

Al Intithar

The film begins abruptly, with an image of a woman carrying a child in her arms. She is seen from behind, gazing towards a gathering of people standing in front of tents; sounds can be heard from the area. After almost 30 minutes, the film ends just as abruptly, with the same woman sitting with her daughter in front of small boxes containing sweets, waiting for customers. The film presents itself as an excerpt; it records fragments of the everyday life of this woman and her three children as though it were gently accompanying her as she cleans the tent, folds the blankets carefully, cooks, talks on the phone with her brother, brings her daughter to be vaccinated, speaks with other women, prays. Her little daughter plays, the younger son writes a love letter, the older son smokes and listens to music on his smartphone. The camera is physically close to these people, but still keeps a discreet distance.

The surroundings, the space the people move within, become visible: a city of tents that is steadily expanding as new tents arrive and containers are set up. A sandstorm sweeps over the settlement, and on the right side of the image, the barbed wire that surrounds the camp can be seen; the desert ground; a passing tank. Children are born, weddings celebrated, marriages arranged. Only when the short credits appear do we learn the names of the film's protagonists, the Syrian refugees in the Jordanian Camp Zaatari, whom Mario Rizzi thanks. During the seven weeks in the fall of 2012 he spent living and filming in the UNHCR camp, three months after it was established, it was already providing shelter to 45,000 refugees from Syria, a mere seven kilometers away. In the spring of 2013 the number has already increased to more than 100,000, and a second camp has been set up nearby. When this publication goes to print, a quarter of the Syrian population will be on the run.

I first saw *Al Intithar* on Mario Rizzi's computer, just as he was finishing the film. The second time was in the cinema, and afterwards on a daily basis in the exhibition at the Villa Romana. Film is a technical recording medium, and I've rarely found the insistence on repetition as valuable as it is in *Al Intithar*, in which waiting and anticipation are reproduced as an enduring presence and reference to real life. While the footage of Zaatari from the fall of 2012 was projected in various different places in the months that followed, the protagonist continues to live in the refugee camp in a state of emergency that carries on and that governs interior and exterior space. *Al Intithar* is not a documentary; it does not explain, and it offers no commentary. It neither explains who the protagonist is, nor why she is there; it does not

criticize camp life, and it identifies no guilty parties. Things are verbalized in the segments of the conversation: the bad sanitary conditions, the necessary trade of foodstuffs, the worry over the condition of family members and the house back in Syria.

The protagonist does not shy away from showing herself for this film in the everyday life that humiliates her. She has made her role, that of a protagonist of a *post-postcolonial* future, her own, as has everyone else in the camp.