

**ABSTRACT THESIS:** The catastrophic effects of the Anthropocene are increasingly evident. Manifestations of crisis are not only environmental but also economic, social, political, ethical; which combined with the dystopian imaginaries of the future, suggest the need for a paradigm shift. In this regard, Commons are seen as an alternative for a transition to a post-capitalist economy. In this context of the Anthropocene, Design for Social Innovation remains understood as a “humanitarian” action, linked to the logic of commodification; reason why some call for decolonizing Design from Western abstractions. The research focused on the relationship between Design and Commons, with an attention to decolonial thought. The idea is to comprehend the role of Design in helping to shift paradigms from an extractivist growth economy to a resource economy; a design attached to situations instead of objects. The investigation followed an action research approach that involved “inhabiting” the oases of Chenini and Jemna in Tunisia, as Commons/community economies in crisis. A collaborative design experiment was conducted using a post-development/feminist line of thought, considering the concepts of “Radical Imagination”, “Epistemologies of the South” and “Situated Knowledge”. What emerged was a different perspective for design research, truly rooted in the present and capable of bringing the communities and contexts involved into a feasible future.

**ABSTRACT THESE:** Les effets catastrophiques de l'Anthropocène sont de plus en plus évidents. Les manifestations de la crise ne sont pas seulement environnementales mais aussi économiques, sociales, politiques, éthiques ; ce qui, combiné aux imaginaires dystopiques du futur, suggère la nécessité d'un changement de paradigme. À cet égard, les Communs sont considérés comme une alternative pour une transition vers une économie post-capitaliste. Dans ce contexte de l'Anthropocène, le Design pour l'Innovation Sociale reste compris comme une action “humanitaire”, liée à la logique de marchandisation ; raison pour laquelle certains appellent à décoloniser le Design des abstractions occidentales. La recherche s'est concentrée sur la relation entre le Design et les Communs, avec une attention particulière à la pensée décoloniale. L'idée est de comprendre le rôle du Design dans l'évolution des paradigmes d'une économie de croissance extractiviste à une économie de ressources ; un Design attaché aux situations plutôt qu'aux objets. L'enquête a adopté une approche de recherche-action consistant à “habiter” les oasis de Chenini et Jemna en Tunisie, comme exemples de Communs/économies communautaires en crise. Une expérience de co-design a été menée en suivant une ligne de pensée post-développement/féministe, considérant les concepts “d'Imagination Radicale”, “d'Epistémologies du Sud” et de “Connaissance Située”. Il en est ressorti une perspective différente pour la recherche en design, véritablement ancrée dans le présent et capable d'amener les communautés et les contextes concernés vers un avenir réalisable.

**(Reflexion) on Design as/for Common(s)**

**DOTTORANDO**  
Safouan Azouzi

**Dottorato di Ricerca**  
Pianificazione, Design, Tecnologia dell'Architettura

Sapienza Università di Roma | SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME | ciclo CYCLE XXXIV | nov. 2018 - oct. 2021  
Scuola di Dottorato in Ingegneria Civile e Architettura | DOCTORAL SCHOOL IN CIVIL ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURE  
Dipartimento di 'Pianificazione, Design, Tecnologia dell'Architettura' | 'PLANNING, DESIGN, TECHNOLOGY OF ARCHITECTURE' DEPARTMENT



**SAPIENZA**  
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

**Dottorato di Ricerca PIANIFICAZIONE, DESIGN, TECNOLOGIA DELL'ARCHITETTURA**  
PHD PLANNING, DESIGN, TECHNOLOGY OF ARCHITECTURE  
**Coordinatore | Director**  
Prof. Fabrizio Tucci

**Curriculum DESIGN DEL PRODOTTO**  
Curriculum PRODUCT DESIGN  
**Coordinatore Curriculum | Curriculum Chair**  
Prof. Lorenzo Imbesi

## **(Reflexion) on Design as/for Common(s)**

Decolonial Participatory Experiences for Post-Capitalist Resilient Future(s)

**Dottorando | PhD Candidate Safouan Azouzi**  
**Supervisore | Supervisor Prof. Loredana Di Lucchio**

**Ciclo | Cycle XXXIV**  
Novembre 2018 - Ottobre 2021







SAPIENZA  
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

DOTTORATO DI RICERCA

Pianificazione, Design, Tecnologia dell'Architettura

COORDINATORE

Prof. Fabrizio Tucci

CURRICULUM

Design del Prodotto

COORDINATORE CURRICULUM

Prof. Lorenzo Imbesi

## (Reflexion) on Design as/for Common(s)

Decolonial Participatory Experiences for Post-Capitalist Resilient  
Future(s)

DOTTORANDO

Safouan Azouzi

SUPERVISORE

Prof. Loredana Di Lucchio

CICLO XXXIV

Novembre 2018 - Ottobre 2021

## INDICE

p. 7 Personal Thoughts

### PART I PREMISES

#### CHAPTER 1 FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH PROJECT

- p. 15 1.1 Introduction  
Topics and Macro Areas  
Research Problem  
Research Methodology and Phases
- p. 29 1.2 Backdrop of the Research

### PART II A DESIGN BEYOND CAPITALISM: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE AROUND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE(S)

#### CHAPTER 2 CAPITALISM, CRISES & DYSTOPIAN FUTURES: A DESIGN INVOLVEMENT

- p. 43 2.1 Ecological Crisis: Design (Un)Sustainability  
Anthropocene, Collapse and Solastalgia  
Guilty/Bipolar Design(er) in front of the Urgency
- p. 56 2.2 Value(s) Crisis: Design's Entanglement in Capitalism  
A Marxian Economics Perspective on Growth  
Entangled/Prekarous Design(er)
- p. 67 2.3 Imagination Crisis: Design Eurocentrism  
(Un)Sustainable Development  
Colinezed/Colonial Design(er) and Blocked Imagination

#### CHAPTER 3 THE (RE)EMERGENCE OF THE COMMON(S) & UTOPIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN

- p. 85 3.1 Design facing Collapse  
The Anthropocene as a Mutual-Aid Era  
Activist/Resilient Design(er) in the Anthropocene
- p. 97 3.2 Design & Common(s): A Post-Capitalist Design  
The Power of Common(s): Looking beyond Capitalism  
Released/Commoner Design(er)
- p. 105 3.3 Unlocking Imaginaries: A Southern Perspective on Design  
Epistemologies of the South  
Rooted/Emancipatory Design(er) and Radical Imagination

### PART III (RE)DESIGNING COMMON(S) FOR RESILIENT FUTURES & FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: THE CASE OF TUNISIAN OASES

#### CHAPTER 4 EFFECTS OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM ON AGRICULTURE IN TUNISIA

- p. 131 4.1 Why Agriculture?  
Climate Change, Food (In)Security and Migration  
Extractivism, Land Grabbing and Processes of Dispossession

- p. 144 4.2 Building (Food)Sovereignty
  - Resisting Food Dependence: Processes of Re-Peasantization
  - Social and Ecological Movements Convergence: The Emergence of a Rural Social Contract
- p. 159 4.3 Understanding the Field: Meeting Local Actors
  - Discussions around Food Sovereignty and Permaculture in Tunisia
  - Discussions around SSE in Tunisia: Commons as the Ultimate Degree

## CHAPTER 5 UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICS OF THE OASES OF CHENINI AND JEMNA IN SOUTHERN TUNISIA

- p. 187 5.1 Why the Oases?
  - A Model of Sustainability: A little story about Resilience
  - Oases in Danger: Facing Development and Climate Change
- p. 213 5.2 Not Islands but a Network: Oases as a Model of Cosmopolitan Localism
  - Oases as Islands: a Colonial Conception
  - Oasis Connectivity: A (Re)Prefiguration of Cosmopolitan Localism
- p. 217 5.3 Preparation: Establishing Initial Contacts
  - Chenini: Agonizing Traditional Agroecology and Water Commoning
  - Jemna: Peasant Resistance and Contested Commons

## CHAPTER 6 INHABITING THE OASES THROUGH DESIGN PRACTICES

- p. 239 6.1 Which Approach? Which Method? Which Design?
  - Contacting Other Design Researchers
  - Future Workshop and Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF)
  - Auto-Ethnography, Situated Knowledge and Inhabitation: The Importance of Orality
  - Asking Questions or Finding Responses?
- p. 249 6.2 Unfolding: Inhabiting the Oasis of Chenini
  - Questioning Locals' Images of the Past, Present and Future of the Oasis
  - Past: A little story about Old Practices of Commoning in Chenini
  - Present: Identifying Actors and Challenges
  - Future: Chenini 2050 Workshop
- p. 297 6.3 Unfolding: The Case of Jemna
  - A Completely Different Scale
  - Unfinished Research: Between Pandemic and Desert Heat
  - An Experience around Commons that did not turn into a Project

## PART IV CONCLUSIONS

## CHAPTER 7 OUTCOMES AND PERSPECTIVES

- p. 321 7.1 Outcomes
  - Principles
  - Practices
- p.336 7.2 Perspectives
- p. 341 *Afterword*



## Personal Thoughts

The desire to carry out this research stems from a personal experience as a newly graduated designer who, after several years of study, was faced with serious ethical questions regarding the practice of design itself. Since reading Victor Papanek's virulent criticism of the trajectory that design had taken, the idea of design guiltiness, even driven by the most positive intentions, towards ecological and social sustainability had become a real concern. Designers have been active promoters of ideas of wellness and lifestyles that are dramatically unsustainable. Today many designers are torn between the desire to produce a work that challenges the established order and the need to produce a salable work to provide a living. Indeed, the very idea of engaged design could itself be questioned if one considers the depth of its impact and its long-term sustainability.

In 2015, the so-called "migration crisis" was a must-read topic for a Tunisian living (and studying design) in Italy, not least because of the importance the issue had assumed across Europe. The migration issue seemed extremely complex due to highly politicized considerations, over which a designer has no power. During the Syrian refugee crisis, many designers were interested in what design could do in the face of such a serious problem. A short experience in the field of Design for Social Innovation (Makers Unite during my Master's degree), international NGOs (notably UNHCR and FAO), dealing with migrants and refugees made me realize that not only politics but also civil society was addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes of the problem, treating migration as an effect of difficult socio-economic and political conditions. Many researchers have questioned the relevance of using the notion of crisis to mask the structural security policies underlying the migration crisis in the Mediterranean (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2016; de Genova, Garelli & Tazzioli, 2018). Others have studied how Tunisian actors assess existing policy responses, focusing in particular on EU policies and cooperation initiatives in this area (Roman & Pastore, 2018). Civil society and government actors have described EU-Tunisia relations as unequal and unbalanced, criticizing the Eurocentric approach to cooperation with third countries.

The existing EU-Tunisia agreements are said to be one of the factors contributing to the Tunisian economic crisis which, in turn, has directly influenced Tunisian emigration to Europe. Migration is described as an undesirable consequence of the

country's difficult socio-economic and political situation, rather than as an independent issue. The focus should therefore be on the economic recession, inter-regional socio-economic inequalities, poverty and the underdevelopment of rural areas. The discourse of a "design for the other 90%" therefore seems quite questionable in itself. Indeed, in the eyes of a designer who is part of the other 90%, this discourse of pity, where designers would have the mission to help their poor black brothers in Africa, actually hides (neo)colonial practices where Design for Social Innovation would be useful in opening up new markets that are still inaccessible. Indeed, migration has never been a crisis but a fundamental right, a condition; but it is the European migration policies, the inequality between the countries of the two shores of the Mediterranean added to the growing xenophobia that have constituted it as a crisis. It was therefore clear to me that Design for Social Innovation is in fact going down the wrong path.

From this situation, a first question emerged: Is there a design that takes into account the perspective of the South? What are the characteristics of a Design for Social Innovation that is not part of a humanitarian or emergency perspective? This research is therefore attentive to the relationship between design and socio-political issues, with particular attention to the perspective of the South and to decolonial thinking. Faced with the situation of irregular migrants in Europe (the author was able to meet several of them in the Netherlands during the research for the Master's degree and in Rome on a daily basis, most of whom are Tunisian compatriots), I wondered if their situation would not have been better if they had stayed at home. At first sight, this question could clearly be considered liberticidal; as migration is a fundamental right. One could point out the fascist basis of such thinking. Banally, instead of focusing on the idea of inclusion and integration, which themselves seemed to be a continuation of the same Eurocentric conception of things, we divided irregular migration into three phases: (1) before, (2) during and (3) after crossing the Mediterranean. Far from the extreme right-wing discourse of a certain Salvini "aiutiamoli a casa loro", we wanted to focus on the (1) before, i.e., before deciding to undertake a hazardous journey and leave the country on a bark; "casa loro" being "casa mia", it seemed to be more a question of self-determination.

The Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux (FTDES) explains in its annual report on irregular migration that “no matter how many different readings and reasons about the phenomenon of irregular migration there are, economic and social factors remain at the forefront of expulsion factors (...) the decade of successive horrors is characterized by larceny, nepotism and corruption. It has witnessed the escalation of conflicts and the impotence of the political elite to respond to the Tunisians’ social and economic issues, where the crisis is exacerbated by a growing pandemic all over the country and protests are met with despair and frustration” (FTDES, 2022). So, most of our compatriots are not driven by the desire to travel (which is of course legitimate, even if most of the time we are denied a visa), they are driven out of the country by unemployment, poverty and lack of prospects. Their situation is very similar to that of many young Italians who leave their country to look for work where it is available, i.e., in the north of Europe. The only difference between a migrant from the Global North and those from the South is the color of the passport. The fact is that no one wants to leave at any cost without a good reason. Most irregular migrants were already in a difficult situation “in our home”; so, the real question is not whether they would have been better off staying at home —as we formulated in the beginning, but what conditions would have allowed them to stay?

From the designer’s point of view, the question was not what are the moments of design intervention (for Social Innovation) in relation to the phenomenon of migration and how design could be an effective approach to address certain aspects of the social and humanitarian challenge of migration. The question is no longer whether it is possible to identify design intervention strategies for migrant inclusion as was the case for me during my master’s degree. Given that the phenomenon of irregular migration is growing exponentially and is not likely to decrease in the near future, given the factors that fuel it (Kachani, 2010), the question would be to understand the broader mechanisms behind migration and whether design really has anything to do with it. The fact is that most of the young Tunisians have lost hope in their own country. Faced with this problem of lack of perspective, the first question to be asked was how design can create support structures that positively influence/help people to stay and address social, political and environmental issues. .



PART I

# Premises



## CHAPTER 1 Framework and research project

### ABSTRACT

The first chapter focuses on the research topic and outlines the main areas discussed, specifies the scientific problem within the disciplinary field and then describes the research questions and objectives. It explains what are the expected results and the targets/contexts that those refer to, the method and the operational phases of the research. The catastrophic effects of the Anthropocene i.e., of human action on the planet are becoming more and more evident. Crisis manifestations are not only environmental but also economic, social, political, ethical etc., which combined with the dystopian imaginaries of the future, suggest the necessity of shifting paradigms. However, several movements in both the Global North/West and the Global South/East are challenging the status quo, as new forms of governance and collective action are concretely implemented by communities to protect and maintain the shared resources entrusted to them. In this sense the Commons have been promoted as an alternative for a transition to a post-capitalist economy (Ostrom, 1990; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Hardt & Negri, 2014; De Angelis, 2017; Federici, 2019).

In the same context of the Anthropocene, design is called to reinvent itself: it is at the center of unsustainable production/consumption systems; yet, in many of its contemporary forms, it aims to improve the livability of the world as a projector or corrector (Bonnet et al., 2019). According to Manzini (2014), Design for Social Innovation could support the aspirations of highly vulnerable communities by proposing solutions to problems that neither the market nor the State have solved. The fact is that a deep understanding of the political economy of design is needed; Design for Social Innovation remains intrinsically linked to market economy and the logic of commodification. Some mention the risk of falling from the dark side of the social. They state that leveraging the social level may well produce unforeseen negative societal outcomes criticizing a certain idealism of the designer (Busch & Palmås, 2016; Nussbaum, 2010). But Design for Social Innovation has always been characterized within an economic and cultural context — that of the consumer economy and where Social Innovation has always been understood as a “humanitarian” action. Elzenbaumer (2013) denounces such practices, which are devoid of a political sense and take for granted the social problems that the designers want to solve, and that therefore do not question the broader global mechanisms producing them. In this context some call for decolonizing design (Escobar, 2018; Fry, 2017; Ansari, 2016) from the tyranny of cold, “Western” abstractions.

The open research question has been: Q1: If design was born and developed in the consumer economy, does design exist in the Commons' economy? Q2: If so, what are the practices for design to play a role in the Commons' economy? Considering that Design for Social Innovation has always been characterized in a Western-centered economic/cultural context, that of the market economy, and where Social Innovation has always been understood as humanitarian action, is it possible to identify the characteristics of a socially and politically engaged design that takes into account the perspective of the South? Q3: Following the different perspectives on commoning/community economies could design contribute to prefiguring the forms of collective action that aim to improve the resilience to the present/near-future climate change issues. Q4: What is the role of design in constructing post-capitalist imaginaries through the perspectives of the Commons and radical imagination? In a Commons' economy, the idea would be to comprehend the role of design in helping to shift paradigms from an extractivist growth economy to a resource economy; a design attached to situations instead of objects.

## 1.1 Introduction

### 1.1.1 *Topics and Macro Areas*

The notion of crisis is now a constant in our daily lives, at the risk of being somewhat overused. The latest crisis is that of COVID-19; what is interesting about this global health crisis (if we can put it that way) is undoubtedly the awareness at a planetary level of the limits of our modern society. After the economic crisis of 2008-2009, this epidemic is indicative of a societal crisis but above all of an ecological crisis. All it took was a virus to bring the planetary mega-machine to a halt. Without a real ecological commitment, the same causes will produce the same effects. Crisis manifestations are not only environmental but also economic, social, political, ethical etc. The idea of crisis is here mobilized either in a naive way or for purely political purposes. In the face of this proliferation of crises, Azmanova (2020) explains that “the very crisis is in a crisis: we are stuck into a “metacrisis” i.e., a “social condition, marked by the absence of utopian energies and prospects for a revolution, even as society experiences itself in perpetual crisis.” The catastrophic effects of human action on the planet are becoming increasingly evident; the term Anthropocene indicates the current geological epoch in which our species have become a primary driver for global environmental change and the main geological force on Earth.

Williston (2015) refers to the Anthropocene as a project, going beyond its specification as a geological epoch; in that way it would be a call to place our industrialized present in a time frame that is both evolutionary and geological. In fact, many are not satisfied with the term Anthropocene, considering it as reductive, since it hides the real question that is what politics anticipate the catastrophe sufficiently so that futures stay open. Some prefer the term Capitalocene (Moore, 2016), while others choose the one of Eurocene or Technocene (Sloterdijk, 2015) — it conjures the technological revolutions of the modern age and their side effects, which should be billed to the account of the European civilization and its technocra-

tic elite. With the concept of Chthulucene, Haraway (2016) sought to develop “a kind of time-place for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” (p.2) as opposed to the Anthropocene. Servigne & Stevens (2015) link the Anthropocene and the notion of collapse in order to make it even more tangible; seen as certain, the collapse thus loses its tragic dimension. Paradoxically, they consider that we are soon entering the era of mutual aid. The disappearance of the social order in which we live would not lead to disaster, chaos or panic, since most humans exhibit extraordinarily altruistic, calm and composed behavior after a catastrophe. It would therefore be necessary to learn to die — as a civilization —to adapt to this strange new world, have new ideas, new myths and new stories, a new way of thinking about our collective existence over and against Capitalism (Scranton, 2015). Numerous scholars have denounced the unsustainability of Capitalism (Meadows, et al., 1972; Klein, 2014; Patel & Moore, 2017), making the future uncertain. Facing these dystopian imaginaries of the future, suggest the necessity of shifting paradigms beyond development and growth.

The fact is that neoliberalism is not in crisis, but has simply changed, and its new version i.e., precarity Capitalism, is flourishing (Azmanova, 2020). In the same direction Saad-Filho (2019) explains that “economic crises show that Capitalism is a flawed mode of production. However, just as crises offer the opportunity to restore balance in capitalist accumulation, crises also play a constructive – or, perhaps, constitutive – role under neoliberalism” (p.9). He joins Harvey (2017) who seeks to understand the origins of what he calls the “madness of economic reason.” Harvey argues that Capital is value in motion, and the problem with Capitalism is precisely that value is reduced to its money form; thus, hiding the exploitative relations attached to Capitalism modes of production. Following a Marxist economic perspective, the crisis would be linked to a crisis of value (and of values) which comes on top of the ecological crisis described above. In his book *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher (2009) says that “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of Capitalism”, a statement attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek. He continues explaining that “Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics” (Fisher, 2009; p.10). Indeed, for Haiven (2014)

this inability to imagine a world beyond Capitalism is due to a crisis of the imagination where all social, moral, ethical, and personal values are subordinated to the value of money.

In the North as in the South of the world, various militant environmental movements, defined as “neomaterialist” (Schlosberg & Coles, 2015), are challenging the status quo by anticipating the end of fossil fuels, climatic disturbances or food supply disruptions by locally building small systems that will better withstand future economic, social and ecological shocks. In the North, Degrowth (Latouche, 2009) and Transition Town movements, started by permaculture designer Rob Hopkins (2008), are seen as political alternatives that fit this imaginary of collapse. Speaking of Permaculture, Centemeri (2018) considers permaculture “both as a new materialist movement and as a Commons movement”. Similarly, the approach of community economies (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) challenges the conventional use of the economy as a formal system of production of goods and monetary exchange, as well as the idea of separation between economy and ecology. It promotes the economy as diverse practices rather than a single economic system, i.e., Capitalism by focusing on commoning as a process. Indeed, De Angelis (2017) distinguishes between the common goods and Commons; the common goods being only an element of the Commons seen as specific social systems including also the commoners (social subjects) and commoning as the activity of doing in common. One can also cite the work of Bookchin (2006) on Communalism as a political alternative capable of overcoming the causes of the destruction of nature to achieve an ecological society. On the contrary, proposals like the green or circular economy remain within the capitalistic rationality and the logic of a universal perspective based on the promise of decoupling economic growth and ecological impacts (Valenzuela & Böhm, 2017).

Movements from the global South must also be considered in the debate, including Buen Vivir (Merino, 2016), Ecological Swaraj (Kothari, 2014), Ubuntu (Metz, 2011) or that of Via Campesina which defends peasant agriculture for Food Sovereignty (Martinez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). Bollier (2014) speaks ironically about a rediscovery of the Commons as it never disappeared for hundreds of millions of people around the world especially in the South. He joins Escobar (2015) in his assumption that the Commons could be the link

between all these different transition narratives and visions that try to think beyond the logic of development or growth contrasting with solutions like sustainable development or green economy. They adopt a post-developmental vision where several worlds (pluriverse) would be possible by integrating nature, rejecting the antagonism amid society and nature. He echoes the work of Latour (2015) for whom the Anthropocene is a revolution that already happened, as a consequence of the Great Acceleration, the effects of which we have to face, although they are not located in the future but in the recent past.

While wanting to maintain an openness and a global level of reflection, this research focuses particularly on the Tunisian context, for various historical-geographical reasons, but also personal ones (given the deep knowledge of the context). Indeed, in Tunisia, the collapse is very concrete and its effects have increased dramatically in recent decades especially since the Arab Spring. Recent literature clearly links migration to the challenge of food security and climatic changes (David, 2018; FAO, 2018). Bettini (2019) speaks about (Climate) Migration as a symptom in the Anthropocene. Indeed, there is no migration crisis per se, instead there is a lack of political will in tackling the Mediterranean's core problems with policies that addressed symptoms rather than causes (Engelke et. al, 2017).

The southern and eastern edges of the Mediterranean are the most vulnerable, as the MENA region is the driest in the world. "By 2030, climate change is likely to further stress water resources in these countries" (Engelke, et al., 2017, p. 7). This is confirmed by the World Bank report (2013) which states that without significant action, climate change will exacerbate the already pronounced poverty and unemployment in Tunisia and could dissolve the development progress made in recent decades. Climate change is expected to have major impacts on Tunisia's agriculture, economy and households, both from global and local perspectives. The ecological crisis in North Africa, which is clearly manifested by acute environmental degradation, land depletion and loss of soil fertility, water poverty, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution and diseases, as well as the effects of global warming such as desertification, recurrent heatwaves, drought and rising water levels (Hamouchene & Minio-Paluello, 2015; Lelieveld et al., 2016).

In Tunisia, the combined situation of food dependence and peasant poverty is far from being a simple cyclical crisis and is instead the culmination of more than a century of anti-peasant government policies. These are the result of decision-makers during both the colonial era and since independence, to integrate Tunisian agriculture into the global market and the global food system (Friedmann, 2016). The reliance on the global food system and the global market increases significantly the risks of instability in international food and agricultural prices. The mechanisms and dynamics of neoliberalism have marginalized the urban and rural poor by reducing their incomes, resources and services. Social marginalization and “individual and collective” stigmatization have affected the inhabitants of peripheral and rural areas as well as the inhabitants of popular neighborhoods of the big cities.

Among the country’s academics, several voices are calling for a real change in the trajectory of the economic model, to reflect on new ways of developing the agri-food system to build food sovereignty and remedy the effects of dependent (colonized) and exporting agriculture. (Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018; Abidi and Riahi, 2019). Local/territorial development is considered here as an inclusive alternative; it is a question of rethinking cultural practices by adapting the technical aspects to the structural, physical and climatic difficulties of Tunisia, thus moving away from the methods advocated by the Green Revolution (seeds, pesticides, fertilizers). Recently, an exercise aimed at developing a detailed repertoire of the conditions for achieving a transition to a real transformation of systems was carried out (Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018) with local players in 2017 and made it possible to identify three priority challenges and objectives for a transition of the Tunisian agricultural system: (1) the preservation of natural resources (water and soil); (2) improving food security (with its different dimensions); (3) the development of socio-economic services provided by the agri-food sector. This is in line with the discourse advocated by Permaculture movements, which, because of their combination of local, situated design practices and underlying social and political philosophies, provide alternative ways of organizing in response to the Anthropocene (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018).

In the same context of the Anthropocene, design is called to reinvent itself: it is at the center of unsustainable production/consumption

systems; yet, in many of its contemporary forms, it aims to improve the livability of the world as a projector or corrector (Bonnet et al., 2019). According to Manzini (2014), Design for Social Innovation could support the aspirations of highly vulnerable communities by proposing solutions to problems that neither the market nor the State have solved. Design has expanded the limits of its field of action, helping to create opportunities for development through social and political involvement of marginalized populations. In the last two decades, design is redefining its boundaries, which no longer concern only aspects of hardware but also of software, and which increasingly confronts other disciplines not only technical but also humanities. The theme of the Commons, its management, definition and design applied to as-yet uninvestigated contexts fits with several current and frontier issues concerning the discipline of design.

Thus, the thesis addresses topical issues: the social and ecological crisis; the importance of the Commons and of thinking beyond the economic; with a focus on decolonial thinking and the importance of a paradigm shift, beyond Capitalism and neoliberalism, beyond the Anthropocene and Capitalocene. The thesis therefore places emphasis on the challenge of how and what countries in the Global South could teach the Global North in terms of development model, from the perspective of mutual and equal exchange. All with a specific focus on the role of design, understood as Social Design/Design for Social Innovation, of which limitations are highlighted.

### 1.1.2 *Research Problem*

The fact is that a deep understanding of the political economy of design is needed; Design for Social Innovation remains intrinsically linked to market economy and the logic of commodification. In this sense some (Busch & Palmås, 2016; Nussbaum, 2010) mention the risk of falling from the dark side of the social. They state that leveraging the social level may well produce unforeseen negative societal outcomes. They criticize a certain idealism of the designer. In order to balance such idealism, designers ought to replace the “what if” starting points with a more realist question of “who whom?”— i.e., who benefits from the Social Innovation, and who pays the price for the change (Busch & Palmås, 2016, p. 287).

But Design for Social Innovation has always been characterized within an economic and cultural context — that of the consumer economy and where Social Innovation has always been understood as a “humanitarian” action. Elzenbaumer (2013) denounces such practices, which are devoid of a political sense and take for granted the social problems that the designers want to solve, and that therefore do not question the broader global mechanisms producing them. In this context some call for decolonizing design (Escobar, 2018; Fry, 2017; Ansari, 2016) from the tyranny of cold, “Western” abstractions to initiate a real dialogue between designers from the Global North and Global South in order to develop a paradigmatic shift from a Eurocentric vision of design. Escobar (2018) suggests the concept of Autonomous Design stating that “design can be creatively re-appropriated by subaltern communities in support of their struggles to strengthen their autonomy and perform their life projects, and that designers can play constructive roles in the ontological and political reorientation of design as an element in struggles for autonomy”. In the same way Fry (2010) asks the question of how designers could be providers of care by transforming themselves into politicized change agents.

Irwin (2015) proposes Transition Design, as a new area, inspired by the Transition Town movement; it promotes a design-led societal transition toward more sustainable long-term futures. The issue of imagining different futures is in fact fundamental. One could talk about speculation in design and its recent development; but who is speculating, and for whom? Di Salvo (2016) answers the que-

stion by exploring the articulation between prefigurative politics (Commons movements are all about prefiguration) and design. For him in prefigurative design, “the speculation is not so much in the design itself, but rather, in the politics (...) it is not that designers are themselves called upon to speculate, but rather, that designers may be called upon to enable speculation” (p.34). Similarly, Haiven (2014) proposes to investigate the concept of radical imagination defining as a “common imagination” involving three “temporalities”: past (searching for Commons as a historical actuality held in common memory); present (recognizing, valorizing and defending even undercurrent Commons of today); future (acknowledging that the ultimate horizon for humanity beyond Capitalism is the Commons). Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) also advance a strategy for convoking the radical imagination with social movements by building a reflexive and responsive relationship between the researcher and the movements in question. The authors approach radical imagination not as something possessed by individuals but as a collective process, a doing together through shared experiences, languages, stories, ideas, art, and theory. Thus, an effective decolonization of design practices lies in shifting its activity “from being set upon the designers’ agenda to “solve” the problem and “save the world” by designing an artefact or intervention to one that puts the process of designing together at center” (Taboada et al., 2020; p.15). The processes described by Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) are reminiscent of the or those of commoning in Participatory Design (Marttila et al., 2014; Marttila, 2016; Teli, 2015; Teli et al., 2020).

From the outset of this research, I have been interested in the specific contexts of oases. The oasis context concentrates, in a way, all the issues previously outlined. In fact, these are artificial, anthropized and cultivated spaces in the heart of vast arid zones, which for thousands of years have adopted a complex social organization of solidarity and commoning around water. Oases are therefore sustainable spaces by definition, where the Commons are fundamentally a tradition. Today, oases are experiencing the effects of climate change, but also those of development and growth, which have almost disrupted the social fabric around the Commons. We can say that oases are Commons economies in crisis. The research focused on two case studies located in southern Tunisia. The first is that of the oasis of Chenini, located in the coastal area of Gabes, known for its pollution due to the production of phosphates, where farmers

continue to perpetuate the ancestral practices of multi-level cultivation and water collection. The second is the Jemna oasis in Nefzaoua, the main date-producing region of the country. The oasis has become the symbol of peasant resistance and has been the scene of the emergence of a local and pluralist civil society, of the learning of participatory democracy and of the pioneering experience in Tunisia of the social and solidarity economy. This is reminiscent of the concept of Autonomous Design (Escobar, 2018) or diffuse design (Manzini, 2015). Considering recent developments in the field of design, this research tried to question its role through the analysis and direct application to the cases of the oases practicing water and land commoning.

Accordingly, the question is:

Q1: If design was born and developed in the consumer economy, does design exist in the Commons' economy?

Q2: If so, what are the practices for design to play a role in the Commons' economy? Considering that Design for Social Innovation has always been characterized in a Western-centered economic/cultural context, that of the market economy, and where Social Innovation has always been understood as humanitarian action, is it possible to identify the characteristics of a socially and politically engaged design that takes into account the perspective of the South?

Q3: Following the different perspectives on commoning/community economies could design contribute to prefiguring the forms of collective action that aim to improve the resilience to the present/near-future climate change issues.

Q4: What is the role of design in constructing post-capitalist imaginaries through the perspectives of the Commons and radical imagination? In a Commons' economy, the idea would be to comprehend the role of design in helping to shift paradigms from an extractivist growth economy to a resource economy; a design attached to situations instead of objects.

### *1.1.3 Research Methodology and Phases*

The research investigation was undertaken following an action research approach according to which the knowledge gathered and processed during the desk-research phase was applied in the organization of the field-research phase, specifically a workshop that allowed the validation of the results through precisely an inductive process. Among the possible research approaches in the field of design, this doctoral work can be categorized predominantly as Research through Design (RtD) as it aims to produce new knowledge through the activity of design, investigating with the tools of the discipline a field of action (Frayling, 1993; Finedli 1998).

Methodologically, different concepts have been merged to build the experimental framework: Participatory Design (Marttila et al, 2014); Transition Design (Irwin, 2015, 2018); Autonomous Design (Escobar, 2018); Design for Sustainment (Fry, 2009); Prefigurative Design (DiSalvo, 2016). However, these different approaches served as reference points. The chosen approach was finally that of “inhabitation” inspired by Irit Rogoff’s reflection on how meaning is produced differently through the multiple relationships that are generated when living through things (Elzenbaumer, 2013).

The research carried out a collaborative design experiment rooted in the present, adopting a post-development/feminist line of thought taking into consideration the concepts of “Radical Imagination”, “Epistemologies of the South” and “Situated Knowledge” as conceptual notions. In this way, the expected aim has been to develop a situated knowledge that is generated from the specific point of view and that does not distance the knowing subject from everyone else but instead engages in collective processes of knowledge production. Following a process of auto-ethnography, observation, conversations and unstructured interviews were developed according to the context. The Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) cycle (Candy & Kornett, 2019), a hybrid framework between futures studies and design, helped to structure the intervention on the field.

The research is divided into three main phases within which appropriate intermediate steps are developed:

#### *Desk-Research*

##### ***Phase 1. Investigation of the topic and state of the art***

The first stage of the research, making use of procedures that refer to the deductive method, constructs the theoretical apparatus on the concept of crisis explicating how the modern/industrialized society is stuck in a “metacrisis” (Azmanova, 2020). A series of logical contentions develops, understanding the involvement of design — understood as social design/Design for Social Innovation —. Three different but interconnected levels of crisis are investigated in order to reveal the embeddedness of design in each one of them: the ecological crisis, the value(s) crisis — value intended both from ethical and economic perspectives — and finally the crisis of imagination. Following a Marxian economics perspective, it demonstrates how contemporary Capitalism is locked into a logic of bad infinity of endless accumulation and compound growth (Harvey, 2017). The research does not dive into a deep analysis, rather it assembles different discussions from different scholars and theorists, in order to have a general understanding of the dynamics of Capitalism. This allowed to situate design in those dynamics i.e., to understand “the political economy of design” (Foster, 2002). Indeed, design is no longer only associated with productive, technological and commercial dimensions. This has manifested itself in the growing social, ecological (and sometimes political) commitment of so-called social design, whose effectiveness, however, seems legitimate to question.

In a second step of this first phase the research then aims to identify and define the research demand with respect to the disciplinary scenario. After focusing on the embeddedness of design and designers in the different crises of the modern/capitalist/Western society model, the research, always through a deductive process, circumscribes the field of investigation by searching for alternatives to said crises. It opposes the notion of Chthulucene (Haraway, 2016) to that of the Anthropocene; the Commons to Capitalism and growth; and finally, decolonial thinking/Epistemologies of the South to that of Eurocentrism and development. Therefore, this first phase identifies (alternative) socially and politically engaged design approaches in order to explore the features or characteristics of a design

that takes into account the issues revealed. This second step served to define the key concepts and approaches that could be used on the field.

*Field-Research*

***Phase 2. Field application and validation through the “inhabitation” of the research contexts***

The second phase opens the field-research — with nevertheless a back and forth with the desk-research. Making use of procedures that refer to both the deductive and inductive methods, the question was to understand the chosen context of Tunisia as a sample from the Global South suffering the effects of Global Capitalism in order to delineate the strategic lines for the design action to deploy. Indeed, one could guess the beginnings of a political ecology in Tunisia (Robert, 2021) with the rise of environmentalist movements fighting for their livelihood. This Environmentalism of the Poor (Martinez-Alier, 2002), also called livelihood ecology (Garí, 2000), would lead to inevitable ecological distribution conflicts. Such conflicts are legion in Tunisia, around access to resources and the living environment. The research is interested in the specific contexts of oases as perfect illustrations of resilience to the arid climate that surrounds them. The oases' context concentrates, in a way, all the issues outlined in the previous phase. In fact, these are artificial, anthropized and cultivated spaces in the heart of vast arid zones, which for thousands of years have adopted a complex social organization of solidarity and commoning around water (and resources in general). During this first stage of the second research phase, it is a question of identifying and analyzing the context and the said movements, as well as delimiting the strategic lines of the design intervention.

The second step of the second phase, proceeds with the exploration/verification of a design as/for/in Common(s). The research investigation was undertaken following an action research approach according to which the knowledge gathered and processed during the desk-research phase was applied in the organization of the field-research phase, specifically a workshop that allowed the validation of the results through precisely an inductive process. Commons, Food sovereignty and radical imagination would act as landmarks to fulfill such a project. It was then a combination of the previous re-

search and the different discussions with the different researchers, activists and people I met which led me to the idea of dividing this step into two parts; a first part corresponding to the inhabitation of the oases and a second one where a future workshop was organized gathering local actors around a common vision of the future.

During the first part observation, conversations and unstructured interviews would be developed according to the context. The use of the EXF protocol was a good way to structure the whole experiment. In short, the idea was to create together a new/old economic imaginary in order to ground resistance in place (Tonkinwise, 2015) in the here and now.

### ***Phase 3. Conclusions***

The seventh chapter extrapolates the outcomes of the research and the prospects of development. It evaluates how much it was possible to fulfill the initial expectations of the research. An analysis of the results of the research is proposed, on two levels: (1) Principles — focusing on results at the level of approaches and methodologies but also of the posture of designers — and (2) Practices — dealing with the contribution of this research in terms of methods and frameworks but also in redefining the role of designers —. It starts from the observation of the results obtained and how these have led to answer the research questions. Then follows an evaluation of the research perspectives through an assessment of the current and future developments of the experiments and processes engaged on the field.

