself as a physical and imagined national space that strongly identifies with its many (and constantly growing) flagship foods. I therefore re-frame such branding as a territorialized index of layered and fabricated, material, affective and symbolic mechanisms of racialization, exploitation and differential inclusion, underscored by colonial logics and met by various forms of resistance, recalcitrance, flight, and refusal.

Since the late eighteenth century, a process of racialization, expulsion, criminalization, and capture of mobile populations and landless peasants set off across southern Italy (then the Kingdom of Naples, which would become part of the newly established Kingdom of Italy in 1861). An international discourse had emerged, as part of the development of "scientific racism," that assigned Italy's Mezzogiorno—the southern part of the country—the status of a hybrid, exotic, and savage land straddling the civilizational divide between Europe and Africa. The drive to de-feudalize land and increase productivity by means of rationalization, that had in private property its central tenet, underscored it. Enlightened scholars' and policymakers' incipient demonization of nomadic, transhumant pastoralism, which for centuries had been the principal economic activity of many parts of central and southern Italy, including Tavoliere, also fed into such representations, depicting shepherds as uncivilized brutes—the likes of "Hottentots" or "Tartars"—and the space itself as an inhospitable, desert wasteland. These quintessentially colonial tropes formed the ideological backbone to processes of expulsion and capture, and would remain at the center of propaganda into the Fascist era (1922–1943) and beyond—although racist ideology as a whole evolved across this period, if always crossed by different pseudo-scientific currents.[2]

Mexico: Sovereign Excisions, Recursive Enclosures, and Trespasses in Militarized Spaces

Borgo Mezzanone's *ghetto*, like others, has continued to expand in size and intricacy despite periodical fires as well as threats of eviction and partial demolitions—collectively averted (but for the occasional bulldozing of old military-structures-turned-bars-and-brothels) through mass demonstrations or acts of passive resistance. Its human and non-human, fleshy, vital, and immaterial infrastructures have become ever more imbricated, knotty, and sophisticated, if ever precarious and even deadly at times. Like other *ghettos*, but in more accentuated form, this is now a refuge for those the military-humanitarian, camp-based system of migration management has made undocumented, and whose energies it partly diverted to cheap, just-in-time farm labor, but also for those that cannot and will not be pressed to the service of extraction—the abject and/as the stubbornly recalcitrant, who live off the informal petty trade of various goods and services, the charity and benevolence of fellow denizens, or plain theft.

Today's *ghetto* extends along what was originally one of the many airstrips built by U.S. forces in the heart of Tavoliere during WWII, in February 1944—then expanded after the end of the conflict (Iacomino 2006), when bunkers

connected by a network of underground tunnels were built. After unsuccessful proposals to turn it into a NATO base and much later into a cargo airport, the airfield underwent decades of partial abandonment. Since 1999 caravans first, and later containers were laid out alongside one of its runways by the Ministry for Internal Affairs to house asylum seekers, first from Kosovo—at a time when the air base was employed as support for NATO's "humanitarian" airstrikes against former Yugoslavia/Serbia—then from the Horn of Africa and West Africa. In 2005, the large asylum-seeker reception center (*Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo*, or CARA), that all migrants simply call "camp," was formally established after plans to convert the air-base buildings into an administrative-detention center for the undocumented were scrapped. Nevertheless, a carceral dimension lurks beneath the surface of humanitarian care, exposing their necessary complementarity.

With the inauguration of the CARA, those first asylum-seeker ware-housing facilities, installed in previous years and progressively left to their own devices, were excised from the official camp by means of a newly built fence (cf. Campesi 2014). This is "Mexico," as in a stroke of genius some of its original founders baptized the shantytown sprawling outside the asylum-seeker camp near the Fascist-era settler hamlet of Borgo Mezzanone. It is that which sits beyond the (stubbornly porous, forever broken into) border, materialized here as the camp's fence—cut open again and again, after every attempt at fixing and strengthening it. And it is also that which, just like the American Mexico (or indeed Palestine), was originally enclosed within the same border and then excised from it by a sovereign act of war,[3] rehearsed over and again by means of renewed attempts to wall off undocumented migrants conceived as invaders, in what Ghassan Hage (2016) has defined as the generalization of a settler-colonial ethos of besiegement. The internal fence in "Mexico" supposedly separates the camp—a space for the legal denial of citizenship rights by way of (humanitarian) enemy politics—from its now illegalized underside, turned into an extension. Yet, it is often impossible to tell the two apart: a recursive process of illegalization within the fuzzy bounds of the camp itself makes it a particularly ambivalent space, oscillating between extension and capture.

In 2005 the eviction of the now illegalized inhabitants of the emerging *ghetto* was threatened and successfully resisted. In 2008, "Mexico's" denizens also obtained the addition of further prefabricated structures, to meet the needs of the ever-growing population of rejected asylum seekers who were being progressively expelled from the official camp. Adjacent to the CARA's fenced perimeter and to the main airstrip where containers had been placed and then

abandoned, the large shantytown has sprawled in the past decade, also as a result of the (partial) eviction of the *Grand Ghetto*, a couple dozen kilometers to the north (of which more later). It extends on land formally controlled by the Ministry of Defense, littered with the rubble of military installations themselves enclosed by another porous fence delimiting the former airfield perimeter, at the intersection between three different administrative units—the municipalities of Foggia, Manfredonia, and Orta Nova. Such liminality is indeed a characteristic of several *ghettos*, their capacity to extend perhaps aided by the collision between different jurisdictions.

Following the (only partially and temporarily successful) reduction of arrivals along the central Mediterranean route that started in 2017, the Italian government has been planning to reconvert the CARA into a camp reserved for regularly employed migrant farm laborers. Renewed bilateral agreements between Italy and Libya (and other African countries), and more generally an intensification of pushbacks and other "deterrence" measures—making the Mediterranean one of the most lethal, militarized migration routes in the world—led to a significant reduction in the number of "guests," as asylum seekers are called in official language. The projected dismantling of the CARA that was announced as a consequence of its partial emptying, however, is yet to come. In the meantime, during the COVID-19 pandemic, new containers were installed to host quarantined West African migrants from across the district, according to a differential, racialized logic of disease containment. A corruption scandal (the latest in a series involving the camp) invested the regional government officials in charge of the operation, for whose bid they received under-the-table kickbacks (Spagnolo 2022). Recently, these latest modules were repurposed to house a few unofficial dwellers of the decaying prefabricated structures located inside the CARA's perimeter, and others living in the shantytown, in a topography where legality and illegality are thoroughly blurred (cf. Peano 2024a). Exception here seems to be the name of operations of rule and capture.

Yet extension exceeds also the neat spatiotemporal contours of wartime military foundations. Just beyond the now leaky airbase enclosure, which encompasses an area of several square kilometers (including the shantytown itself), the ruined remnants of (largely failed) interwar projects of land reclamation and peasant resettlement have themselves become the living spaces for migrants employed in the farming industry. The nearby hamlet of Borgo Mezzanone itself was founded, in 1935, as part of the grand scheme that the Fascist regime had come to conceive as an "integral" project—encompassing agrarian and social (read, repressive and eugenics-streaked) dimensions. Its target was the landless

(and land-hungry) peasantry, perceived as potentially dangerous, that across Tavoliere had progressively concentrated in what were described as "slum-like" agro-towns. The Fascist drive to ruralize and thus disperse such population led to repeated attempts at apportioning plots of land, complete with settler-colonial houses scattered across the largely uninhabited, malaria-infested countryside. In 1926 *Masseria La Scrofola*, the large estate encompassing what would become the military airport, was donated by its owner, Marquis De Piccolellis, to the would-be charitable foundation bearing his name and formally established according to his testamentary will a couple of years after his death, in 1928. Taking advantage of the Fascist regime's incentives for the allotment of land to be apportioned out to sharecroppers, in the 1930s the foundation began the construction of twenty colonial houses, most of which remained unfinished and uninhabited, while the plots have been rented out to farmers to this day, as a source of revenue for the charity, forever under special administration due to corruption and bankruptcy.[4] Many of these ruined buildings are currently inhabited, in extension mode, by Eastern-European farm workers (Figures 1 and 2).

Figures 1 and 2. A settler-colonial house built by the Fondazione De Piccolellis (FDP), at the time of its construction (Figure 1) and now (Figure 2). Figure 1, courtesy of the Archivio Fondazione De Piccolellis. Figure 2, by Chiara Busca, reproduced with permission.

However, some exceptions such as the De Piccolellis Foundation aside, the Fascist regime's attempt at coopting landlords into collaborating in the reclamation effort (without estranging their crucial political support) largely fell on deaf ears. Hence, the largest swathe of land included in the grandiose "integral" scheme was eventually to be managed by the Great-War veterans' organization (*Opera Nazionale Combattenti*, ONC), which survived the demise of Fascism in 1943 and the establishment of the Republic in 1946. Not only were veterans (at least in the Fascist government's proclamations) to figure among the main beneficiaries of the scheme, in an attempt to fulfill one of the regime's core promises (decisive for their rise to power), and put an end to the decades-old agrarian question that had plagued Italy since before its unification in 1861. Integral reclamation (*bonifica integrale*) itself was anointed in military rhetoric, dubbed by Mussolini as Fascists' "favourite war," waged with the plough but underscored by the sword, belying truly imperialistic ambitions that encompassed internal as much as overseas colonial spaces and traced their ideal origins to Ancient Rome. But if Fascism's settler-colonial ambitions had themselves come to acquire an explicitly martial character, the imprint of such projects on Tavoliere has deeper genealogies, that today surface through some of its other extensions.

Campagna: Settler Colonization as Serial Failure

Together with the *Grand Ghetto*, Borgo Tretitoli (known also as "*campagna*"[5] by its inhabitants, and sometimes called "Ghana house" or "Ghana ghetto" due to the prevailing nationality among its inhabitants) is one of the oldest surviving migrant encampments in the Apulian Tavoliere. According to its original residents, it was established at some point in the 1990s. It is also the one that changed the least through the decades. Located in the southern part of the provincial district of Foggia, not far from the large agro-town of Cerignola, it is nested in a rural *borgata* (a hamlet) established in the 1950s as part of the Agrarian Reform.

For centuries a stopping station for transhumant shepherds (*posta*), part of the Kingdom of Naples' royal demesne, already in 1831 the estate of which it was part (called *Feudo di Torre Alemanna*) was earmarked to host one of two settler colonies to re-house the inhabitants of the nearby salt marshes, then part of the municipality of Barletta. The salt-extraction establishment was the property of the crown, infested by malaria, and inhabited by poor salt-pan workers (*salinari*) and smugglers who lived in *pagliaie*—straw huts that were common abodes for landless peasants and which would be repeatedly flagged, throughout the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century, across several regions,

Figure 3. San Ferdinando's coat of arms, sporting a *pagliaia*.