## 1.2 Backdrop of the Research

Since the writing of the proposal for this practice-based research in the summer 2018, our societies have lived through an unprecedented health crisis in the modern era. The three years of PhD coincided with more than two years of global pandemic. I therefore had to manage this situation and organize the field research as best as possible. The first trajectory of this research was largely shaped by the blockages encountered; the confinement imposed obliged me to focus on pure theory during the first phase of the research. The fact of not being able to go directly to the field led me to questions of a practical nature that originated in theoretical issues.

At a theoretical level, I wanted to identify socially and politically engaged design approaches that would take into account the issues raised. The first phase of research was solitary to say the least and would have benefited from being developed in a multidisciplinary context; but during the early days of confinement such a context was simply not easy to find. This first phase, which could be described as theoretical/deductive, served to define the key concepts and approaches that I would use on the field. At the end of a first phase of theoretical research, I came to the conclusion that in the face of the ecological crisis and that of our economic and social system i.e., Capitalism, of which the crisis is the driving force, the question is clearly linked to a blockage of the imagination.

On a practical level, the questions were about how I was going to proceed, what attitude to adopt and what I could achieve with the communities and the people, who, after all, had not asked for anything at all. The long period of confinement had prevented me from developing a first anchoring in the contexts which interested me. This even had the effect of questioning the usefulness of such a project. Design being essentially a science of practice, I was forced to limit myself to theory for many months without ever being able to verify on the field the tangibility of the different design approaches and theories I had studied. These practical questions were

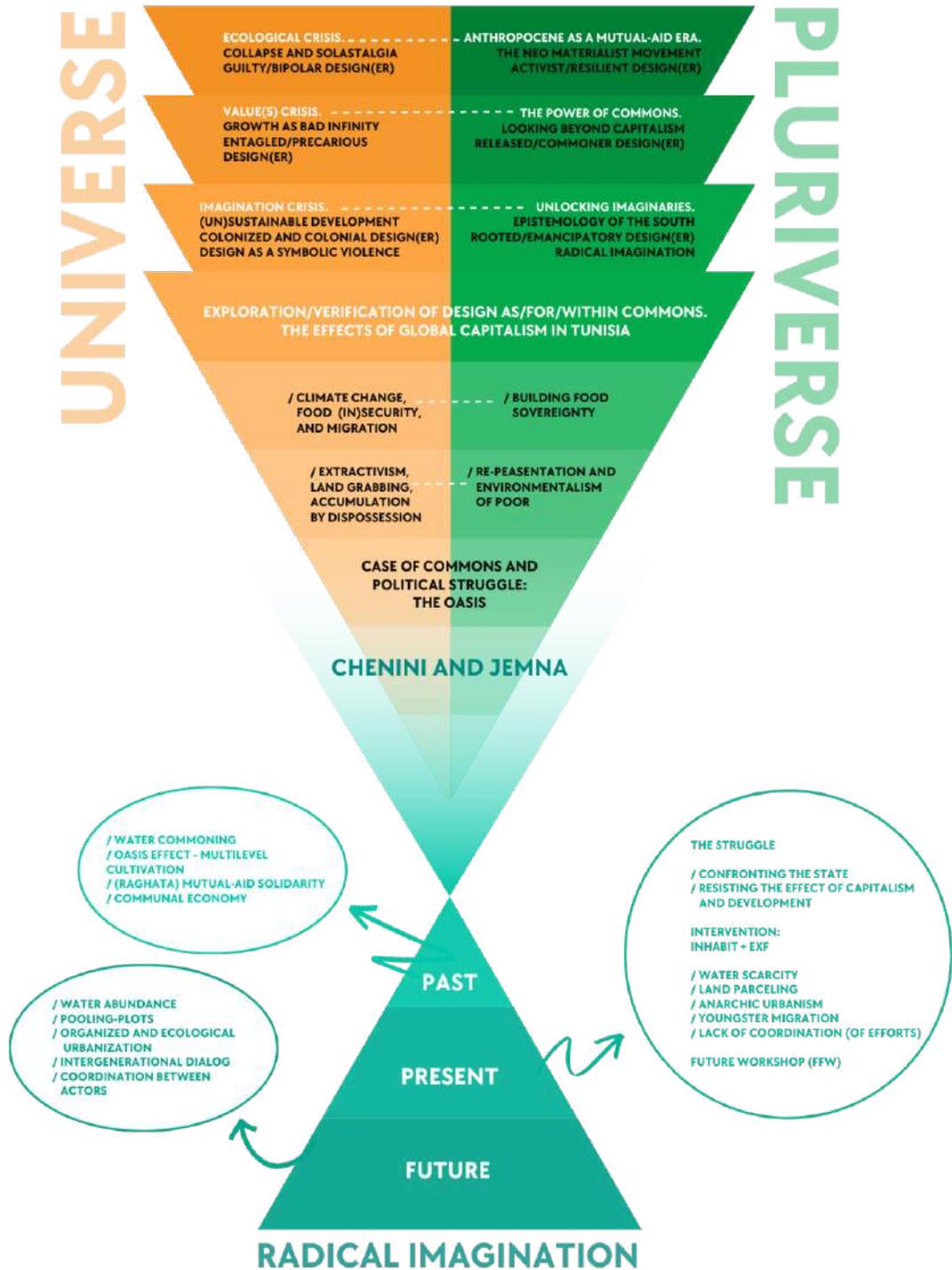
clarified as soon as I returned to Tunisia to make the first contacts. As said, I had already identified the context I wanted to intervene in, but was looking for the right approach and method; an approach that would challenge the capitalist, colonial and patriarchal roots of design. During this purely theoretical phase, I had identified many approaches, but did not know which one to choose. What I did know was that there was no universal method or tool to apply as advocated by the Human Center Design (HCD) and Design Thinking approaches. I also understood that Design for Social Innovation tends to frame problems in a relatively narrow manner.

The second part was a continuation of this exploration/verification of this design as/for within the Common(s) by focusing on the specific context of Tunisia combining the various problematic elements addressed during the first phase. The answers came through practice. When returning to Tunis in March 2021, I also escaped the second wave of Covid-19 and emerged from a long period of quarantine. Paradoxically, the confinement made it easier to connect with other researchers, as screen-to-screen discussions became the norm, I had reached out to people conducting research similar to mine to help gain perspective on the issues that had emerged. I contacted several design and non-design researchers working on the same issues.

The idea was a priori simple, I did not know what design to practice or if it would still be design. Still, I knew that in front of the future climatic risks added to the damage already perpetrated by the chemical industry for the case of Chenini (Gabes) and the loss of breath of the experience of Jemna because of legal and institutional blockages, it was undoubtedly necessary to envision new horizons. Food sovereignty, Commons and radical imagination acted as landmarks to fulfill such a project. It was then a combination of the theoretical research conducted and the different discussions I had with the different researchers which led me to the idea of dividing my stay into two parts; a first part corresponding to the inhabitation of the oases and a second one where I would try to organize a future workshop gathering local actors around a common vision of the future.

The inhabitation of Chenini (April to May, 2021) was the initial experiment and the one of Jemna (June to July, 2021) the second; however, the third wave of Covid-19 prevented me from finishing the

experiment in Jemna. The intention was to understand the political dimensions of working with Commons and explore the tensions and potentialities encountered when designing for (and from within) Commons and community economies. The aim was to make an experiment on a micro-scale that had as its objective to explore how design could contribute to the restoration/defense of other economic cultures in view of the current and especially future challenges. In the words of economic geographer Katherine Gibson, how we can “take back the economy, without waiting until an ideal situation, idea or opportunity presents itself some time in an indefinite future.”



## References Chapter 1

- Azmanova, A. (2020) Anti-Capital in the XXIst Century (on the metacrisis of capitalism and the prospects for radical politics). *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 46 (4). ISSN 0191-4537.
- Bettini, G. (2019), *And yet it moves! (Climate) migration as a symptom in the Anthropocene*, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK.
- Bollier, D. (2014). *Think Like a Commoner. A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.
- Bonnet, E., Landivar, D., Monnin, A., Allard, L. (2019). *Le design, une cosmologie sans monde face à l'Anthropocène*. *Sciences du Design*, 10(2), 97-104.
- Bookchin, M. (2006). *Social ecology and communalism*. Ak Press.
- Busch, O. V., Palmås, K. (2016). *Social Means Do Not Justify Corruptible Ends: A Realist Perspective of Social Innovation and Design*. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation* Volume 2, Issue 4, Winter 2016, Pages 275-287.
- Centemeri, L. (2018). *Commons and the new environmentalism of everyday life. Alternative value practices and multispecies commoning in the permaculture movement*. *Rassegna italiana di Sociologia*, In press. fhal-01773575.
- David, A. (2018), CHAPITRE 1 - *Migrations en Provenance et à Destination des Pays Méditerranéens*, CIHEAM, MediTERRA 2018. Presses de Sciences Po, p. 27-38
- De Angelis, M. (2021). *Omnia sunt communia: on the commons and the transformation to postcapitalism*. Zed Books.
- DiSalvo, C. (2016). "Design and Prefigurative Politics." *The Journal of Design Strategies*, Vol 8., No. 1 (2016): 29-35.
- Elzenbaumer, B. (2014). *Designing Economic Cultures: cultivating socially and politically engaged design practices against procedures of precarisation*. London: Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Engelke, P., L. Aronsson, M. Nordenman, 2017, *Mediterranean Futures 2030: Toward A Transatlantic Security Strategy*, Atlantic Council
- Escobar, A. (2015). *Degrowth, postdevelopment, and transitions: a preliminary conversation*. *Sustainability Science*, 10(3), 451-462. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-015-0297-5>
- Escobar, A. (2018), *Designs for the pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* Duke University Press.
- FAO IFAD IOM WFP. (2018), *The Linkages between Migration, Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development*. Rome.
- Filho, A. S. (2019). *Value and Crisis: Essays on Labour, Money and Contemporary Capitalism*. Brill.
- Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zero Books.
- Friedmann, E., Kurlaender, M., & van Ommeren, A. (2016). *Addressing College Readiness Gaps at the College Door*. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2016(176), 45-52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20221>
- Fry, T. (2010), *Design as Politics*, Berg Pub Ltd.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., Cameron, J., & Healy, S. (2013). *Take back the economy: an ethical guide for tran-*

- sforming our communities. University Of Minnesota Press.
- Haiven, M. (2014). *Crises of imagination: capitalism, culture and resistance in a post-crash world*. London, England: Zed Books.
- Haiven, M. and Khasnabish, A. (2014). *The radical Imagination: social movement research in the age of austerity*. London, England: Zed Books, [London, England.
- Hamouchene, H. (2015, November 21). *La Prochaine Révolution en Afrique du Nord : La Lutte pour la Justice Climatique*. Nawaat. <https://nawaat.org/2015/11/21/la-prochaine-revolution-en-afrique-du-nord-la-lutte-pour-la-justice-climatique/>
- Haraway, D.J. (2016), *Staying with the trouble – making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2017). *Marx, capital and the madness of economic reason. The concept, the book, the history*. Profile Books.
- Hopkins, R. (2008). *The transition handbook from oil dependency to local resilience*. Cambridge Uit Cambridge Ltd.
- Irwin, T. (2015). *Transition Design: A Proposal for a New Area of Design Practice, Study, and Research, Design and Culture*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University.
- Klein, N. (2014). *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, New York: Simon, and Schuster, 2014.
- Kothari, A., Demaria, F., & Acosta, A. (2014). *Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy*. Society for International Development.
- Latouche, S. (2009). *Farewell to Growth*. Cambridge. Polity Press.
- Latour, B. (2015). *Face à Gaïa : huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique*. Paris: Les Empêcheurs De Penser En Rond, DL.
- Lelieveld, J., Proestos, Y., Hadjinicolaou, P., Tanarhte, M., Tyrlis, E., & Zittis, G. (2016). Strongly increasing heat extremes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the 21st century. *Climatic Change*, 137(1-2), 245–260. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-016-1665-6>
- Manzini, E. (2014). *Design for social innovation vs. social design*, Retrieved April 12, 2019 from: <http://www.desisnetwork.org/2014/07/25/design-for-social-innovation-vs-social-design/>
- Manzini, E. (2015). *Design When Everybody Designs. An introduction to design for social innovation*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Martínez-Torres, M. E., & Rosset, P. M. (2010). *La Vía Campesina: the birth and evolution of a transnational social movement*. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 149–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150903498804>
- Marttila, S. (2016) *From Rules in Use to Culture in Use – Commoning and Infrastructuring Practices in an Open Cultural Movement*, in Lloyd, P. and Bohemia, E. (eds.), *Future Focused Thinking - DRS International Conference 2016*, 27 - 30 June, Brighton, United Kingdom. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.454>
- Marttila, S., Botero, A., & Saad-Sulonen, J. (2014). *Towards commons design in participatory design*. *Proceedings of the 13th Participatory Design Conference on Short Papers, Industry Cases, Workshop Descriptions, Doctoral Consortium Papers, and Keynote Abstracts - PDC '14 - Volume 2*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2662155.2662187>
- Meadows, D.H. (1972). *The Limits to growth: a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament*

of mankind. New York: Universe Books.

Merino, R. (2016). An alternative to “alternative development”? Buen vivir and human development in Andean countries. *Oxford Development Studies*, 44(3), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2016.1144733>

Metz, T. (2011). Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 11(2), 532–559. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC51951>

Moore, W. J. (2016). *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. PM Press. Oakland: Canada.

Patel, R. & Moore, J. W. (2017) *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. Oakland: University of California Press, 289 pp.

Riahi, L. & Abidi, W. (2019). Aliment, agriculture, souveraineté : Une analyse des politiques agricoles tunisiennes à la lumière du concept de souveraineté alimentaire. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Vial, S. (2010). *Court traité du design*, PUF, Paris.

Roux-Rosier, A., R. Azambuja, G. Islam. (2018). Alternative visions: Permaculture as imaginaries of the Anthropocene, *Organization* 2018, Vol. 25(4) 550 –572

Schlosberg, D., & Coles, R. (2015). The new environmentalism of everyday life: Sustainability, material flows and movements. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 15(2), 160–181. <https://doi.org/10.1057/cpt.2015.34>

Schwoob, M., Elloumi, M. (2018). CHAPITRE 8 - Sous-Développement Rural et Migrations Internes : l'Exemple de l'Agriculture Tunisienne, CIHEAM, MediTERRA 2018. Presses de Sciences Po, p. 171-184.

Scranton, R. (2015). *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene. Reflections on the end of a civilization*. San Francisco: City Light Books.

Servigne, P., Stevens, R. (2015). *Comment tout peut s’effondrer. Petit manuel de collapsologie à l’usage des générations présentes*. Editions du Seuil.

Sloterdijk, P. (2015). The Anthropocene: A process-state at the edge of geohistory? In: Davis, H, Turpin, E (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*. London: Open Humanities Press, pp. 327–339.

Taboada, M.B., Rojas-Lizana, S., Dutra, L.X.C. and Levu, A.V.M. (2020). Decolonial Design in Practice: Designing Meaningful and Transformative Science Communications for Navakavu, Fiji. *Design and Culture*, 12(2), pp.141–164.

Teli, M. (2015). Computing and the Common. Hints of a new utopia in Participatory Design. *Aarhus Series on Human Centered Computing*, 1(1), 17–20. <https://doi.org/10.7146/aahcc.v1i1.21318>

Teli, M., Foth, M., Sciannamblo, M., Anastasiu, I., & Lyle, P. (2020). Tales of Institutioning and Communing. *Proceedings of the 16th Participatory Design Conference 2020 - Participation(S) Otherwise - Volume 1*, 1. p 159–171, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3385010.3385020>

Valenzuela, F., & Böhm, S. (2017). Against wasted politics: a critique of the circular economy. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization*, 17(1), 23–60. <http://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/30441>





PART II

# Design beyond Capitalism

Exploring Alternative Discourse around Sustainable Future(s)



## CHAPTER 2 Capitalism, Crises and Dystopian Futures: a Design Involvement

### ABSTRACT

The second chapter corresponds to the first phase of the desk-research. It develops the theoretical apparatus on the concept of crisis explicating how the modern/industrialized society is stuck in a “metacrisis” (Azmanova, 2020) while understanding the involvement of design — understood as social design/Design for Social Innovation—. To do so, three different but interconnected levels of crisis are investigated in order to reveal the embeddedness of design in each one of them: the ecological crisis, the value(s) crisis — value intended both from ethical and economic perspectives — and finally the crisis of imagination.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the catastrophic effects of human activity on the planet and introduces the concepts of Anthropocene, collapse and Solastalgia. Today, design is no longer only associated with productive, technological and commercial dimensions. This has manifested itself in the growing social, ecological (and sometimes political) commitment of so-called social design, which effectiveness, however, seems legitimate to question. This helped to extrapolate the position of designers who are in a dual posture of guiltiness and bipolarity when facing the question of sustainability. Social Design/Design for Social Innovation seemed more about achieving a “feel good” effect than actually producing a meaningful political change.

The second section following a Marxian economics perspective, demonstrates how contemporary Capitalism is locked into a logic of bad infinity of endless accumulation and compound growth (Harvey, 2017). This logic of growth being essentially related to a problem of values. The research does not dive into a deep analysis, rather it assembles different discussions from different scholars and theorists, in order to have a general understanding of the dynamics of Capitalism. This allowed to situate design in those dynamics i.e., to understand what Foster (2002) calls “the political economy of design”. The bipolarity and guiltiness of designers in front of the ecological crisis are related to their entanglement in the capitalistic system. Designers are in fact at the very center of the processes of commodification on the one hand, and remain blocked in market logics and processes of precarization on the other. Critical social engagement in design is often being sacrificed or diminished in order to cater to the needs of the market (Elzenbaumer, 2013).

The chapter concludes with a third section focusing on a third level of the crisis, that related to imagination which would be at the origin of the two previous ones. For

Haiven (2014) the inability to imagine a world beyond Capitalism is due to a crisis of the imagination where all social, moral, ethical, and personal values are subordinate to the value of money; moving beyond Capitalism seems to be the only key to survival. This section shows how development (and consequently sustainable development) is seen as an instrument of colonization; growth and development being two sides of the same coin. The difficulty of imagining the end of Capitalism is shown to be related to what Castro-Gómez (2005) calls “the illusion of the zero-point epistemology.” Unblocking the imagination would thus imply a necessary shift from the rhetoric of Western modernity or what Mignolo (2009) calls epistemic disobedience. This helped to show how design acts as an oppressive force; a lever of the zero-point epistemology. Here the posture of designers is both colonial and colonized.





## 2.1 Ecological Crisis: Design (Un)Sustainability

### 2.1.1 *Anthropocene, Collapse and Solastalgia*

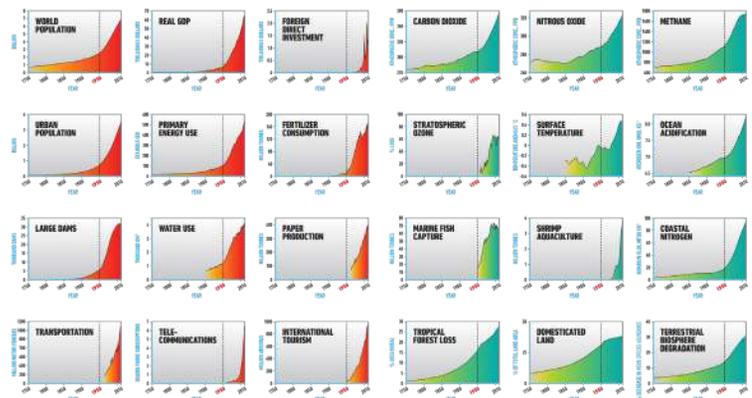
The catastrophic effects of human activity on the planet are becoming increasingly evident; the Anthropogenic origin of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicates in its latest report that there are only a few years left to reverse the current trajectory and remain below the 1.5°C warming limit, beyond which non-linear, uncontrollable changes will inevitably occur. The Anthropocene is the name chosen for that. It indicates the current geological epoch in which our species have become a primary driver for global environmental change and the main geological force on Earth. The term has been popularized by Crutzen (2000). Crutzen, who won a Nobel Prize in 1995 for his work on the depletion of the ozone layer in the stratosphere, argued that the Anthropocene began in the late eighteenth century, with the onset of the fossil fuel energy regime. The invention of the steam engine in 1784 would be the marker of the modification by man of his living environment, responsible for climate change (Gomart, 2019).

McNeill and Engleke (2014) agree with Crutzen's belief of an eighteenth-century origin for the Anthropocene could be valid, as his hypothesis could be supported by the unprecedented population growth starting in the same period of energy use. However, they prefer a more recent date for the beginning of the Anthropocene, linking it to the mid-twentieth century coining speaking about the Great Acceleration (Steffen et al., 2004) following World War II. According to them, one could find different reasons to date the Anthropocene depending on the criteria one wishes to emphasize, but since the mid-twentieth century, human action has become the most important factor governing crucial biogeochemical cycles in addition to the escalation of its impact on the Earth and the biosphere. Beyond a discourse on the existence of a change of geological epoch and the date of its possible beginning, one can state that the environmental crisis is a concrete reality. Numerous scientists

#### Images 2.1

1. *Anthropocene* by Edward Burtynsky. lithium Mines #1, Salt Flats, Atacama Desert, Chile, 2017
2. *Anthropocene* by Edward Burtynsky. Phosphor Tailings Pond #4, Near Lakeland, Florida, USA,, 2012
3. *Anthropocene* by Edward Burtynsky. Dandora Landfill #3, Plastics Recycling, Nairobi, Kenya, 2016

around the world are warning about the disastrous impact of humans on the planet presenting evidence to suggest that the planet is facing increasing systemic instabilities that seriously threaten the ability of some human populations to sustain themselves in a viable environment (IPCC, 2021). As early as 1957, Roger Revelle warned in his report that the burning of fossil fuels could be “a grand scientific experiment” on the climate.



Schema 2.2

In his essay “The Climate of History: Four Theses” Chakrabarty (2009) advances a first thesis “Anthropogenic Explanations of Climate Change Spell the Collapse of the Age-old Humanist Distinction between Natural History and Human History” explaining that scholars writing on the current climate-change crisis are saying something significantly different from what environmental historians have said so far. He quotes Oreskes (2007) explaining that “to deny that global warming is real” is denying “that humans have become geological agents, thus changing the most basic physical processes of the earth”. For Chakrabarty (2009) there is no longer a distinction between human and natural histories “it is no longer a question simply of man having an interactive relation with nature (...) A fundamental assumption of Western (and now universal) political thought has come undone in this crisis” (p.207). Servigne and Stevens (2015) consider that it has become paradoxical to undergo this media surge of disasters, but not to be able to speak explicitly about major catastrophes, without being seen as catastrophists.

#### Schema 2.2

Steffen, et al, The Trajectory of the Anthropocene The Great Acceleration Anthropocene Review, January 2015 (updated from 2004) – the year 1950 is in red.

Source: [curtewwhite.site/what-is-earth-for/](http://curtewwhite.site/what-is-earth-for/)

The authors ironically wonder if this could be linked to a possible weariness of bad news, if this catastrophism was not a new opium of the people or simply a typically European or Western narcissistic phenomenon? For the authors, humans are confronted with serious environmental, energy, climatic, geopolitical, social and economic problems where crises are interconnected, influencing and feeding one another.

The word crisis in itself could be discussed; Latour (2015) for example refuses the term, in that it refers to a transitory state that would be controllable or surmountable to then regain equilibrium. Rather than a crisis, he sees a “profound mutation of our relationship to the world” (p. 17). A mutation which according to him would be irreversible, already at work and approaching more the catastrophe on the long term because the perspective which appears is without any doubt that of the collapse. Servigne and Stevens (2015) ask why the majority of people do not believe in a scenario complaining about the alarmist reports of the IPCC whereas the latter, by definition, only generates a consensual and neutral discourse where scientists describe a global planetary crisis and warn about the possibility of a “sixth mass extinction of species.”

This echoes Latour (2015) who seeks to understand why people persevere in their attitude of denial. For Latour, the notion of the Anthropocene is of major interest: it marks the unambiguous recognition of the impact of human activities on the Earth system. This recognition puts deeply in crisis the dominant paradigms of modernity that underlie human modes of existence in their relations with themselves, with non-humans and with the Earth system; a paradigmatic crisis of such magnitude that would lead to a change of civilization (Latour, 2019). According to Latour, the Anthropocene is a revolution that has already occurred, a consequence of the Great Acceleration, the effects of which humans must face, although they are not located in the future but in the recent past. Thus, Nature is no longer an abstraction, it becomes Gaïa (taking up the hypothesis of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis), an unstable “being” in perpetual upheaval whose manifestations are difficult to predict. He opposes a cold human history to the natural history that has become frenetic. “It is as if we had effectively ceased to be modern and, this time, collectively” (Latour, 2015; p.87).

According to Latour, the inability to recognize the world to come is due to the perceptive insensitivity of modern people. He invokes several explanations, such as those concerning the lobbying of the big oil companies, but goes beyond that, seeking the origin of the apocalyptic insensitivity of the moderns and proposes a renewed aesthetic. Analyzing the meaning of Gaïa in the age of the Anthropocene, Latour links this scientific insensitivity to the religious origin of the image of the Globe. He shows how the Earth has been reduced by the Moderns to a representation of a Globe composed of a single homogeneous matter in an infinite, neutral space-time, an image that is destroyed by the intrusion of Gaïa and the advent of the Anthropocene. Latour speaks of the “time of the end” at the origin of the very idea of counter-religion and its relationship to “the end of time” or apocalypse. For him, “those who accuse ecology of being too often catastrophist and of indulging in apocalyptic speeches, are those who, not content with having triggered the catastrophes, have obscured the very notion of apocalypse” (p.203).

Latour returns to the Judeo-Christian religious origins because of the resurgence and the omnipresence of the term apocalypse. “The same people who call themselves irreligious and unbelievers, laic and secular, would have extracted from counter-religion the idea that one can live in the time of the end, “reversing the meaning of such a discovery into its exact opposite: there is no longer any doubt that the end of time is indeed realized” (p. 219). For Latour, believing that they are fighting religion, Westerners have become irreligious, making negligence their supreme value; Modernity lives already in after the Apocalypse. It is therefore necessary to finally hold an apocalyptic discourse for good in the present time. Latour hypothesizes that the moderns and climate sceptics are heirs to a degenerate “apocalypticism”, against which it is necessary to reinstate, in the age of Gaïa, the authentic meaning of the “time of the end”. His work is thus a call for the (re)composition of science, politics and religion to make humans more capable of responding and more sensitive to the Earth. For Latour, with the Anthropocene, “Humans” are now at war not with Nature, but with “Earthbound” (les Terrestres). Humans living in the Holocene epoch (climate sceptics) are in conflict with Earthbound of the Anthropocene.

This leads to the concept of Solastalgia introduced by the environmental philosopher and psychologist Glen Albrecht (2019).

Faced with the Anthropocene and the prospect of a sixth extinction that the IPCC figures announce, it could help redefine the relationship we have with our environment and the natural world. Solastalgia is a pun on the word “nostalgia”, “in direct contrast to the dislocated spatial dimensions of traditionally defined nostalgia, Solastalgia is the homesickness you have when you are still located within your home environment” (Albrecht, 2019; p.38). The word is derived from the Latin *solarie*, associated to the alleviation of *algia*, pain or distress. Literally, Solastalgia is defined as the failure to derive solace or strength from a place that an individual would call home and territory; a chronic, and painful emotion in the face of negatively experienced environmental change. It is defined as the existential and lived experience of negative environmental change, manifesting as an attack on one’s sense of place. According to Albrecht, faced with climatic and environmental anxiety, the concept of Solastalgia reminds that the psychic stability of people depends on the state of their environment. The author also explains that populations of the Global South have been living for a long time the effects Solastalgia as if colonization never ended. The populations of the North are not spared either “the planetary-scale solastalgic distress now felt by many people is generated by multiple attacks on life and its foundations, and by the size of human population and economic growth conducted within neoliberal notions of progress and development” (Albrecht, 2019; p.71).

Similarly, Williston (2015) refers to the Anthropocene as a project, going beyond its specification as a geological epoch; in that way, it would be a call to place our industrialized present in a time frame that is both evolutionary and geological. In fact, many are not satisfied with the term Anthropocene, considering it as reductive, since it hides the real question that is what politics anticipate the catastrophe sufficiently so that futures stay open. Some prefer the term Capitalocene (Moore, 2016), while others choose the one of Eurocene or Technocene (Sloterdijk, 2015) — it conjures the technological revolutions of the modern age and their side effects, which should be billed to the account of the European civilization and its technocratic elite. It would therefore be necessary to learn to die — as a civilization — to adapt to this strange new world, have new ideas, new myths and new stories, a new way of thinking our collective existence over and against Capitalism (Scranton, 2015).

Numerous scholars have denounced the unsustainability of Capitalism (Meadows, et al., 1972; Klein, 2014; Patel & Moore, 2017), making the future uncertain. With the concept of Chthulucene — a compound of two Greek roots khthon (land, country, region) and kainos (New)— Haraway (2016) sought to develop “a kind of time-place for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” (p.2) as opposed to the Anthropocene. For Latour, what is needed “is to discover a path of care; in this sense, “it would not be impossible to progress, but it would be a progress in reverse, which would consist in going back on the idea of progress, in retrogressing, in discovering another way of feeling the passage of time. Instead of talking about hope, we should explore a rather subtle way of despairing; which does not mean “despair”, but not trusting in hope alone” (p.26). The manifestations of the crisis are not only environmental but also economic, social, political and ethical, which, combined with dystopian imaginings of the future, suggest the need for a paradigm shift beyond development and growth. The question for designers is therefore: what design practice should be deployed in the face of this state of Solastalgia? A first hypothesis would be that of a design that recognizes that the collapse is not to be expected but is already here.

### 2.1.2 *Guilty/Bipolar Design(er) in front of the Urgency*

In the last section, I introduced various notions, such as the Anthropocene, collapse and Solastalgia, in view of the changes that would be implied by a warming of more than 1.5°C at the planetary level. In the same context of the Anthropocene, faced with the approaching prospect of a sixth extinction and a possible global civilizational collapse, design (in fact almost everything) is called upon to reinvent itself: it is at the center of unsustainable production/consumption systems; however, in many of its contemporary forms, it aims to improve the habitability of the world as a projector or corrector (Bonnet et al., 2019).

“There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a very few of them (...) designers have become a dangerous breed (...) In an age of mass production when everything must be planned and designed, design has become the most powerful tool with which man shapes his tools and environments (and, by extension, society and himself)” (Papanek, 1972; p.2). This quote from Papanek has never been more relevant; he pointed to the importance design had taken over the years and was sounding the alarm about the need for responsible and sustainable design. In his searing indictment of the discipline, Papanek argues that the best thing designers (with different specialties ranging from architecture to industrial design to advertising design) could do for humanity would be to stop working altogether. Designers are castigated for their passivity and acceptance of Capitalism’s control. According to Papanek, design manipulates consumers, persuading them “to buy things they don’t need, with money they don’t have, in order to impress others who don’t care to make products desirable and, in a way, manipulate the consumer.

In the same way Foster (2002) asks “to what extent has ‘the constructed subject of postmodernism become ‘the designed subject’ of consumerism” considering the generalized unsustainability of the contemporary inflation of design. He questions the penetration of design in everyday life and its role in “merging marketing and culture but also the general ‘mediation’ of the economy: More than ‘the culture of marketing’ and ‘the marketing of culture’; I mean a retooling of the economy around digitizing and computing, in which the product is no longer thought of as an object to be produced so

much as a datum to be manipulated - that is, to be designed and re-designed, consumed and re-consumed. This mediation also inflates design, to the point where it can no longer be considered a secondary industry. Perhaps we should speak of a political economy of design." (Foster, 2002; p.22)

Papanek's and Foster's writings are still relevant today because they have inspired (and continue to inspire) several generations of designers who have never stopped questioning the very essence of their discipline. Despite the various attempts made in the field of design, their critiques remain extremely topical and a very personal feeling of bitterness, a sort of unpleasant aftertaste, remains. What seems even more topical in Papanek's plea is his definition of this design that we are trying to invent; a design that aims to respond to the needs of a world that has its back to the wall. The idea of "guilt" of even the most positively-intentioned design towards ecological and social sustainability is central in Papanek's critique. It is also a concern for a wide range of theorists and practitioners in the design world. Designers have been active promoters of ideas of well-being and lifestyles that we have recently and dramatically discovered are not sustainable. We would go so far as to speak of a designer's "syndrome" as the issue is so central at all levels (practice, research and teaching). That is, designers have largely been part of the (climatic, economic, social, political) crisis that we are facing now. As a reaction to it, theory and practice around social design evolved from the 2000s (Manzini & Jegou, 2003; Margolin & Margolin, 2002; Mau, 2004; Meroni, 2007; Meurer 2001, Thorpe 2010; Tromp & Hekkert, 2011).

The idea of doing design the "good of others" rather than for commercial purposes became real but also lucrative (Taboada et al, 2020). One could say that Human-centered design and Design Thinking are the expression of this designer syndrome or feeling of guilt. Through Design Thinking (Brown, 2009), Human-centered design expanded beyond the field of design itself being depicted as a driver for business innovation. In that same direction Vial (2010) shows quite well how the semantic shift from "object design" to "product design" is born under the influence of marketing. Vial explains quite well how design is based on a structural and historical contradiction; design is in fact a socialist invention (born in England against industrialization recalling the Arts & Crafts movement) and a ca-

pitalist invention (born in Germany from the assumption of industrial mass production recalling the influence of Bauhaus). He goes beyond this fact in which the designer has to be “socialist” and “capitalist” at the same time speaking about “a form of compulsion to madness, an effort to make the designer mad” (Vial, 2010; p.45). We would go so far as to say that this is a kind of “bipolarity” of design, which would be at the very origin of this feeling of guilt specific to designers.

Jennifer Daniel (2015), a designer at Google and previously at the New York Times, clearly states: “Design is Capitalism”. In a sarcastic presentation, Daniel criticizes the arrogance of designers who follow the mantra “Design can change the world” saying that “design looks like a very specific blanket of liberal white guilt”. During the presentation she showed a piece of the documentary “Design Disruptors” explaining that she was offended by the attitude of designers today and their implication in sustaining the market even when they claim the opposite: “[they] love talking about themselves (...) they speak on behalf of rich very well-off companies and talk about design like it is inherently a good thing and design is not good onto itself, design is in fact neutral (...) design is not a philosophy, design is not a revolution, design is not a cause (...) so when designers prophesize design as a solution to the world’s problems, it is important to recognize that when they say design, what they really mean is money (...) sometimes their interests can be aligned to the public’s and sometimes they’re not and they need to be they’re more comfortable to the interest of the company they work for than the community they live in. Don’t forget that design is Capitalism. (...) They say I want to enact change but (...) they elevate themselves above the change (...) my problem is how tone-deaf designers have become recently (...) I don’t understand how we have become so self-important and I suspect that designers like many people see the profession everywhere, everything is design, design is architecture, it is human interaction, it is business pillow design is cutting cheese (...) So why are we so desperate to make ourselves feel better?

Beyond launching an umpteenth discussion around the definition of design or its etymology, whether the French dessin/dessein, the Italian progettazione or the German Gestaltung, we would like to focus on the idea of guilt that the designer faces with his own profession. From a semantic point of view Flusser (1983) explains the

idea of trickery in design: “As a noun, it means -among other things- intention, plan, intent, aim, (...) all these being connected with cunning and deception.” He explains, among other things, the split that has taken place since the Renaissance between the so-called hard sciences and the soft sciences, between the world of technology and that of art. The design would have bridged the gap between them by making them as equals which permitted the creation of a new kind of culture. A culture aware of the fact that it is deceptive. This is what Flusser or Papanek had anticipated and that was more recently brought up to date by Foster. Maybe the real question is not about understanding “why we are so desperate to make ourselves feel better” —as Jennifer Daniel asks— but rather how design could break out of this dynamic of deceptiveness to overcome this feeling of guilt?

The disciplinary perimeter of design is today much more complex and reflects the social and economic changes of our society. Design is no longer associated only with “productive, technological and market dimensions. This desire to stand out from the market was manifested by the appearance, during the last two decades, of social design(s); often summarized as “design that changes the world” and inclusive of all design rather than being restricted to one (Markussen, 2013). Following Simon’s definition of design, Findelli and Bousbaci (2004) suggested social design as a discipline aimed at improving the livability of the world, which is also quite close to the definition of design as a “total social phenomenon” (Maldonado, 1976). In fact, design can be considered as social in a variety of ways. It could simply be social because design products have a social impact in the sense of having a direct footprint on people’s daily lives. Responding to this dilemma many voices consider the opposition between what is called Human-Centered design (HCD) and the traditional market-centered design (Brown, 2009). As explained, faced with the growing social, ecological (and sometimes political) commitment of designers, it seems legitimate to question the effectiveness of the so-called social design.

In their attempt to define social design, Victor and Sylvia Margolin (2002) consider that its foremost intent “is the satisfaction of human needs where the design for market is creating products for sale.” Nevertheless, they don’t suggest “the market model and the social model as binary opposites, but instead view them as two

poles of a continuum.” In opposition with the vision of Papanek of excluding the mainstream market, the role of a socially responsible designer is here much wider. Focusing on the process of social service intervention, they also meet the idea of collaboration by integrating the designer in a team with human service professionals. This somehow joins the reflection of Tim Brown (2009), who speaks about Design Thinking as an approach focusing on creating products and services that are Human-Centered; going so far as to propose a process that could be adopted by all, using designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success. In that way the designer becomes a link in a chain, a member of a multidisciplinary team.