Figure 4. The picture of a *pagliaia*, contained in Rosario Labadessa's private album titled "My work for the colonization of Tavoliere, 1936–1938," currently held at Foggia's provincial library, Magna Capitana. Labadessa was a Fascist MP, commissioner of Foggia's Reclamation Consortium and cadre of the National Veterans' Association, in charge of reclamation in Tavoliere. The caption reads: "Tavernola's colonists started to work their land before they had a house." Once again, paradoxically, a project of reclamation fostered the proliferation of those very dwellings it was supposed to replace.

as unsanitary and in need of destruction. Several commentators alleged that the inhabitants of the marshes had to be disciplined by attaching them to the land, where they should dedicate themselves to the supposedly uplifting labor of agriculture.[6]

For reasons that remain unclear, however, in 1839 the Bourbonic Crown ultimately scrapped the settlement project at *Torre Alemanna*, while moving forward with the construction of the other planned colony, San Ferdinando—a village that took the name of its founder, King Ferdinand II (Defacendis 2011, Di Cicco 1977, Labadessa 1933, Piazzolla 1985). It was not until 1847 that settler families were selected from the nearby salt marshes. Issues such as the lack of housing and of means sustenance, indebtedness, officials' corruption, and disease marred the experiment. Despite the initial aims, houses were provided to a restricted elite of professionals only, whilst colonists were once again forced to build huts (*pagliaie*) with straw and canes. These became so tightly associated with the new settlement as to paradoxically figure in its coat of arms when it was finally proclaimed a municipality (*Comune*) in 1899 (Figure 3).

After the alienation of Tavoliere's land that began during the Napoleonic interlude (1807–1815) and was completed with the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, Tretitoli became one of the core farms (*masserie*) of the Pavoncelli family estate. Hailing from Cerignola, in the earlier part of the nineteenth

century the Pavoncellis had amassed great wealth as ruthless wheat traders, to then acquire vast agrarian estates, in the order of tens of thousands of hectares, across different regions of Italy. On their lands, they successfully undertook the intensive cultivation of wheat as well as implanting vineyards and promoting the most advanced farming techniques for several other crops, which they achieved thanks to sharecropping arrangements that demanded improvement work of tenants. Already in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Pavoncellis aimed to organize the life of their farmer dependents in every detail—from religious practice to schooling and consumption.

In 1931, exactly a century after the first settlement plan was hypothesized at Torre Alemanna, the politically well-connected Pavoncellis (from whose family hailed government ministers and members of parliament, who also controlled the agrarian bloc's organizations and sat on several financial enterprises' boards) sought to take advantage of the grand "integral reclamation" (*bonifica integrale*) project promoted by Fascism to reconvert Tretitoli into a settler colony. By the Pavoncellis' intentions, this should be managed according to sharecropping principles that would prove advantageous to the property. Yet, for reasons that also remain unclear in archival and secondary sources, the plan would again never see the light of day, much like the whole "integral reclamation" scheme across Tavoliere.[7]

In the same period, meanwhile, the heirs of the 1847 Bourbonic colony of San Ferdinando were the object of yet other experiments and relocations. In 1927, in nearby Margherita di Savoia, the Electrical Company for Reclamation and Irrigation (*Società Elettrica per la Bonifica e l'Irrigazione*) established an experimental farm initially relying on sharecroppers from neighboring San Ferdinando. Starting from 1932, the S. Chiara complex (formerly a convent) would be settled by fourteen landless peasant families from the northeastern Veneto region, each counting fifteen to twenty members (some returning from the colonization campaigns in northern and eastern Africa). Settlers were first employed in reclamation works and subsequently allocated their own pieces of land, totaling 200 hectares, on which the first attempts at horticulture were made. These included the growing of tomato—that starting from the late 1970s would become Tavoliere's "red gold", whose harvest employs to this day tens of thousands of migrant workers every year. In 1935 and 1937, respectively, people from San Ferdinando would also be resettled in the newly founded reclamation *borgate* of La Serpe (today Borgo Mezzanone) and Tavernola, where in many cases they once again had to build *pagliaie* as their abodes (cf. Figure 2).[8] Almost a century later, in 2021, after the last descendants of the first colonists at Santa Chiara were finally forced

Figures 5 and 6. The part of azienda S. Chiara where today Ghanaian workers from Tretitoli live. Photographs by Irene Peano.

out of the estate by the current property, some Ghanaian workers previously living in Borgo Tretitoli settled there and are employed as farmhands on nearby land (Figures 5 and 6).

In the late 1950s, *masseria* Tretitoli was confiscated from the Pavoncellis by the agencies implementing the Agrarian Reform and, more than a century

since the initial project had been conceived, finally parceled out into small plots given out to tenants. Most of the houses built during the reform—which were not equipped with connections to the electrical grid nor to a water supply and sewage system, just like those built during the Fascist-era reclamation, across Tavoliere and beyond—were never inhabited by its beneficiaries, whose heirs however maintain control over them and in many cases charge rent to the occupiers (sometimes to be paid in kind by means of free labor).

Grand Ghetto: Echoes of Fugitivity

Like other encampments in this archipelago (including Tretitoli), what its inhabitants call the "Grand Ghetto" began as a seasonal dwelling to then become progressively more permanent. Also similarly to Borgo Tretitoli, this *ghetto* took shape starting from the semi-abandoned premises of an Agrarian-Reform era settlement, carved out of a 544-hectare estate originally named Torretta Antonacci, confiscated from Neapolitan Princess Ippolita Cattaneo (Figures 7 and 8).[9] In 2018, the USB union (*Unione Sindacale di Base*) planted a plaque marking the place's original name at one end of the settlement, alleging it is a more "dignified" toponym than the term *ghetto*, which in their reading is tainted by racist undertones. I beg to differ.

The self-assigned appellation of the shantytowns where West African migrants live is, according to my interlocutors, drawn from Jamaican English via its Ghanaian and more generally West African assimilation. Across these geographies, the term *ghetto* denotes a place (or a gathering) on the margins of or outside the law, with obvious reference to Black Atlantic imaginaries, marking these as spaces of fugitivity. Black-Atlantic, Caribbean, and North American connections also manifest in references to some or other version of Rastafarianism and more generally to Jamaican culture (linked to the awareness of living in "Babylon"), or in the scathingly and bitterly ironic nicknames some such *ghettos* or squatted buildings are given. "Washington," located about a kilometer from the core of the Grand Ghetto, was thus named because it consisted of a large, derelict, white farmhouse, possibly built in the eighteenth or nineteenth century and demolished in the early 2010s. Its quietness and remoteness were in stark contrast to the buzzing atmosphere of the Grand Ghetto, which according to some of the older residents also used to be named "New York," capturing its urban vibe. Other *ghettos* are or used to be known as "the White House" (a disused dairy factory in the outskirts of Foggia, painted white) and "Guantánamo" (an informal tent city in Saluzzo, Piedmont, dismantled in 2017). And of course there is "Mexico."

In other cases, parts of the *ghettos* are named after African geographical markers, such as *Bamako*—a section of the Grand Ghetto inhabited mainly by Malian people—or the previously mentioned Ghana House. Here, toponyms signal the eccentricity of the *ghettos* to Italian national borders. Yet, while the term *ghetto* clearly bears North American, Black geographical referents dating back to the early twentieth century, its genealogies can lead all the way to fourteenth-century Venice, where the original Jewish *geto* was established (cf. Hutchinson and Haynes 2012), summoning the (mostly eclipsed) Mediterranean prehistories of modern, racialized containment (cf. Peano 2023). In all cases, the *ghettos*' extensive quality is explicitly foregrounded. In their ambivalence and sharp irony, these vernacular topographic markers certainly bear more potential to subvert the grip of projects of capture than the names through which the latter were crystallized across the centuries.

But the reverberations of fugitivity in places like the Grand Ghetto extend even beyond the Black Atlantic or its Euro-Mediterranean precursors and afterlives, being inherent to settler colonial reclamation and reform projects, which carried heavily disciplinary undersides. In Italy, the 1950s Agrarian Reform materialized as the Republican State's attempt to quell the wave of land occupations and protests (often repressed in a bloodbath) that had resurfaced since the downfall of Fascism, during which time they had been illegalized and violently suppressed. Tavoliere, in fact, had been the stage for one of the most significant, longer-term, and successful landless-peasant struggles, that began in the late nineteenth century and that Fascism rose to extinguish with the support of the agrarian bloc (Snowden 1986, Rinaldi and Sobrero 2004). It is in this context that the need to "ruralize" landless masses acquired even greater strength. Yet, if the post-war, Republican Reform on the one hand traced a line of continuity with previous projects of reclamation-as-settler-colonization, purged of their most explicitly racist content, on the other it represented the epilogue of a long trajectory of ruralist policies, which in Italy had marked economic and social planning since the dawn of the contemporary era. Funded by means of U.S. Marshall Plan reconstruction funds, the Reform expressed more the ruling elites' attempt to appease peasant demands with brazenly inadequate measures than a real investment in small-property landholding agriculture, at a time when economic policy was sharply turning to industrial investment, which also required the labor power of southern peasants and their offspring (D'Antone 1990, Ginsborg 1990).

Figures 7 and 8. The Grand Ghetto in 2017 (with Agrarian Reform prefabricated houses now demolished). Photos courtesy of R. Catapano.

Just like Tretitoli and many of the Fascist reclamation-era colonial houses, abandoned at the first chance, the settlement at Torretta Antonacci was never really a living space for the beneficiaries of the Reform, many of whom in fact migrated out of the region in search of more remunerative jobs in northern factories during the 1960s' industrial boom. In parallel with organized peasant protest, mass out-migration has characterized this area in waves across the contemporary period and up to the present, making for a core cause of the agrarian bloc and its political representatives' concern. Tavoliere and its district capital, Foggia, have long been famed as a place that most seek to escape from. "*Fuggi da Foggia*!" (Fly from Foggia!) is the centuries-old intimation that musically captures this sentiment, widespread among early contemporary-era travelers and relayed, for example, in the eighteenth-century journal published by Abbot Longano (Ventura 1987), one among the several reformist intellectuals that at the time advocated the intensification of agricultural production in Tavoliere and across the then Kingdom of Naples. Here, flight was evoked as the elites' gut reaction to the horror elicited by what was represented as a desolate, malaria-infested, empty land, dotted by insalubrious towns populated by indolent, dirty, poor, and treacherous men, and debauched women. As mentioned, such widespread discourses were the ideological terrain on which the perceived need for reclamation

and ruralization germinated. On the other hand, the equally entrenched, recalcitrant refusal of landless peasants to be ruralized away from agro-towns into isolated settler-colonial houses, evident since the first projects were set in motion in the late eighteenth century, recurs in today's migrants' tendency to cluster in urban-like *ghettos*.

Like Tretitoli, today as at its foundation the Grand Ghetto also lacks any connection to an electrical grid, water supply or sewage system. It is said to have been established after the evacuation of an abandoned sugar plant nearby (built in the 1960s and closed some thirty years later), where migrant farm workers had found refuge during harvest times. The former factory is now a biomass power plant, temporarily confiscated by the judiciary in 2017 for supposed environmental violations. As with all *ghettos*, this also developed into a space of leisure, with bars, restaurants, and "connection houses" (mostly Nigerian-run brothels), as well as clothing, barber, and food stores (sometimes also offering other services, like photocopying). Electrical power is increasingly supplied by solar panels installed by inhabitants on the shacks' roofs.