However, Alain Cadix (2014) speaks of Design Thinking as a fashion and the risk of importation without any cultural adaptation when discussing the founding idea of Tim Brown, that everyone can design. Cadix does not believe in the idea of a single thought of creation/design. He emphasizes the risk of confusion between Human-Centered and User-Centered design, which is at the heart of the choices of functionality, ergonomics and aesthetics; besides, the designers do not all have the same toolkit (methods). The Design Thinking method involves people, in various ways, in the three phases: inspiration, ideation, implementation, but Cadix insists on the idea that users cannot be the vectors of a real breakthrough. He finishes by asserting that “thinking is only a step: difference takes place and value is created in the doing, still the business of professional designers”.

However, the approaches of Brown and Cadix remain fundamentally similar in essence. Morelli (2007) demonstrates this quite well when claiming that “for several years the majority of designers interpreted their social role as complementary to business strategies”. An unbreakable market-based industrial logic facing a marginal socially responsible design. Morelli also explains that in social studies this distinction between market-based and non-market-based interventions on social processes has vanished as market-driven initiatives have gradually covered the field of social services. By citing the work of De Leonardis, he focuses on the idea of a “space made available by the reduction of public intervention in connection with social problems”. But he also explains that the market-driven approach because of its relieving logic, is leading to a progressive “passivization” of the customers (or users). These initiatives, while

demonstrating a movement towards change in design practice, are still intrinsically rooted in notions of an artefact-centered design and solution-centered paradigm (Tonkinwise 2015; Tunstall 2013).

On a larger perspective, social design could be the field of design supporting the aspirations of highly vulnerable population groups and the injustices to which they are subjected: epidemics, refugees, various segregations, access to water, education, transport, work, health care, etc. In that sense, design could also be social because it is a leverage for Social Innovation. Manzini (2015) prefers the notion of Design for Social Innovation which is frequently considered similar, if not coincident, with the one of social design. Manzini (2014) considers that as an error; for him the two expressions refer to different activities and have very different implications. Social design refers to a complementary activity to a normal design that operates in economic terms; a design that, to exist, asks for someone else who generously can and will pay for it. For Manzini the problem takes place with the double meaning usually attributed to the adjective “social”. The first one referring to something concerning social forms i.e., the way in which a society is built. The second one, instead, refers to the various wicked social problems that we already mentioned. Problems that, according to Manzini both the market and the state have failed in finding solutions; the designer becomes an “infrastructure” in support of initiatives for self-organized communities. (Morelli and Sbordone, 2018).

Manzini considers Social Innovation as a positive driver of change, and sees in Design for Social Innovation an agent to trigger and support it. Manzini (2016) also speaks about the political aspect of design but he nuances that claim by considering that the latter has a very special way to subsist in the political area since it doesn’t “do politics” but “is politics”. It comes that, the political acts exercised by design are not made apparent by putting design at the service of politics, but rather by producing events, services and products that offer, and give easier access to opportunities for sustainable behaviors. Irwin (2018) considers however, that approaches like Design for Social Innovation still tend to frame problems within relatively narrow spatio-temporal contexts. It continues to be fed and nurtured by ideas for development and improvement from communities that need help. Typically, this need for help is defined by designers from their own perspectives and biases, and without regard to what

the terms improvement, development or help actually mean for those specific communities (Taboada et al, 2020). One could state that Design for Social Innovation remains intrinsically linked to the logic of market economy; it has always been characterized within an economic and cultural context — that of the consumer economy and where Social Innovation has been understood as a “humanitarian” action; a design for others 90% (Bloemink, 2007).

Elzenbaumer (2013) denounces such practices, which are devoid of a political sense and take for granted the social problems that the designers want to solve, and that therefore do not question the broader global mechanisms producing them. In the same way Fry (2010) asks the question of how designers could be providers of care by transforming themselves into politicized change agents. What all agents of change need to do is to learn how to move design out of its economic function and into a political frame. As explained, design even when driven by a sincere intention can be really harmful when politically disengaged. What is really at stake is an attitude of guilt and denial of designers, most of the time precarious (Elzenbaumer, 2013) stuck with their job and trying to feel better about it. Going into a social discourse without questioning the paradigms of growth of commodity production or the question of value and the role that design plays in their development and deployment in the capitalist system seems to us an absurdity. The real emergency remains that of anthropogenically accelerated global warming.

A politically engaged design is one that takes into consideration the possibility of collapse. As Fry (2019) explains it would be a design that starts at the end considering the structural unsustainability of the world of human material and immaterial fabrication (the Anthropocene) and acknowledges the process of defuturing i.e., “the negation of world futures for us, and many of our unknowing non-human others” as a new design philosophy (Fry, 2020; p.10).

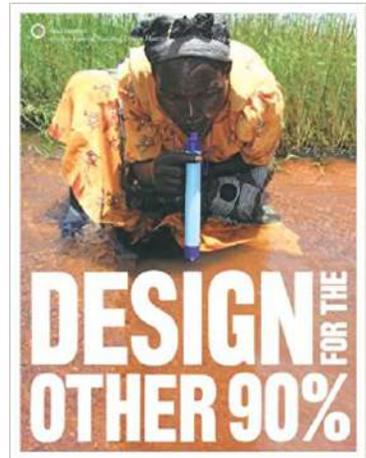


Image 2.3

Cynthia Smith (2017). Design for the Other 90 Per Cent - Paperback

## 2.2 Value(s) Crisis: Design's Entanglement in Capitalism

### 2.2.1 A Marxian Economics Perspective on Growth

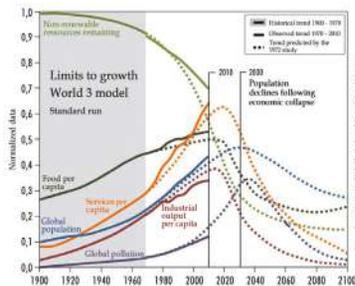


Image 2.4

Limits to growth World 3 model - standard run.

Source: Turner, Graham, M. (2012). on the cusp of global collapse?

Already in 1972, the link between growth and collapse was established by the Meadows Report. The Club of Rome asked MIT to study the prospects for long-term growth. The Meadows Report, "Limits to Growth" was published in 1972. It was the first book to study the long-term dynamic evolution of six macroeconomic variables through eight different scenarios. He and his team modelled the impact of human population growth on environmental resources using the "World3 model". The team examined the five basic factors that determine, and therefore, ultimately limit, growth on planet-population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production, and pollution. Although they show different scenarios, they all show that growth ends between 2020 and 2060. The first clear statement of a limit to economic growth dates back to Malthus, the first chair in economics, in 1798. He considered that since the yields of agricultural land grow linearly while the population grows exponentially, the population eventually runs up against the limits of the land's capacity to provide for its needs.

According to Georgescu-Roegen (1979), the contemporaries of the Meadows report primarily defend the ideology of growth without offering valid critical arguments from the point of view of economic science. The prevailing thinking in economics does not seem inclined to study the limits of growth or the problem of its environmental limits (Oswald and Stern, 2019). It seems, therefore, that there are intrinsic impediments to economics being a source of real answers to the environmental crisis. Although economics has become the science of growth, it was originally placed with politics in Aristotle's *Treatise on Economics*. Economics was then conceived more as a practice of house rules, in the sense that the house was the center of production for the Greek citizen. In this conception, economy is thought of as the good management of resources in the service of the production of a home.

The notion of growth does not appear, but we find the notion of *chrematistics*, an attitude decried by Aristotle, which consists in seeking personal enrichment with the sole aim of accumulating wealth. The need to understand how/why economics has become a science of growth therefore emerges. Concern over the ecological unsustainability of human presence on Earth, and the growing inequality coupled with continuing deprivation of a huge part of humanity, has grown rapidly in the last couple of decades; Inequality, injustice and unsustainability, already part of many state-dominated systems, have clearly been worsened by the recent phase of Capitalism's accelerated expansion (Rockstrom et al., 2009; Piketty, 2014; Steffen et al., 2015). Following the different readings on the climate crisis, a repeated criticism of the capitalist system precisely as a system of accumulation has emerged.

In a third thesis, Chakrabarty (2009) states that the geological hypothesis regarding the Anthropocene requires putting global histories of Capital in conversation with the species history of Humans. Indeed, he considers that questioning freedom through critiques of capitalist globalization are essential in the age of Anthropocene; climate change might in fact accentuate all the inequities of the capitalist world order. However, although Chakrabarty does not deny that climate change is deeply linked to the history of capital, he considers that a critique that focalizing only on that of capital is not sufficient for addressing questions relating to the Anthropocene. He therefore estimates that an analysis of deep history of the species and the one (much shorter) history of capital together is needed. Slavoj Žižek (2010) criticizes this point of view considering that the key struggle is the particular one since "one can solve the universal problem (of the survival of human species) only by first resolving the particular deadlock of the capitalist mode of production" (p.334).

A good starting point could be according to Ugo Rossi (2012) Harvey's reappraisal of the contemporary relevance of the Marxian theory of primitive accumulation and the related notion of accumulation by dispossession. In what he calls the new imperialism, "Harvey draws on Marx's theory of primitive accumulation to provide a theoretically informed and politically situated explanation for the contemporary dynamics of Capitalism in times of neoliberal globalization" (p.335). Rossi thus takes up the idea developed by Marx that primitive accumulation was brought about through the forced

separation of workers from the means of production and the capitalist expropriation of land and common resources. This resulted in the creation of a proletariat that had to sell its own labor in order to survive. The concept of primitive accumulation — which is pursued through expropriation and enclosure — is thus at the very origin of the historical rise of Capitalism, on the one hand, and its geographical expansion with the colonization (of previously non-capitalist environments) on the other.

On closer examination, there are two main opposing discourses in economics. The so-called orthodox or mainstream, which adopts a vision centered on utilitarianism and functionalism and maintains that growth and respect for nature can be combined, and the so-called heterodox, which maintains that it is the very idea of growth and development that is at the origin of the catastrophe. The orthodox economics adopted today is the so-called neoclassical economics which promotes the ideas of growth for development. Neoclassical economics is an approach to economics in which the production, consumption and valuation (pricing) of goods and services are driven by the supply and demand mode. According to Saad-Filho (2019) “in the current age of neoliberalism, mainstream (orthodox or neoclassical) economics has tightened its grip on the discipline, dismissing heterodoxy in general and in particular as failing the tests of logical, mathematical and/or statistical rigor” (p.17). This criticism is shared by Harvey (2017) who speaks of “a supposedly scientific, highly mathematised and data driven field of study (...) to which no one else is admitted except on state and corporate business” (p. xiii).

We will take Harvey’s work as a reference for understanding Marx’s thought and situating it in the current situation. Harvey (2017) starts from the idea of visualizing Capital as “value in motion.” To do so, Harvey draws a sort of parallel between the capitalist system and the water cycle, to explain Marx’s vision of Capitalism as value in motion. Indeed, he explains that in the hydrological cycle H<sub>2</sub>O passes through different forms and states in a very similar way to how capital (money) moves. “It begins as money capital before taking on commodity form passing through production systems and emerging as new commodities to be sold (monetized) in the market and distributed in different forms to different factions of claimants (in the forms of wages, interest, rent, taxes, profits) before returning

to the role of money capital once more” (p.3).

This comparison and analysis that Harvey makes of Marx’s theory of value explains precisely the logic linked to the dogma of growth, its implication not only in the dynamics of exploitation intrinsic to Capitalism but also and especially in the depletion of resources. For where the driving force in the hydrological cycle is a constant or almost infinite source of energy (the sun), in the case of Capital, the sources of energy are varied (because finite), which explains its tendency to growth, or what Harvey describes as a spiral in constant expansion. According to Harvey, by keeping the value concept as central, Marx invites us to enquire into the nature of the metamorphosis that converts value from the money form into the commodity form. This moment of metamorphosis would indeed be problematic and at the very origin of crises.

Marx defines value as: “the social labor we do for others as organized through commodity exchanges in competitive price-fixing markets.” Harvey explains that labor is a social relation and could be seen as an immaterial but objective force where value is the socially necessary labor time to produce a commodity i.e., the time spent making goods (commodities) for others to buy and use. Therefore, money is simply a kind of material/tangible representation of what value is. Value is not money itself - money is merely its physical representation. (Real) value is the social relation and “all social relations escape direct material investigation”. Money is the material representation and expression of this social relation.

Value — social relation— is produced during the process of production, of commodities for sale, when labor power and means of production are successfully brought together under the supervision of the capitalist. It is essentially here that value is produced taking the form of a new commodity. “Value is produced and sustained by a movement that runs from things (commodities) to processes (the activities of laboring that congeal value in commodities) to things (new commodities). What has been produced is a material commodity and we see no sign of value in motion. The only motion that will count at this point is that of the capitalist hastening to take the new commodities to market to convert their hidden value back into money form (...) at the end of the day, capitalists care only about the surplus value, which will be realized as monetary profit”.

As Haiven (2017) states it, the process of commodification is the

transformation of life processes into things to be bought and sold. This moment in capital circulation encompasses not only the production of commodities but also the production and reproduction of the class relation between capital and labor in the form of surplus value as, the longer the working day is, the more surplus value is produced for capital. Harvey, speaking about what is new in neoliberalism explains that more and more people are forced to accumulate jobs to survive as a result of the atrophy of the power of organized labor. A true description of precariousness. Capitalist production implies perpetual growth due to the proliferation of value and surplus generated by the production process through which capital passes. With final consumption the commodities disappear from circulation entirely which is not the case with the means of production. We would add that this is not the case for waste either, raising the question of the ecological footprint which is not taken into consideration here.

When commodities that are the carriers of value are consumed, they drop out of circulation ceasing to be a moment of the economic process. This disappearance is depending on the prior conversion of value from the commodity into the money form, as money has the capacity to remain in circulation in permanence. That is why the recycling of waste and other recycling processes are in themselves an aberration. The production system itself is based on profit and the processes of Harvey (2017) recalls that for Marx “daily life is held hostage to the madness of money” (p.172).

Harvey explains (2017) that from the point of view of commodities, exchange value is of “only passing interest” since satisfying social needs is the ultimate purpose of commodity production. In a world of exchange, money only facilitates exchange. While in the world of capital and the production of surplus value, money takes on an entirely different aspect. Here, value “preserves itself by increasing; and it preserves itself precisely by constantly exceeding its quantitative fence. Thus, getting rich is an aim in itself. The activity of capital can only have the objective of getting wealthier. Money, insofar as it functions as a measure of wealth, must also engage in “the constant willingness” to go beyond its quantitative limit; an endless process. Its own vitalization consists exclusively in constantly multiplying itself” (p.172). This is what distinguishes money under Capitalism from all its multiple pre-capitalist forms. According to Harvey

(2017) contemporary Capitalism is locked into the bad infinity of endless accumulation and compound growth. Capitalism promotes limitless accumulation while claiming a virtuous infinity of harmonious growth and continuous, achievable improvements in social welfare.

Harvey argues that there are three contradictions that portray a clear and present danger to the survival of Capitalism in the current epoch: (1) the degradation of our relationship with nature (from global warming to habitat and species destruction to water scarcity and environmental degradation); (2) the perpetual compound growth that has reached that turning point on the exponential growth curve that is rapidly proving more and more difficult to perpetuate in the face of diminishing opportunities for profitable investment. It also put intense pressure on that one form of capital that can grow without limit, especially the credit forms of money that seemed to be getting out of control. (3) what Harvey calls “universal alienation”. The alienation of the relationship to nature and to human nature is thus a prerequisite for the assertion of the productivity and powers of capital.

Beyond the aspects of “infinite bad” growth and commodity production outlined above, it is important to note that the original contribution of the Marxian political economy remains essentially related to the study of the production of the material conditions of reproduction of society, where “value theory is a theory of class and class relations”. It hence shows that capitalist production inevitably implicates social conflicts in production and in distribution. In this perspective, the theory of value is a rest as Saad-Filho explains, theory of classes, class relations and exploitation in Capitalism, with Capitalism understood as a mode of production, social reproduction and exploitation, distinguished by five interconnected elements: (1) the social form of property relations, which is structured by the monopoly of the capitalist class over the means of production, i.e. the separation between the workers and the means of production; (2) the social form of labor, i.e. wage labor, imposed by the dispossession of the working class, the commodification of labor power and the generalization of the wage relation; (3) the mode of control of labor, based on the capitalist right to manage the performance of labor; (4) the social form of the products of labor, as commodities; (5) the goal of social production, which is profit.

#### Image 2.5

Tony Biddel. (2010). The Free Trade and Globalization Machine. [online] Available at: < <https://www.perfectworlddesign.ca/cartoons-and-graphics> >

Image 2.5

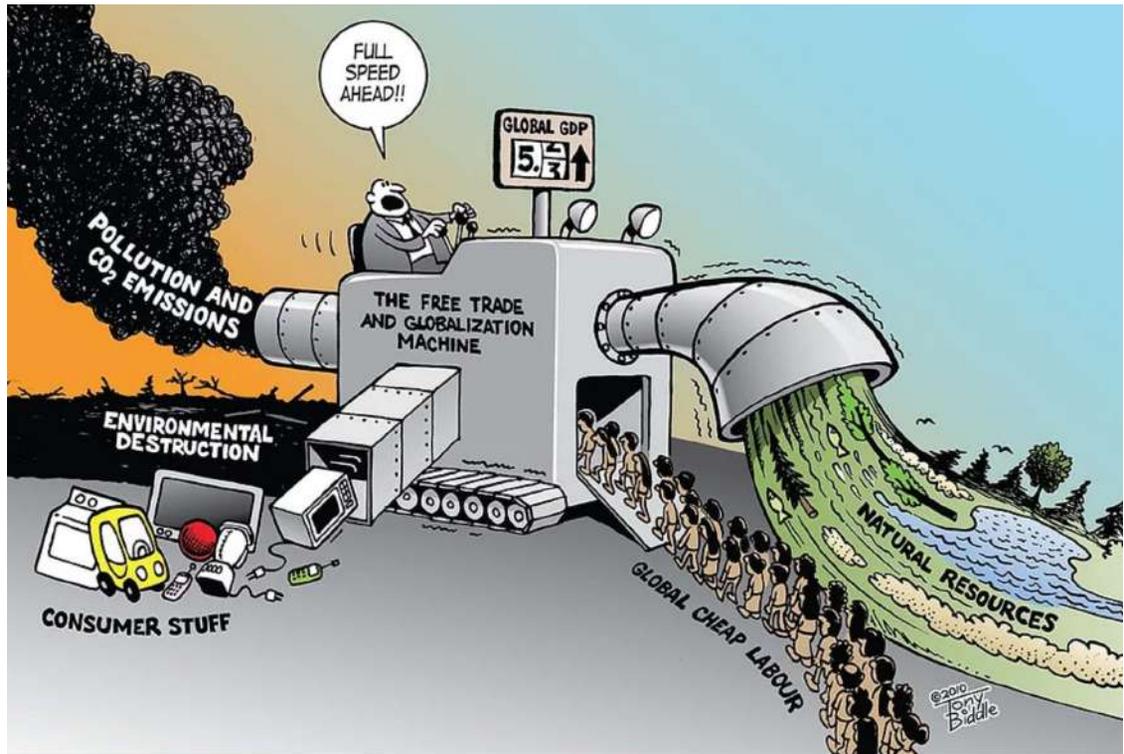


Image 2.6



### 2.2.2 *Entangled/Prekarious Design(er)*

In the last section I showed how Capitalism is by definition a system based on a chronic pursuit of growth and commodification. I also showed how a critical analysis of the notion of value is central in order to understand and unravel the processes of exploitation intrinsically related to its mode of production. Indeed, the Marxist value theory is in primis a theory of class. As in the previous section, the notion of value is also central here. In design we speak of social value, value creation and value chain; notions that are amply developed in economic circles. But as Heskett (2017) explains, the relationship between design and economics is quite complex, often antagonistic, with designers being mostly disdained by economists. Where does design fit in and what is its role in the economy? How does design contribute to the making of the capitalist economy?

Design historian Guy Julier (2017) argues that the rise of design and neoliberalism are connected. According to Harvey (2005) “neoliberalism values market exchange as an ethic in itself”; it thus seeks to maximize the reach and frequency of market transactions, which in turn explains the upsurge of technologies of information since it requires a massive use/analysis/transfer/storage of data in the global marketplace. This corroborates Julier’s claims on the interrelation between the “extraordinary growth and visibility of design” since the 1980s and the fundamental developments in Capitalism which shifted focus from manufacture to the service sector and commercial practices such advertising.

Similarly, Haiven (2014) explains that the idea of creativity, has been integrated into the capitalist imagination through the rise of the creative economy or what Harvey (2017) calls “cognitive Capitalism.” Therefore, design is not only structurally embedded in the capitalist system but is also involved in its deployment. If design is not strictly speaking the engine of Capitalism, it would undoubtedly be a kind of turbocharger. Indeed, Julier (2017) considers that both design and neoliberalism act as processes in perpetual change. While the former is constantly looking for new markets by creating new needs and desires, the latter is continuously conquering new territories. Thus, by integrating design more clearly into economic activities, we realize that design can be seen as a driving force in the modeling of the consumer society; in this respect, Julier argues for the

#### Image 2.6

David Ruccio. (2018) Marx Ratio. [online] Available at: < Available at: < <https://www.perfectworlddesign.ca/cartoons-and-graphics>>

recognition of the emergence of a “design economy”. Julier asserts that design works in two ways in relation to neoliberalism. (1) producing commodities (products and services) for sale, and (2) making social, economic and political changes appear reasonable; thus, playing a more subtle semiotic role. Following a Marxist perspective, we notice that design is in the middle of the most problematic issue of capital i.e., the metamorphosis of value passage from money to commodities. We can therefore see that design occupies a central position in the mechanism of value creation in the economic sense - i.e., the creation of surplus value - and of values in the ethical/social sense, through the production of commodities to be put in the sphere of circulation, i.e., on the market.

Paradoxically, Julier (2017) attempts to reveal the precarious qualities of design by pointing out “the blurred distinctions between work and play, bureaucracy and autonomy” (p.55); hence asserting that these are features fitting within wider developments in labor through contemporary Capitalism i.e., flexible accumulation and fragmentation of work specific to post-Fordism. He thus joins Elzenbaumer’s (2013) discourse on the relationship between post-Fordism and processes of precarization. Elzenbaumer notices that a growing number of designers face “symptoms of poor pay, unpredictability and long-term insecurity that come with precariousness within the creative industries” (p.40); since designers are now hired on specific project tasks, as freelancers in an ever more competitive market, which drives them in vicious circle of precariousness.

In the previous section we defined value as social relation, which is produced during the process of production, of commodities for sale, when labor power and means of production are successfully brought together under the supervision of the capitalist. Therefore, what is produced by designers is not only new material commodities, but a social relation of exploitation of labor power. As a result, designers themselves are subject to exploitation of their labor power. In this context Harvey (2005) explains that deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision are specific processes of neoliberalism.

Heskett (2017) considers that the neoclassical (neoliberal) economic approach and design are incompatible in terms of the notion of value. There are still major gaps in economic studies in understand-

ding how value and values are created and increased or added (at least in part) by design. “If markets and products are as constant as depicted in Neoclassical theory, this at best reduces design to a trivial activity concerned with minor, superficial differentiation of unchanging commodities (...) at worst, it contradicts the whole validity of design” (Heskett, 2017; p.66). Here we notice that the work of designers i.e., design labor (adopting a Marxist terminology) is in itself prey to the commodification process specific to Capitalism. The main issue here is that neoclassical economics fail to grasp the real essence of design. Indeed, Heskett (2017) explains that designers’ activity is essentially concerned with enlarging boundaries i.e., the future, while it is reduced to a mere production of commodities.

In this context Balamir (2017) argues for a shift from an object-centered paradigm to a value-centered one. He thus, downplays Lees-Maffei’s (2009) “Production, Mediation and Consumption” stages (PCM) conventionally used for the study of design; a vision that hides the design process i.e., design labor. Indeed, following a Marxist stance, Balamir distinguishes three instances in the political economy of design: (1) design as a verb which corresponds to the activity of designing or design labor — the creative/subjective process— (2) design as noun which stems for the finalized project or design(er) knowledge — plan, blueprint etc.— and (3) designed as an adjective that is the design physical object/artefact. Through this new paradigm, design is no longer reduced to its physical dimension (a commodity for sale), which makes it prey to the processes of capitalist exploitation. Balamir thus exists the market mediation by putting the design project at the center; considering this new paradigm as a frame for design seen as “depository of value” since the labor of designers is a valuable activity in itself. Ultimately, this could help designers escape their entanglement to Market/Capital and its resulting processes of exploitation/precarity.



Image 2.7

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Source: [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

## 2.3 Imagination Crisis: Design Eurocentrism

### 2.3.1 (Un)Sustainable Development

In his book “Capitalist Realism”, Mark Fisher (2009) says that “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of Capitalism”; a statement he attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek. He continues explaining that “Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics” (Fisher, 2009; p.10). For Haiven (2014) this inability to imagine a world beyond Capitalism is due to a crisis of the imagination where all social, moral, ethical, and personal values are subordinate to the value of money; moving beyond Capitalism seems to be the only key to survival. According to Haiven “It is a war between money and the earth, between capital and people, between the blunt stupidity of greed and the resilient creativity of humanity” (Haiven, 2014; p.8). The real issue would be related (see section 2.2) to a global crisis of value where the real utopians are the ones « whose thinking has become associated with the term ‘neoliberalism’, believe that by mobilizing people’s competition and inherently acquisitive human nature, Capitalism is, ultimately, value-neutral – markets are simply egalitarian arenas of exchange” (p.9).

Through the idea of a crisis of the imagination, Haiven claims that Capitalism has colonized how we all imagine and express what is valuable. According to Haiven, Capitalism is not in crisis, “it is the crisis”, joining the thought of Azmanova (2020) who states that “the very crisis is in a crisis: we are stuck into a metacrisis”. This corroborates the idea of a crisis of the imagination, where social condition “is marked by the absence of utopian energies and prospects for a revolution, even as society experiences itself in perpetual crisis.” Among other issues, Haiven criticizes the privatization of creativity and the power of finance capital in opposition to the power of the imagination of contemporary social movements.

This crisis of imagination develops on several interconnected levels: (1) A parochialism of a global North that seems to discover precarity and austerity crises which were once was only reserved for former colonies, and similarly, concern over the global ecological crisis borne of climate change that for decades have been impacting the poor, peasants and indigenous people around the world. (2) A crisis of ruling where the vast majority of politicians and policymakers remain enthralled to “the now undead ideology of necroneoliberalism” and Thatcher’s dictum that there is no alternative meant to hopeless resignation in front of the false promises of peace, sustainability, prosperity and innovation. (3) A constricting of imagination on which Capitalism relies on convincing people that they are essentially isolated, lonely, competitive economic agents; conceiving the capitalistic system as the natural expression of human nature.

The idea of a decolonization of the imaginary is not new in itself and has already been proposed by Latouche (2002). Latouche believes, as do others (Shiva, 1989; Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Rahnema, 1997), that the Western development model has reached a critical stage. “Development was and continues to be although less convincingly so as the years go by and its promises go unfulfilled the magic formula” (Escobar, 1995; p. vii). As explained by Amin (1976) the underdevelopment of the periphery is intrinsically linked to the development of the center and vice versa. Development (and consequently sustainable development) is seen as an instrument of colonization; growth and development are two sides of the same coin. Latouche notes however, the emergence of a new creative thinking that aspires to a more balanced and just social and economic life (see section 3.3.1), challenging the certainties surrounding Western economic thinking and practice; its negative effects on most of humanity and on the environment being obvious it would be necessary to slow it down, or even stop it.

Santos (2016) takes up the idea of the difficulty of imagining alternatives to Capitalism. He speaks of an end to Capitalism without end “haunting the Western political imagination (...) it is as difficult to imagine the end of Capitalism as it is difficult to imagine that Capitalism has no end” (p. 24). This difficulty, according to the author, has divided critical thought into two currents, which have represented two options of the left. The first current was blocked by the difficulty of imagining the end of Capitalism. Thus, putting an end

to the anguish that this idea caused, this current put its creativity at the service of the development of a *modus vivendi* with Capitalism, capable of reducing to a minimum the social costs of capitalist accumulation governed by individualism, competition and the expansion of exchange values. Santos thus speaks of a state Capitalism that is in itself a form of neo-developmentalism.

The second (minority) current of the critical tradition is convinced that Capitalism will one day come to an end, but faces the difficulty of imagining how this will happen and what will happen next. In the Latin American subcontinent, according to Santos, this difficulty is experienced in two very contrasting ways. On the one hand, post-capitalist alternatives are being imagined after the collapse of real socialism; on the other, pre-conquest and pre-colonial pre-capitalist alternatives are being reinvented. Attempts to combine these two imaginations are found in hybrid conceptions such as “Buen Vivir socialism” in Ecuador and ‘communitarian socialism’ in Bolivia. However, these formulations have different emphases: while governments tend to see post-Capitalism from the perspective of Capitalism, indigenous movements tend to see post-Capitalism from the perspective of pre-Capitalism. Both see Capitalism and colonialism as going hand in hand.

According to Mignolo (2009) it would be necessary to operate a shift from the rhetoric of modernity and “the illusion of the zero-point epistemology” calling for an epistemic disobedience. The zero-point hubris is the concept developed by Santiago Castro-Gómez (2005) and his assumption that the violence exercised by European colonialism was not only physical and economic, but also ‘epistemic’. Castro-Gomez questions the idea of a universality of scientific-enlightened knowledge (based on objectivity, neutrality and detachment) seen as the highest point on the cognitive scale, and thus discarding other epistemes. Through the concept of zero-point hubris, the sociologist analyzes the formation of the ideology of whiteness among the Colombian elites of the eighteenth century. He consequently criticizes the European Enlightenment based on: the search for scientific knowledge, understood as the only true form of knowing and the sole source of rationality, and the effort to banish everything unscientific or irrational.

Indeed, Mignolo (2007) considers that the control of subjectivity and knowledge is seen as an essential domain in what Quijano called the “colonial matrix of power.” The concept represents the extension of western domination, through four interrelated domains: control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity). Mignolo (2009) argues that this colonial matrix of power is at the very origin of the remapping of the world as first, second and third during the Cold War; a racial system of social classification that invented Occidentalism and Orientalism. Thus, “implanting the colonial matrix of power (either in sixteenth century Anahuak (Valley of Mexico) or in today’s Iraq) implies to dismantle, simultaneously, existing forms of social organization and ways of life” (Mignolo, 2007; p.157).

Imagining the end of Capitalism in order to create sustainable ways of living therefore involves a first step, that of epistemic disobedience, i.e., the refusal of modernity. He is joined by Escobar (2015) who explains how critical debates about growth and development are domesticated in the discourses of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change, are said to have blurred the distinction between industrialized and developing countries and their involvement in global warming (Marquardt, 2018). Similarly, Erickson (2020) laments the tendency of environmental discourses to focus on technological innovation - what Harvey (2017) calls the techno-utopia - of a green society instead of examining structures such as colonialism that could help creatively reimagine the social relations that led to the Anthropocene.

### 2.3.2 *Colonized/Colonial Design(er) and Blocked Imagination*

Already in 2003, Akkach spoke about eurocentrism in design. The term Eurocentrism was first coined by Amin (1988) and the concept gained significance in the post-colonial and post-orientalist discourses that were concerned with Western hegemony. Akkach explains how during his early years of study, in Syria, design culture appeared to him as being “truly universal”, knowing exactly what was expected of him being “able to read, interpret and understand the foreign built environment, to communicate my design ideas in an advanced graphic language, and indeed to excel”. He was likewise “able to practice in Australia, Saudi Arabia and Syria” being “exposed to a range of design and teaching ideologies and practices in both the Arab and Western worlds”.

This cross-cultural experience would have made him aware of how design institutions, teaching and practices “in the Arab world have continued to reflect what is happening in the West (...) although the discourse of design remains predominantly Eurocentric, its adaptations and assimilations into the Arab world seem to raise no noticeable intellectual, moral or practical concerns” (Akkach, 2003; p.323-324). He turns to the lexical origins of the word design in Arabic and its derivations, sammama (to design) and musammim (designer), as modern since they were not used in this sense in pre-modern Arab-Islamic literature. In linguistic terms “design” is an act of determination, of sorting out possibilities, and of projecting a choice. Thus, he points out that the word in Arabic does not deal with problem-solving, but rather with making choices (in addition to the different definitions proposed by Akkach we would add the idea of insistence or obstinacy in the word musammim). Despite these linguistic differences, Akkach argues that it is the Western conceptualization and institutionalization of design that has been adopted.

According to Akkach the question of Eurocentricity itself reinforces the Western/non-Western divide and announces a one-sided ownership of the project of modernity, where western experts would have noticed the flaw in their models and are now asking for a collective responsibility in imagining alternative modes of living, inclu-

ding design thinking and practicing. The non-Western other remains on the borrowing, adopting and receiving end, not considered as “a partner in the making of the project, but is nonetheless a partner in dealing with its consequences, the various socio-economic and ecological problems”. Interestingly, Arabs (like others), have voluntarily accepted this position; having been effectively alienated from the project of modernity, and having themselves theoretically disavowed it, their effective contribution, i.e., “their difference, seems to lie in their past and not in their present, which has already been condemned for being too Westernized”. Akkach sees the urgency of sustainability as an opportunity to move beyond West/non-West dichotomies to engage with the common core of humanity i.e., its survival ethics and responsibility to sustain life on this unique and fragile planet.

As explained in the previous sections, in most of its manifestations, design is based on market perspectives in which the processes of creation, innovation and production are linked to networks of lucrative, human-centered goals (Foster 2002, Papanek, 1972). It can be argued that contemporary conceptions of design derive from the paradigm of modernity that contributes to the conditions of coloniality by reproducing the culture of consumption and mass production derived from the Western-centric worldview. In this context some call for decolonizing design from the tyranny of cold, “Western” abstractions (Tunstall, 2013; Ansari, 2016; Schultz, 2017; Fry, 2017) to initiate a real dialogue between designers from the Global North and Global South in order to develop a paradigmatic shift from a Eurocentric vision of design to a pluriversal one (Escobar, 2018).

Similarly, the theory and practice that has evolved around social design has reproduced the same mechanisms without addressing the roots of the problems. Doing social without politics has shown its limits and seems to serve only to assuage a sense of guilt, to compensate for wrongdoing in order to look at oneself in the mirror or to inflate an oversized ego. It is also a manifestation of the process of commodification of everything and the recovery of the capitalist system itself. It continues to be fed and nurtured by ideas for development and improvement from communities in need of “help”. Typically, this need for help is defined by designers from their own perspectives and biases, without regard to what the terms “improvement”, “development” or “help” actually might entail or mean for

those specific communities. This approach often ignores the fact that the very concept of “help” creates an unbalanced power relationship between the helper and the helped (Andreotti 2016, Freire 1970), often does not fully incorporate the multiplicity of knowledge that arises from these interactions into the design process, and may even undermine local social and decision-making structures with unintended negative consequences for the inhabitants.

Tunstall (2013) argues that, approached in this way, design could become another form of cultural imperialism that destabilizes and undermines indigenous approaches from other creative traditions. Tunstall (2013) also argues that there should be no distinction between any type of creation (art, craft or design), arguing for a dialogical and critical process, in which one must look simultaneously at what is gained, what is lost and what is created in the combination of value/cultural systems (Tunstall 2013). In this sense, some (Busch & Palmås, 2016; Nussbaum, 2010) point to the risk of falling on the dark side of the social. In their view, exploiting the social level may well produce unforeseen negative societal outcomes. They criticize a certain idealism of the designer. In order to balance this idealism, designers should replace the ‘what if’ starting points with a more realistic question of ‘who is who’, i.e., who benefits from the Social Innovation and who pays the price of change (Busch & Palmås, 2016, p. 287). A view that echoes that of Myerson (2016), who calls for a new way of thinking about downscaling and reverse thinking rather than seeking to systematize solutions.

One could conclude that design serves a homogenizing ontology that generally negates and oppresses the aesthetic, functional and cultural values of non-Western design, craft and art traditions (Abdulla et al. 2019, Fry 2017, Mafundikwa 2013, Tunstall 2013, Fry 2009, Escobar 2018). Indeed, Boenhert, Elzenbaumer and Onufawa (2016) use the concept of symbolic violence coined by Bourdieu (1979) in order to explain how ideas are reproduced by design. For Onufawa (2018) seeing design as symbolic violence recalls the matrix of power of Quijano (see section 3.3.1) and is valuable in understanding the role of design as an oppressive and a collaborative force. “Certain unjust practices and norms to institutions that an oppressor might perceive as natural, and that might lead them to suppress differences with isms such as racism, sexism, colonialism, and imperialism” (p.8).

Similarly, Tlostanova (2017) recalls Castro-Gomez's zero-point hubris (see section 3.3.1) to explain how modern/colonial design operates "a perfect and pure manifestation of modernity's objectifying principle of perception and interpretation of the world, of other human and non-human beings, of man-made objects and knowledges" (p.2). Similarly, Kiem (2017) takes up the colonial matrix of power or ground zero epistemology to explain that the field of design studies as a whole has functioned as a discourse, disciplinary orientation, mode of thought and set of practices (assembled and elevated to the status of scholarly theoretical interest in the context of industrial Capitalism) that have acted (and continue to act) to support a modern/colonial structure of violence and exploitation.

#### Images 2.8

Vincent Callebaut. (2014). 2050 Paris Smart City Project.  
Source:<https://amazingarchitecture.com/futuristic/paris-smart-city-2050-by-vincent-callebaut-architectures>



## References Chapter 2

- Abdulla, D., Ansari, A., Keshavarz, M., Kiem, M., Oliveira, P., Prado, L., Republic, M., Schultz, T. and Australia, G. (2019). A Manifesto for Decolonising Design: The Journal of Futures Studies, 23(3): 129–132
- Akkach, S. (2003). Design and the Question of Eurocentricity. Design Philosophy Papers, 1(6), 321–326. <https://doi.org/10.2752/144871303x13965299302910>
- Albrecht, G. (2019). Earth Emotions: New Words for a New World. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Amin, S. (1970). L'accumulation à l'échelle mondiale. In: Tiers-Monde, tome 13, n°52, 1972. Le capitalisme périphérique. pp. 865-868.
- Amin, S. (1988). L'eurocentrisme : critique d'une idéologie. In Google Books. FeniXX réédition numérique. [https://books.google.tn/books/about/L\\_eurocentrisme\\_critique\\_d\\_une\\_id%C3%A9ologie.html?id=v7FYDwAAQBAJ&source=kp\\_book\\_description&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.tn/books/about/L_eurocentrisme_critique_d_une_id%C3%A9ologie.html?id=v7FYDwAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y)
- Ansari, A. (2016). Towards a Design Of, From & With the Global South. Carnegie Mellon University.
- Azmanova, A. (2020) Anti-Capital in the XXIst Century (on the metacrisis of capitalism and the prospects for radical politics). Philosophy and Social Criticism, 46 (4). ISSN 0191-4537.
- Balamir, S. (2017). Commoning in postcapitalist design practices. XVI Biennial IASC Conference “Practicing the Commons”, 10-14 June 2017, Utrecht, the Netherlands.
- Boehnert, J., Elzenbaumer, B., & Onafuwa, D. (2016): Design a symbolic violence: Addressing the ‘isms’. Loughborough University. Conference contribution. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/36272>
- Bonnet, E., Landivar, D., Monnin, A., Allard, L. (2019). Le design, une cosmologie sans monde face à l'Anthropocène. Sciences du Design, 10(2), 97-104.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979). La Distinction : Critique Sociale Du Jugement. Éditions De Minuit.
- Brown, T. (2009). Change by design: How design thinking creates new alternatives for business and society. New York: Collins Business ; Enfield.
- Busch, O. V., Palmås, K. (2016). Social Means Do Not Justify Corruptible Ends: A Realist Perspective of Social Innovation and Design. She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation Volume 2, Issue 4, Winter 2016, Pages 275-287.
- Cadix, A. (2014). “Design thinking” : que peut-on en penser ?. Wwww.usinenouvelle.com. <https://www.usinenouvelle.com/article/design-thinking-que-peut-on-en-penser.N252621>
- Castro-Gomez, S. (2005). La hybris del punto cero: Ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816) (2nd ed.). Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15hvx8r>
- Chakrabarty, D. (2019). The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category. Critical Inquiry, 46(1), pp.1–31.
- Crutzen, P. J., & Stoermer, E. F. (2017). “The “Anthropocene”” (2000). The Future of Nature, 479–490. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300188479-041>
- Elzenbaumer, B. (2014). Designing Economic Cultures: cultivating socially and politically engaged design practices against procedures of precarisation. London: Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Elzenbaumer, B., Graziano, V., & Trogal, K. (2016). Introduction: The Politics of Commoning and Design. DRS2016: Future-Focused Thinking. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.614>
- Erickson, V. J., & Halford, A. (2020). Seed planning, sourcing, and procurement. Restoration Ecology, 28(S3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.13199>

- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (STU-Student edition). Princeton University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rtgw>
- Escobar, A. (2015). Degrowth, postdevelopment, and transitions: a preliminary conversation. *Sustainability Science*, 10(3), 451–462. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-015-0297-5>
- Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* Duke University Press.
- Findelli, A., & Bousbaci, R. (2004). *L'éclipse de l'objet dans les théories du projet en design*. Université de Montréal.
- Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zero Books.
- Flusser, V. (1996). *Pour une philosophie de la photographie*. In Google Books. Circé. [https://books.google.tn/books/about/Pour\\_une\\_philosophie\\_de\\_la\\_photographie.html?id=KQvHPQAACAAJ&source=kp\\_book\\_description&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.tn/books/about/Pour_une_philosophie_de_la_photographie.html?id=KQvHPQAACAAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y) (Original work published 1983)
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Fry, T. (2009). *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice*. In Google Books. Berg Publishers.
- Fry, T. (2010). *Design as Politics*, Berg Pub Ltd.
- Fry, T. (2017). Design for/by “The Global South”. *Design Philosophy Papers*, 15(1): 3-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14487136.2017.1303242>
- Fry, T. (2019). *Unstaging war, confronting conflict and peace*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fry, T. (2020). *Defuturing: a New Design Philosophy*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts.
- Georgescu-Roegen, N., Grinevald, J., & Rens, I. (1979). *La décroissance : entropie, écologie, économie*. Bibliothèque Paul-Émile Boulet de l'Université du Québec à Chicoutimi.
- Gomart, T. (2019). *L'affolement du monde : 10 leçons de géopolitique*. Tallandier.
- Haiven, M. (2014). *Crises of imagination: capitalism, culture and resistance in a post-crash world*. London, England: Zed Books.
- Haiven, M. (2017). *Commons as Actuality, Ethos, and Horizon*. In: Means, A., Ford, D., Slater, G. (eds) *Educational Commons in Theory and Practice*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58641-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58641-4_2)
- Haraway, D.J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble – making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199283262.001.0001>, accessed 1 Sept. 2022.
- Harvey, D. (2017). *Marx, capital and the madness of economic reason. The concept, the book, the history*. Profile Books.
- Heskett, J., Dilnot, C., Boztepe, S., & Poggenpohl, S. H. (2017). *Design and the creation of value*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- IPCC, 2021: *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment*
- JenniferDaniel 2015
- Julier, G. (2017). *Economies of Design. Economies of Design*, 1–224. <https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5018000>

- Kiem, M. N. (2017). The coloniality of design. Handle.net; UWS Research Direct Website. <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.7/uws:47387>
- Klein, N. (2014). *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, New York: Simon, and Schuster, 2014.
- Latouche, S. (2002). D'autres mondes sont possibles, pas une autre mondialisation. *Revue du MAUSS*, no<(sup> 20), 77-89. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rdm.020.0077>
- Latour, B. (2019). De la nécessité d'atterrir. *Revue Projet*, 373, 18-21. <https://doi.org/10.3917/pro.373.0018>
- Latour, B. (2015). *Face à Gaïa : huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique*. Paris: Les Empêcheurs De Penser En Rond, DL.
- Mafundikwa, S. (2013). Four Corners (A. Montgomery, Interviewer) [Interview]. <https://www.design-week.co.uk/issues/march-2013/four-corners-an-interview-with-saki-mafundikwa/>
- Maldonado, T. (1976). *Disegno industriale. Un riesame*. Feltrinelli Economica.
- Manzini, E. (2014). Design for social innovation vs. social design, Retrieved April 12, 2019 from: <http://www.desisnetwork.org/2014/07/25/design-for-social-innovation-vs-social-design/>
- Manzini, E. (2015). *Design When Everybody Designs. An introduction to design for social innovation*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Manzini, E. (2016). Design Culture and Dialogic Design. *Design Issues*, 32(1), pp.52–59.
- Manzini, E. and Jégou, F. (2003). *Sustainable everyday: scenarios of urban life*. Milan: Ambiente.
- Margolin, V. and Margolin, S. (2002). A 'Social Model' of Design: Issues of Practice and Research. *Design Issues*, 18(4), pp.24–30.
- Markussen, T. (2013). The Disruptive Aesthetics of Design Activism: Enacting Design Between Art and Politics. *Design Issues*, 29(1), pp.38–50.
- Marquardt, J. and Kamilla Karhunmaa. 2018. "Why We Should Care About the Fate of Climate Science." *STS Vignettes*.
- Mau, S. (2004). *The Moral Economy of Welfare States*.
- McNeill, J.R. and Engelke, P. (2014). *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*. [online] JSTOR. Harvard University Press. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjf9wcc>.
- Meadows, D.H. (1972). *The Limits to growth: a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*. New York: Universe Books.
- Meroni, A., Priya Bala and Al, E. (2007). *Creative communities: people inventing sustainable ways of living*. Milano: Poli. Design.
- Meurer, B. (2001). The Transformation of Design. *Design Issues*, 17(1), 44–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1511908>
- Mignolo, W. D. (2007). Delinking: The Rhetoric of modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 449–514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>
- Mignolo, W., De, A. J., Wynter, S., Gordon, L. R., & Duke. (2009). *La teoría política en la encrucijada descolonial*. Ediciones Del Signo.
- Moore, W. J. (2016). *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. PM Press. Oakland: Canada.

- Morelli, N. & Sbordone, M.A. (2018). Il Territorio delle Relazioni, Il Design infrastructuring per i contesti locali. *Design e Territori*. MD Journal, 5, 176-185.
- Morelli, P. (2008). Alain Joannes, *Le journalisme à l'ère électronique* : Paris, Vuibert, coll. Lire Agir, 2007, 247 p. *Questions de communication*, 14, 355-357. <https://doi.org/10.4000/questionsdecommunication.1564>
- Nussbaum, B. (2010). Is Humanitarian Design the New Imperialism? Does our desire to help do more harm than good? <https://www.fastcompany.com/1661859/is-humanitarian-design-the-new-imperialism>
- Onafuwa, D. (2018). Allies and Decoloniality: A Review of the Intersectional Perspectives on Design, Politics, and Power Symposium, *Design and Culture*, 10:1, 7-15, DOI: 10.1080/17547075.2018.1430995
- Oreskes, N. (2007). The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change: How Do We Know We're Not Wrong?. In: Joseph F. DiMento & Pamela Doughman (eds.) *Climate Change: What It Means for Us, Our Children, and Our Grandchildren*. MIT Press. pp. 65 (2007)
- Oswald, A., & Stern, N. (2019). Why does the economics of climate change matter so much, and why has the engagement of economists been so weak? <https://www.andrewoswald.com/docs/Climatechange-OswaldSternSept2019forRES.pdf>
- Papanek, V.J. and Fuller, R.B. (1972). *Design for the real world*. London: Thames And Hudson.
- Patel, R. & Moore, J. W. (2017) *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. Oakland: University of California Press, 289 pp.
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Pyke, C.R. (2004). Steffen, W., et al. 2004. *Global Change and the Earth System : a Planet under Pressure*. Springer-Verlag, New York, New York, USA. *Ecology and Society*, 9(2).
- Rahnema, M., & Bawtree, V. (Eds.) (1997). *The post-development reader*. London: Zed Books.
- Revelle, R., & Suess, H. E. (1957). Carbon Dioxide Exchange Between Atmosphere and Ocean and the Question of an Increase of Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> during the Past Decades. *Tellus*, 9(1), 18–27. <https://doi.org/10.3402/tellusa.v9i1.9075>
- Robert John Foster (2002). *Materializing the nation: commodities, consumption, and media in Papua New Guinea*. Bloomington And Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press.
- Rockström, J. (2009). A safe operating space for humanity. *Nature*, 461(7263), 472–475. <https://doi.org/10.1038/461472a>
- Rossi, U., & Vanolo, A. (2012). *Urban Political Geographies: A Global Perspective*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446288948>
- Saad-Filho, A. (2019). Crisis in Neoliberalism or Crisis of Neoliberalism? *Value and Crisis: Essays on Labour, Money and Contemporary Capitalism*, 302–318. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004393202\\_017](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004393202_017)
- Sachs, W. (Eds.) (1992). *The development dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. London: Zed Books.
- Santos, B. S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*.
- Schultz, T. (2017). Design's Role in Transitioning to Futures of Cultures of Repair. In: A. Chakrabati; D. Chakrabati (eds.), *Research into Design for Communities*. New Delhi: Springer, vol. 2, p. 225-234. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3521-0\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3521-0_19)
- Scranton, R. (2015). *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene. Reflections on the end of a civilization*. San

Francisco: City Light Books.

Servigne, P., Stevens, R. (2015). *Comment tout peut s'effondrer. Petit manuel de collapsologie à l'usage des générations présentes.* Editions du Seuil.

Shiva, V. (1989). *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development.* London: Zed Books

Sloterdijk, P. (2015). The Anthropocene: A process-state at the edge of geohistory? In: Davis, H, Turpin, E (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies.* London: Open Humanities Press, pp. 327–339.

Smith, C. E., & Bloemink, B. (2007). Design for the Other 90%. In Google Books. Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Organization. [https://books.google.tn/books/about/Design\\_for\\_the\\_Other\\_90.html?id=1IMSAQAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.tn/books/about/Design_for_the_Other_90.html?id=1IMSAQAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y)

Steffen, W., Richardson, K., Rockstrom, J., Cornell, S. E., Fetzer, I., Bennett, E. M., Biggs, R., Carpenter, S. R., de Vries, W., de Wit, C. A., Folke, C., Gerten, D., Heinke, J., Mace, G. M., Persson, L. M., Ramanathan, V., Reyers, B., & Sorlin, S. (2015). Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. *Science*, 347(6223), 1259855–1259855. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1259855>

Stein, S., & de Andreotti, V. O. (2016). Decolonization and Higher Education. *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1–6. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-532-7\\_479-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-532-7_479-1)

Taboada, M.B., Rojas-Lizana, S., Dutra, L.X.C. and Levu, A.V.M. (2020). *Decolonial Design in Practice: Designing Meaningful and Transformative Science Communications for Navakavu, Fiji.* *Design and Culture*, 12(2), pp.141–164.

Thomas Robert Malthus, T. R. (1989). *An essay on the principle of population.* Cambridge Univ. Pr. (Original work published 1798)

Thorpe, A. (2010). Design's Role in Sustainable Consumption. *Design Issues*, 26, 3-16.

Tlostanova, M. V. (2017). *Postcolonialism and postsocialism in fiction and art : resistance and re-existence.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Tonkinwise, C. (2015). Design for Transitions – from and to what? *Design Philosophy Papers*, 13(1), pp.85–92.

Tromp, N., Hekkert, P. and Verbeek, P.-P. (2011). Design for Socially Responsible Behavior: A Classification of Influence Based on Intended User Experience. *Design Issues*, 27(3), pp.3–19.

Tunstall, E. (2013). Decolonizing Design Innovation: Design Anthropology Critical Anthropology, and Indigenous Knowledge. In: W. Gunn; T. Otto; R. Smith (eds.), *Design Anthropology. Theory and Practice.* London, Bloomsbury, p. 232-250.

Vial, S. (2010). *Court traité du design.* Paris cedex 14: Presses Universitaires de France.

Williston, B. (2015). *The Anthropocene Project.* Oxford University Press. UK.

Žižek, S. (2010). *Living in the End Times.* Verso. London.





# The (Re)Emergence of the Commons(s) & Utopia: Implications for Design

## ABSTRACT

The third chapter correspond to the second phase of the desk-research. It aims to identify and circumscribe the research demand with respect to the disciplinary scenario. After focusing (chapter 2) on the embeddedness of design and designers in the different crises of the modern/capitalist/Western society model, this chapter proceeds, always through a deductive process, by circumscribing the field of investigation by searching for alternatives to said crises. It opposes the notion of Chthulucene (Haraway, 2016) to that of the Anthropocene; the Commons to Capitalism and growth; and finally, decolonial thinking/Epistemologies of the South to that of Eurocentrism and development. Therefore, this third chapter identifies (alternative) socially and politically engaged design approaches in order to explore the features or characteristics of a design that takes into account the issues revealed in chapter 2. This first phase of research served to define the key concepts and approaches that could be used on the field.

The first section of this chapter attempts to define the profile of the designer of the Anthropocene, evoking among others the contributions of Papanek and Maldonado. It starts from the observation of various militant environmental movements — both in the North as in the South of the world —, which are challenging the status quo by anticipating the end of fossil fuels, climatic disturbances or food supply disruptions by locally building small systems that will better withstand future economic, social and ecological shocks. These “neomaterialist” movements (Schlosberg & Coles, 2015) are seen as political alternatives that fit this imaginary of collapse. They are initiatives already in place that may lead to the delineation of a new designer’s attitude. To the figure of Bipolar/Guilty designer is opposed here to that of the Activist/Resilient designer. This Activist/Resilient designer would correspond to a reactivation of what Maldonado called “speranza progettuale”.

The second section focuses on the notions of Commons and community economies seen as a driving principle for social, ecological, economic and political change; a principle for alternative ways of living in a post/non-capitalist system. The approach of community economies challenges the conventional use of the economy as a formal system of production of goods and monetary exchange, as well as the idea of separation between economy and ecology. It promotes the economy as diverse practices rather than a single economic system, i.e., Capitalism by focusing on coming as a process in order to “take back the economy” (Gibson-Graham et al.,

2013). To the previous figure of Entangled/Precarious designer, is opposed the one of a Released/Commoner designer; emitting the hypothesis of pursuing practices around Commons and commoning in order to escape processes of commodification and precarization.

In response to the idea of a crisis of imaginaries, the chapter concludes with a section focused on the notion of Epistemologies of the South as alternative forms of knowledge and life; proposing the epistemological foundations of a global, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal critical theory. Indeed, it provides both analytical and conceptual parameters, for an anti-hegemonic ecology of knowledge (Santos, 2016). To the figure of Colonial/Colonized designer is opposed a Rooted/Emancipatory one. Design would be attached not only to a specific territory but also to specific situations of struggle and conflict. Recalling the notion of radical imagination defined as a “common imagination” (Haiven, 2014), this Rooted design would involve three temporalities: past (searching for Commons as a historical actuality held in common memory); present (recognizing, valorizing and defending even undercurrent Commons of today); future (acknowledging that the ultimate horizon for humanity beyond Capitalism is the Commons).

## 3.1 Design Facing Collapse

### 3.1.1 *The Anthropocene as a Mutual-Aid Era*

Servigne & Stevens (2015) link the Anthropocene and the notion of collapse to make it even more tangible; seen as certain, collapse loses its tragic dimension. Paradoxically, they consider that we are soon entering the age of mutual aid. The disappearance of the social order in which we live would not lead to catastrophe, chaos or panic, since most humans behave in an extraordinarily altruistic, calm and composed way after a catastrophe. They take up the work of Meadows who explains that “it is too late for sustainable development, we must prepare for shocks and build small resilient systems in the emergency” (Agnes Sinai, 2013). Human communities have self-healing capacities; powerful social cohesion mechanisms that allow a community to rebuild itself after a shock by recreating social structures that favor its survival in the new environment. Thus, “preparing for a disaster is first of all weaving a bond around oneself” (p.99). They speak of the stages of the framework mourning process established by the American psychologist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, to speak of a generalized process in the face of the climate emergency and the possibility of the impending collapse. They explain that certain political movements are already placing themselves in an imaginary collapse. We can see here the convergence between several economic theories and social/political movements calling for a change beyond the growth and development paradigms.

Indeed, one could also mention various environmental activist movements in both the North/West and South/East of the world. These movements are merging and aiming to anticipate the end of fossil fuels, climate disruption or disruption of the food supply. The idea is to build small resilient systems at the local level that will better withstand future economic, social and ecological shocks. Their posture is “both catastrophist and optimist, that is, both lucid and pragmatic.” (p.108). Lucid, because they are not in denial about di-

sasters, renouncing the idea of eternal growth but also the myth of apocalypse described by Latour (see section 2.1). The people involved in these movements would also be pragmatic, as they are already inventing a post-disaster world beyond the “business as usual” scenario. All the movements that are converging today in both the North/West and South/East are further evidence of this learning to stay in the trouble in the Chthulucene (Haraway, 2016), without waiting for politicians and multinationals to change the status quo. We follow Schlosberg and Coles’ (2015) analysis defining these systems and movements as “new materialist movements”; in their words, these movements represent an environmentalism of the everyday. Both researchers see common themes in these many, seemingly disparate initiatives. Indeed, they posit three key analytical frameworks that have helped them to think about these movements at a theoretical, political and environmental level. Firstly, the overcoming of an individualistic and value-driven notion of post-materialism, embodied in and embedded in collective institutions of material flows. Second, Foucault’s conceptions of governmentality and biopolitics, which examine these movements as a form of resistance to what he calls circulatory power. Third, these movements interpret a misfit, or misaligned relationship, between humans and the non-human world as a key challenge creating a new ethic around an explicit recognition of human immersion in non-human natural systems.

In the North, we can cite the degrowth movement and the Transition Town Network originally launched by permaculture designer Rob Hopkins (2008), considered as political alternatives that fit into this imaginary of collapse. André Gorz is said to have first coined the term in reference to the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (1971) in relation to the publication of “The limits to Growth” (Meadows et al., 1972). The definition of Degrowth is a literal translation of *décroissance*, a French word meaning reduction. It was Bruno Clémentin and Vincent Cheynet who “officially coined the term sustainable degrowth as an alternative to sustainable development” (Parrique, 2019; p.173). In the context of neoliberal Capitalism that locks down politics (Swyngedouw, 2007), degrowth is an attempt to re-politicize the debate on the necessary socio-ecological transformation and desired futures by asserting dissent with current representations of the world and by seeking alternatives.

Degrowth also challenges the ideas of green growth, green economy or sustainable development and the associated belief in economic growth as a desirable pathway in political agendas. For De Maria et al. (2013), Degrowth confronts dominant social science paradigms such as neoclassical economics and Keynesian economics. However, even though a new ecological macroeconomics without growth is emerging (Victor 2008; Jackson 2011) that could evolve into a new paradigm in economics, there is still a long way to go. Degrowth has now become a confluence of critical ideas and political actions.

Similarly, the Transition Town movement, which started in Totnes, aims to make towns self-sufficient in food and energy by 2030; it has rapidly grown into a vast network of local initiatives based on the same principles. The Transition Towns and Degrowth movements share the assumptions that growth is inexorably coming to an end, and are concerned with a less energy-intensive future and the imagination of collapse. Like degrowth, it builds on the work of Meadows and the dynamics of peak oil, with a particular emphasis on resilience and self-reliance, but with a (seemingly) less politicized discourse. Transition initiatives start from food and agriculture, through health, education, transport, energy and housing, but above all a vision of the economy in its ancient form (Aristotle) and of the domestic economy. Like degrowth initiatives, the transition movement promotes local currencies and other currencies: community currencies, time banks and local exchange systems. It is a practical and evidence-based perspective, which starts from the idea that societies in the global North are dependent on oil, and therefore considers the challenges of change. One of the main foundations of the Transition movement is Permaculture, which is not seen as a 'farming technique' but as designed agriculture. The transition approach is one in which the principles of permaculture are implicit, not explicit. An attempt to get around the fact that permaculture is a very difficult concept to explain.

Speaking of permaculture, Centemeri (2018) sees it as "both a new materialist movement and a Commons movement. Its distinguishing feature is that it conceives of the satisfaction of basic needs through the creation of multi-species Commons." Permaculture movements, which, because of their combination of local and situated design practices and underlying social and political philosophies, offer alternative means of organization in response to the Anthro-

pocene (Roux-Rosier et. al, 2018). Permaculture, particularly in terms of vocabulary, is undergoing a transition from being very specific about landscape configuration to a much more general usage. "It must be stated at the outset that I regard permanent agriculture as a valid, safe, and sustainable, complete energy system. Permaculture, is defined here, claims to be designed agriculture, so that the species, composition, array and organization of plants and animals are the central factor. In that sense this is not a gardening book." (Mollison, 1988). It is here defined as set of design principles centered on whole systems thinking. Permaculture uses these principles in a growing number of fields from regenerative agriculture, rewilding, and community resilience. Mollison (1979) puts down as an ethical basis for permaculture speaking about three main principles: (1) care of the earth: provision for all life systems to continue and multiply; (2) care of the people: provision for people to access those resources necessary to their existence; (3) setting limits to population and consumption. From the perspective of a given individual, permaculture can be seen as a design system for ecologically responsible home economics. From a scholarly perspective, permaculture is a notoriously multi-faceted approach, evolving aggressively from its agricultural origins to culture-wide applicability by allowing shifting definitions to suit particular needs.

From the global South, alternative societal concepts also need to be taken into account in the debate. The concepts and terminologies are numerous and we will limit ourselves here to mentioning some of them. They all share a critique of growth and development by adopting a post-developmental posture (Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Rahnema, 1997). Among the intellectuals who have laid the conceptual foundations of degrowth, we can also mention Ivan Illich who introduced the concept of conviviality (1973), Serge Latouche who introduced the term frugal abundance (2009) or Pierre Rabhi who speaks of happy sobriety (2010); Rabhi is familiar with the context of the South and in particular that of North Africa, especially in the oasis environment, which was at the origin of the project of oasis everywhere of the hummingbird movement launched by the latter.

In Latin America one can cite the Buen Vivir movement (Acosta, 2014; Correa, 2013; Merino, 2016) which means living well. "Sumak Kawsay" or "Suma Qamaña" in Ecuador and Bolivia stemming

from indigenous philosophies are movements that look at post-Capitalism from the perspective of pre-Capitalism. Another example is Via Campesina, a transnational social movement defending peasant agriculture for food sovereignty that is considered by many to be the most important transnational social movement in the world (Borras 2004; McMichael 2006; Patel, 2006; Edelman 2005; Martinez Torres and Rosset 2008; Borras and Franco 2009). In order to avoid the disappearance of the peasantry long predicted as an inevitable result of the penetration of Capitalism into agriculture (Hobsbawm 1994), and since the private sector is typically transnational in nature, peasant social movements have increasingly organized themselves into transnational alliances, the most important and broadest example of which is Via Campesina.

Similarly, Ecological Swaraj in India promotes an economy of permanence (Kothari et al., 2014), based on Gandhi's precepts in his book "Hind Swaraj" (1909), where he criticized not only British colonization but the entire Western civilization model. Finally, Ubuntu — a philosophy of the Bantu-speaking peoples of Africa — understands life in its entirety (Bohm 1980) where a community is a triad of the living, the undead (ancestors) and the unborn. Ubuntu's emphasis on connection, and being in relationship with others, resonates strongly with notions of the Commons and pooling (Ramosse, 2003, 2014; Metz, 2011). Sharing, simplicity, conviviality, care and the Commons are terms used to describe what these alternative futures might look like (D'Alisa et al., 2015). Escobar (2015) speculates that the Commons could be the link between all these different narratives and visions of transition that attempt to think beyond the logic of development or growth contrasting with solutions such as sustainable development or the green economy.

Image 3.1



### 3.1.2 *Activist/Resilient Design(er) in the Anthropocene*

As explained, designers have tried to explore new terrain but have often failed to break out of market economy. They have often played (intentionally or not) a central role into the maintenance and deployment of Capitalism by opening up new markets even through what was intended to deal with social issues. Opinions differ on the definition of the boundaries of design dealing with the concept of social and the manner of doing it. Our starting point was Papanek and his virulent critique of design which remains a pivotal moment in the history of design. Emerged the idea of a “designer’s syndrome” i.e., a chronic feeling of guilt when he realizes his structural involvement in the system. As discussed in the previous chapters, design is involved in the deployment and maintenance of the capitalist imaginary of growth and development; design as a commodity but also as an instrument of commodification. We have also shown how mainstream design practice (in its various specialisms) is consequently colonized and colonizing. The idea of design’s contribution to the creation of economic imaginaries is supported by many, especially Guy Julier (see chapter 2) who has made the direct link between design and neoliberalism, but also by Boehmert and Elzenbaumer to name but a few, for its possible contribution to the creation of new economic imaginaries responding to Haiven’s call (see chapter 2).

In a recent article, Fabienne Denoual (2020) attempts to define the profile of the designer of the Anthropocene. The author describes the different stages through which the designer would go when confronted with the awareness of the Anthropocene; design (and designers) also enters a crisis and, indeed, is itself called to a profound metamorphosis. “The designer is first crushed, then he examines the possibilities, he looks for possible entries and, among them, he goes in search of the best one (...) The designer of the Anthropocene would therefore start by slowing down, because he would need time to understand, to examine each of the terms of the problem with extreme attention. He would start by researching, looking to see what economic model would stop destroying the habitability of the Earth. He would then discover the concept of resilience (...) would understand that the more complex a society is, the less resilient it is and that, consequently, he would have to contribute by his action to simplify the ways of life (...). But he would soon understand

#### Image 3.1

Via Campesina 2022. International day of Peasant Struggle.  
Source: <https://viacampesina.org/>

that even low growth would continue to cross the earth's thresholds (...) In short, the designer would understand that metamorphosis requires a new paradigm: degrowth" (Denoual, 2020, p. 45).

In the face of the Anthropocene, then, there is a growing awareness that the call for sustainable development, which still sees economic growth as part of the development of human progress, has done little to avoid recent negative environmental or social trends. The lack of critical thinking and political vision, but above all the precariousness, makes the task of designers even more difficult. Perhaps it is appropriate to speak of design activism (Clarke 2013; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Julier, 2013; Thorpe, 2012) for those who question the deep roots of the status quo. But what is activism and what would be activist design? Rather than social designer, the term design activist seems more appropriate; you are either in the growth narrative or you are trying to get out of it. All design is social, and all design is political. In the face of the Anthropocene, perhaps we need a generalized activist design rather than a Design for Social Innovation? Design that actually does politics? A semblance of an answer would be to say that today an activist designer would be a designer who opposes the doctrine of growth with all that it implies in terms of (colonial) discourse on development (sustainable or not).

Denoual (2020) speaks about a designer "objectant" (a notion proposed by Latour); designers of the Anthropocene would therefore adopt an active reflexive approach, aiming to resist, slow down and make people hesitate. In this sense, Rigot and Strayer (2020) propose a return to the 1970s and in particular the year 1972, as a pivotal moment in the history of design when "it seemed conceivable that design thinking would not be subordinated or instrumentalized by the dogma of growth" (p.37). Indeed, they consider that the 70's would offer a very relevant point of view to position design and economy in the face of collapse. Through a re-evaluation of Meadows's report and a re-reading of Maldonado and Papanek, the authors propose the idea of a design working towards the habitability of the world involving an economy of resources and not of growth.

The contribution of Papanek and Maldonado is judicious in its critical aspect of design practice and its contribution at the social level. Like a growing number of design theorists, the authors emphasize the need for a rapprochement between economics and design

(Heskett, 2017; Boehnert, 2018; Julier, 2017). They examine this hypothesis through a re-evaluation of the Meadows report, on the one hand, and a re-reading of Maldonado and Papanek, on the other. Two proposals should be taken into consideration: Papanek's proposal, which consists of a cessation of the designer's activity, and Maldonado's idea of "speranza progettuale", of a design that can lead a revolution through progettazione. According to Rigot and Strayer (2020) the designer of the Anthropocene is by definition an activist. According to Papanek's proposal, a halt in the designer's activity would in itself be activism; the Anthropocene designer would thus learn to take his time, in line with Denoual's proposal of the designer "objectant". This is in line with Hartmut Rosa and William Scheuerman's (2009) idea of social acceleration due to Capitalism. However, the activist designer cannot afford to adopt the nihilistic attitude criticized by Maldonado (1972) in which a design disengagement contributes to the collapse of our society, in a form of impotence and indifference in the face of the mercantile and liberal economy. A re-actualization of the notion of "speranza progettuale" put forward by Maldonado would therefore be necessary.

Fuad-Luke (2009), scoped the broad territory of design and activism, acknowledging that activism is focused around contemporary social, environmental and political issues, and seeing how current design theory and practice sit within the sustainability debate. In what could be considered a "short history of alternative design movements" (see graphic) we intentionally start from the 1960s/early 1970s trying to integrate it with the history of the neo-materialist movements elaborated earlier (see section 3.1.1) and trace their influence on the evolution of the said alternative design movements. Indeed, this period was one in which some designers realigned themselves towards more altruistic goals after the so-called "economic boom" of the 1950s, and the rise of Good Design in England, Bel Design in Italy or Good Form in Germany by governments and their design agencies.

These were replaced by radical alternative design movements in the late 1960s; the Italian Radical Design and Anti-Design movements which criticized the rationalist approach and challenged the role of design in consumerism. Fuad-Luke acknowledges that the reality of the downside of the consumer economy began to be felt when the scale of global environmental problems, coupled with the oil crisis

of the mid-1970s and the general decline of European manufacturing, was felt. The same period also saw the publication of Herbert's Simon "Science of the Artificial" (1969) and Victor Papanek's "Design for the real world" (1972), both of which are considered fundamental to alternative design discourses. For him, Simon and Papanek are frequently cited by those who wish to highlight the important contribution that design makes and can make to contemporary issues of societal development and environmental stability. Over the last two decades (2000-present) there has been a significant development of currents trying to challenge the status quo — concerned with social, economic, and environmental problems (Julier, 2013; Thorpe, 2012). Several design approaches are emerging to challenge the sustainability agenda and go beyond eco-efficiency. Through the analysis over a sample group of publications between 1971 and 2015 Cetin (2016) distinguishes between four distinct topics in design activism discourse; social issues, economic issues, political issues, and environmental issues. Most arguments within design activism discourse neglect to challenge the established economic and political aspects of the design profession (Fry, 2010). Cetin concludes by considering that (activist) designers must recognize interdependency of social, environmental, economic, and political issues. The autonomy of design profession (and its precarity) emerges here as the main obstacle in order to sustain projects recognizing the intertwining of these issues (Julier, 2008; Margolin, 2007; Elzenbaumer, 2013; Balamir, 2021).

Permaculture could provide some responses to such a lack of autonomy; speaking of design activism Fuad-Luke also takes into consideration permaculture and movements like slow food or transition. Permaculture is seen as a particular form of ecological design/design activism. Permaculture design, especially in terms of vocabulary, is moving from a very specific use of landscape design to a much more general use. "It should be made clear at the outset that I see permanent agriculture as a complete, valuable, safe and sustainable energy system. Permaculture, as defined here, claims to be a designed agriculture, so that the species, composition, arrangement and organization of plants and animals are the central factor. In this sense, it is not a gardening book. (Mollison, 1988). It is defined here as a set of design principles centered on whole systems thinking. Permaculture uses these principles in a growing number of areas from regenerative agriculture to rewilding to community resiliency.

ce. Most recently, Cassel & Cousineau (2018) make the connection between design and permaculture. They argue that the formulation of permaculture as a design discipline can be partially credited to Mollison's reading of Papanek. They also consider that Mollison has made many contributions to Systemic Design, including easy-to-remember lists of ethics and guiding principles; a vocabulary of categories for discussing interactions; a toolkit of design methods for selecting and assembling systems of elements; holistic design processes; and some ideas for designing agroecological and social systems. However, this exchange of ideas could go both ways, and design could help address current permaculture challenges "including forming stable goals, evaluating appropriate technology, engaging stakeholders and launching sustainable projects".

Similarly, this same permaculture has influenced and inspired the Transition Town movement (see section 3.1.1) which in turn has influenced the birth of Transition Design (Irwin, 2015). Speaking about Service Design and Design for Social Innovation, Irwin proposes "Transition Design as a third new approach". It is based upon longer-term visioning in order "to address twenty-first-century wicked problems such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, depletion of natural resources, and the widening gap between rich and poor" (2015, p. 229). The main difference with other activist design approaches, in particular Design for Social Innovation, is that Transition Design proposes a long-term commitment of designers in addressing wicked problems such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, crime, poverty, pollution, etc. Transition Design argues that entire socio-economic-technical-political systems must transition since the complex wicked problems confronting humans in the 21st century are systems problems. The new approach calls for compelling future visions as a requisite of societal transition by reframing in a first step wicked problems within large spatio-temporal contexts.

Therefore, Transition Design is concerned with three kinds of systems in particular: (1) living systems i.e., the environment; (2) socio-technical systems defined as tangles of people, technology, and the built world; (3) wicked problems, which are systems problems. Like for natural systems Transition Design acknowledges the importance of adopting a slow pace and knowledge in order to achieve resilience. A three-phased approach is proposed for applying them

to design interventions. Thus, in the face of the Anthropocene, a dual figure of an activist and resilient (autonomous) designer emerges. An activist designer acknowledging collapse while adopting in the ideation of new resilient ways of life — starting with his own with a view to his own economic autonomy — an attitude of slowing down that would follow (like in Permaculture) the rhythms of natural systems.

## 3.2 Design & Common(s): A Post-Capitalist Design

### 3.2.1 *The Power of Common(s): Looking beyond Capitalism*

Commons are habitually defined as “shared resources that are vulnerable to social dilemmas” (Hess & Ostrom 2007). Originally, the theme of the Commons dealt with what Ostrom (1990) called Common Pool Resources (CPR); shared natural resources or traditional Commons that are often subject to overuse and overconsumption. A situation that Hardin (1968) refers to as the “tragedy of the Commons” to represent the environmental degradation to be expected when many individuals use a scarce resource in common; claiming that the freedom of the Commons automatically leads to negligence, overconsumption and ultimately the ruin of shared resources. In opposition to Hardin’s assumptions —which has become a reference to describe diverse issues in numerous fields— and this idea of tragedy, Ostrom showed that forms of governance other than privatization or statism are possible, and that they are concretely implemented by communities in order to protect and maintain the shared resources entrusted to them.

From concrete observations, Ostrom developed an analytical and institutional framework for the observation of the Commons; she identifies eight necessary design principles to constitute a credible explanation for the persistence of CPRs. She does not consider goods for themselves, but in their relation to the social groups that participate in their production or maintenance. The Commons are not particular goods, but also systems of rules for collective action. What is then open to sharing is not just a resource, but a particular social arrangement; consequently, its preservation requires awareness of the social interactions that enable this sharing. A second theme of the Commons revolves around the New Commons whose emergence corresponds to the rise of the network society and the internet; free software, collectively constructed as shareable and open resources, as well as Creative Commons licenses, participate in its development (Hess 2008; Hess & Ostrom 2007). New and

open Commons are mainly intangible and cumulative resources, such as knowledge and digital resources, which are not depleted by rivalry or overconsumption. However, as with natural Commons, digital Commons (even if they appear to be infinitely reproducible at marginal cost) face risks of degradation and containment strategies (Boyle, 2003).

A third conception — on which we want to focus in this section— identifies Commons as activist/political. It deals with Commons not as shared resources but rather as a relational quality. An important focus of this strand is to identify alternative means for the provisioning and governance of Commons, i.e., means that go beyond the market or the state. Here, Commons are seen as a driving principle for social, ecological, economic and political change; a principle for alternative ways of living in a post/non-capitalist system (Bollier & Helfrich 2019; Bollier, 2014; Coriat & Bauwens, 2015; Bauwens, 2009; Bauwens et al., 2019; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Midnight Notes, 1990; Federici 2011, 2019; Harvey, 2012; Linebaugh, 2014; Dardot & Laval, 2014). Capitalism would be at the very origin of its own fall because of the spontaneous rise of collaborative production using network technology (Rifkin, 2014). Mason speaks about “the educated and connected human being” as “a new agent of change in history” (2016, p. xvii). These current focusses more on the processes of commoning; how to create, sustain and govern Commons. It also deals with topics such as new forms of enclosures, struggles and social justice, or the reproductive labor necessary to care for Commons.