But unlike Borgo Tretitoli, the Grand Ghetto has undergone heavy mutations through the last two decades, which, besides mere expansion, were also the consequence of heavy state intervention. A partial eviction was enforced in 2017 by means of a large-scale police operation, during which a fire erupted due to unascertained causes (but which some inhabitants attributed to the police). The blaze killed two residents in their sleep (Mamadou Konate and Nouhou Doumbia) and destroyed a large portion of the shantytown—the one that, according to the authorities, lay on land belonging to the Regional Government of Apulia. A new encampment, where shacks have been partially substituted by caravans and now brick-and-mortar houses, developed on nearby grounds, while in 2019 the regional authorities established first a tent and then a container camp, now largely unmaintained, in the section that had been razed to the ground after the fire. The tent camp was partially swept away by a gale in 2020. More Reform-era houses, inhabited by seasonal workers, were demolished during this period.

In a twist of bitter irony, the rural settlements built as alleged solutions to the problems of unruly urbanization today materialize another result of the same processes of expulsion that drove earlier urbanization. The sparse, isolated settler-colonial farmhouses of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reclamation and reform projects, deserted by their supposed beneficiaries, have been turned into urban-like spaces in their own right—into a version of those slums that so preoccupied reformers in earlier times, and that are still represented as a

biopolitical threat today (cf. Peano 2021b, 2024b). Yet, to fully grasp the importance of fugitivity away from the discipline of settler-colonial schemes, the more evidently carceral dimensions of projects of reclamation and settlement must also be addressed.

San Ferdinando: Carcerality and Blackness Resurface

In addition to settler colonies, contemporary-era reformers pushed for the establishment of penal colonies across different parts of Italy to employ convicts in dangerous drainage and land reclamation works. Already in 1781, Marquis Domenico Grimaldi printed a "Plan to usefully employ convicts and with their labor ensure and increase wheat harvests in Apulia and in other provinces of the Kingdom" (Grimaldi 1781, my translation). The Marquis belonged to a patrician family of Genoese origins, that several centuries previously had resettled to Seminara, in the Plain of Gioia Tauro (now part of the Calabria Region, at the southernmost tip of the Italian peninsula), where he had introduced capitalist innovations to his land estates, besides being a member of several agronomical academies internationally (Venturi 1962). In his tract, Grimaldi reflected on the differences between American slave plantations and cultivated lands in the Kingdom of Naples. Notwithstanding the laziness, feeble-mindedness, and proneness to suicide of African slaves in the Americas, he asserted, and even considering their high prices and the significant costs of their trans-Atlantic shipping (also in terms of lives lost), in Grimaldi's mind the wondrous fecundity of American soils, uncultivated for millennia, overweighed the disadvantages derived from employing such workers. On the contrary, not only did the Kingdom's land not give comparable yields, but convict labor had been demonstrated to be less productive than "free" wage work.

Still, Grimaldi's pamphlet expressed a widely shared sentiment among the Enlightened elites and intellectuals of his time, according to whom the thousands of convicts locked behind the prison bars of the Kingdom of Naples should be put to work so as to alleviate public coffers of their maintenance. Such utilitarian drive was indeed that same that invested agricultural production, with an aim to make it more effective, intensive and profitable. Grimaldi reached the conclusion that convict labor should be employed to "arrange the economy of the Kingdom's waters, of which we now ignore the true usage and the true, wondrous advantages" (1781, 8; my translation). This was also the orientation of the Kingdom of Naples' "Plan for justice reform in the provinces, by the Justice Secretary," Giuseppe Maria Galanti, drawn up in 1795 but never adopted (cited in Ambron 2006). From then onwards, proliferating land-reclamation and hydraulic-drainage projects often encouraged the use of convict labor, and plans

for workers' accommodation in more or less temporary structures followed suit. Employing convict labor for such projects, in the eyes of their proponents, would have the advantage of avoiding competition and a race to the bottom against free workers—for convicts would be toiling on fallow, marshy land, performing highly perilous, often deadly tasks due to the high incidence of malaria.

Thus, in the 1840s, during the so-called Scientists' Meetings that were held across several Italian cities to debate—among other issues—economic development in a capitalist sense, agrarian penal colonies were further theorized as an instrument to force the "non-industrious poor" to work in reclamation projects. This would keep in check the mass exodus of dispossessed peasants from newly enclosed lands, then underway, in a country where agriculture would constitute the principle economic activity until well into the twentieth century (Melossi 1981). Throughout the nineteenth century, several agricultural penal colonies, often aimed at reclamation projects, would be realized (Di Pasquale 2019; Gibson 2015, 2019; Gibson and Poerio 2018; Puddu 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2023)—some of which are still operational today. Accommodation for convicts invariably consisted of communal barracks, in many cases imagined as temporary and usually arranged in circular shape for the purpose of surveillance. In some instances, convicts were expected to turn into settlers after having redeemed themselves by means of reclamation work, once again pointing to the porosity characterizing settler and penal colony.

In the Plain of Gioia Tauro, home to Marquis Grimaldi and many of his estates, and today littered with a number of encampments where West African farm workers live, an early experiment at reclamation testifies to particularly eloquent recursions. The Industrial Zone located between the municipalities of San Ferdinando and Rosarno—initially intended as a complement to the Port of Gioia Tauro, built in the 1970s but largely deserted of economic activities—in the 2010s became the site of two encampments. A container camp was established in 2010, and after a few years largely left to its inhabitants' own devices until their final eviction and subsequent relocation to another prefabricated camp structure just outside the town of Rosarno, in April 2024. Nearby, since 2012 a series of successive tent cities each rapidly turned into shantytowns by virtue of institutional abandonment as much as of dwellers' reappropriation, to then be razed to the ground at least four times and rebuilt until their latest, still standing incarnation. Meant as "emergency" solutions in the wake of a large and heavily mediatized revolt counterposing West African farmworkers and the local population, which had erupted in early 2010 as a reaction against the physical attacks periodically endured by the migrants, they should have been replaced by more stable solutions that never quite materialized as envisioned. Besides the

prefabricated village where some of the inhabitants of the former container camp were eventually resettled 14 years later, a complex of five three-story buildings remains empty to this day, after more than five years since its completion. Both were erected and left uninhabited for years, undergoing pillage and occupation by Italian citizens and interruptions in their construction due to suspected infiltrations by the local mafia cartels. Other informal encampments and one more official camp, recently built and only belatedly inaugurated in 2024 but still partially empty, are located in other areas of the Plain.