An approach to Commons that focuses only on resource sharing leads indeed to a neglect of important political aspects. In particular, some criticize Ostrom’s “developmentalist” approach, which is said to have been part of the neoliberal project of the Reagan administration « between the delegitimization of the modernizing, technocratic and state-centered development model stemming from the New Deal, and the promotion of a new, alternative model favoring a convergence between the market and the customary practices of local communities called upon to adapt to the latter” (Sauvêtre, 2018, p.82). Sauvêtre also considers that the “Ostromian Commons perspective was remarkably well-suited to be enlisted in a joint operation to weaken the southern states, and to transfer financial responsibility to local communities, under the guise of empowerment” (p.95).

“Anti-capitalist Commons, then, should be conceived as both autonomous spaces from which to reclaim control over the conditions of our reproduction, and as bases from which to counter the processes of enclosure and increasingly disentangle our lives from the market and the state. Thus, they differ from those advocated by the Ostrom School, where Commons are imagined in a relation of coexistence with the public and with the private (...) already the Commons we build should enable us to gain more power with regard to capital and the state and embryonically prefigure a new mode of production, no longer built on a competitive principle, but on the principle of collective solidarity” (Federici & Caffentzis, 2014; p. 1101). Federici and Caffentzis here coin the term anti-capitalist Commons in order to prevent them from being coopted by Capitalism through its processes of commodification. They also clearly adopt an anarchist perspective operating a demarcation from the conception of Ostrom by discarding the possibility of coexistence with the state and the private sector.

This recalls the work of Bookchin (2006), theorist of social ecology and communalism. Social ecology articulates both socialist and ecological thought in order to bring society within the framework of ecological analysis. For him, almost all ecological problems are social problems (Bookchin, 2011); he therefore rejects the dualism between nature (defined as first nature) and society (defined as second nature) common in modern thought and analyses their interdependence, interpenetration and differentiation within the same natural process (Bookchin, 1986). For Bookchin, the industrial revolution constitutes a key period in history describing this opposition between society and nature; that of the formation of a class society turned towards exploitation. For this Bookchin (2015) proposes Communalism and its concrete political dimension, libertarian municipalism —where in which municipal communities, democratically plan and manage their affairs through popular assembly—, as a political alternative capable of overcoming the causes of the destruction of nature to achieve an ecological society.

Bollier (2014), ironically speaks of a rediscovery of the Commons, as they have never disappeared for hundreds of millions of people around the world, particularly in the global South; communal property systems continue to exist in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa and among indigenous peoples in Latin America

(Linebaugh, 2012). Federici & Caffentzis (2014) speak of large-scale social formations that in pre-colonial context “were continent-wide.” In this sense Bauwens & Niaros (2017) considers that “there seems to exist an increasing consensus that we are going through a ‘value crisis’ and that a new value regime must be invented. This crisis is characterized by an increased capacity to create common value through Commons-based peer production and other practices of the collaborative economy” (p.2). According to political theorist Massimo De Angelis (2017) Commons in recent years have been used as an organizational model of struggles by different movements joining the idea Dardot and Laval (2014) in considering the Commons as a political principle in expanding. Commons could be understood as a socio-ecological system structured by alternative value practices to build alternative futures; “It is clearly a movement that, together with social and ecological justice and a good life, also has the expansion of resilience as a goal” (de Angelis, 2017, p.340). Similarly, Escobar (2015) assumes that the Common(s) could be the link between all these different transition narratives (what was called neomaterialist movements) and visions that try to think beyond the logic of development or growth contrasting with solutions like sustainable development or green economy (see section 3.3.1). In this sense, we can now speak of a global movement of the common directed against neoliberalism in all its aspects, whose unity is based on the idea of opposition to a rationality that is itself global (Sauvêtre & Taylan, 2019).

Indeed, there have constantly been Commons outside of Capitalism that have played a key role in the class struggle, feeding the radical imagination as well as the bodies of many commoners (De Angelis, 2007). De Angelis (2017) thus identifies identify the process of commonization, as an alternative to the dominant process of commodification and distinguishes between the common goods and Commons; the common goods (or commonwealth) — being only an element of the Commons seen as specific social systems—, the commoners (social subjects) and commoning as the activity of doing in common. Similarly, feminist economic geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham, developed a suite of complementary techniques for use in research specifically designed to cultivate more diverse, people and environment centered economies; what they call “community economies.”

The approach of community economies challenges the conventional use of the economy as a formal system of production of goods and monetary exchange, as well as the idea of separation between economy and ecology. It promotes the economy as diverse practices rather than a single economic system, i.e., Capitalism by focusing on commoning as a process in order to “take back the economy” (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). The diverse economies framing they propose, broadens the conception of economy beyond its representation as “an ordered machine that governs our lives”. As a first step toward reframing the economy propose “The Iceberg Model”. The emerged part symbolizes the economic activities that are visible in mainstream economics and regularly reported as making up a “capitalist” economy. The submerged part, on the other hand, contains “a range of people, places, and activities that contribute to our well-being” that usually are not portrayed as core economic activities. This first step allows us to visualize work, business, market, property and finance from the perspective of Commons and communities.



Image 3.2

Gibson Graham et al., (2013). The Diverse Economies Iceberg. Source: [www.communityeconomies.org](http://www.communityeconomies.org)

### 3.2.2 *Released/Commoner Design(er)*

Commodities and Commons are two diametrically opposed notions. The former are goods that circulate on the basis of exchange, while the latter are shareable goods. If design in its “classic” political economy is considered in relation to the production of commodities, what would be its role when dealing with Commons? A first draft answer would be to consider the relationship of design to the management of Commons seen as common goods i.e., resources; natural resources in the case of “traditional Commons” or cultural one in the case of “New Commons”. As shown in the previous section, Ostrom’s conceptual innovation is to understand the Commons as self-organized, non-hierarchical institutions of collective action and governance, concretely implemented by communities in order to protect and maintain the shared resources entrusted to them; this clearly distinguishes the Commons from state and private spheres/institutions. More importantly she defines Commons as social relations since she does not consider goods for themselves, but their relation to the social groups that participate in their production or maintenance. Considered as a social relationship, the Commons become a kind of process; what Peter Linebaugh (2014) describes in the act of commoning, i.e., doing in common. In this case one might be tempted to define design as commoning/designing in common.

As shown above, a third conception identifies the Commons as an activist/political process that resists the commodification and enclosure processes specific to Capitalism. By adopting this broader perspective, the instances of commoning activity appear, as de Angelis (2017) states it, to build common systems that are mutually supporting, proliferating and reinforcing each other. The anti-capitalist Commons (Caffentzis and Federici 2014) thus become a kind of strategic vision for a political project aimed at shaping counter-power. Would it be possible, then, to conceive design in such a scenario? A design as commoning that would help build alternatives to the capitalist system?

In view of the overlapping challenges of the Anthropocene, Boehnert, (2018) argues that design could engage with heterodox economics in order to reverse the logics of neoclassical/neoliberal economics; thus, design could “contribute to economic transitions with conceptualizing, modeling, mapping, framing, and other future

making practices.” Designers could in this case commit to creating diverse economies — to use Gibson-Graham’s terms — by supporting grassroots/neomaterialist movements (described in section 3.1.1), contributing to the process of “taking back the economy.”

Recently, the relationship between Commons and design has been investigated (Elzenbaumer, 2013, 2014; Balamir, 2017, 2021; Björgvinsson, 2014; Marttila, et al. 2014; Teli, 2015; Teli et. al, 2020). In the case of Participatory Design, it has been considered with regard to the concept of infrastructuring in relation to processes of commoning —engaging with grassroots movements that challenge the status quo— and institutioning —engaging with institutions— informing new discourses on participation. In the case of the Global South, these processes seem to be difficult to implement in view of the conflicts that generally oppose the populations in front of the authoritarian derives of the states. Balamir (2017) proposes the figure of a designer commoner engaging in peer-to-peer production/ designing, thus creating value in common (Bauwens, 2008) in order to escape what he calls the commodity-machine — using the term first coined by Foster (2002) —.

“Whenever the Commons are discussed in the context of design, the discourse tends to privilege certain aspects of the theory as proposed by authors such as Ostrom or the P2P Foundation. While these sources provide some useful guidance and rules that are readily applicable by designers to their professional practices, the lack of inclusion of other perspectives risks leaving some significant political aspects unaddressed in theory and practice” (Elzenbaumer et. al, 2016).

Thus, Bianca Elzenbaumer, Kim Trogal and Valeria Graziano suggest to engage in a deeper analysis of the political economy of design by considering that the “Common” — from a Marxist-autonomist perspective (Hardt & Negri, 2009) — forces designers (and creative workers in general) to rethink their relationship to work (or design labor) by considering the two parameters of time and livelihood. Indeed, the time of the Common is slow compared to the time of the project, where designers are called upon to produce quickly in order to satisfy the imperatives of the market. A different conceptualization of time would therefore be required. This leads us, according to the three researchers, to question our own livelihood.

Considering the processes of blurring between professional and personal life, as well as the processes of precarization enacted by neoliberalism, the questions posed by the latter seem to be entirely legitimate. We here consider a vision in which time and space are completely disconnected from the market. According to them, producing differently would not be enough; rather, design should engage in building networks “beyond localism” — talking about the potential of digital tools and technology — in order to build an effective counterpower. However, as they add, this design is yet to be invented.

### **Ecological Crisis**

*Bipolar/Guilty Design(er)*

### **Value(s) Crisis/Growth**

*Entangled/Precarious Design(er)*

### **Imagination Crisis/**

### **(Un)Sustainable Development**

*Colonial/Colonized Design(er)*

### **Neomaterialist Movements**

*Activist/Resilient Design(er)*

*Papanek, Maldonado/Permaculture, Transition Design*

### **Commons/Community Economies**

*Released/Commoner Design(er)*

*P2P production, (low-tech)/Participatory Design (commoning)*

### **Radical Imagination/**

### **Epistemologies of the South**

*Rooted/Emancipatory Design(er)*

*Dig where you stand, Autonomous Design/Prefigurative Design*

#### **Image 3.3**

Graphic Visualization of the steps of the Desk-Research. Personal elaboration.

## 3.3 Unlocking Imaginaries: A Southern Perspective on Design

### 3.3.1 *Epistemologies of the South*

Faced with the idea of a crisis of imaginaries, we here would like to focus on the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, critical thinker, who among others dealt with issues such as the epistemology of modern sciences, social movements of the Global South and multiculturalism. In his book “Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide,” Santos (2016) proposes the concept of “cognitive injustice” described as the failure to recognize of alternative forms of knowledge and life; since the understanding of the world exceeds the western, hegemonic one. He argues that Western domination has profoundly marginalized knowledge and wisdom that had been in existence in the global South. For him it would be imperative to recover and valorize the epistemological diversity of the world. The author takes up the challenge of proposing the epistemological foundations of a global, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal critical theory for the moment. Sousa Santos criticizes the Western hegemonic epistemology (including critical projects that originate from Western experience such as Marxism) and provides both analytical and conceptual parameters, for an anti-hegemonic ecology of knowledge. Indeed, he considers that there is no global justice without global cognitive justice explaining that the emancipatory transformation of the world may follow narratives that are not considered by the Western tradition.

The failure of recognizing cognitive injustice hides what Santos identifies as the major problem of the first decades of the twenty-first century, i.e., the incapacity to recognize the permanence of what he calls an abyssal line. This line would be dividing metropolitan from colonial societies decades after the end of historical colonialism. He believes that the abyssal line divides social reality so that whatever lies on the other side of the line remains invisible or irrelevant. His work is a critique of The European universalism which generates generalizations especially in the social sciences, to

the extent that they take into account only the social reality of metropolitan side of the line. The concept of abyssal line joins here the theory of “Peripheral Capitalism” of Samir Amin speaking about a “Periphery” that would not be able to catch up the “Center” in the context of a capitalist world-economy because of the system’s inherent polarization. He also explains that the most significant issue caused by the abyssal line is the collapse of social emancipation into social regulation in metropolitan societies. Consequently, Santos proposes to reinvent emancipation considering that we are facing a modern problem that cannot be solved in modern terms. Santos claims that modern science, particularly modern social sciences, including critical theories, have never acknowledged the existence of the abyssal line and are part of the project of Western modernity. Modern social sciences have conceived of humanity as a homogeneous whole, issue de Enlightenment construction of “universal” humanity inhabiting the (metropolitan) side of the line and hence as wholly subjected to the tension between regulation and emancipation. “Of course, modern science did acknowledge the existence of historical colonialism based on foreign territorial occupation, but it did not recognize colonialism as a form of sociability that is an integral part of capitalist and patriarchal domination, and which, therefore, did not end when historical colonialism ended” (de Sousa Santos, 2016; p.19).

With the notion of the notion of epistemicide (present in the title) Santos joins Santiago Castro-Gómez and his zero-point hubris (2005, 2021); consequently, epistemicide means the murder of knowledge; “Unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinated culture, hence the death of the social groups that possessed it (...) In the most extreme cases, such as that of European expansion, epistemicide was one of the conditions of genocide.” (de Sousa Santos, 2014; p.92). This concept of epistemicide is central since “it involves the destruction of the social practices and the disqualification of the social agents that operate according to such knowledges” (p. 153).

In “A manifesto for Good Living” Santos evokes Buen Vivir, Ubuntu, Food Sovereignty and other movements to speak about the Global South as a homogeneous entity, a “we” fighting against the same obstacles of “Capitalism among humans and between humans and nature, colonialism, patriarchy, fetishism of commodities, monocul-

tures of knowledge, the linear time of progress, naturalized inequalities, the dominant scale, and the productivism of economic growth and capitalist development. Santos considers the Global South not a geographical concept but rather as a metaphor for the human suffering caused by Capitalism and colonialism on the global level; a South wants to speak for itself and eliminate the (abyssal) line and fighting for a life with dignity. “Our context is the urgency of a life with dignity as a condition for everything else to be possible. We do know that only a civilizational change can guarantee it, but we also know that our urgency can bring about such change” (p.8).

In another book, Santos (2018) develops his concept of “Epistemologies of the South”, in which he outlines a theoretical, methodological and pedagogical framework for challenging the dominance of Eurocentric thinking. “The aim of the Epistemologies of the South is to enable oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms, for only in this way can they change it according to their own aspirations” (p.1). Santos proposes to arrive at a postabyssal thinking that goes beyond the metropolitan/colonial binary with 3 chapters understood as 3 layers of problems representing the successive degrees of separation between the Epistemologies of the South and the North:

(1) Post-Abyssal Epistemologies, in which Santos explains some fundamental concepts of the Epistemologies of the South and analyses “struggle” in its specific epistemological meaning and potential. The concept of struggle against domination, exclusion, discrimination and repression is indeed central to the Epistemologies of the South. Santos explains that in Eurocentric social theory (apart from Marxism), the theme of social struggle and resistance has always been treated as a mere sub-theme of the social question, with the emphasis on social order rather than social conflict. This difficulty is, according to him, visible in the work of Bourdieu (1980) and his concept of ‘habitus’ explaining that all struggle must begin with the struggle against oneself. According to Santos, this difficulty Bourdieu has in reconciling his theory with social struggles has a deep root common to all Eurocentric social sciences based on Northern Epistemologies. The problem is the epistemological privilege accorded to the social sciences as scientific knowledge completely distinct from other modes of knowledge circulating in society. This distinction is rooted in the idea of rigor and the search for objectivity. According

to Santos, there are two main types of struggles possible, those that deal with abysmal exclusions and those that deal with non-abysmal exclusions, i.e., those that treat the symptoms and remain on the surface and those that question the deep origins of exclusion. One thing is certain: struggles are constructed and lived by those who participate in them. Therefore, the knowledge, discourses and repertoires promoted by international NGOs, rather than emerging from the struggles, are imposed from outside and take precedence over the lived experience of the social groups that are actually struggling; privileging types of struggles that do not affect the regimes of domination by proposing pseudo-solutions, almost always formulated in a language far removed from the lived experience of the oppressed. In this sense, Santos asks the question: "Can recognition precede cognition?" (See section 5.3 on the case of the Jemna oasis).

(2) Postabyssal methodologies consider the theoretical, methodological and conceptual reconstructions required by Southern Epistemologies. Santos asks how it would be possible to produce credible and reliable knowledge using methods that have little to do with those favored by modern science. Indeed, he sees colonialism as a co-creation, but an asymmetrical co-creation, and therefore decolonization requires decolonizing both the knowledge of the colonized and the knowledge of the colonizer. To be coherent and effective, decolonizing thought and action must also be anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal. It must also recognize that the Epistemologies of the South have no center, "it is the centrality of struggles against capitalist, colonial and patriarchal domination wherever they take place." Santos also explains that Epistemologies of the South are effective and flourish in the social fields where struggles take place and thus outside the sites of academic debate; they call for dialogues and interactions between counter-hegemonic knowledges, be they postabyssal scientific or craft. He then proposes a process of methodological decolonization that requires a shift from 'knowing about' to 'knowing with'. He calls for the removal of the barrier between scientists and laymen to allow for greater epistemic exchange and equality;

(3) Post-abyssal pedagogies; Santos explains that intercultural translation has a central role to play in the Epistemologies of the South. It is a crucial tool for reciprocal learning between different oppres-

sed social groups who, in different regions and at different times, resist and struggle against the different forms of domination to which they are subjected. Post-Abyssal pedagogies are thus converted into a kind of new common sense for broader, counter-hegemonic subaltern publics engaged in progressive transformative practices. Santos identifies two types of globalization: neoliberal hegemonic globalization and counter-hegemonic globalization, i.e., the globalization of social movements that struggle against neoliberalism, colonialism and patriarchy. The World Social Forum (WSF) is, according to him, a living example of this counter-hegemonic globalization that calls for an intercultural translation. Santos cites the example of Via Campesina to explain that this intercultural translation gives rise to new articulations; opportunities for inter-knowledge and inter-communication that led to an intercontinental articulation of struggles between movements fighting against domination. At the intellectual level, Santos values the work of Paulo Freire and his pedagogy of the oppressed, as well as that of Orlando Fals Borda on Participatory Action Research (PAR), which he considers essential in the formulation of Epistemologies of the South. The proposals of Paulo Freire and Fals Borda were formulated independently, but they responded to the same problems and proposed convergent solutions. Both Freire and Borda were looking for solutions that would strengthen the resistance of peasants and the urban poor, and both believed that education and knowledge were key to these solutions. For Santos, the Epistemologies of the North were translated into institutions of knowledge production and transmission such as education systems and pedagogies, which continued to produce and reproduce the abyssal line. He therefore proposes to move from the University to Pluriversity; Santos refers to the concept of pluriverse “a world where many worlds fit”, as the Zapatista movement puts it (Escobar, 2018). The concept of Pluriversality is here proposed by the alter-globalization movements as a shared project based on the multiplicity of ways of worlding (Kothari et al., 2019).

These 3 layers of problems could be seen as 3 levels of interventions to decolonize design practices. (1) The designer should learn to share/experience the struggles of the people they intend to support and not to help; the idea of external help being problematic in itself. (2) the designer should learn to listen in order to understand the struggles of the lay people and learn from the lived experience of the oppressed, thus escaping the logic of the object and focusing in-

stead on the situations. This analysis is in line with Vasquez (2017) who asks whether design can be thought of as a mode of listening. (3) the designer should seek to strengthen resistance, particularly by promoting intercultural translation through the production of counter-hegemonic education and knowledge.

### *3.3.2 Rooted/Emancipatory Design(er) and Radical Imagination*

As explained in chapter 2, the “classical” history of design is linked to industrial/Western countries and current design practice in the South is mainly based on perspectives received from the North. In short, “Design came to name modernity’s way of worlding the world” (Vazquez, 2017). Escobar (2018) believes that “critical design studies are becoming pluriversal” as “a domain of thought and action in which design might function as a political technology for a better, and different, world, or worlds” (p.141). He thus calls attention to the fact that: (1) an ever-expanding number of designers (mostly in the Global North) are today engaging “more deeply than ever with the interrelated crises of climate, energy, poverty, inequality, and meaning and the momentous questions they pose.” (2) a transnational space (mostly in the Global South) questioning design through the lens of decolonial theories has recently emerged.

Indeed, a growing number of theorists are interested in decolonial theory (Ansari, 2016, 2018; Abdulla et al., 2019; Charlotte-Smith, 2020; Escobar, 2018; Tony Fry & Anne-Marie Willis, 2017; Kalantidou & Fry, 2014; Nussbaum, 2010; Tlostanova, 2017; Tunstall 2013; Schultz, et al. It is also true that in the Global North, new design theories, notably that of Transition Design (Irwin, 2015), provide tangible methodological tools and a framework for a renewal of theory and practice in the face of the complexity of the crises we are experiencing, but these are also recent; we therefore have no real hindsight as to the concrete practice of such a ‘pluriversal’ design, but let us propose a reflection in this direction. A good starting point would be the one of Tony Fry (2017), who in his essay “Design for/by The Global South” aimed to contribute to the development of a paradigmatic shift in how design is understood, transformed and practiced in the Global South. Thinking about such an issue requires according to Fry to reflect not just about design as modernity’s mode of “worlding the world” but also calls to think about design across the “North/South divide” challenging the geopolitics of design that has constituted itself along the modern/colonial divide; recalling the concept of abyssal line proposed by Santos (see section 3.3.1).

“Design (in all its forms) provides a key conduit for the world of the North to be projected at and upon the South as the form of the future to desire and to work toward. In this respect, design was not only an agent of modernity, but continues as a servant of late modernity (...) the seeming utopia of unrestrained consumerism, a promise from the North, is in reality the harbinger of a defuturing nightmare in glittering lights. As such, it is unrealizable, unsustainable and a means to further the inequity that is at the very core of the North/South divide in its geographic, nationally internal and diasporic forms. (...) Any expectation that a design response to the problems of the Global South can simply be rolled out is frankly ridiculous (...) The central issue and project for design of/by and for the South is another kind of ontological designing – one based on the creation of structures of care able to constitute Sustainment. Responding to this imperative means identifying, and finding ways to counter whenever possible, all those forces – material, economic, social, political, cultural and psychological – that defuture. This can only be done by bringing ‘things’ (material and immaterial) into being that care (...) it presents designers in the South with an enormous challenge of imagination (...) this cannot be done with design as it is in its compromised, colonized and contaminated form” (Fry, 2017; pp. 24-29).

Although long, this citation explains how design is instrumental in prolonging the utopia of modernity and development in the Global South; design thus acts as a “beautifier” of defuturing processes. The idea of a design seen as capable of finding responses for the Global South is also discarded. Fry also highlights the significance of the imaginative challenge facing designers in the South. In his book “Crises of imagination: Capitalism, creativity and the Commons” Haiven’s contribution lies in the analysis of creativity and the imagination seen as intimate parts of Capitalism’s functioning (see section 2.3.1); claiming that one should bring them into the heart of our analysis of economic power. Through a re-reading of Marx, Haiven seeks “to sketch what might be called a materialist theory of the imagination” (p.16). Like Foster (2002), Haiven states that in the neoliberal period, creativity has become a big business where arts (and design) are ever more commodified and enclosed; he thus criticizes the so-called Creative Capitalism and its commercialization of the idea of creativity itself as a panacea to the problems of alienation, unfulfilling and precarious work.

Similarly, Haiven and Khasnabish (2010), cite the work of Haraway (1991) who problematized the notion of human-centered imagination but also that of Armstrong and Cardinal (1991) who state that from an indigenous point of view all imagination and creativity is a collaboration between human beings, community, ancestors, future generations, other creatures, spiritual beings and the world itself. They thus defend an understanding of imagination “as always embodied and relational, and recognizing that the radical imagination is a space of encounter, learning and disruption” (p. xix). Haiven argues that real creativity is a collective, common pursuit, and that one should reimagine creativity more broadly to understand the way that the drive to create is a practice of commoning. Haiven thus proposes to investigate the concept of radical imagination defining as a “common imagination” involving three “temporalities”: past (searching for Commons as a historical actuality held in common memory); present (recognizing, valorizing and defending even undercurrent Commons of today); future (acknowledging that the ultimate horizon for humanity beyond Capitalism is the Commons).

Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) also advance a strategy for convoking the radical imagination with social movements by building a reflexive and responsive relationship between the researcher and the movements in question. “The radical imagination is not just about dreaming of different futures. It’s about bringing those possibilities back from the future to work on the present, to inspire action and new forms of solidarity today.” The authors approach radical imagination not as something possessed by individuals but as a collective process, a doing together through shared experiences, languages, stories, ideas, art, and theory. Thus, an effective decolonization of design practices lies in shifting its activity “from being set upon the designers’ agenda to “solve” the problem and “save the world” by designing an artefact or intervention to one that puts the process of designing together at center” (Taboada et al., 2020; p.15). The processes described by Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) are reminiscent of the or those of commoning in Participatory Design (Marttila et al., 2014; Marttila, 2016; Teli, 2015; Teli et al., 2020). They are also reminiscent of the development of prospective-reflexive currents whose rise is more recent and which slightly displace the perspective of Participatory Design, such as Adversarial Design (DiSalvo, 2012) or speculative design (Dunne and Raby, 2013). In particular, these currents draw on feminist and decolonial approaches that

allow them to tool their attention to relational processes such as power dynamics, interpretation or performativity.

One could talk about speculation in design and its recent development; but who is speculating, and for whom? Di Salvo (2016) answers the question by exploring the articulation between prefigurative politics (Commons movements are all about prefiguration) and design. For him in prefigurative design, “the speculation is not so much in the design itself, but rather, in the politics (...) it is not that designers are themselves called upon to speculate, but rather, that designers may be called upon to enable speculation” (p.34). Di-Salvo (2016) recalls the work of Fry (2010) who explores the possible articulations between prefigurative politics and design. Haiven also explains that the concept of “radical” refers to the Latin word “rooted”, where radicalism does not describe a certain set of tactics, strategies or beliefs but speaks to a general understanding that, systems can be changed through incremental institutional reforms.

This leads us to reflect on the concept of a “rooted design”; a design that is not only attached to a specific territory but also to specific situations of struggle and conflict. A rooted Design for/by the South would thus adopt the long-termism proposed by the Transition Design approach (Irwin, 2018), while focusing on the struggles of people and social movements (in the Global South) fighting for the preservation of their livelihood; this rooted Design for/by could thus articulate the approaches of prefigurative design and radical imagination using Commons as a key to reading. In this same direction Escobar (2017, 2018) considers Autonomous Design as a specific case of Design for/by the South originating from the Latin American context; he thus establishes a parallel between Autonomous Design and Transition Design in both the South and the North. Autonomous Design defined as “a design imagination centered on autonomy and the realization of the communal” (Escobar, 2018; p. 186) seems to be the most complete proposal, emerging from a Southern context. Escobar thus suggests that design could be creatively re-appropriated by subaltern communities in support of their struggles to strengthen their autonomy where the role of designers could be constructive in the ontological and political reorientation of design as an element in struggles for autonomy.

In Vazquez (2017) words, this could be the idea of a design “capable of healing, of enabling relationality, of recovering the possibilities of listening to the communal, to the ancestral, of caring and nurturing earth, of enabling the formation and dignification of other worlds of meaning” (p.13). According to Ansari (2018) this could only be done by the colonized since the colonizer have never experienced anything beyond the world-system which make him unable to imagine alternatives.

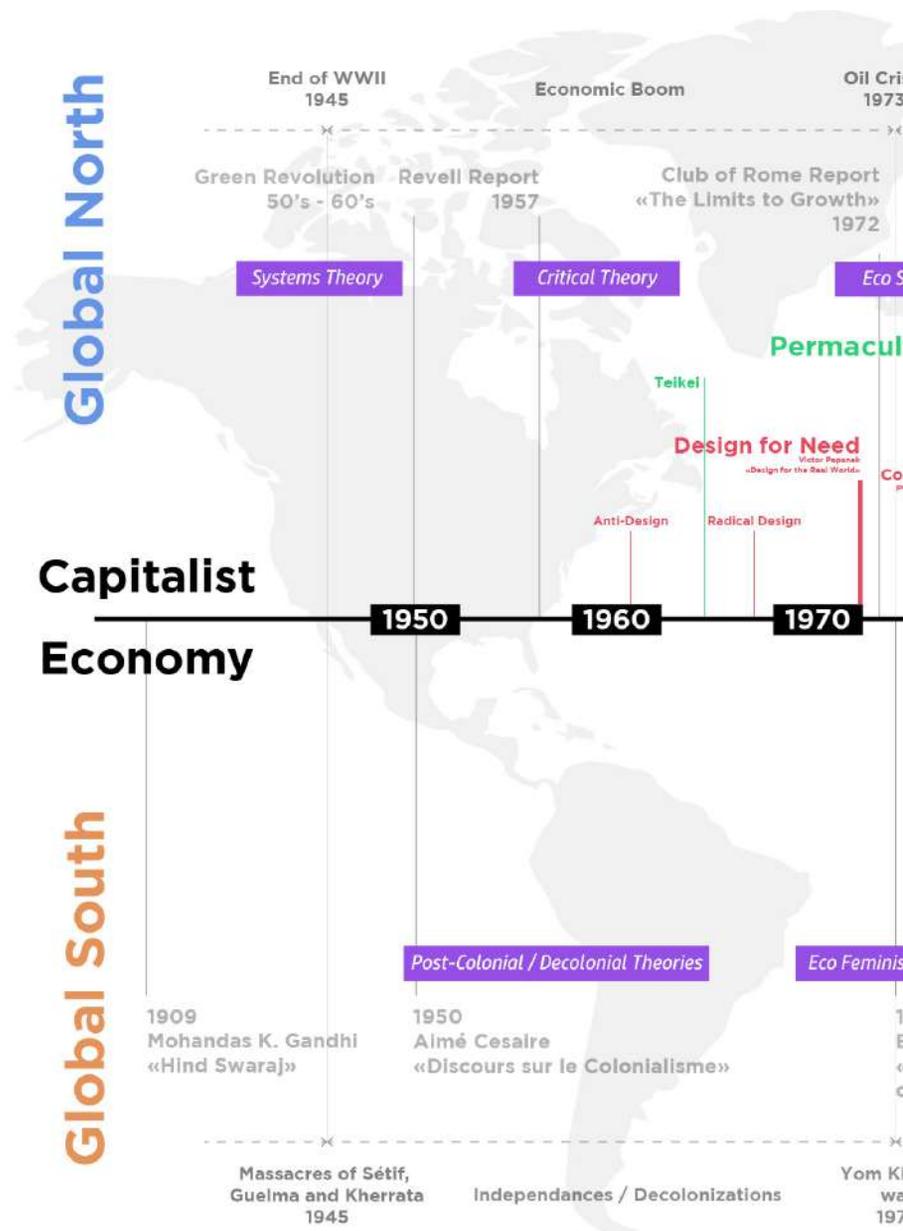
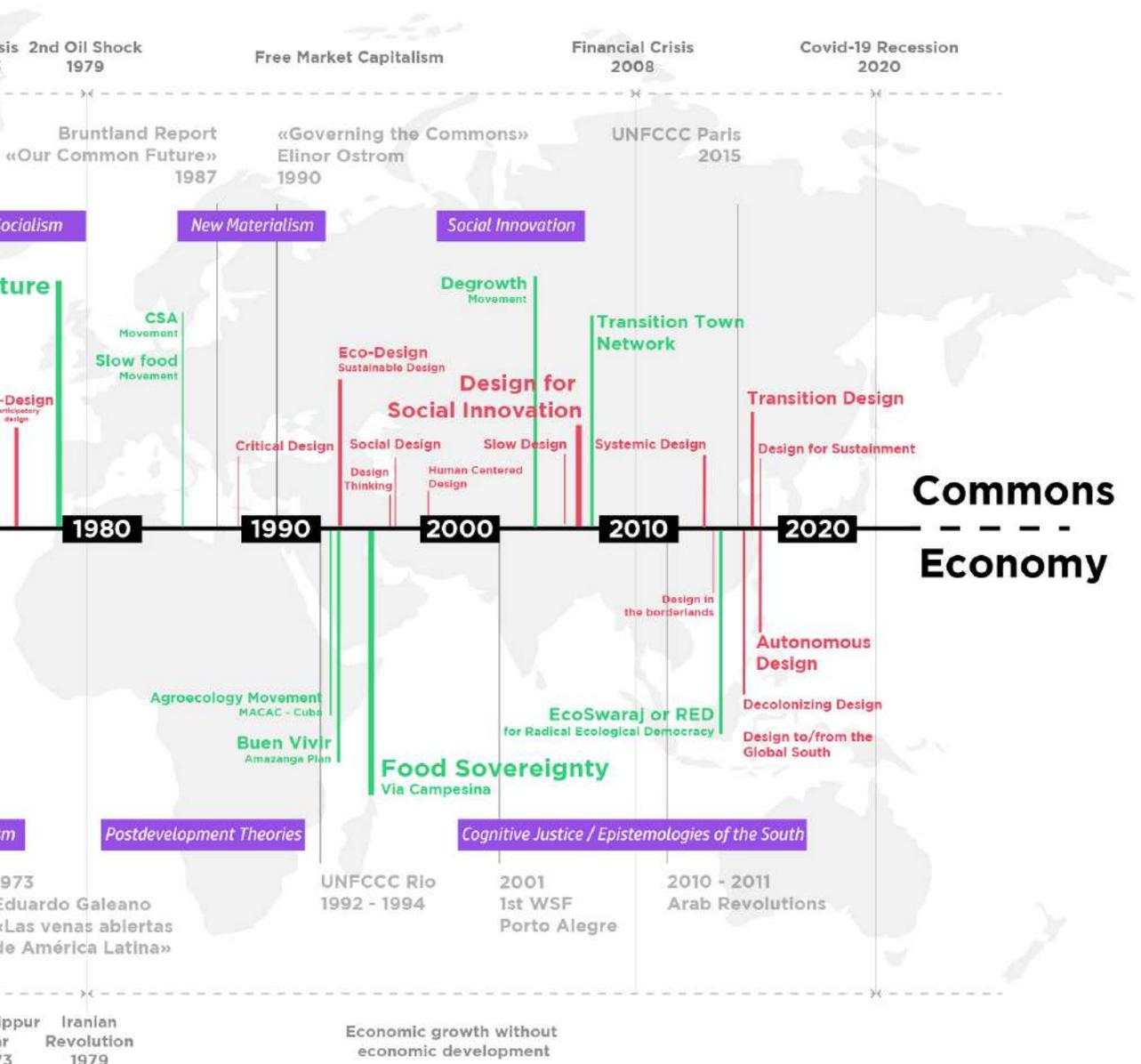


Image 3.4  
Neomaterialist Movements and  
Activist Design Practices in Global  
North and South.  
Personal elaboration.



## References Chapter 3

- Abdulla, D., Ansari, A., Keshavarz, M., Kiem, M., Oliveira, P., Prado, L., Republic, M., Schultz, T. and Australia, G. (2019). A Manifesto for Decolonising Design: The Journal of Futures Studies, 23(3): 129–132
- Ansari, A. (2016). Towards a Design Of, From & With the Global South. Carnegie Mellon University.
- Ansari, A., (2018), What Knowledge for Decolonising the Philosophy of Technology? Distributed, Open Editions, London, pp 185-197
- Balamir, S. (2017). Commoning in postcapitalist design practices. XVI Biennial IASC Conference “Practicing the Commons”, 10-14 June 2017, Utrecht, the Netherlands.
- Balamir, S. (2021). Unsustaining the commodity-machine: Commoning practices in postcapitalist design. Dare.uva.nl. <https://hdl.handle.net/11245.1/41641ebe-104c-4572-9b5f-56f64c9390a1>
- Bauwens, M. (2009). Class and capital in peer production. *Capital & Class*, 33(1), 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030981680909700107>
- Bauwens, M., Kostakis, V., & Pazaitis, A. (2019). Peer to Peer: The Commons Manifesto (Vol. 10). University of Westminster Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvfc53qf>
- Bauwens, M., Niaros, V. (2017). Value in the Commons Economy: Developments in Open and Contributory Value Accounting
- Bauwens, M. (2008). The Political Implications of the Peer-to-Peer Revolution.
- Björgvinsson, E. (2014). The Making of Cultural Commons: Nasty Old Film Distribution and Funding. In *Making Futures: Marginal Notes on Innovation, Design and Democracy*. P. Ehn, E.M. Nilsson and R. Topgaard (eds.). Cambridge: MIT Press. CC:BY-NC.
- Boehnert, J. (2018). Design, Ecology, Politics. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474293860>
- Bohm, D. (1980). Wholeness and the implicate order. Boston.
- Bollier, D., & Helfrich, S. (2019). Free, fair, and alive: the insurgent power of the commons. New Society Publishers.
- Bollier, D. (2014). Think Like a Commoner. A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.
- Bookchin, M. (1986). The modern crisis. New Society Publishers.
- Bookchin, M. (2006). Social ecology and communalism. Ak Press.
- Bookchin, M. (2011). Une société à refaire : vers une écologie de la liberté. Éditions Écosociété.
- Bookchin, M., Bookchin, D., & Taylor, B. (2015). The next revolution: popular assemblies and the promise of direct democracy. Verso.
- Borras, S. (2004). L a V í a C a m p e s i n a An Evolving Transnational Social Movement. TNI Working Paper.
- Borras, S. M., & Franco, J. C. (2009). Transnational Agrarian Movements Struggling for Land and Citizenship Rights. IDS Working Papers, 2009(323), 01-44. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2009.00323\\_2.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2009.00323_2.x).
- Bourdieu, P. (1980). L'identité et la représentation. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, [online] 35(1), pp.63–72. Available at: [https://www.persee.fr/doc/arss\\_0335-5322\\_1980\\_num\\_35\\_1\\_2100](https://www.persee.fr/doc/arss_0335-5322_1980_num_35_1_2100)

[Accessed 14 May 2020].

Caffentzis, G., & Federici, S. (2014). Commons against and beyond capitalism. *Community Development Journal*, 49(suppl 1), i92–i105. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsu006>

Cardinal, D.J., & Armstrong, J.C. (1991). *The Native Creative Process: A Collaborative Discourse between Douglas Cardinal and Jeannette Armstrong*.

Cassel, J., Cousineau, S. (2018). *Permaculture as a Systemic Design Practice*, *Systemic Design, Translational Systems Sciences* 8, Springer Japan.

Castro-Gomez, S. (2005). *La hybris del punto cero: Ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816)* (2nd ed.). Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15hvx8r>

CASTRO-GÓMEZ, S., & ASCHERL, A. (2021). *Critique of Latin American Reason*. Columbia University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/cast20006>

Centemeri, L. (2018). Commons and the new environmentalism of everyday life. *Alternative value practices and multispecies commoning in the permaculture movement*. *Rassegna italiana di Sociologia*, In press. fhal-01773575.

Cetin, O. D. (2016). Design activism from the past to present: A critical analysis of the discourse. *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Design History and Design Studies*. [https://doi.org/10.5151/despro-icdhs2016-04\\_016](https://doi.org/10.5151/despro-icdhs2016-04_016)

Clarke, A. J. (2013). “Actions Speak Louder”: Victor Papanek and the Legacy of Design Activism. *Design and Culture*, 5(2), 151–168. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175470813x13638640370698>

Coriat, B. & Bauwens, M. (2015). *Le retour des communs : la crise de l'idéologie propriétaire*. Les Liens qui libèrent. Paris

Correa, R. (2013). *De la république bananière à la non-république - pourquoi la révolution citoyenne (Utopia)*. Primento Digital Publishing.

D'alisa, G., Demaria, F., & Kallis, G. (2015). *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era*. Routledge.

Dardot, P., & Laval, C. (2014). *Commun : essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle*. La Découverte.

De Angelis, M. (2007). *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital*. Pluto Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18mvp2n>

De Angelis, M. (2017). *Omnia sunt communia on the commons and the transformation to postcapitalism*. Zed Books.

Demaria, F. & Schneider, F. & Sekulova, F. & Martinez-Alier, J. (2013). What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement. *Environmental Values*, 22. 191-215. [10.2307/23460978](https://doi.org/10.2307/23460978).

Denoual, F. (2020). Le designer de l'Anthropocène : vers une éthique de l'habitabilité élargie. *Sciences du Design*, 11, 42-50. <https://doi.org/10.3917/sdd.011.0042>

DiSalvo, C. (2012). “Spectacles and Tropes: Speculative Design and Contemporary Food Cultures.” *Fibreculture: Special Issue on Networked Utopias and Speculative Futures*. Issue 20: 109-122.

DiSalvo, C. (2016). “Design and Prefigurative Politics.” *The Journal of Design Strategies*, Vol 8., No. 1 (2016): 29-35.

Dunne, A., Raby, F. (2013). *Speculative Everything. Design, fiction and social dreaming*. MIT Press, CA, 2013.

Edelman, M. (2005). Bringing the moral economy back in . . . to the study of 21st-century transnational peasant movements. *American Anthropologist*, 107(3), 331–45.

- Elzenbaumer, B. (2014). *Designing Economic Cultures: cultivating socially and politically engaged design practices against procedures of precarisation*. London: Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Elzenbaumer, B., Graziano, V., & Trogal, K. (2016). Introduction: The Politics of Commoning and Design. *DRS2016: Future-Focused Thinking*. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.614>
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (STU-Student edition). Princeton University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rtgw>
- Escobar, A. (2015). Degrowth, postdevelopment, and transitions: a preliminary conversation. *Sustainability Science*, 10(3), 451–462. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-015-0297-5>
- Escobar, A. (2017). Complexity theory and the place of the now. *Cultural Dynamics*, 29(4), 333–339. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374017740460>
- Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* Duke University Press.
- Fals-Borda, O. (1987). The Application of Participatory Action-Research in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 2(4), 329–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026858098700200401>
- Federici, S. (2011). WOMEN, LAND STRUGGLES, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE COMMONS. *WorkingUSA*, 14(1), 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-4580.2010.00319.x>
- Federici, S. (2019). *Le capitalisme patriarcal*. La Fabrique Éditions.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Fry, T. (2010). *Design as Politics*, Berg Pub Ltd.
- Fry, T. (2017). Design for/by “The Global South”. *Design Philosophy Papers*, 15(1): 3-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14487136.2017.1303242>
- Fry, T. and Willis, A.-M. (2017). Design and the Global South. *Design Philosophy Papers*, 15(1), pp.1–2.
- Fuad-Luke A. (2009). *Design Activism: Beautiful Strangeness for a Sustainable World*. Earthscan, London-Sterling, Virginia.
- Gandhi, M. (1909). *Hind Swaraj*. Rajpal & Sons.
- Georgescu-Roegen, N. (1971). *The entropy law and the economic process*. Harvard Univ. Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., Cameron, J., & Healy, S. (2013). *Take back the economy: an ethical guide for transforming our communities*. University Of Minnesota Press.
- Haiven, M. (2014). *Crises of imagination: capitalism, culture and resistance in a post-crash world*. London, England: Zed Books.
- Haiven, M., Khasnabish, A. (2010). What is radial imagination? A special issue. *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, 4(2), 1-37.
- Haraway, D.J. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, D.J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble – making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Hardin, G. (1968). The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science*, 162(3859), 1243–1248. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1724745>
- Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel cities: from the right to the city to the urban revolution*. Verso.
- Heskett, J., Dilnot, C., Boztepe, S., & Poggenpohl, S. H. (2017). *Design and the creation of value*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hess, C. (2008). Mapping the New Commons. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1356835>
- Hess, C., & Ostrom, E. (2007). *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons from Theory to Practice*. The

Mit Press.

Hobsbawm, E. (1994). *The age of extremes: the short twentieth century, 1914-1991*. London Abacus.

Hopkins, R. (2008). *The transition handbook from oil dependency to local resilience*. Cambridge Uit Cambridge Ltd.

Boyle, J. (2003). The Second Enclosure Movement and the Construction of the Public Domain, 66 *Law and Contemporary Problems* 33-74 (Winter 2003)

Available at: <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/lcp/vol66/iss1/2>

Illich, I. (1973). *Energie et équité*. Paris, Éditions Du Seuil.

Irwin, T. (2015). *Transition Design: A Proposal for a New Area of Design Practice, Study, and Research*, Design and Culture. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University.

Irwin, T. (2018). The Emerging Transition Design Approach. *Cuadernos Del Centro de Estudios de Diseño Y Comunicación*, 73. <https://doi.org/10.18682/cdc.vi73.1043>

Jackson, T. (2011). Societal transformations for a sustainable economy. *Natural Resources Forum*, 35(3), 155–164. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-8947.2011.01395.x>

Julier, G. (2008). *Practising Design Culture*. Design, Pedagogy, Research: Leeds 2007, 1.

Julier, G. (2013). *The culture of design*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Julier, G. (2017). *Economies of Design*. *Economies of Design*, 1–224. <https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5018000>

Kalantidou, E. and Fry, T. (2014). *Design in the borderlands*. London: Routledge.

Kothari, A., Demaria, F., & Acosta, A. (2014). Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy. *Development*, 57(3-4), 362–375. <https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2015.24>

Kothari, A., Demaria, F., & Acosta, A. (2014). Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy. Society for International Development.

Kothari, A., Salleh, A., Escobar, A., Demaria, F., & Acosta, A. (2019). *PLURIVERSE: a post-development dictionary*. Tulika Book.

Latouche, S. 2009. *Farewell to Growth*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Laval, C., Sauvêtre, P. & Taylan, F. (2019). *L'alternative du commun*. Hermann. <https://doi.org/10.3917/herm.laval.2019.01>

Linebaugh, P. (2012) Enclosures from the bottom up, in D. Bollier and S. Helfrich, eds, *The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State*, Leveller Press, Amherst, MA, pp. 114 – 124.

Linebaugh, P. (2014). *Stop, thief! : the commons, enclosures and resistance*. Pm Press.

Maldonado, T. (1972). *Environnement et idéologie (vers une écologie critique)*. In Google Books. Union générale d'éditions. [https://books.google.tn/books/about/Environnement\\_et\\_id%C3%A9ologie\\_vers\\_une\\_%C3%A9cologie\\_critique.html?id=LlUqnQAACAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.tn/books/about/Environnement_et_id%C3%A9ologie_vers_une_%C3%A9cologie_critique.html?id=LlUqnQAACAAJ&redir_esc=y)

Margolin, V. (2007). Design, the Future and the Human Spirit. *Design Issues*, 23(3), 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.1162/desi.2007.23.3.4>

Martínez-Torres, M. E., & Rosset, P. M. (2010). La Vía Campesina: the birth and evolution of a transnational social movement. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 149–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150903498804>

Marttila, S. (2016) From Rules in Use to Culture in Use – Commoning and Infrastructuring Practices in an Open Cultural Movement, in Lloyd, P. and Bohemia, E. (eds.), *Future Focused Thinking - DRS International Conference 2016*, 27 - 30 June, Brighton, United Kingdom. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.454>

- Marttila, S., Botero, A., & Saad-Sulonen, J. (2014). Towards commons design in participatory design. Proceedings of the 13th Participatory Design Conference on Short Papers, Industry Cases, Workshop Descriptions, Doctoral Consortium Papers, and Keynote Abstracts - PDC '14 - Volume 2. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2662155.2662187>
- McMichael, A. J., Woodruff, R. E., & Hales, S. (2006). Climate change and human health: present and future risks. *Lancet* (London, England), 367(9513), 859–869. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(06\)68079-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(06)68079-3)
- Meadows, D.H. (1972). *The Limits to growth: a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*. New York: Universe Books.
- Merino, R. (2016). An alternative to “alternative development”? Buen vivir and human development in Andean countries. *Oxford Development Studies*, 44(3), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2016.1144733>
- Metz, T. (2011). Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 11(2), 532–559. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC51951>
- Midnight Notes #10 (1990) – New Enclosures | [libcom.org](http://libcom.org). (1990). <https://libcom.org/article/midnight-notes-10-1990-new-enclosures>
- Mollison, B. (1979). *Permaculture two: Practical design for town and country in permanent agriculture*. Stanley, Australia: Tagari.
- Mollison, B. (1988). *Permaculture: A designer's manual*. (2nd ed.). Sisters Creek, Australia: Tagari.
- Negri, A., & Hardt, M. (2012). *Commonwealth*. In Google Books. Stock. [https://books.google.tn/books/about/Commonwealth.html?id=sR2RBQAAQBAJ&source=kp\\_book\\_description&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.tn/books/about/Commonwealth.html?id=sR2RBQAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y) (Original work published 2009)
- Nussbaum, B. (2010). Is Humanitarian Design the New Imperialism? Does our desire to help do more harm than good? <https://www.fastcompany.com/1661859/is-humanitarian-design-the-new-imperialism>
- Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Papanek, V.J. and Fuller, R.B. (1972). *Design for the real world*. London: Thames And Hudson.
- Parrique, T. (2019, December 16). The political economy of degrowth. [tel.archives-ouvertes.fr](https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-02499463). <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-02499463>
- Patel, R. (2006). The Role of Finance: Spotlight by Local Economy. *Local Economy*, 21(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02690940500517998>
- Rabhi, P. (2010). Pierre Rabhi, un humaniste au service de la terre mère. Michel.
- Rahnema, M., & Bawtree, V. (Eds.) (1997). *The post-development reader*. London: Zed Books.
- Ramose, M. (2003). The ethics of ubuntu. In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *Philosophy from Africa* (pp. 324330). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Ramose, M. (2014). Ubuntu. In G. D'Alisa, F. Demaria & G. Kallis (Eds.). *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era*. London. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. ISBN : 9781138000766
- Rifkin, J. (2014). *The zero marginal cost society: The Internet of Things, the rise of the collaborative commons and the eclipse of capitalism*. St. Martin's Publishing Group.
- Rigot, E. & Strayer, J. (2020). *Retour vers 1972 : rouvrir les possibles pour le design et l'économie face*

- aux effondrements. *Sciences du Design*, 11, 32-41. <https://doi.org/10.3917/sdd.011.0032>
- Rosa, H., & Scheuerman, W. E. (2019). *High-speed society: social acceleration, power, and modernity*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Roux-Rosier, A., R. Azambuja, G. Islam. (2018). *Alternative visions: Permaculture as imaginaries of the Anthropocene*, *Organization* 2018, Vol. 25(4) 550 –572
- Sachs, W. (Eds.) (1992). *The development dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. London : Zed Books.
- Santos, B. S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. New York. Routledge.
- Santos, B. S. (2016). *Epistemologies of the South and the future*. From the *European South: a transdisciplinary journal of postcolonial humanities*. *Archivi del futuro : il postcoloniale, l'Italia e il tempo a venire*, 2016, Issue 1, 17-29
- Santos, B. S. (2018). *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*. Durham; London. Duke University Press.
- Sauvêtre, P. (2018). *Forget Ostrom. From the development commons to the common as social sovereignty*, in S. Cogolati & J. Wouters (eds.), (2018) *Commons and a New Global Governance: Democratic, Institutional and Legal Perspectives*. London, Edward Elgar.
- Schlosberg, D., R. Coles (2015). *The New Environmentalism of Everyday Life: Sustainability, Material Flows, and Movements*, in «*Contemporary Political Theory*», 15, 2, pp. 160-181.
- Schultz, T. (2017). *Design's Role in Transitioning to Futures of Cultures of Repair*. In: A. Chakrabati; D. Chakrabati (eds.), *Research into Design for Communities*. New Delhi: Springer, vol. 2, p. 225-234. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3521-0\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3521-0_19)
- Servigne, P., Stevens, R. (2015). *Comment tout peut s'effondrer. Petit manuel de collapsologie à l'usage des générations présentes*. Editions du Seuil.
- Simon, H. A. (1996). *The sciences of the artificial*. Mit Press.
- Sinaï, A. (2013). *Penser la décroissance*. Presses de Sciences Po. <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.sinaï.2013.01>
- Smith, R. C., & Otto, T. (2020). *Cultures of the Future: Emergence and Intervention in Design Anthropology*. *Design Anthropological Futures*, 19–36. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003085188-3>
- Swyngedouw, E. (2007). *The post-political city*. *Urban Politics Now. Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*. 58-77.
- Taboada, M.B., Rojas-Lizana, S., Dutra, L.X.C. and Levu, A.V.M. (2020). *Decolonial Design in Practice: Designing Meaningful and Transformative Science Communications for Navakavu, Fiji*. *Design and Culture*, 12(2), pp.141–164.
- Teli, M. (2015). *Computing and the Common. Hints of a new utopia in Participatory Design*. *Aarhus Series on Human Centered Computing*, 1(1), 17–20. <https://doi.org/10.7146/aahcc.v1i1.21318>
- Teli, M., Foth, M., Sciannamblo, M., Anastasiu, I., & Lyle, P. (2020). *Tales of Institutioning and Commoning*. *Proceedings of the 16th Participatory Design Conference 2020 - Participation(S) Otherwise - Volume 1*, 1, p 159–171, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3385010.3385020>
- Thorpe, A. (2012). *Architecture and Design versus Consumerism: how design activism confronts growth*. New York: Earthscan, Routledge, 2012.
- Tlostanova, M. V. (2017). *Postcolonialism and postsocialism in fiction and art: resistance and re-exi-*

stence. Palgrave Macmillan.

Tunstall, E. (2013). Decolonizing Design Innovation: Design Anthropology Critical Anthropology, and Indigenous Knowledge. In: W. Gunn; T. Otto; R. Smith (eds.), *Design Anthropology. Theory and Practice*. London, Bloomsbury, p. 232-250.

Vazquez, R. (2017). Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene: Decolonizing design. *Design Philosophy Papers*, 15(1), 77–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14487136.2017.1303130>

Vial, S. (2010). *Court traité du design*, PUF, Paris.





PART III

# (Re)Designing Common(s) for Resilient Futures & Food Sovereignty

The Case of Tunisian Oases



## CHAPTER 4 Effects of Global Capitalism on Agriculture in Tunisia

### ABSTRACT

The fourth Chapter opens the field-research — with nevertheless a back and forth with the desk-research — where the question was to understand the chosen context of Tunisia as a sample from the Global South suffering the effects of Global Capitalism in order to delineate the strategic lines for the design action to deploy. Indeed, one could guess the beginnings of a political ecology in Tunisia (Robert, 2021) with the rise of environmentalist movements fighting for their livelihood (recalling the notion of Solastalgia). This Environmentalism of the Poor (Martinez-Alier, 2002), would lead to inevitable ecological distribution conflicts. Such conflicts are legion in Tunisia, around access to resources and the living environment.

The first section deals with issues of climate change, migration and food security, but also reveals the processes of dispossession proper to Capitalism — extractivism and land grabbing — taking place in Tunisia.

The second section retakes the notions of food sovereignty and permaculture evoked in chapter 2 focusing on local initiatives/movements taking place in Tunisia. Indeed, numerous voices call for a drastic change in the trajectory of the economic model, to reflect of new pathways for the development of the agri-food system. This, in order to build food sovereignty and remedy the effects of dependent (colonized) and exporter agriculture (Ayeb & Bush, 2019; Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018; Labidi and Riahi, 2019), thus moving away from the methods advocated by the Green Revolution (seeds, pesticides, fertilizers).

The third section finally summarizes some passages of discussions conducted during the first phase of the field-research with local activists and researchers around the questions of food sovereignty, permaculture and Commons/Social & Solidarity Economy in Tunisia. This passage leads us identifying/confirming the contexts of the oases as a possible field of intervention.

*l'Association Tunisienne de Permaculture présente*

# LA FÊTE DES SEMENCES PAYSANNES



7-8 SEPTEMBRE 2019  
À L'OASIS DE CHENINI - GABES



**TERRE  
SOLIDAIRE**  
Soyons les forces du changement



## 4.1 Why Agriculture?

### 4.1.1 *Climate Change, Food (In)Security and Migration*

Since 2015, the term “European migration crisis” (Europarl, 2017) has been largely used to describe the increase in the number of people arriving in the European Union. The large numbers of migrants reported to have died or gone missing in the Mediterranean during their journeys led the United Nations to consider Europe’s Mediterranean border “the world’s deadliest” for migrants (Fargues, 2017). The European Union has been trying to establish a common asylum system since the 1990s and the Dublin Convention is the result of this effort. In practice, the Dublin Convention defines which State has the responsibility to assess the asylum application presented by individuals who arrive in Europe. However, asylum-seekers cannot choose the State they want.

The founding principle of the Dublin III Regulation is that: one and only one State member must examine each asylum application and this competency is generally attributed to the one that played the most significant role in the phase of the individual’s first arrival in the European Union. In practice, a person recognized as a refugee in Italy does not have this status in Germany or Sweden, for example. The current boundaries of the European Union thus do not allow for the application of the principle of mutual recognition and beneficiaries of international protection are not granted freedom of residence in Europe (Ammirati, 2015). Europe’s migration crisis has exposed shortcomings in the Union’s asylum system. There have been some outcries against a perverse effect of this system that is supposed to prevent an applicant to seek asylum in several places; it puts considerable pressure on areas geographically closest to the Mediterranean, i.e., Italy, Greece, Spain (Mouillard and Nadau, 2015).

The issue of migration has sparked a lively debate at the academic level on the different classifications and definitions used to describe individuals concerned. In fact, the various terminologies and

#### Image 4.1

A poster of the “festival of peasant seeds” at the oasis of Chenini in 2019. The event is organized every year by the “Tunisian Association of Permaculture” working for the conservation of local seeds and for Food Sovereignty.

Source: <https://permaculturetunisie.org/fete-des-semences-2019/>

definitions, whether of a legal nature or of a social origin, are confusing among people. The terms “migrant” and “refugee” are used every day to suggest one and the same thing. This could become an endless debate since even the researchers dealing with the subject “argue that the language of immigration and refugees is insufficient to capture this emergent history” (Sassen, 2016). Fabio Colombo (2015) claims that the distinctions that are made between refugees and economic migrants are irrelevant since they do not take into account the stories of these individuals. Supporting Colombo’s claim, different individual from different communities became aware of the importance of the stories, and eventually grasped what stories are “better” to obtain the refugee status. They also started trading information and transferring them to new entrants to explain how the asylum application process works. This is how being a refugee or an economic migrant is part of the process of self-construction that migrants put in place.

But far from a simple chronology retracing the different events that explain, for instance, the change in Europe’s status from a region of departure to one of the principal destinations of migratory flows — during the 1950s and the post-war context, to the effects of the 1973’s oil shock on European migration policy until the present day (Bonifazi, et al., 2008) — on which most researchers come together, the most important point would be the close relationship that “modern migration” has with the concept of crisis. Anna Lindley (2014) claims that “crisis and migration have a long association, in popular and policy discourse as well as in social scientific analysis.” Crisis situations would be generally associated with significant out-migration and displacement, while in-migration is often correlated with tensions or conflict at destination. In that sense “sedentarist” thinking proponents frame migration as a crisis and remaining where one is as the natural and desirable human condition; this correlation between crisis and migration is owed to their powerful contemporary resonance.

In Tunisia, the collapse is very concrete and its effects have increased dramatically in recent decades especially since the Arab Spring. Recent literature clearly links migration to the challenge of food security and climatic changes (David, 2018; FAO, 2018). Bettini (2019) speaks about (Climate) Migration as a symptom in the Anthropocene, joining the criticism of others regarding the lack of

political will in tackling the Mediterranean's core problems with policies that addressed symptoms rather than causes (Engelke et al., 2017). The southern and eastern edges of the Mediterranean are the most vulnerable, as the MENA region is the driest in the world. "By 2030, climate change is likely to further stress water resources in these countries" (Engelke, et al., 2017, p. 7). This is confirmed by the World Bank report (2013) which states that without significant action, climate change will exacerbate the already pronounced poverty and unemployment in Tunisia and could dissolve the development progress made in recent decades. Climate change is expected to have major impacts on Tunisia's agriculture, economy and households, both from global and local perspectives. The ecological crisis in North Africa, which is clearly manifested by acute environmental degradation, land depletion and loss of soil fertility, water poverty, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution and diseases, as well as the effects of global warming such as desertification, recurrent heatwaves, drought and rising water levels. (Hamouchene & Minio-Paluello, 2015; Lelieveld et al., 2016)

As part of the project CASCADES, an interdisciplinary project funded under Horizon 2020 devoted to the analysis of cross-border impacts of climate change, Desmidt (2021) speaks about the concept of cascading climate risks. North Africa will face numerous socio-economic challenges in the next decades, related to a demographic transition, growing urbanization, growing economies, amidst (slow) process of democratic reforms and a huge demand for job creation. These challenges will have an impact on stability and development, but also on migration trends, notably towards Europe. As Knoll and Teevan (2020) note, the socio-economic and political conditions in the region mean that emigration remains of great interest to the media and the general public across North Africa. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of young people from the Maghreb attempting to cross to Europe through irregular channels. In 2020, Tunisians were the principal nationality arriving in Europe irregularly, followed by Algerians (Knoll and Teevan 2020).

However, for many migrants, there is no distinction between the environment, their livelihood and the economy, given the considerable percentage of populations dependent on the agricultural sector for day-to-day income and (formal and informal) employment. While environmental and climate factors were found to play a role in dri-

ving migration in North Africa, there are always a range of other socio-economic factors at stake (Wodon et al. 2014).

More and more analyses show the importance of the role played by the agricultural sector for the economy and employment, in particular in the southern Mediterranean countries (CIHEAM and Plan Bleu, 2009). Research examining the effects of youth migration on agricultural production and employment in rural areas of origin in Tunisia has shown mainly negative implications for communities of origin, from rural areas (Martín, Nori & Bacchi, 2017, p. 20). The result of a recent report shows that about half of international migrants had made at least one internal displacement before arriving at their destination (Zuccotti et al., 2018). For Martín, Nori, and Bacchi (2017), rural migration is a major challenge for Tunisian society as a whole and the North African area in general. The size and intensity of the phenomena are expected to increase and should therefore be a source of concern for generational turnover in agriculture and the sustainable development of rural areas. The data also show that an important percentage of migrants wish to return to Tunisia to work in the agricultural sector. For Zuccotti et al. (2018), agriculture is an ideal sector for the transnational engagement of migrants and as an area of targeted activities and investments for future incomes, taking into account also the mobilization of the diaspora.

Ferreira considers the 2011 Arab uprisings as a turning point in terms of the relations of the EU and the Southern Mediterranean countries; however, while the southern countries focused on development issues and common dialogue, those in the north emphasized the control of migration flows and the management of irregular migration (Ferreira, 2019, p. 107). In this sense, Badalič (2018) argues that the externalization of migration controls to third countries is one of the central pillars of EU migration policy; which explains the process of placing Tunisia as an effective buffer zone within the broader EU strategy of externalizing migration controls. Roman & Pastore (2018) studied how Tunisian stakeholders evaluate existing policy responses, focusing in particular on EU policies and cooperation initiatives in this field.

Both civil society and governmental actors described EU-Tunisia relations as unequal and unbalanced, criticizing the Eurocentric approach to cooperation with third countries. Existing EU-Tunisia

agreements are said to be one of the factors contributing to the Tunisian economic crisis which, in turn, has directly influenced Tunisian emigration to Europe. Migration is described as an undesirable consequence of the country's difficult socio-economic and political situation rather than an independence matter. The focus is on economic recession, interregional socio-economic inequalities, poverty and underdevelopment in rural areas. Local researchers have studied the mechanisms of impoverishment of Tunisian farmers and their correlation with climate change. Questioning the most appropriate ways of organization to recover rights of access to land and water, they have shown the limitations of dependent (colonized) and exporting agriculture including sectors that are often presented as national successes, such as olive growing or date production (Ayeub & Bush, 2019; Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018; Labidi and Riahi, 2019).

Ayeub & Bush (2019) develop a searing critique of the contemporary global food regime by arguing that food and agricultural policy has helped shape politics and underdevelopment in Tunisia. The authors argue that dependence on food imports makes the region tremendously vulnerable to global price fluctuations and shocks. For too long, food security has been dissociated from the development of links with food producers. The debate has remained focused on the interests of big capital, foreign direct investment and export crop production. They highlight how a rhetoric of export-oriented growth and the absence of government commitment to food producers has repeatedly failed to safeguard national food availability at affordable prices for the poor and to ensure well-being for smallholder farmers. They thus propose to broaden the debate about food security away from macro-economic concerns of trade in food on international markets and the ability of states to purchase food on global markets. They pursue a concern to place small-scale farmers at the center of the action needed regarding food availability and consumption. They also affirm the importance of making food security an integral part of national strategies of rural development.

They thus criticize the role played by the FAO and the international financial institutions which concentrate their work on food security on the ability of countries to purchase food on global markets, pushing countries in the Global South to liberalize domestic and international food markets and discouraging self-sufficiency;

reverting to or simply continuing with patterns inherited from colonialism (A pattern of dependence on exporting resources, and purchasing food on international markets). With the support of international financial institutions, food security has become the most used concept in agricultural policies implemented by governments. However, it is the attitude embedded in the concept of food security that is problematic. The concept is broadly defined as the adequate and secure provision of food globally. Rooted in neo-liberal thought, food security is an operational principle that seeks to mitigate some of the issues relating to global development: it is justified on the basis of a perceived solidarity between people, a direct solution to the global shortage of food.

While the goal of food security has merit in its aim of ending chronic food shortages in the world, the means, conditions and production of sufficient food seem to be of little practical importance. The concept of food security is not simply a description and explanation of ideas, it has become a tool to promote certain policies and create a semblance of universal consensus. What food security does not take into account is that the mechanisms put in place to ensure food security have in fact impoverished and starved people, and deprived communities of the food they produced with their own hands (GTSA Tunisie & ATTAC Maroc, 2020). As Aymen Amayed (2019) explains:

“Since the end of French colonization in 1956, successive Tunisian governments have managed to ensure access to healthy and sufficient food for the vast majority of its citizens (...) Most Tunisians eat their fill and some even allow themselves luxury food products from time to time. Physical access to something to eat without too much trouble is not the challenge. The question is, given the context of a stagnant economy and high unemployment: at what cost?” This question reveals that the rhetoric of promoting food security has neglected consultation with farmers and has been driven by patterns of capital accumulation for major domestic and foreign investors. In Tunisia, this has been accompanied, by an acceleration of combined and uneven development, illustrated by the development of the richer Sahelian region in the north of the country at the expense of the south, demonstrated partly by unequal access to water and land.

#### *4.1.2 Extractivism, Land Grabbing and Processes of Dispossession: The Tunisian Context*

Harvey's (2010) reassessment of the contemporary relevance of Marx's theory of primitive accumulation and the related notion of accumulation by dispossession might be a good starting point for this section. Primitive accumulation was achieved through the forced separation of workers from the means of production and the capitalist expropriation of land and common resources, which created a proletariat that had nothing to sell but its own labor to survive. Thus, the concept of primitive accumulation was automatically associated, on the one hand, with the historical rise of Capitalism and on the other hand, with its geographical expansion into (hitherto) non-capitalist environments such as colonial lands in Marx's time; for example, through the enslavement and the so-called trade of Africans on colonial plantations. Ugo Rossi (2012) points out that the processes of dispossession did not, nevertheless, take place without protests and opposition from below (Glassman, 2006; Hart, 2006). Transgressing conventional South-North dichotomies, as well as temporal dualisms between past and present.

Anthropologist Tania Murray Li (2010) has offered an enlightening analysis of how the dialectical management of possession and dispossession has regulated conflicting relationships between indigenous and capitalist forces in the colonial era as well as contemporary periods in a variety of locations in Asia, Africa and the United States. In such different spatio-temporal contexts, she argues that Capitalism emerges as an external force against which Indigenous peoples mobilize. In the Global South, accumulation by dispossession takes the brutal form of extraction, plunder of natural resources and degradation of environments and ecosystems through privatization and the commodification of land and water. Hamouchene (2019) explains that extractivism as a mode of accumulation and appropriation in North Africa was structured under colonialism in the 19th century to meet the demands of metropolitan centers.

This model of accumulation and appropriation is based on the commodification of nature and the privatization of natural resources, which has led to serious environmental degradation. Accumulation by dispossession has reaffirmed the role of North African countries as exporters of nature and providers of natural resources and raw

materials that are heavily dependent on water and land, such as agricultural products. This role consolidates the subaltern integration of North Africa into the global capitalist economy, maintaining relations of imperialist domination and neocolonial hierarchies (Amine, 1970). For Hamouchene (2019), the neocolonial character of North African extractivism reflects the international division of labor and that of nature. In Tunisia, it manifests itself in large-scale phosphate, oil and gas extraction (on a smaller scale) and in water-intensive agro-industry and tourism. This plays a fundamental role in the ecological crisis in North Africa.

Like many countries of the Global South, Tunisia is facing the intensification of the issue of land grabbing. Land grabbing started as a colonial practice but continued with the independent state. Although there are various forms of land grabbing in Tunisia, one clear pattern emerges: small and medium farmers are being dispossessed of their lands through a transfer of rights to foreign and local investors and agricultural enterprises. This intense commodification and privatization of land – often land that was collectively owned – has had staggering effects on farmers and agricultural workers. In the same perspective, Federici (2008) explains that societies in Africa are undergoing a process of primitive accumulation, where many farmers are forced off the land, new property relations and concepts of value-creation are coming into place, breaking down communal solidarity. For her, one should not misread the context, as it is not communalism per se that is in crisis “but a model of communal relations that for more than a century has been under attack, and, even at its best, was not based on fully egalitarian relations” (p. 31).

Bush & Martiniello (2017) focus on systemic contradictions within Capitalism. Indeed, these contradictions can be illustrated by the fact that the capitalist system needs to satisfy the working class with cheap food and low inflation. However, this must be done while expanding control over the world’s natural resources. The contradictions have been amplified in the period of neoliberalism where the state has been removed from welfare provision and used to police and deliver flexible working conditions and casualization as global value relations have been reconfigured. This has been done, moreover, by promoting authoritarian populism (Boffo et al., 2018). In the South, the consequence was the lost development decade of

the 1980s, debt crisis and the end of redistributive land reform. It also opened the South, as in the case of Tunisia, to deregulation of land markets, commodification of seeds and other farming inputs, and agro-export promotion at the expense of local consumption that led to land grabbing and a global subsistence crisis (Akram-Lodhi, 2012).

Talking about the debt crisis, Federici (2001) argued that the debt crisis has been a productive crisis for the capitalist classes of both the debtor and the creditor nations refuting the assumption, shared by both Right and Left, that the debt crisis is an obstacle to capitalist development in the 1990s. On the one side, the Right has viewed the crisis as a threat to the international banking system, serious enough to call for harsh even draconian policy measures. On the other side, The Left, instead, has emphasized the human cost, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionalities required of debtor nations. Specifically, she defends the idea that the debt crisis has been used by capital to shift the balance of forces to its side on both poles of the debt relation. This is the case for the Tunisian context, where “the discrepancy is clear between the discourse and the reality of IMF policy-related conditions, which are supposed to promote employment and the socio-economic resilience of Tunisia, however, they led to worsen the dysfunctions of the development model” (Chandoul, 2017; p. 8).

Federici asserts that the debt crisis is a productive crisis because nowhere is capital more visible than in Africa, because it has served to rationalize class relations, and to tackle the central question of ownership of land, essential for the capitalist development of the continent. The author explains that the land question is particularly central in Africa, since in most parts of the continent, communal land relations still exist, as colonial domination has failed to destroy the relationship of peoples to land. The privatization of land in Africa has proceeded throughout the 1970s and 1980s, due to World Bank Agricultural Development Projects, which under the guise of modernization have introduced new ownership relations in the rural areas. The violation of communal lands was also spurred both by Government expropriation campaigns and by increasing urbanization. Federici (2001) talks about the tendency in the United States to see Africans either as a helpless victim of government corruption or natural disasters or as protagonists of backward struggles revol-

ving around tribal allegiances. In reality, she considers that from the fields to the factories, the markets and the schools, struggles are being carried and are most modern in content, since their objective is not the preservation of a mythical past, but the redefinition of what development means. Federici asserts that the whole African continent and a vast majority of countries of the periphery has suffered (and continues to suffer) processes of primitive accumulation and dispossession described above.

In Tunisia, access to land for small-scale family farmers has indeed worsened since independence. This is because the political decisions taken by state holders fostered the interests and enhanced access for big agricultural landowners. Large landowners and wealthy absentee owners have been considered as the only stakeholders able to adapt to the challenge of modernity and guarantee integration in the global economy. A second explanation can be found in the set of neo-liberal policies implemented since the early 1970s, which disadvantaged peasant farmers. The third explanation lies in the state's decision not to redistribute the colonial lands nationalized in 1964 to the heirs of previous owners. In so doing the regime continued the dispossession of small farmers of their lands by the colonial forces. Following its independence in 1956, the Tunisian State initiated a vast program of reclaiming and purchasing agricultural land previously possessed by French colonial settlers. In the 1960s, state-owned agricultural land was part of the cooperative movement, which focused on diversifying and improving production. Land fragmentation was a justification for collectivization in Tunisia as it was seen to be the reason why farmers left their land and migrated to the towns (Ben Salah, 2008).

The experience of collectivization called the socialist experience in Tunisia was dramatic for smallholders. "The concentration of land in the hands of the biggest owners, after independence, shows that the collectivization of land in 1960 did not touch the category of big agricultural owners since it continues to dominate 22 per cent of the total usable agricultural area in the contemporary period." (Ayebe & Bush, 2019; p.97) A large number of farmers had been simply dispossessed of their agricultural resources in less than a decade. Yet the State's subsequent adoption of a liberal economic and political system was to accelerate dispossession (Ayebe & Bush, 2019; Labidi & Riahi; 2019). An important dimension to Tunisia's neoliberal

transformation was the often-overlooked land reform introduced in 1988. The reform redefined the modes and conditions of access to agricultural collective land, sought-after by the big owners, by accelerating its privatization (Ayeb & Bush; 2019). The reform modified the legislation removing the barriers that partially protected collective land from private appropriation. Prior to this legislation, communities could farm collective land with the possibility of appropriating, individually, the lands not intended for pasture, and getting the necessary funding for its development. Jouili (2008) explains that the state opened these protected areas to commodification, to the land market and to agribusiness and export sector gains. Smallholder farmers were caught in a vice of the consequences of economic reform on the one hand, and of big landowner predation that was accelerated by smallholder indebtedness on the other.

The state export approach has destroyed many local agricultural cultivars through its focus on exportable crops, with commercial agriculture relying on hybrid seeds used mainly in the production of seeds and vegetables. The cultivation of foreign cultivars of seeds and trees is based on soil exhausting and water-depleting methods, intensive use of chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides, and high fossil fuel consumption. Combined, these methods have contributed to climate change and have resulted in flooding and droughts. Labidi and Riahi (2019) explicate that such mechanisms, and the direct marginalization of small producers, are illustrated in the production of olives (in the center) and date (in the southwest). With the transition to the production of specific varieties (for which entire regions have been allocated), small and medium farmers have been forced to adopt this mode of production by directing their activity towards this market.

The variety and diversity that once characterized local agriculture has disappeared, rendering farmers completely dependent on the international market in the hope of competing with big businesses. Since the early 1990s, water management policies have been strongly influenced by neoliberalism. In order to best meet the interests of an exclusive export-oriented agricultural class, the agricultural sector has been a top priority for the design and development of water management policies by the state. The use of water resources has led to a general decline in rainfall levels and has contributed to droughts, which in turn have had an impact on food crops. The

scarcity of water and the strategies adopted for the economic sector have a direct impact on the socio-economic situation of Tunisian farmers. Although the Tunisian state is often praised for its long-sighted policy of collecting and saving water, the repercussions will become insurmountable. State incentive mechanisms have greatly contributed to increasing the area under irrigation. Monocropping, which is encouraged by the state, has increased the consumption of water and raised the environmental risks substantially.

The difficulties of access to land for poor farmers increases in areas where there may be dam development or possibilities of irrigation. The price of land in these circumstances increases dramatically and limits the access of small owners. This shows specifically that the political choice favored groundwater-based irrigation in the south to develop and intensify export-oriented agriculture. The irrigated and intensive agriculture in the south benefited from very low labor costs fueled by poverty and high unemployment. The conditions generated quicker returns than were received in the higher rainfall agriculture in the North of Tunisia. Advantageous climate conditions and state incentives for investors provided enduring and secure access to deep underground water since the 90s. In this same context, Ayeb and Bush (2019) speak about Irrigation as a “tool of dispossession” as almost half the irrigable area is in the north of Tunisia, which also receives the most rainfall. The distribution by number and size of the farms of irrigated areas also highlights a strong inequality in access to irrigation. They explain that the inequality in access to irrigation exacerbates differences between large and small-scale farmers.