On the very same land that today hosts the dryport Industrial Zone where tent and container camps were erected, a reclamation project, initiated in 1818, led to the construction of a whole new village. Again named San Ferdinando in honor of the King, just like in Tavoliere, it was the fruit of the labor of dozens of convicts. The latter were leased by the crown of Naples to Marquis (General) Vito Nunziante, who also recruited peasants from nearby localities for the reclamation and settlement of the area. Convict laborers were first housed in a derelict Saracen tower, and later in what would be defined by Nunziante's heir, Ferdinando, in 1929 as "a perfect African Village" made, once again, of pagliaia, which in his book Ferdinando called "tokuls of a rather picturesque character" (Nunziante 1929, 77–78; see Figure 9). The supposed connections between southern Italian peasants and Africa made for a great deal of speculation by nineteenth-century anthropology, and formed the basis for racialist thinking and class-based anti-southern discrimination which the Nunziantes readily embraced and that are not dispelled in the present.[10] In late nineteenth and early twentieth century Italy, "tokuls" or "tukuls" were imagined to be the traditional dwellings in the Horn of Africa, then in the process of being invaded by Italian troops as part of the country's colonial ambition. In particular, it was Italian architects in the colonies that essentialized, and even actively invented, *tukul* as the quintessential "native" housing type in Eritrea and more broadly in what then was Italian East Africa (Fuller 2006, 83). In a reverse feedback loop, the *tukul* then became a paragon, a material analogy for the slums sprawling in metropolitan Italy,

> described with an exotic vocabulary that assimilated them to more 'primitive' dwellings abroad [...]. In Rome in the early twentieth century they were sometimes called '*villaggi abissini*' ('Abyssinian villages'), evoking the cluster of rectangular or circular houses and huts in Italian-occupied Eritrea [...] of which pictures had been reproduced in contemporary illustrated magazines. [...] In Milan after 1950 the areas of migrant housing, sometimes self-built, on what was then the north and north-east periphery of the city, were called *coree* ('Koreas'), a term that emerged shortly after

> the Korean War of 1950–1953 and apparently derived from the fact that the established residents of the surrounding areas saw the migrants, most of whom came from poor areas of northeast or southern Italy or from Yugoslavia, as 'like exiles, refugees, like people who had lost a war.' (Forgacs 2014, 32)

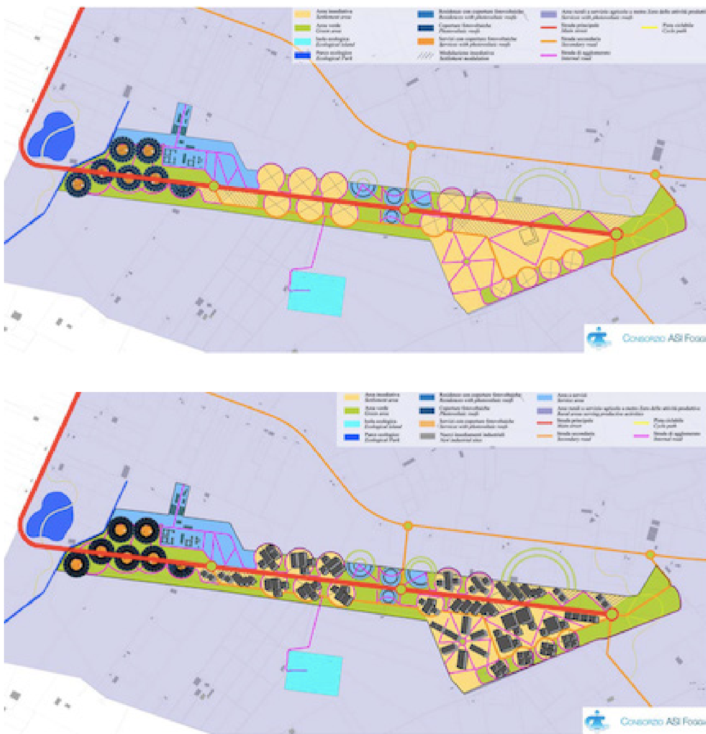
Pier Paolo Pasolini himself referred in 1958 to "shacks like those in Bedouin towns" on the edge of Rome (Forgacs 2014, fn45), and another "Korea" was identified in 1950s Rosarno itself, in the "Case Nuove" (new houses) neighborhood, inhabited by "blackfeet," as the children of poor peasants were called (Chirico and Magro, cited in Campesi 2015, 12). Again, colonial wars and their racist presuppositions encoded the spaces of inhabitation of the poor, this time in the negative—rather than as the positive settler-colonial antidotes of reclamation projects we encountered earlier.

After a fire that in 1894 destroyed a good portion of the "African" settlement at San Ferdinando, in one year Marquis Vito's grandson built two hundred cottages to house the growing population, in a bid to maintain the family's grip on the land and its resources, which lasted into the twentieth century.