Under the guise of agricultural modernization, first the colonial regime and then repeated postcolonial governments have accelerated patterns of rural social differentiation marked by extreme inequality in land holding, access to farming inputs and to markets to ensure a sustainable and effective rural standard of living. One of the consequences of the trend of persistently high food prices has been the systematic and systemic presence of political protest. Often simplified in the description as food riots, the political struggles that emerged in many parts of the Global South were an indication of much deeper opposition and resistance to Capitalism and its crisis (Bush & Martiniello 2017). For countries in the Global South, the question of food production and its availability represents an ur-

gent and strategic issue. The commodification of food has thrown several states into a vicious cycle of dependence, which prevents them from consuming the basic food that they have produced. In light of the many issues with food security, the concept of food sovereignty has emerged.

## 4.2 Building (Food) Sovereignty

### *4.2.1 Resisting Food Dependence: Processes of Re-Peasantization*

“Two processes have shaped Tunisia’s food and agriculture sector. The first has been an increase in food dependence, which has become structural and exceeds 50 per cent of the country’s food needs. The second has been the general impoverishment of the peasantry, which in large part is now unable to supply and ensure its own food security” (Ayeb & Bush, 2019; p.93). This combined situation of food dependence and peasant poverty is far from being a simple cyclical crisis and is instead the culmination of more than a century of anti-peasant government policies. These are the result of decision-makers during both the colonial era and since independence, to integrate Tunisian agriculture into the global market and the global food system (Friedmann, 2016). The reliance on the global food system and the global market increases significantly the risks of instability in international food and agricultural prices. The mechanisms and dynamics of neoliberalism have marginalized the urban and rural poor by reducing their incomes, resources and services.

Social marginalization and “individual and collective” stigmatization have affected the inhabitants of peripheral and rural areas as well as the inhabitants of popular neighborhoods of the big cities. They were thus considered as a dangerous social group by the government and the media who have usually indicted them due to increased crime rates, drug use, prostitution and Salafism (Lamloum & Ben Zina, 2015). The urban poor are proletarian as they were dispossessed of access to the means of production. The inhabitants of the peripheral and rural areas (south, center and northwest of Tunisia) have also undergone a process of abjection because of the extractive dispossession of regional resources to the benefit of the center - Tunis and the coastal areas. The resources extracted from the rural areas (water, human resources, agricultural products or raw materials such as phosphate, minerals, oil, gas, etc.) are tran-

sferred to the center for processing, consumption or export. There was remarkably no local accumulation of wealth as investors are based more in coastal cities and manage their investments from there (Zemni & Ayeb, 2016).

Ayeb & Bush (2019) think that the inequality of land ownership and its concentration to the benefit of large landowners is a bigger problem than fragmentation. An alternative rural development strategy engaged with agroecological production may be a solution for small farmers to take control of their agricultural futures: A strategy based on the fact that fragmentation can be an advantage and cannot have only negative consequences (Latruffe and Piet, 2013). The mainstream policies put in place a “continuous historical process of de-sovereignization under the guise of food security” (Ayeb & Bush, 2019; p.151). Today, numerous voices call for a drastic change in the trajectory of the economic model, to reflect of new pathways for the development of the agri-food system in order to build food sovereignty and remedy the effects of dependent (colonized) and exporter agriculture (Ayeb & Bush, 2019; Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018; Labidi and Riahi, 2019). Local/territorial development is here considered as an inclusive alternative where it is a question of rethinking cultural practices by adapting the technical aspects to the physical and climatic structural difficulties of Tunisia, thus moving away from the methods advocated by the Green Revolution (seeds, pesticides, fertilizers).

Recently, an exercise aimed at developing a detailed repertoire of the conditions for achieving a transition to a real transformation of systems was carried out (Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018) with local players in 2017 and made it possible to identify three priority challenges and objectives for a transition of the Tunisian agricultural system: (1) the preservation of natural resources (water and soil); (2) improving food security (with its different dimensions); (3) the development of socio-economic services provided by the agri-food sector. This is in line with the discourse advocated by Permaculture movements, which, because of their combination of local, situated design practices and underlying social and political philosophies, provide alternative ways of organizing in response to the Anthropocene (Roux-Rosier et al., 2018).

Indeed, the three priority challenges and objectives set for a transition of the Tunisian agricultural system closely resemble what Mol-

lison (1979) puts down as an ethical basis for permaculture speaking about three main principles: (1) care of the earth: provision for all life systems to continue and multiply; (2) care of the people: provision for people to access those resources necessary to their existence; (3) setting limits to population and consumption. From the perspective of a given individual, permaculture can be seen as a design system for ecologically responsible home economics. From a scholarly perspective, permaculture is a notoriously multi-faceted approach, evolving aggressively from its agricultural origins to culture-wide applicability by allowing shifting definitions to suit particular needs. In this context, we noticed the emergence of several citizen/academic initiatives promoting permaculture in Tunisia. The permaculture movements offer in this sense alternative means of organization in response to the Anthropocene. The Association Tunisienne de Permaculture which I had the opportunity to collaborate with, is working with different realities in rural areas with the aim of developing a tangible Community-Centered Agriculture network, the creation of a resilient production and consumption system, as well as the training of farmers to permaculture as a sustainable alternative.

The project “Reverdir la Tunisie” was launched in 2013, in collaboration with the Higher Institute of Applied Biological Sciences of Tunis (ISSBAT), in the south of Tunisia heavily impacted by global warming, especially in the southern region of Gabes. The initiative aims to promote a model of agriculture adapted to climate change, notably by creating “oasis-forests” and using traditional techniques of irrigation by jars based on ancestral knowledge and permaculture to enrich the soil naturally in nitrates and phosphorus (Chesnot & Ballanger, 2019). Reverdir la Tunisie creates edible oasis-forests in schools, without pesticides or chemical fertilizers, with a decrease in mechanical use and a real water saving. No more monoculture, but a studied assembly of fruit trees, peasant seeds, aromatic plants. I had the opportunity to meet professor Samia Mouelhi (ISSBAT) who was at the origin of the project the project and is also a member of the Observatoire de la Souveraineté Alimentaire et l’Environnement (OSAE); according to her this would be way to tackle the issue of Food Sovereignty at the base.

But what does food sovereignty really mean? Food sovereignty is a relatively new political concept, first brought to international atten-

tion at the World Food Summit organized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in 1996. It was promoted by La Via Campesina; in February 2007, in the village of Nyéléni, Sélingué, Mali, more than 500 representatives from over 80 countries adopted this definition of food sovereignty: “Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal – fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. (...) It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations”. (Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007).

Therefore, Food Sovereignty is a framework and set of policy praxis that prioritizes the principle and policies to deliver food as a human right rather than as just another commodity exchanged for cash or kind. The definition of Food Sovereignty also retells how Capitalism expands and does so by enlarging the borders at which it operates. Both agribusiness and rural social movements are attempting to re-territorialize spaces, that is, reconfigure them to favor their own interests, whether those are maximum extraction of profits, or are defending and building communities. A key aspect is that we are speaking not just of a battle over land as such, but also very much of a battle over ideas. Land grabbing is part of a global enclosures’ movement but capital does not grab land for itself. It does so as part of the process of creating new social relations of exploitation, of surplus value creation, access to cheap resources and cheap labor to work on the fields and also to hold land as a hedge for investment without farming it at all. Yet the contemporary period only offers

glimpses of attempts to develop meaningful alternatives to food security.

According to Ayebe and Bush (2019), there is no single variant or definition of Food Sovereignty. Like democracy, it is a process without an end but one that nevertheless, contains several important key themes that promote peasant and small farmer demands for autonomy and control over food production and consumption. In short, Food Sovereignty offers a comprehensive peasant path to social control and decision-making over food-related issues. Food sovereignty also begs the question of the relationship between the town and countryside, of the importance of maintaining delivery of food to urban areas at prices that are affordable and sustainable. Ultimately, Food Sovereignty offers an agenda for promoting a national sovereign project (Amin, 2017). Capitalism is a regime that, as indicated previously, systemically undermines the majority of humanity who rely on family peasant production. One of the issues that our analysis has confirmed is that, "Capitalism, by its nature, cannot resolve the peasant question" (Amin, 2017; p.156). To counter this scenario, Amin advanced the strategy of sovereign national projects that might inch towards an end of the dependence upon the international law of value.

Rather than defining peasant, Van der Ploeg (2008) prefers to define what he calls "the peasant condition" characterized by the constant struggle to build autonomy focusing on two characteristics: The first is that peasants seek to engage in co-production with nature in ways that strengthen their resource base. The second resides in the struggle for autonomy, via the reduction of dependence in a world characterized by inequality and unequal exchange. He advances the idea of repeasantization i.e., being peasants again rather than being entrepreneurial farmers by undergo a transition from input-dependent farming to agroecology (van der Ploeg, 2010; Rosset and Martinez-Torres, 2013), or by the conquest of land and territory from agribusiness and other large landowners, whether by land reform, land occupations, or other mechanisms.

In an article seeking to add a contribution from the countries of the South to the food sovereignty and food security debate, the Groupe de Travail sur la Souveraineté Alimentaire (GTSA), denounce a "concept trap", because behind the amalgam between the terms: "sovereignty" and "security" and the difficulty in distinguishing the

nuance, there is a confusion between two opposing economic, social, political and environmental projects (GTSA, 2020). The authors regret that the concept of food security is opposed to the interests of the people and the sustainability of peasant agricultural activities, and that in Tunisia it remains inseparable from the discourse of governments and various national organizations (trade unions, associations, political parties). Ayeb and Bush (2019) explain that the development of strong Food Sovereignty agendas remains fragmentary and marginal; it is rarely accompanied by the use of the term Food Sovereignty or a connection to broader social movements that at least advance Food Sovereignty internationally.

This is also real for the case of Tunisia, even if the situation seems to be in full mutation; which I was able to verify directly on the ground by meeting several food sovereignty activists. In Tunisia, where several initiatives like the Observatory for Food Sovereignty and the Environment (OSAE) - of which Habib Ayeb is the president -, the Groupe de Travail sur la Souveraineté Alimentaire (GTSA), the Association Tunisienne de Permaculture (ATP) or a group called Million Rural Women, linked to La Via Campesina since the summer of 2017, efforts still need to be made at the level of coordination. During our field research, I noted certain tensions between the various actors working in Tunisia, even though initiatives to coordinate and converge efforts seem to be increasingly put in place. For example, the North African Network for Food Sovereignty, including also associations from Morocco and Algeria, was set up at a meeting in Tunis in July 2017 as a framework for unifying struggles in the region and engaging in local, continental and global mobilizations.

#### *4.2.2 Social and Ecological Movements Convergence: The Emergence of a Rural Social Contract*

In their book, Ayeb and Bush (2019) explore among others the social, economic and political origins of the revolutionary process that toppled Ben Ali from power on 14 January 2011 in Tunisia (and Hosni Mubarak on 11 February 2011 in Egypt). Unlike most commentary on the uprisings, the focus should be on the role played by rural-social classes, peasants and the near landless. In fact, the Tunisian peasants which have been one of the major actors in the uprisings, have been totally overlooked by the vast majority of analyses. Paradoxically, despite the fact that the first catalyst to provoke the long-term crisis in Tunisia was Mohamed Bouazizi who came from a peasant background and, as we will see, was driven to self-immolation because of debt and land dispossession (Ayeb, 2011). Many criticize the Orientalist, Eurocentric or neocolonial and modernist representations of the political events after December 2010 (Allal & Geisser, 2011) describing the events as extraordinary, aided or influenced by Western ideas. Too often the Tunisian society (and the Arab world) has been described as obedient and passive.

An analysis that was based on the so-called security-pact or social contract (Hibou, 2006) between the Tunisian society and Ben Ali's regime (and the one of Bourguiba before him), where the population would have been "subjected to a duty of obedience in return for which they received security against the risks of forced Islamization" (Ayeb & Bush, 2019; p. 52). In return for protection and delivery of consumption goods for many, the provision of credit and controlled prices, the population was required to grant the regime legitimacy. Daguzan (2011) supposed for example that the combination of the peaceful and obedient people and the authoritarian regime, legitimized by its role of protector against risks and dangers through the security-pact, provided the political foundation of authoritarian stability. This so-called social contract made any popular uprising leading to a radical change in the political system and regime improbable.

The two catchy phrases "The Arab Spring" and "The Jasmine Revolution", are evidence of this reductive and Eurocentric analysis, failing to capture the real origins of the revolt that led to the fall of

the regime: the privatization of the state; where a small group (the president's family and their relatives) monopolized the state as if it were private property. Gherib (2012) speaks of crony Capitalism, for whom the Tunisian revolution lends itself perfectly to an analysis in terms of political economy, not only because of the relevance of this approach in general to explain social change, but also because of a specificity of Tunisian political history and, above all, because of the economic and social character of the revolution's demands. More than a decade after the revolution, nothing or almost nothing in the condition of the majority of Tunisians has changed. The processes of dispossession and marginalization that led to the uprising of peasants and workers are still in action. It is important to note that the protests of 2010-2011 were not isolated events, several episodes including those of 2008 in the mining basin around the city of Gafsa or the bread events of 1984 and before them those of 1978 had an economic and social element, to varying degrees, and resulted from the breach of a clientelist contract linking society to the state (Gherib, 2012). These are also notable examples of the resistance of the Tunisian people to the dictatorship and the effects of the capitalist system. January 2008 was a crucial time in the long revolutionary processes in Tunisia's history (Zemni et al., 2012).

The poor peasants and landless in Sidi Bouzid wove a fabric of solidarity in their conflict with the local and national ruling class of land investors and merchants. The solidarity went beyond affinity of family and tribe to affirm a new and larger framework of social class. It is within this framework of conflict and solidarity of classes that the struggles were led, and which resulted in their climax in December 2010. Zemni (2016) speaks about the emergence of "the people" as a unitary political actor, bringing together different classes and social groups; a large and spontaneous mobilization that could fit into what Bayat calls a "social non-movement". A social non-movement refers to the "collective actions of noncollective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations" (Bayat, 2013; 15). In other words, the process was initiated spontaneously by the rural population. Among these are the peasants, since the mid-2000s, before intersecting in late December 2010 with the middle-class population that aspired to more individual and collective freedoms

and to a larger space for political expression and participation.

On a personal level, the history of this resistance has even shaped the history of my own family. My parents are indeed convinced Marxists and for a long time were among the activists of the Parti Communiste des Ouvriers de Tunisie (PCOT) but had also been part of an experience of popular song. I was rocked by my mother's songs and texts telling the daily struggle of Tunisian workers and peasants; the musical group "Al Bahth Al Moussiki" literally the musical research was part of a whole cultural and political movement which did not cease to claim the rights of the oppressed. My father was even imprisoned twice (in the late 80s and early 90s) for illegal political activity. The flight of the dictator was experienced by most Tunisians as a kind of consecration. The demonstrations of 2010-2011 were at that time just another episode of resistance to the repeated attacks on our freedom and dignity. We were and still are outraged by so much injustice and marginalization. When I was 20 years old, I took part in the demonstrations, and far from the nomenclature of "Arab Spring" or "Jasmine Revolution", we demanded: "work, freedom, national dignity". Many make the link between the Arab Spring and the Occupy or Indignados movements. More than ten years after these episodes, I am one of those who preferred to leave. In Tunisia, life is a constant struggle but I refuse to be perceived as a victim. Even those who chose to cross the Mediterranean on a boat would refuse to be. I repeated to myself and still repeat to myself that if I left it was for a better return. Migration is a right, but living in dignity at home is an even more fundamental right.

One of the perverse effects of Capitalism is this colonization of imaginaries, the impression that there is no alternative to the continuous degradation of our living environment. It was during the months following the flight of Ben Ali, we (Tunisians) had lived a period of euphoria that unfortunately lasted only a few months. In the absence of the state and in front of the attacks of the snipers and policemen, we had constituted committees of districts everywhere in Tunisia. It was an experience of commoning and mutual aid on a scale that was unprecedented. The inhabitants took turns at night to protect their houses and their neighborhoods. People met at night around a fire, equipped with whatever they could get their hands on. We prepared food together and the different neighborhoods joined their efforts, trusting only the military. During the day we collected

garbage and cleaned the streets, while others organized sit-ins and Facebook protests. We had suddenly taken back the public space that had previously been taken from us. This experience was for me (and certainly for a good number of Tunisians, especially those of my generation) a kind of revelation. In many ways the experience of the neighborhood committees resembled the episodes of mutual aid described by Servigne during major disasters. It was also an experience in which a whole country prefigured a draft of the system that was (and still is) to emerge in Tunisia.

During the demonstrations of 2010-2011, some people chanted the chorus of my mother's songs. Unfortunately, these songs have never been as topical as they are today because the demands are still the same; more proof that nothing has changed. There is talk of a Tunisian exception but the country does not seem to be getting out of the mess. The parties in power and a good part of the political class have disappointed by their incompetence and their inability to provide economic alternatives. The situation in many respects has even worsened; to the point of wondering whether Tunisian democracy has failed to convince its youth (Rennick, 2021). Inflation and reduced purchasing power of Tunisians complicate daily life and migration seems to be the only way out for young people; between 2020 and mid-2021, migration from and through Tunisia increased to levels not seen since the months following the 2011 revolution, prompting Herbert (2022) to ask why Tunisians are leading the surge for irregular migration to Europe. No one questions the progress that has been made in terms of freedom of expression and of the press, but if we were to analyze the situation in Tunisia today, one would say that we are living through a crisis that according to some closely resembles that of the 1980s when under conditions imposed by the IMF, the regime embarked on a program of economic liberalization and austerity measures (Murphy, 1999).

Throughout my stay in Tunisia to carry out the field research, the health crisis worsened after the first wave of Covid-19 was managed as well as possible. The worsening of the health situation and its catastrophic management by the government, added to the chronic economic crisis that the country has been experiencing for more than a decade, has led to a series of protests, in particular against Ennahdha, the majority party in parliament. In response, President Kais Saied announced, on July 25, 2021, the dismissal of the go-

vernment and the freezing of Parliament. The president's decisions were acclaimed by a large part of the population but also denounced by human rights organizations. It was considered by several foreign media and Tunisian political entities as a self-coup. For now, people seem to be waiting to see the actions of this president who has rid them of the corrupt by promising rapid change. A timetable has been put in place, but there are many critics and fears. The people have for a long time stopped believing in the promises of their political class, and the different social and environmental movements that have formed are a living proof of this. Every struggle is accompanied by hope, otherwise it would be in vain.

The 2010-2011 uprising paved the way for a profound change in Tunisian social and political history. Over the past decade, protest episodes originating from these margins of the country's interior and social movements have intensified, contributing to a profound change in the relationship between social actors and the central state. Desrues and Gobe (2021) explain that protests take the form of grievance movements centered on land exploitation and obtaining a right of control over natural resources. They argue that these movements, which are part of what the social movements and revolutions sociology calls the "Contentious politics" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2006) are indicative of the emergence of a "protest democracy" (Mathieu, 2011). One can speak about the emergence of the concept of "Tunisianité" (Zemni, 2016). In Tunisia (and North Africa generally) we are witnessing the emergence of movements resisting the plundering of their subterranean resources, the despoliation of their land, the invasive destruction of the environment and the loss of their livelihoods (Hamouchene, 2019). This is accompanied by a rise in power of resistance forces and the entry on the scene of new actors who demand the equitable sharing and distribution of wealth. Hamouchene (2019) questions whether these new actors are primarily environmental or are they fundamentally anti-systemic. Are these circumstantial episodes of resistance or rather the most recent development in the historical trajectory of the class struggle against the last capitalist offensive in North Africa? The exercise is perilous, because the multitude of movements and, often, the lack of media coverage sometimes make it impossible to report them in order to be able to deal with their demands and the follow-up given to these movements (Kalboussi, 2017).

Diane Robert (2021) guesses the beginnings of a political ecology in Tunisia by introducing the work of Martinez-Alier, author of the “Environmentalism of the Poor.” Indeed, Martinez-Alier calls for a broadening and redefinition of the notion of environmentalist movements as long as their objectives are defined in terms of ecological needs for life (Martinez-Alier, 2002). This Environmentalism of the Poor, also called livelihood ecology (Gari, 2000), even liberation ecology (Peet and Watts, 1996) is growing, which will lead to inevitable ecological distribution conflicts. For Robert such conflicts are legion in Tunisia, around access to resources and the living environment. These protests are numerous but the most notable are those of Tataouine in El Kamour, Jemna and finally the one of Gabes.

There have been protests regarding the control of mining and oil resources: such as the sit-in in El Kamour, the movement in Tataouine, where the claims of the population focused on the use of resources, the repartition of profits, access to information on the quantities extracted, the turnover generated. Other protests regarded the question of land like in Jemna, where peasants were first dispossessed of their land during colonization, and then after independence, when government policy annexed the land and made it the private property of the state. During the revolution, the question of land was the perfect representation of fierce struggle in the oasis of Jemna. A struggle that has prepared the basis of the social and solidarity economy law now in Tunisia. Actually, the Jemna experience can be seen as an experience of land commoning or a case of contested Commons (Ben Slimane et al., 2020). Among the mobilizations that concern the living environment, the question of waste occupies a place of choice. Protests against industrial pollution have also increased, for example in the phosphate sector in Sfax and Gabes. The sector, dominated by the state-owned phosphate company Groupe Chimique Tunisien of Gabes, represents a significant portion of GDP and employs thousands of people. Each step in the production chain is responsible for environmental and health damage: the air, soil and water in the areas concerned are contaminated, with harmful consequences for other economic activities, particularly agriculture; the inhabitants and workers report an increased frequency of respiratory, skin and bone diseases and cancers, not counting work accidents (toxic gas leaks, acid burns). In addition, industrial processes require the use of very large quantities of water to the detriment of agricultural and domestic consumption. Agrochemical

companies and the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture are promoting the opening of the local market for genetically modified seeds. Despite these pressures, seed banks (national and local such as the one of Gabes and its oasis) exist and work on the preservation and extension of the life of local seed varieties. This clearly shows that the farmers are defending and fighting for their autonomy from international capital.

According to Saidani (2021) the Kamour movement, for example, was seen as a source of inspiration, as it drew its strength from the legitimacy of its local social demands and its roots in a supportive social structure, but also from the leverage of the activists who had stopped the oil extraction, thus directly affecting the interests of the companies. The protesters were thus in a position of strength in the face of an official non-governmental convoy that remained in place until the end of the negotiations. Finally, in November 2020, an agreement was signed between the government and representatives of the movement, providing multiple subsidies for the region and recruitment in gardening companies and oil companies. The sit-in was lifted and production resumed. The success of the Kamour movement made it a new model of social protest and an inspiration for other activists to try to replicate the same type of mobilization in other parts of the country. For Saidani, the lesson was learned, if you can hit where it hurts, the government will eventually give in. One of the main successes of the Kamour mobilization was to highlight important social issues regarding wealth sharing and resource exploitation, since the region is highly marginalized and oil producing. Critics of the movement have been quick to point to regionalism and a tribal mentality. Yet this is a legitimate demand to reorganize the distribution of the fruits of national wealth among local communities and the country as a whole.

Saidani (2021) states that in this arm wrestling, activists have gambled on an end to centralized resource management in the name of global national balances within “grand development plans” and “general state budgetary equations” that imply the possibility of completely depriving local people of their income. As explained throughout this chapter, the social contract, as the basis of the relations between rulers and populations in the Maghreb region, has been highly contested especially since 2011. However, the rural dimension of this phenomenon remains yet under researched. Saidani consi-

ders that the Kamour experience has been essential in reformulating the social contract around the management of national wealth. Speaking about the small victories of these new movements, the author coins the term of a “rural social contract” announcing the gradual death of the old social contract put in place by the post-colonial state, which continues to resist its announced death in 2010-2011.



Image 4.2

A local protester shuts off the wheel of a petroleum pumping station in El Kamour, in Tunisia's southern state of Tataouine, last May. (AFP). Source: <https://thearabweekly.com/tunisian-government-quandary-over-protesters-oil-production-stoppage>

أمارو للإنتاج - فرنسا Les Productions de l'Amaru (France) خمسة على خمسة للإنتاج - تونس 5/5 Production (Tunisie)

# GABES labess

## قابس لابسس

فيلم لحبيب عائب

Un film de / Directed by Habib Aieb

مساعدة مخرج : مهي عبد الحميد  
صورة : أنيس بن سعد و صابر الزموري  
مونتاج / Editing : كاترين مابيل و ماغالي باشير  
Assistant réalisateur / Assistant director : Maha Abdelhamide  
Image / Cinematography : Anis Ben Saad et Saber Zamouri  
Montage / Editing : Catherine Mabilat et Magali Pachet

## 4.3 Understanding the Field: Meeting Local Actors

During the second year of research, I had identified the key themes around which I wanted to work and the contexts in which I would conduct the fieldwork; I chose to work on the contexts of the Chenini and Jemna oases because of the national and international enthusiasm that the experiments conducted there have generated. Speaking of design that focuses on the struggles of communities and social movements to defend their territories and worlds against the ravages of neoliberal globalization, the oases of Chenini (Gabes) and Jemna seemed to be the perfect examples. Both had the characteristics of an Environmentalism of the Poor, in hyper-politicized contexts where the population is fighting against the central power to defend their livelihoods.

The first is located in the coastal area of Gabes, known for its pollution due to phosphate production, where farmers continue to perpetuate ancestral practices of multi-level cultivation, agroecology and water distribution; practices that closely resemble those advocated by Permaculture. As mentioned, speaking of the discourses around Food Sovereignty, locals have also created seed banks working on the preservation and extension of the life of local seed varieties (despite the risks of imprisonment involved, as this practice is considered illegal by the central government). The second is the Jemna oasis in Nefzaoua, the country's main date-producing region. The oasis has become the symbol of peasant resistance and has been the scene of the emergence of a local and pluralist civil society, the learning of participatory democracy and the pioneering experience of the social and solidarity economy in Tunisia. This is not unlike the concept of autonomous design (Escobar, 2018) or diffuse design (Manzini, 2015). Considering the recent developments in the field of design, I tried to question its role through the analysis and direct application to the cases of oases practicing water and land commoning. The idea was to conduct research through design, in a kind of back and forth between theory and practice. Unfortunately, the pandemic and the many periods of quarantine prevented us from conducting such research, or at least partially.

### Image 4.3

*Gabes Labess, all is well in Gabes.*  
Habib Ayeub, 2014.

Documentary film highlighting the impacts generated by the installation of a chemical industry pole in the Gulf of Gabes, and on the oasis ecosystem in particular.

When I returned to Tunis in March 2021, I also escaped the second wave of Covid-19 and emerged from a long period of quarantine. My three years as a PhD student coincided with more than two years of global pandemic. I therefore had to manage this situation and organize my field research as best I could. In order to set up this first experience that would allow me to gain an embodied knowledge of the obstacles that my research project might entail, I drew on the (limited) means at my disposal. During the summer of 2020, I had already spoken with a few researchers and I spent the whole month of March 2021, contacting activists, researchers working on Food Sovereignty, Permaculture and the Social Solidarity Economy in order to understand the reality of the field and maybe convince them to join the experiment. I was able to exchange directly (physically or by telematics) with a number of the researchers I mentioned above in the last two sections and even the following chapters (Mohamed Kerrou, Mohamed Elloumi, Layla Riahi, Ouassim Labidi, Houcine Rhili, Habib Ayeb, Irène Carpentier, etc.), sometimes in a planned way and other times by force of circumstance during my numerous trips. My intention was to get an idea, albeit a broad one, of the context in which I was going to work but also to convince some of them to collaborate in the field experiment I wanted to undertake. The idea was not yet clear but my intention was to organize a workshop where people from the communities of Chenini and Jemna and activists or researchers could meet and discuss issues around the Social Solidarity Economy (the notion of the Commons is not - or hardly - mentioned in Tunisia where we rather talk about social solidarity economy), permaculture and food sovereignty.

### *4.3.1 Discussions around Food Sovereignty and Permaculture in Tunisia*

In March 2021, I tried to contact Habib Ayeb who is one of the major figures of food sovereignty in Tunisia without success. Habib Ayeb is a geographer and teacher-researcher at the University of Paris 8 in Saint Denis (France). A specialist in social geography, his research interests cover issues related to food sovereignty, the environment and peasant issues. I ended up meeting after finishing the experience in Chenini in June 2021. He had indeed organized a small meeting for the first screening of his film “Omm Layoun” dealing with the issue of water in Tunisia and that he had decided to share with the farmers of Chenini. This film is the last in a series of documentaries that have dealt with the issue of Food Sovereignty in Tunisia. One could cite the example of the film “Couscous: the seeds of dignity” released in 2017 or “Gabes Labess” shot in 2014, which dealt with the catastrophic ecological situation of the city of Gabes.

Along the way I also met activists Heythem Gasmi and Nada Trigui from the Association Tunisienne de Permaculture (ATP) who were developing a project aiming at the convergence of several protest movements of farmers in different regions of the country. This same association had two years ago organized the first edition of the seed festival in Chenini itself.

Since 2017, the ATP has also been the origin of the citizen initiative “Reverdir la Tunisie”, born of an alliance of the Higher Institute of Applied Biological Sciences (ISSBAT), the Association Eco-Conscience and the ATP. I had met Samia Mouelhi responsible for the project and professor at ISSBAT and we had discussed the said initiative. Originally, Samia Mouelhi explained: “I had visited shared gardens in Paris and then in Puerto Rico (...) and in Puerto Rico in the street you have only fruit trees (...) and therefore we have less hunger”. She compared this to the “aberrant” situation in Tunisia where “there are trees that are completely useless”. From this observation, Samia Mouelhi and her students decided to set up shared gardens and started by doing so in a plot of land within their institute. They contacted the ATP who trained them in Permaculture design. The students did not want to stop at Permaculture per se, and expressed their desire to develop a more complete project. “Since the Tunisians have not understood the problem of climate change and the

issue of Food Sovereignty, we will do things at the base” explained Samia Mouelhi. The students were trained in environmental management and had no knowledge of agroecology or permaculture. Samia Mouelhi, who taught courses on sustainable development and climate change, organized a kind of extracurricular course on a voluntary basis at the request of her own students. The students had the choice between visiting Jemna and its land commoning experience or answering the invitation of the mayor of the commune of Mareth in Gabes who proposed to establish a shared garden within a school in the locality. This is how the project developed little by little and spread to different schools throughout Tunisia. “We are experimenting with crop models that combine scientific knowledge, innovations and ancestral knowledge in order to offer all those directly impacted by climate change concrete, efficient, sustainable and achievable solutions in the short term”. Reverdir la Tunisie creates edible Oasis-forests in schools, without pesticides or chemical fertilizers, with a decrease in mechanical use and a real water saving. No more monoculture, but a studied assembly of fruit trees, peasant seeds, aromatic plants. Samia Mouelhi had offered to send her students to take part of the visit of Chenini, but finally the idea was abandoned for logistical reasons.

I also contacted the activists of the Groupe de Travail sur la Souveraineté Alimentaire (GTSA); meeting with Layla Riahi and Ouassim Labidi, authors of a book entitled “Our food, our agriculture, our sovereignty”, to discuss in more depth the issues outlined in the previous sections. Ouassim Labidi is from Redeyef (Gafsa) known for having been the scene of the 2008 social movement and events in Gafsa fueled by a scandal related to an entrance exam to the CPG, which broke out against the backdrop of a deteriorating social climate. He studied economics and was active with the communist party for several years during high-school and university until 2011 to focus on associative work. In 2013 and 2015, the 12th and 13th editions of the World Social Forum (WSF) were organized. Thanks to the debates and exchanges with activists from all walks of life, especially those from Via Campesina, these events were a kind of revelation for him regarding the issues of food sovereignty and the social and solidarity economy.

Ouassim mentioned the boom of associations and at the same time criticised the conditional funding and themes parachuted into the

Tunisian context by foreign donors, considering that none of them dealt with the real issues and the reality of Tunisian citizens. He deplored the absence of substantive issues and the hypocrisy of Western funders in their support of Tunisian civil society. Ouassim was also part of the support committee for the Jemna experience in 2016, which resulted in a research paper on the issue of state land. Jemna was an opportunity to open up lively debates around the issues of land, the distribution of wealth between regions in Tunisia, but also to question the imperialist concept of development. Ouassim was intrigued by the experiment I was trying to conduct in Chenini and Jemna. He confirmed that the two contexts were the most appropriate for the issues addressed in the research. In Chenini, Ouassim considered that there was an acute political awareness in relation to agriculture, the concept of food sovereignty, pollution and the environment, unlike in other oasis contexts; the people of Chenini would be more aware of the risks faced by Tunisian oases in the near future, especially in relation to climate change, resource depletion and the sustainability of their own activities. Unlike in Chenini where I have a real and tangible knowledge of the territory, in Jemna I had to establish contacts and Ouassim helped me to draw up an initial list of contacts by offering to come and participate in the experiments I wanted to carry out in the field.

Layla Riahi is an architect by training; she had met Ouassim in 2013 during the WSF. She worked for the Tunisian Economic Observatory before joining forces with Ouassim to found the GTSA. Talking about Jemna, Layla asked me about the fact that the collectivization and social economy experience was not necessarily adopted by all the inhabitants (many of them having no connection with the said experience) and that the workers working in the association were not necessarily inhabitants of Jemna. She had several doubts about the adherence of the local population of Jemna to the participatory workshop that I intended to set up, because of the many disagreements that there were with the Association for the Safeguarding of the Oases of Jemna that was managing the experiment on the state land that the youth of Jemna had taken over by force during the revolution of 2010/2011. So, I attended a meeting where different activists for food sovereignty in Tunisia but also farmers from different regions of Tunisia were present; we were dealing with the idea of redeploying cooperatives on state-owned land (*terres domaniales*) but also to systemize them by creating a kind of network.

I decided to investigate the issue of state-owned land in more depth, therefore contacting Mohamed Elloumi, professor and head of the Rural Economy Laboratory at the Tunisian National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRAT). He was the author of a paper entitled “Les terres domaniales en Tunisie: Histoire d’une appropriation par les pouvoirs publics” published in 2012. This was an opportunity to get an overview of the agricultural sector in Tunisia. Mohamed Elloumi is indeed a well-known figure in the field and I had read several of his articles during my desk-research. He seemed to be well informed about the history and evolution of the Tunisian agricultural system as well as the present and future challenges of the agricultural sector. I here try to summarize our discussion here, but can already say that he highlighted the issues of the marginalization of farmers and the limits of the Tunisian agricultural model discussed in the previous sections. For Elloumi, Tunisia inherited a colonial model of dual agriculture, i.e., a dry farming model, with olive trees in the center and the south based on soil mineralization and mining, and a cereal model in the north which is exactly the same.

“We tried to get out of this model in a first moment by trying to generalize it in the first place and not to challenge it through the agricultural cooperatives in the 1960s. Then came the green revolution model that Tunisia adopted with its positive aspects that should not be neglected; making a clear leap forward, particularly in terms of the quantity of cereals produced, for example. The Green Revolution model had thus been adapted to the Tunisian context, particularly in terms of irrigation”. For Elloumi, what was important was the development of a movement at the international level that challenged this Green Revolution model; there are those who do so only on the social level, criticizing all the drifts at the socio-economic level, land grabbing and exclusion of the peasantry. Nevertheless, Elloumi explained that it was necessary to make a global analysis, both on the technical level (since this model has effectively exhausted the soil and natural resources) and on the social level, taking an interest in the small peasantry, small-scale farming and family farming, which he believes are the driving force of Tunisian agriculture. A family agriculture that does not fit into the current model; “basically this model has reached its limits and we have to get out of it”.

Elloumi gave a brief historical overview of how Tunisia has overcome the various crises it has faced. For him, Tunisia at the end of the

1960s went through a crisis similar to the current one, as was also the case in the mid-1980s, which led to a structural adjustment program. Thus, either the technical or the economic model or both have always been changed. In the 1960s both were changed by adopting the technical model of the green revolution and moving from a state socialist model to a liberal model. In the 1980s, the economy was balanced between the agricultural sector and the other sectors of the economy by pushing the green revolution model even further and trying to generalize it, notably through the rural development programs that Elloumi briefly criticised.

“Currently we are in a similar crisis, on the socio-economic level (...) the 2010-2011 revolution is a direct consequence of this model of the 1980s”. According to Elloumi, agriculture in Tunisia has historically always been mobilized for the other sectors of the economy. Elloumi thinks that “the revolution started in the rural world. The crisis is stronger in rural areas than in urban areas (...) it’s not the same, because in urban areas it’s the problem of recognition and problems of political integration, whereas in rural areas the problems are linked to living conditions, social and economic exclusion, and therefore it’s the agricultural model that is at fault. So, to get out of this, we need to rethink the technical model if we want to avoid the depletion of natural resources and soils by moving on to permaculture, conservation farming, ecological intensification or agro-ecology (...) and on the social level, to support the model of family farming inserted in its territory and on the economic level, to rethink the relationship between the agricultural sector and the rest of the economy”.

After the revolution, Elloumi was part of a working group that proposed a diagnosis (not widely shared by the sector’s actors) and new strategic orientations for a new agriculture. He was responsible for thinking about agricultural research in Tunisia up to 2035. He proposed a research program to move towards these new models. “The problem in all this is that we are too focused on France and we have little or no access to literature from Latin America or Asia (...) we are not able to set up an internal reflection and our proposal has been rejected. For him, the few youth initiatives on permaculture are not yet gaining importance and “we have been going in circles for 20 years (...) In the long term we cannot face climate change and we cannot face globalization”.