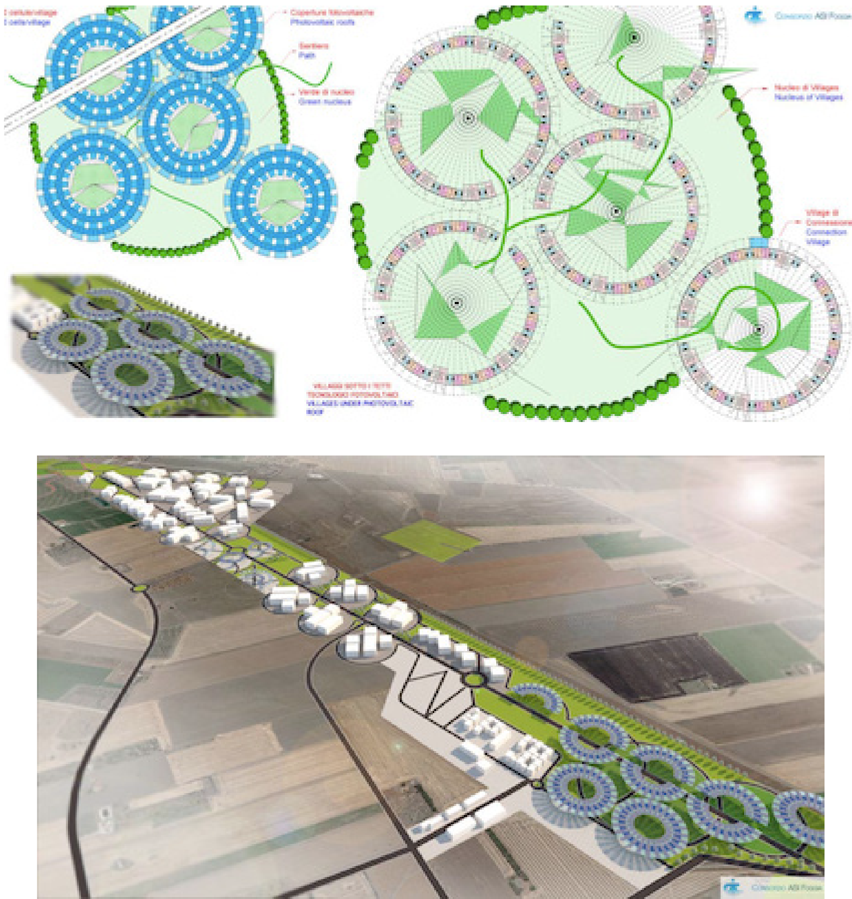
Il villaggio primitivo sotto la neve (1892).

Figure 9. "The primitive village under the snow" (1892), depicted in Ferdinando Nunziante's 1929 book on the village of San Ferdinando, founded by his great-grandfather.

In yet another recursive loop, today the labor camps turned self-constructed shantytowns, located in the periphery of the village of San Ferdinando, are inhabited by "real Africans," who have been periodically threatened by (often deadly) fires that paved the way to resettlement into an allegedly safer and certainly securitized and heavily surveilled camp in 2018. The latter then turned into a shantytown once again—not before a fire caused by short-circuiting electrical wires took the life of Noumou Sylla in March 2019. Agglomerations of shacks, just like camps themselves, here as in other districts, are sometimes naturalized as "Africans'" habitual living places, just as *pagliaie* were considered as Africanized southern shepherds' and peasants' natural abodes in earlier times. Plans for further resettlements of the latest camp-turned-shantytown located in San Ferdinando's deserted Industrial Zone, that were recently discussed by the regional council of Calabria, explicitly referred to the constructions-to-be as "a sort of African village, with prefabricated structures arranged in a circle within a series of communal open spaces" (Pantano 2022). Similarly, a project for the requalification of "Mexico," the sprawling shantytown surrounding the



Figures 10 and 11. Consorzio ASI Foggia, "Il Ghetto di Mezzanone e il suo recupero come Area produttiva territoriale" [(The Ghetto of Mezzanone and its rehabilitation as territorial productive Area]), Urbanpromo Design Conference 2020. Note the circular shapes representing workers' living spaces.



Figures 12 and 13. Consorzio ASI Foggia, “Il Ghetto di Mezzanone e il suo recupero come Area produttiva territoriale” [The Ghetto of Mezzanone and its rehabilitation as territorial productive Area], Urbanpromo Design Conference 2020. Note the circular shapes representing workers’ living spaces.

asylum-seeker reception center of Borgo Mezzanone, in the district of Foggia, presented in the fall of 2020 at the prestigious Urbanpromo design conference, took inspiration from “African constructions,” in the words of its creator (personal communication with the author, October 2021; see Figures 10–13).

BEYOND RECURSIVE LOOPS

I started this essay gesturing to one of today’s most acute global struggles, one that keeps much of the world holding its breath, to suggest one way to extend its forms of perseverance and thereby also to invigorate others, within apparently less severe conflicts: exploring the reverberations of forms of colonial—racist, carceral, and military—violence across seemingly heterogeneous contexts, and the possible connections between purportedly distant currents of

resistance to it. The serial deferrals and irresolutions, on which the renewed efforts at enclosure and capture I have retraced have rested, in forever recursive mode, are witness to powers of perseverance I proposed could be read and inhabited through the notion of extension. Decentering predominant narratives that depict present-day encampments on the basis of pacified histories (when not of sheer denials of historicity) and spectacularizations of misery with distancing effects, to which academic discourse itself is not immune, and beckoning to the force of extension and perseverance, is I hope a small step in this same extending direction.

The temporal dimension proves crucial in this decentering exercise: if, as Abourahme argues, "settler colonialism everywhere is a particularly, even peculiarly, fraught struggle over time" (2025, 2), and the camp "a reminder of the always-unfinished work of repression" (15), the structurally unaccomplished projects I have sketched here testify to this constitutive incompleteness as temporal deferral, undoing any attempt to establish purified myths of origin and to thus overcome the need to settle. Not only did the eminently colonial crusade against nomadism, in contemporary Italy as much as in Palestine and elsewhere, rely on the encampment as its target, but also as its means, signaling an intolerable but ultimately unassailable impermanence. In the southern Italian context, the *pagliaia*, the slum and the agro-town, and today the *ghetto* are the encampment extensions against which *campization* has been pitted as solution, in different forms that have ranged from the penal to the settler colony and the militarized camp, where one form blurs into the other in varying shades. Furthermore, just like in Palestine, it was the very settler-colonial project that in many instances engendered the displacement and unsettlement it was meant to be up against (witness the recursive use of *pagliaia* by putative beneficiaries of settler-colonial schemes), thus simultaneously reinforcing and undermining itself by relying on a variety of forms of containment that straddled distinctions between penal, military, and settler forms of *campization*.

On the other hand, crucial differences of course obtain between other contexts and the one I have focused on, and between current encampment forms and their past reverberations. On Italian territory *natives* and *settlers* were not categorically incompatible subjects, but rather imagined as successive developmental stages in a process of moral and biopolitical reform and citizen-making, whereby the racialized southern Italian peasant/shepherd or criminal (often made to coincide into the same person) would be transformed into the heroic, virtuous, and pugnacious (but still docile and exploitable), racially improved settler—at best an indebted sharecropper, when not a waged worker. Here, the project was one of "settling natives" rather than nativizing settlers as in other

canonical forms of settler colonization. Natives' racialization did not, for the most part, imply immutability; rather, the settler project was always also a project of racial improvement, whether by means of labor alone or of miscegenation too—as during Fascism, when northern and southern peasants were supposed to mix by means of settler colonial schemes (as in the case of S. Chiara in Tavoliere), and thereby improve the "stock." Present-day encamped migrants, on the contrary, are hardly imagined as tomorrow's settlers, if not in residual forms—where their proper place is represented as the camp in one shape or other—and thus, for the most part, confined to the role of post-colonial natives-in-displacement. Yet, their stubborn, extensive excess against *campization* points, I would argue, to the spectral survival of the settler-colonial project in its displacing and enclosing violence, across geographies and temporalities—a project we cannot but aim to resist against.

ABSTRACT

Starting from the struggles of migrants living in Italian agribusiness's encampment archipelago, this essay retraces the colonial matrix of contemporary processes of capture and seeks to connect them to other currents of anti-colonial resistance in the present—most notably those of Palestine. What I call campization *sits at the center of such conflicts, across multiple geographies and in varying intensities. Yet, by means of a genealogical method I show how, throughout the contemporary history of Italian agrocapitalism, the camp as a colonial technique of capture has been intrinsically connected to other spatial dispositifs such as the penal and settler colony, where all are imbued by military and racializing logics. At the same time, I highlight how encampments have also been "extensions" in the sense that AbdouMaliq Simone and others have attributed to the notion, as a constantly oscillating form of unsettling and resettling that I make resonate with Palestinians'* sumud—*perseverance in the building and rebuilding of lives and spaces, through and beyond their undoing.*

[agrocapitalism; campization; recursion; fugitivity; sumud]

NOTES

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1. See the social-media accounts of Campagne in Lotta (https://campagneinlotta.org/borgo-mezzanone-fg-basta-prese-in-giro-vogliamo-risposte-sullacqua-subito/); Facebook: Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne; X: @Campagneinlotta; Instagram: @campagneinlotta; Tiktok: @documentipertutt.

2. See Moe (2002); Melchiorre Delfico (1788a, 1788b), cited in Ventura (2013, 14); Giuseppe Palmieri (1789, 1792), cited in Ventura (2013, 16, 126–27); and Mercurio (1989). See also the short film released by the Fascist regime's Istituto Nazionale Luce, *La bonifica del Tavoliere* (1940), accessible at https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000084076/1/la-bonifica-del-tavoliere.html. For the overseas equivalents of these discourses in colonized Libya, see Hom (2019).
3. I am of course referring to the colonization process that culminated in the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846, when U.S. troops finally succeeded in annexing what are now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California—territories that had hitherto (or until shortly before, as in the case of Texas) belonged to the Mexican state, since its independence. The fencing of the new U.S.-Mexico border started shortly afterwards, and has been renewed and upgraded at different stages up until the present day (see Anzaldúa 1987).
4. Cf. the Archive of Fondazione De Piccolellis, Foggia. It is likely that other plots, or portions of the estate, were requisitioned for the construction of the airport in late 1943, but I have been unable to find traces of such a process, and more generally of the construction of the airport itself. For details on the history of land reclamation in Tavoliere, see Bevilacqua (1988). For a history of Borgo Mezzanone, see D'Alessandro (2002); Mercurio et al. (1993). Cf. also Peano (2021b, 2024b) with respect to both and with reference to the overall Fascist project of *bonifica integrale*.
5. Literally "countryside" in Italian. The toponym probably derives from the name of the nearest train station, *Cerignola Campagna*.
6. On the history of Tretitoli from the earlier part of the nineteenth century until the 1950s Agrarian Reform, I am relying mainly on information gathered from the State Archives in Foggia (including the private archive of the Pavoncelli Family), Bari, and Naples, as well as on Cioffi (1984). On the project of resettlement at Torre Alemanna, see Labadessa (1933); Russo (1986).
7. Cf. the Pavoncellis' private archive, held in the State Archives at Foggia, and Cioffi (1984), Cioffi and Bufano (1988), Nardella et al. (1999), Pasimeni (1978), Sereni (1939).
8. On Azienda S. Chiara, see Pantanelli (1929), Barone (1986), and cf. Peano (2021b, 2024b). On the resettlement of colonists from San Ferdinando, see Piemontese (2010).
9. Cf. Central State Archives, Rome, and information gathered at the Ente Riforma e Sviluppo Agrario di Puglia, Foggia.
10. For this and more generally the whole paragraph, I am drawing also on the Nunziantes' private archive, held in Naples' State Archives.

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