According to Elloumi, “the covid has had an impact, but despite everything, the sector that has fared best, or rather least badly, is the agricultural sector; knowing how to meet demand, even if it is not as true as that (...) we have been somewhat resilient, but we have still been obliged to import large quantities of cereals and to stockpile them, whereas the previous year was a very good one”. Elloumi considered that the question of self-sufficiency was a false problem; we can talk about food security and food sovereignty but not self-sufficiency. For him, the issues of food security and food sovereignty go hand in hand; “currently in Tunisia, food security is achieved or rather sought through the balance of payments, i.e., we export olive oil and dates to import cereals, which is not sustainable even in accounting terms and indirectly calls into question our food sovereignty (...) but what is worse is that we have to make sure that our food security is not undermined (...) but what is worse is that it disconnects agricultural production from national consumption (...) the situation is getting worse every year. This translates into food dependency, 40% of calories are imported, even if we say we are self-sufficient in meat, fruit and vegetables, the fact is that globally we cannot hold out”.

Elloumi believes that the production model should be reoriented towards this correspondence between consumption needs and national production. Secondly, Elloumi spoke of the need to rediscover the Mediterranean diet, known and recognized for its health benefits; “to do this, we need to strengthen the family character of Tunisian agriculture, to anchor it even more firmly in its territories in order to create a territorial dynamic without becoming closed”. For him, the health dimension is a dimension that is always forgotten in the debate on food sovereignty: “Tunisia is among the world champions in terms of diseases linked to poor nutrition, i.e., diabetes, cholesterol (...) hallucinating figures, and only Mexico, Egypt and the USA are worse off than us (...) this is a side that is never taken into account in the agricultural and food balance, since the cost in terms of health is enormous.”

Speaking about the work of the Food Sovereignty Working Group, Elloumi criticised a guilt-ridden discourse, saying that it was necessary to recontextualize the choices that had been made in the past. “I don’t want to defend what was done before, but when this was conceived there was another vision of the world (...) we should not

put these people on trial with the way we look at it now, the political decision-makers may not have had the information or access to alternative models." Elloumi nevertheless deplored the fact that today the majority of actors defend the current model "to the extreme" by accepting "regional imbalance" as a "creative imbalance." Most accept the idea of mobilizing resources and financial means towards the most productive regions, which helps to maintain a neoliberal discourse of trickle-down wealth. He explained, however, that more and more young researchers are moving towards questioning this green revolution model.

Elloumi also explained that in 2015, during the elaboration of the Tunisian state's economic and social development plan for the period 2021-2025, GIZ had led a participatory process at the regional and local levels, initiating attempts to reflect on development models in which the different actors formulated proposals together. He explained that the process remained vertical and top-down because the weight of the central administration was consequent: "It is the central administration that holds the levers of financing and that makes the arbitrations and therefore even the texts of the constitution on positive discrimination for the least developed regions has not been respected in the last development plan (...) it is always the most well-off regions that receive the most means as it was in the past."

Elloumi explained that better tools and models which are more adapted to the context were today available. Thus, the community management of goods, the model of social and solidarity economy, agroecology or permaculture are ways out but "if we want to change the model, it is not the business of farmers or politicians only but above all the business of society as a whole". Elloumi advocates an alliance between consumers and producers: "If we did well during the covid, it is because Tunisian consumers turned to local products". For him, Tunisian agriculture is not as efficient as it could be because the question of distribution channels and the corruption that is rampant in them should be addressed, since most consumers are urban while producers are rural. Elloumi explained that many initiatives were tackling the problem by creating short circuit projects between consumers and producers, but these remained isolated. The contribution of design could be to develop a network around these initiatives. Small networks exist but unfortunately,

they have no resonance at the political level and there are no synergies between them.

For Elloumi, the real issue remains that of family farming or subsistence farming, which is becoming increasingly impoverished as it competes with other players on the market. It is isolated from intermediaries and faces prices that are often administered and not sufficiently remunerative. The result is an impoverishment of this great mass of farmers who are offered territorial development as a solution. "This territorial development based on the development of local products and handicrafts is just window-dressing (...) they all make the same thing, jam and forest essences. There is no market because the Tunisian consumer cannot buy these products, which means that there are young people who start up only to give up after three years". Elloumi also spoke of the ageing of the agricultural population, a massive exodus of young people and a refusal to practice agriculture, which is becoming less attractive to young people. "It is the future of Tunisian agriculture that is at stake". Reshaping the model and creating a market are solutions that remain partial because for Elloumi "we should think about a complete change of paradigms (...) exporting agriculture to get foreign currency is a model that does not hold the road."

### 4.3.2 *Discussions around SSE in Tunisia: Commons as the Ultimate Degree*

With Elloumi we had also discussed the issue of state-owned land. I mention it in this subsection on the social and solidarity economy because we noticed that the two subjects (state-owned land and social and solidarity economy) were often discussed together. The notion of Commons is not (or barely) mentioned in Tunisia where we talk instead about social and solidarity economy. The context of Jemna was also discussed. Elloumi believes that the Jemna model could be generalized; state-owned land in Tunisia would represent roughly 50,000 hectares. “We could distribute 2 to 3 hectares to young people (...) a scenario of joint management within the framework of cooperatives (...) water could be a common good (...) but in Tunisia the problem is precisely the perception of the common good because the farmers are not in this perspective (...) they are rather in a race for the resource, a Hardin-like scenario where the one who exploits the most and has the most means benefits the most.” For Elloumi, it is very complicated to reverse this trend, even if in the oases a reactivation of the Commons would be possible because there is a tradition, but in the rest of Tunisia we are rather in the vision of a tragedy of the Commons.

I therefore wanted to investigate more deeply the new law on the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in Tunisia voted in 2020. The conflict in Jemna between the population and the central power has contributed to the debate on SSE and to its mediatization. First, I contacted Houcine Rhili, who is an expert in SSE but also in water and sustainable development and head of the study project “water and social justice in the mining basin” within the framework of the Observatoire Tunisien de l’Eau (OTE). In 2018, faced with the alarming situation of the water sector in the governorate of Gafsa, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, funded the regional project “Economic Policies for Social Justice” in collaboration with the association NOMAD08 (of which Ouassim Labidi is a member). Using a participatory and citizen-based approach, this study was the fruit of diagnostic work, data collection and field surveys carried out with the citizens of the governorate of Gafsa. The aim of this study was to provide a number of results, recommendations and proposals for decision-makers and civil society organizations, with a view to creating a dynamic perception beyond the extractive nature towards integra-

ted development dimensions with high added value.

For Rhili, the issue of water in Tunisia is not technical but structural. Tunisia continues to apply a colonial model of building dams in the northwest of the country, whereas rainfall has changed in recent years, mainly due to climate change. According to Rhili, it does not rain as much in the North of Tunisia and there are torrential rains in the South; rains in El Hamma (Gabes), Gafsa and Tataouine in essentially desert areas. The sand does not allow water to infiltrate the renewable water tables in the south, particularly the Jeffara water table in Gabes. Rhili explained to me that nearly 36 billion/m<sup>3</sup> of water is poured into Tunisia every year, whereas the retention capacity of Tunisian dams is only 2 billion/m<sup>3</sup> (there is no way to check these figures). The shortfall is therefore quite significant and the problem, according to Rhili, would be linked to planning, where a different strategy for the mobilization of surface water would be needed than the one imposed during the French colonization of the country. He believes that it would have been better to build underground dams with underground standards and techniques than large dams with enormous costs before continuing his implacable reasoning on the loss of earnings in water extraction and the resulting waste. The mobilization of water in a dam is expensive (more than a billion dinars per m<sup>3</sup>), but water mobilization through underground dams can be achieved thanks to innovative techniques that help water to infiltrate rapidly and recharge the aquifers, hence the interest in implementing new techniques. Rhili believes that in the future there may be one good year that gives way to another critical year in the future, i.e. one in three years of rainfall, emphasizing the idea of anticipating such episodes.

Rhili is also the author of a book entitled "Social and Solidarity Economy: Mechanism of Struggle", so this was an opportunity to discuss the idea of water as a common good. Rhili would refer to Marxism-autonomism and Negri's work (2000) to talk about SSE; considering in passing the social entrepreneurship as a disguised form of Capitalism. He thus referred to the Latin American approach to the popular economy (Razeto, 1984; Larrachea & Nyssens, 1994; Singer, 2000; Sarria Icaza and Tiriba, 2006), which he considered to be more adapted to the Tunisian context and closer to his ideals. We discussed the experience of Marinaleda in Spain (Andalusia) and its transformation into a cooperative municipality since the 1980s.

Rhili was very enthusiastic about the participatory approach I wanted to take in the two oases and about mobilizing the notion of Commons; he expressed his interest in participating in such a process.

I then contacted Lotfi Ben Aissa, an academic, expert and leading figure in the SSE in Tunisia. Ben Aissa could be considered as one of the fathers of the new law on SSE voted in 2020, "I have been carrying the SSE project since 2007, i.e., since the beginning (...) at the time we discussed it in a very restricted circle, we organized seminars in Tunisia or participated in seminars abroad. It is only after the revolt that the project started to have visibility and we started to build networks dedicated to SSE." Ben Aissa did not seem to have a clear idea of Commons but felt that it was similar to his definition of SSE and cooperatives. Through the discussion with him I was able to get an overview of the current context of the SSE in Tunisia but also of its history. For Ben Aissa, if we were to make a diagnosis of the SSE in Tunisia through an evaluation of its components, we would realize that it is both a new and an old concept; "SSE covers a very old reality, What is new is the terminology but for us in Tunisia cooperatives are part of our history of more than a century, i.e. since the (1) consumer cooperatives launched by Mohamed Ali Hammi in parallel to the trade unions in 1924 and that was developed by the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) with the economic and social program of 1956 and all the cooperative fabric created by the UGTT through the people's bank in the 1957-60 period (...) before the cooperativism of the Tunisian economy was established. ) before cooperativism became a state policy with Ben Salah. At the same time, since 1954, (2) the mutual societies were created, which are the second component of the SSE, and finally the 1959 law on (3) associations, which organized the associative world (...) today it is the 2011 law which organizes the associative sector. These are the three main components of the SSE in Tunisia which, under particular names, constituted the SSE ecosystem until then. We can add to it since about ten years a new ecosystem that has been grafted on the SSE which is the social entrepreneurship".

Ben Aissa explained that in the agricultural sector, a 2005 law gave rise to a new generation of cooperatives known as service cooperatives; these are the Societes Mutuelles de Services Agricoles (SMSA) which have replaced and made us forget the old generation of cooperatives of the 1960s and the Ben Salah area, speaking of Taadhod

(cooperativism) which remains a rather negative experience in the Tunisian common imagination. “Before that, in 1984, as part of a reform of the agricultural sector, we introduced what we call the Sociétés de Mise en Valeur et de Développement Agricole (SMVDA), which are companies or individuals who have been granted state-owned land to work on within the framework of usufruct, with the property remaining that of the state, while at the same time the cooperatives of the 1960’s, were blocked in a deliberate choice to privatise the agricultural sector”.

The only way out for state-owned land was to concede it to the private sector as part of a global policy favoring the private sector over the cooperatives. According to Ben Aissa, this was a preparation for the liberal option that was gradually taking hold, that of state Capitalism. This gave rise to the coexistence of three sectors (public, private, cooperative) with a prevalence of the private sector to which “all the means were given, whereas it is an emanation of the public sector (...) the state financed the private sector in particular through the public banks. Ben Aissa spoke of a rentier system considering that in Tunisia “we have never had a true Capitalism, we have neither capitalist in the true sense of the word, nor a working class in the true sense of the word because the state is everywhere, it is a totally disfigured modernity. Ben Aissa nevertheless believes that Tunisia has some achievements, notably with a well-established civil society.” According to Ben Aissa, cooperatives are being reborn in Tunisia, whereas they “were deliberately marginalized, especially from 1987 onwards, since Ben Ali took power (...) this was the starting point and the adhesion to the Washington consensus (...) the neo-liberalism and savage Capitalism of Thatcher and Reagan (...) we were in a context of globalization and liberalization and Ben Ali’s era was that of neo-liberalism par excellence.

Ben Aissa explained that agriculture is essential in the SSE ecosystem: “Quantitatively, there are more than 3,000 Agricultural Development Groups (GDAs) that manage water resources, several SMSAs, soft versions of the cooperatives of the 1960s, essentially basic SMSAs that operate at the regional level and are small in size, but also central SMSAs with a turnover of 20 billion dinars, which are the behemoths of the SSE in Tunisia (...) and finally, there are about twenty returnees from the cooperative system of the 1960s, which are established on state-owned land. “ But Ben Aissa also explained

that the SSE should not be limited to the agricultural sector, especially since the dynamics set in motion a decade ago just after the 2010-2011 revolution. "Agriculture, all sectors combined, public, private and copper, constitutes only 14% of the country's GDP while services constitute more than 60%." According to Ben Aissa, the mutualist sector has great potential but remains conservative because the actors/leaders have not been renewed, citing the example of the Mutuelle de la Santé which has had the same director since 1975. Finally, in Tunisia "the associative world has had more than 23,000 associations since the revolution, 14 to 15% of which work in the economic activity development sector".

Speaking of food sovereignty, climate change and the challenges facing the country, Ben Aissa considers that "a new generation of cooperators and cooperatives with a new governance, new financing mechanisms with a total respect for all the principles of SSE (...) today we are in a process of reconstitution and refoundation of the SSE ecosystem which remains very scattered (...) we have scattered composites of cooperatives and cooperatives with a new governance, new financing mechanisms with a total respect for all the principles of SSE (...). ) we have scattered components, no link between GDAs, SMSAs and former cooperatives, which are under the same supervision but remain compartmentalized (...) beyond the agricultural sector, associations have different legal forms due to the absence of an adequate framework (...) but we have the new law on SSE voted in 2020. "

Along with Houcine Rhili and Mostfa Jouili, Ben Aissa was part of the Jabha Chaabia (Popular Front) expert group bringing together several left-wing parties on the occasion of the implementation of the Popular Front's economic and social program. Ben Aissa explained the presence of some divergences on certain questions: "we return to certain debates of the 1970s with the Perspectives Movement which are still relevant today (...) the question was 'what is the nature of the revolution in Tunisia? Is it a socialist revolution or a democratic and national revolution? This debate has been settled (...) the 2011 revolution has reminded us of the terms of this debate (...) there is confusion today and the 2011 revolution is a revolt for freedom, equality and dignity (...) it is neither an Islamist revolution nor a liberal revolution since it was made against the effects of neo-liberalism, nor even a socialist revolution (...) we are therefore in a

democratic and national revolution whereas some people do not recognize this and continue to speak of a capital/labor contradiction, of union work not being respected by this or that boss (...) for them the solution would be to nationalize everything (...) there is confusion in the reading of the nature of the phase we are going through and the SSE which was invited into the debate or which I had invited into the debate within the National Front was experienced with a certain uneasiness (...) because the SSE at the level of its principles imprints on the public sector the idea of general interest or common good to put it simply, but imprints on the private sector the principle of economic profitability in order to propose a new equation. If I invest in an activity with a social, societal or environmental purpose, this does not justify the loss (...) it is still necessary to make a profit (...) the first principle of the SSE is the primacy of man over capital, I do not suppress it because I need it but as a means and not as an end. This leads us to the second principle, which is that of limited profitability, which has been capped at 25%, the rest being invested in the development of the company. To guarantee the company's sustainability, it must nevertheless generate a return on financial investment."

For Ben Aissa the SSE law is "a real struggle"; it was commissioned by UGTT in 2016 and elaborated by a group of experts of which Ben Aissa was the scientific coordinator. "It was presented in 2016 by UGTT to the head of government at that time Youssef Chahed who had just been appointed and with whom Houcine Abassi, former president of UGTT, was on good terms so that the ministries concerned could study it, while we could pass it directly to the Assembly of People's Representatives without going through the president of the republic or the head of government because I had gathered a list of 50 deputies who had signed it (...) I know the workings of the state and the administration (...) the project took 3 years before being sent to the assembly (...) the project which was well articulated was massacred during the governmental process. "

For Ben Aissa this new law will allow the creation of a link between the SSE entities in Tunisia. The latter have nothing in common today, "neither at the conceptual level, nor for the objectives, nor at the level of the definition of SSE, nor at the level of the financing structures (...) this lack of linkage makes them marginal entities". A law was needed to organize "this nebula", which was done with the

law passed in 2020. Ben Aissa explained that within the UGTT the interest of such a law was understood and that the trade union was the most legitimate since cooperativism has been part of its history for more than a century. “What was missing was a critical and lucid reading of the situation and the fact of being impregnated by the logic of the moment (...) the UNO decreed 2012 as the international year of cooperatives, which shows the weight of cooperatives on an international scale, starting with the USA (...). In Tunisia, cooperatives have long been scorned because of the failed experiment of cooperativism in the 1960s, but fortunately today we are uninhibited and the term Taadhod will soon be rehabilitated.”

With the UGTT Ben Aissa explained that he had *carte blanche* to impose a participatory approach to the implementation of the law with the collaboration of social partners, civil society and networks dedicated to SSE; “we imposed our presence in all the legislative and regulatory process.” In the immediate future, in order for the sector to be equipped, there should be a development of institutions but also of financing. The law provided for the creation of three institutions: (1) a public institution in charge of the coordination and implementation of the public policy on SSE, i.e. the Tunisian Authority of Social and Solidarity Economy; (2) a consultative structure, i.e. the Superior Council of Social and Solidarity Economy under the supervision of the Prime Ministry, where public representatives and representatives of SSE, as well as social partners, meet to discuss general orientations or draft texts concerning SSE (3) an autonomous civil entity which is none other than the self-organized, totally independent ecosystem that the UGTT could organize according to Ben Aissa (this ecosystem being totally dispersed, the UGTT could provide them with a federative and representative structure at local, regional and national levels).

This reminded us of the tri-centric model that Jose Vivero Pol (2018) speaking about the relation between public, civic and the private sectors defending the idea of ‘food as Commons’. Ben Aissa saw Commons as simply a collective heritage that is reflected in all parts of society but to varying degrees. We spoke of SSE; SSE being here a kind of transitional phase for the constitution of an economy around Commons. Ben Aissa explained that he was thinking about strategies while being an actor in the steering committee in charge of drafting the implementation decrees foreseen by the new

SSE law. “In Tunisia we are in a process and I remain realistic (...) everything is a question of power relations but the fight is worth it (...) a cooperative alone can do nothing but small, medium and large cooperatives networked would weigh on the decisions of the central power and that is what I am working on.” It is worth noting that this idea of networking initiatives was central to most of the discussions we had with different researchers and activists in food sovereignty and SSE on site.

Finally, we discussed Jemna who, according to Ben Aissa, was not at the origin of the new law on SSE but contributed to the debate and to its mediatization. “In the end, Jemna and Taher Tahri, the president of the Association for the Safeguarding of Jemna Oases, are friends (...) I understand why they are bitter about the law (...) but Jemna is a symbolic and an original experience that has had great international success (...) unfortunately in the Tunisian context, the debate on SSE is overloaded with issues that go beyond the framework of the law itself (...) in Jemna the problem is among others the legal and regulatory dimension (...) today the association is de facto installed on a state land belonging to the Tunisian state. And the actors of the civil society have imposed the right to the usufruct and not the property, which is already considerable in view of the social impact that the experience has had (...) I always remind Taher Tahri that the Jemna experience could introduce a real agrarian revolution in Tunisia, an agrarian reform for a new management of state-owned land (...) the legal forms do not matter as long as the principles of the SSE are integrated. “

For Ben Aissa, the members of the Jemna association would be against the idea of limited profitability since they are in the business of redistributing the totality of the profits whereas, as an association, they do not have the vocation to do so “what is both extraordinary and problematic is that they have substituted themselves for the state and local authorities (...) I want to keep Jemna for its symbolic value, but in a divided and fragmented ecosystem Jemna cannot become the norm.” For Ben Aissa the Jemna model is “maximalist” and by not integrating the framework of this new law, the experiment risks becoming a “utopian island lost in a different capitalist landscape”. He recalled Owen’s utopian socialism criticised by Engels (1880) entitled ‘utopian socialism and scientific socialism’. For Ben Aissa “we need accumulation at least as a transition becau-

se we are not yet in a socialist revolution". He thus considers that the SSE through its principles participates in the rehabilitation of socialist values. His objective is to finalize the legislative texts in order to proceed with the creation of a cooperative bank, the financial arm of the sector guaranteeing its autonomy, which the government had initially removed from the draft law. Ben Aissa remains critical of the final form of the law, but sees it as a start; "I am dreaming with my feet on the ground, I always have something in mind but I am dealing with the balance of power." Finally, he explained that international support was currently massive (GIZ, UNDP, etc.) but that this was good up to a certain limit, "because once the foreign donors have left, it will be necessary to take over at the local level, and this is the whole point of setting up a cooperative ethical bank."

## References Chapter 4

- RobeAkram-Lodhi, A. H. (2012). Contextualising land grabbing: contemporary land deals, the global subsistence crisis and the world food system. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 33:2, 119-142, DOI: 10.1080/02255189.2012.690726
- Allal, A. & Geisser, V. (2011). La Tunisie de l'après-Ben Ali: Les partis politiques à la recherche du « peuple introuvable ». *Cultures & Conflits*, 83, 118-125. <https://doi.org/10.4000/conflits.18216>
- Amayed, A. (2019, December 16). Food Security in Tunisia: A Need to Move Back to Sovereignty. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. [online] Available at: <<https://za.boell.org/en/2019/12/16/food-security-tunisia-need-move-back-sovereignty>>
- Amin, S. (1970). L'accumulation à l'échelle mondiale. In: *Tiers-Monde*, tome 13, n°52, 1972. Le capitalisme périphérique. pp. 865-868.
- Amin, S. (2017). « The Sovereign Popular Project; The Alternative to Liberal Globalization », *Journal of Labor and Society*, Volume 20.
- Ammirati, A. (2015, 8 décembre). What is the Dublin regulation? *Open Migration*. <https://openmigration.org/en/analyses/what-is-the-dublin-regulation>.
- Ayeb, H. (2011). Géographie sociale et géopolitique de la révolution tunisienne : la révolution de l'Alfa. *Maghreb - Machrek*, 210, 61-77. <https://doi.org/10.3917/machr.210.0061>
- Ayeb, H. and Bush, R. (2019). *Food insecurity and revolution in the Middle East and North Africa : agrarian questions in Egypt and Tunisia*. London: Anthem Press.
- Badalič, V. (2018). Tunisia's role in the EU external migration policy: Crimmigration law, illegal practices and their impact on human rights. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 20, 85-100.
- Bayat, A. (2013). *Life as Politics How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. (Second ed.). Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bettini, G. (2019), And yet it moves! (Climate) migration as a symptom in the Anthropocene, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK.
- Boffo, M., Saad-Filho, A., & Fine, B. (2018). *Neoliberal Capitalism: The Authoritarian Turn*. In Panitch, L., & Albo, G. (Eds.), *A world turned upside down?* London. The Merlin Press.
- Bonifazi, C. (2008). Bonifazi C., Okolski M., Schoorl J., and Simon P. (eds.). 2008. *International Migration in Europe: New Trends and New Methods of Analysis*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Bush, R. and Martiniello, G. (2017). Food Riots and Protest: Agrarian Modernizations and Structural Crises. *World Development*, [online] 91, pp.193–207. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X16305198> [Accessed 18 Apr. 2019].
- Chandoul, J. (2017). POLICY BRIEF: Tunisia and IMF: transitional injustice. *Tax Policy in the Arab Region program*.
- Chesnot, C., Ballanger, F. (2019). *La Tunisie en première ligne du changement climatique*. France Culture. <https://www.franceculture.fr/environnement/la-tunisie-en-premiere-ligne-du-changement-climatique>
- CIHEAM, . & Plan Bleu. (2009). *MediTERRA 2009: Repenser le développement rural en Méditerranée*. Presses de Sciences Po. <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.cihea.2009.01>

- Colombo, F. (2015). Rifugiati e migranti economici: facciamo chiarezza, [online] Available at: <<https://www.lenius.it/rifugiati-e-migranti-economici/>> [Accessed 22 March 2019].
- Daguzan, J. (2011). Tunisie: La révolution improbable. Dans : Thierry de Montbrial éd., Ramses 2012: Les États submergés ? (pp. 160-163). Paris: Institut français des relations internationales. <https://doi.org/10.3917/ifri.demon.2011.01.0160>
- David, A. (2018), CHAPITRE 1 - Migrations en Provenance et à Destination des Pays Méditerranéens, CIHEAM, MediTERRA 2018. Presses de Sciences Po, p. 27-38
- Declaration of Nyéléni, February 27, 2007, <https://efaidnbmnmbpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://nyeeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf>
- Desmidt, S. (2021). Climate change and security in North Africa Focus on Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. CASCADES project.
- Desrues, T., & Gobe, E. (2021). “We don’t want to be governed like this anymore”: protest democracy as an expression of a crisis of governmentality in post-revolution Tunisia. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1996333>
- Elloumi, M. (2012). Les terres domaniales en Tunisie. *Études Rurales*, 192, 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesrurales.9888>
- Engelke, P., L. Aronsson, M. Nordenman, 2017, Mediterranean Futures 2030 Toward A Transatlantic Security Strategy, Atlantic Council
- Engels, F. (1880). *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.
- Europarl. (2017). Europe’s migration crisis. [online] Available at: <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20170629STO78631/europe-s-migration-crisis>> [Accessed 27 March 2019].
- FAO IFAD IOM WFP. (2018), The Linkages between Migration, Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development. Rome.
- Fargues, P. (2017). Four decades of cross-Mediterranean undocumented migration to Europe: A review of the evidence. International Organization for Migration.
- Federici, S. (2008). Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 10(1), 21-35. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol10/iss1/3>
- Ferreira, S. (2019). Human security and migration in Europe’s southern borders. Palgrave.
- “Friedmann, H. (2016) Commentary: Food Regime Analysis and Agrarian Questions: Widening the Conversation. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 43, 671-692. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1146254>”
- Gherib, B. (2012). Économie politique de la révolution tunisienne: Les groupes sociaux face au capitalisme de copinage. *Revue Tiers Monde*, 212, 19-36. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rtm.212.0019>
- Glassman, J. (2006). Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession, Accumulation by Extra-Economic Means. *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 30, no. 5, Oct. 2006, pp. 608–625, [10.1177/0309132506070172](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132506070172).
- GTSA (2020). Le changement climatique en Tunisie, entre les approches institutionnelles et les effets sur la paysannerie. [online] ritimo. Available at: <https://www.ritimo.org/Le-changement-climatique-en-Tunisie-entre-les-approches-institutionnelles-et> [Accessed 28 Apr. 2022].
- GTSA (2020). Le piège des concepts entre « sécurité alimentaire » et « souveraineté alimentaire » : où se

positionnent les peuples ? siyada.org. [online] Available at <<https://www.siyada.org/fr/siyada-board/agriculture-dexportation/le-piege-des-concepts-entre-securite-alimentaire-et-souverainete-alimentaire-ou-se-positionnent-les-peuples/>>

Hamouchene, H. (2015, November 21). La Prochaine Révolution en Afrique du Nord : La Lutte pour la Justice Climatique. Nawaat. <https://nawaat.org/2015/11/21/la-prochaine-revolution-en-afrique-du-nord-la-lutte-pour-la-justice-climatique/>

Hamouchene, H. (2019). Extractivism and resistance in North Africa. [online] Available at: [https://www.tni.org/en/ExtractivismNorthAfrica?content\\_language=fr](https://www.tni.org/en/ExtractivismNorthAfrica?content_language=fr) [Accessed 28 Apr. 2022].

Hart K. (2006). Informal Economy. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thememorybank.co.uk>> [Accessed 15 April 2020].

Herbert, Matt. (2022). Tunisia - Growing Irregular Migration Flows Amid Worsening Political Fragility. the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC).

Hibou, B. (2006). 7. Les contours du pacte de sécurité tunisien. Dans : , B. Hibou, La force de l'obéissance: Économie politique de la répression en Tunisie (pp. 219-251). Paris: La Découverte.

Jouili, M. (2008). Ajustement Structurel, Mondialisation Et Agriculture Familiale En Tunisie. Montpellier: L'universite De Montpellier 1.

Kalboussi, M. (2017). Mouvements sociaux et environnement : Quels horizons en Tunisie ? In nawaat.org. [online] Available at : <<https://nawaat.org/2017/12/09/mouvements-sociaux-et-environnement-quels-horizons-en-tunisie-partie-i/>>

Knoll, A., & Teevan, C. (2020). Protecting migrants and refugees in North Africa: challenges and opportunities for reform. ECDPM.

Lamloum, O., & Ben Zina M. A. (2015). Les jeunes de Douar Hicher et d'Ettadhamen: Une enquête sociologique (Youth of Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen: A Sociological Survey). Tunis: International Alert and Arabesques.

Larraechea I. et Nyssens M. (1994), «L'économie solidaire, un autre regard sur l'économie populaire au Chili», in Laville J.-L. (éd.), L'économie solidaire. Une perspective internationale, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 177-222.

Latruffe, L., & Piet, L. (2013). Does Land Fragmentation Affect Farm Performance? A Case Study from Brittany. Factor Markets Working Paper no. 40. April.

Lelieveld, J., Proestos, Y., Hadjinicolaou, P., Tanarhte, M., Tyrlis, E., & Zittis, G. (2016). Strongly increasing heat extremes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the 21st century. *Climatic Change*, 137(1-2), 245-260. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-016-1665-6>

Li, T. M. (2010). To Make Live or Let Die? Rural Dispossession and the Protection of Surplus Populations." *Antipode*, vol. 41, no. s1, Jan. 2010, pp. 66-93, 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00717.x.

Lindley, A. (2014). *Crisis and Migration: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

Martín, I., Nori, M., & Bacchi, A. (2017). Effects of youth migration on agricultural production and employment in the rural areas of origin in Tunisia (Paper). Sixth AIEAA Conference. <https://10.22004/ag.econ.263007>

Martinez-Alier, J. (2002) *The environmentalism of the poor: a study of ecological conflicts and valuation*. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.

Mathieu, L. (2011). *La démocratie protestataire. Mouvements politiques et sociaux en France aujour-*

rd'hui. Paris. Les Presses de SciencesPo.

Mollison, B. (1979). *Permaculture two: Practical design for town and country in permanent agriculture*. Stanley, Australia: Tagari.

Mouillard, S., & Nadau, L. (2015, 15 aprile). Le système pénalise les pays du sud de l'Europe, porte d'entrée des migrants. *Libération*. [http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2015/04/15/droit-d-asile-la-loidu-chacun-pour-soi-des-accords-de-dublin\\_1242077](http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2015/04/15/droit-d-asile-la-loidu-chacun-pour-soi-des-accords-de-dublin_1242077)

Murphy, E. (1999). *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia: From Bourguiba to Ben Ali*. New York, N.Y., St. Martin's Press in association with University of Durham.

Peet, R. and Watts, M. (1996) *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. Routledge, London. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203286784>

Razeto L. (1984). *Economía de solidaridad y Mercado democrático*. Libro primero. Santiago de Chile, PET.

Rennick, S. A. (2021). Has Tunisia's Democracy Failed to Convince Its Youth? The Slow-Going of Democratic Socialization. *Arab Reform Initiative*. <https://www.arab-reform.net/pdf/?pid=19729&plang=en>

Riahi, L. & Abidi, W. (2019). *Aliment, agriculture, souveraineté : Une analyse des politiques agricoles tunisiennes à la lumière du concept de souveraineté*

Rosset, P. M., Martínez-Torres, M. E. (2014). Food Sovereignty and Agroecology in the Convergence of Rural Social Movements. In: *Alternative Agrifood Movements: Patterns of Convergence and Divergence*, pp.137-157. DOI: 10.1108/S1057-192220140000021001

Saad-Filho, A. (2020). De la Covid-19 al fin del neoliberalismo. *El Trimestre Económico*, 87(348), 1211–1229. <https://doi.org/10.20430/ete.v87i348.1183>

Saidani, M. (2021). Tunisie. Les mouvements sociaux amorcent une nouvelle révolution. *OrientXXI*. [online] Available at: <<https://orientxxi.info/magazine/tunisie-les-mouvements-sociaux-amorcent-une-nouvelle-revolution,4400>>

SARRIA ICAZA A. M., TIRIBA L. (2006) *Économie populaire*, in J.-L. Laville et A. D. Cattani (dir.) *Dictionnaire de l'autre économie*, Paris, Gallimard, 258-268.

Sassen, S. (2016, 16 febbraio). Why migrant and refugee fail to grasp new diasporas. *Open Migration*. <https://openmigration.org/en/op-ed/why-migrant-and-refugee-fail-to-grasp-newdiasporas>

Schwoob, M., Elloumi, M. (2018). CHAPITRE 8 - Sous-Développement Rural et Migrations Internes : l'Exemple de l'Agriculture Tunisienne, *CIHEAM, MediTERRA 2018*. Presses de Sciences Po, p. 171-184.

Singer P. (2000). *Economía dos setores populares: proposta e desafio*. In Kraychete G. & Costa L.B. (Eds.), *Economia dos setores populares: entre a realidade e a utopia*, Brasil, Vozes.

Tilly, C., & Tarrow, S. (2006). *Contentious Politics*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Van der Ploeg, J. D. (2008). *The New Peasantries: Struggles for Autonomy and Sustainability in an Era of Empire and Globalization*. London; Sterling, Va, Earthscan.

Van der Ploeg, J. D. (2010). The peasantries of the twenty-first century: the commoditisation debate revisited. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. 37:1, 1-30, DOI: 10.1080/03066150903498721

Wodon, Q., Liverani, A., Joseph, G., & Bournoux, N. (2014). *Climate Change and Migration: Evidence from the Middle East and North Africa*. The World Bank.

Zemni, S. (2016). From revolution to Tunisianité : who is the Tunisian people? Creating hegemony through compromise. *MIDDLE EAST LAW AND GOVERNANCE*, 8(2-3), 131–150. <https://doi>

org/10.1163/18763375-00802002

Zemni, S., & Ayeb, H. (2016). (2016). Les racines sociales et économiques de la révolution tunisienne. Vers une analyse socio- spatiale classe. Les mouvements sociaux en Afrique du Nord et au Moyen-Orient. Paris, Université Paris 8 à Saint- Denis.

Zemni, S., De Smet, B., & Bogaert, K. (2012). Luxemburg on Tahrir Square: Reading the Arab Revolutions with Rosa Luxemburg's The Mass Strike. *Antipode* 45, no. 4: 888– 907.

Zuccotti, C., Geddes, P., Bacchi, A., Nori, N., & Stojanov, R. (2018). Rural migration in Tunisia: Drivers and patterns of rural youth migration and its impact on food security and rural livelihoods in Tunisia. FAO.





# Understanding the Politics of the Oases of Chenini and Jemna in Southern Tunisia

## ABSTRACT

The fifth chapter is a continuation of the field-research — albeit with new theoretical inputs — focusing on the oases' context in Tunisia. The research is interested in the specific contexts of oases as perfect illustrations of resilience; they have been present for centuries, even millennia, and have been able to adapt to the many shocks (climatic, political, economic, etc.) that the region has experienced during its history (Cheneval & Michel-Queirel, 2015). Today, they remain a symbol of sustainable management of rare natural resources in a hostile environment. The oases' context concentrates, all the issues outlined in the previous chapters. In fact, these are artificial, anthropized and cultivated spaces in the heart of vast arid zones, which for thousands of years have adopted a complex social organization of solidarity and commoning around water (and resources in general).

The first section of the chapter explains how oases are sustainable spaces by definition, where the Commons are fundamentally a tradition. Commons are at the center of every facet in the oases. They constitute a rich and varied historical and cultural heritage, related to culture, biodiversity, architecture, religion, farmers' know-how in irrigation and crop management, literature, poetry, theology, art, crafts and original culinary habits. Today, oases are experiencing the effects of climate change, but also those of development and growth, which have almost disrupted the social fabric around the Commons. We can say that oases are Commons/community economies in crisis.

The second section follows Battesti's (2018) idea of "oases connectivity", who dismisses the idea of the insularity of oases. It seems oases are in essence an example of cosmopolitan localism (Sachs, 1999; Manzini, 2014). However, the concept of oases connectivity only reminds what is called African communalism (Olasunkanmi, 2011; Ikuenobe, 2018). This connectivity of the oasis remains a fundamental aspect, where trade is an essential articulation of its sustainability. It is these features of oases that this section highlights as possible fields of action for design.

The third section of the chapter corresponds the preparation phase i.e., establishing initial contacts with the oases communities to work with (interviews, discussions online and in person). This, in order to verify if design had a role to play in such contexts, focusing on the cases of Chenini and Jemna as two landmarks/case studies in the social and environmental movements that have developed in Tunisia since the revolution.

Images 5.1



## 5.1 Why the Oases?

During my first year of research for this PhD, I told my grandmother about the books, papers and other research I was interested in. I discussed the Commons, Permaculture, Cosmopolitan Localism and the different experiments of transitional communities that are emerging in response to the risks of collapse linked to climate change and the different crises of the capitalist system. The discussion we had was like a sort of revelation: “We were right to live as we did (...) the colonizers and the West should take the example from the so-called Third-World, that they still have not understood everything and continue to consider us as miserable, backward and underdeveloped (...) we don’t need a Nobel Prize in economics (talking about Ostrom’s research) to explain to us what the Commons are; this permaculture and the agriculture we have always practiced in the oases are like two peas in a pod; and finally, Cosmopolitan Localism is just a complicated word to describe the reality of the relationships between the different communities and tribes that came and went from the north to the south of Tunisia and beyond.”

Among other things, this conversation allowed me to discover the importance of indigenous knowledge and to engage in a deeper analysis including de Sousa Santos’s work and the concept of epistemicide (2014). Indeed, my grandmother considered genuinely that none of the solutions I was presenting was new. This could be a first answer to the question: why oases? Some of the answers to future challenges may lie in the ancient practices of peoples, pre-capitalist practices that were still relevant not so long ago, as those of grandmother’s generation still remember them. This is reminiscent of Thackara’s words: new approaches to development are more about exchange and distribution than blue-sky invention. Among the elements of a sustainable world that already exist, many are social practices — some of them very old ones — already learned by other societies and in other times. From this insight flows the idea of designers as global hunter-gatherers of models; processes and ways of living that already exist; Or used to. As scavenger-innovators, our

### Images 5.1

Old water sources in Chenini oasis.

1. The roman Dam (Reha).

2. Charchara.

3. Young woman on a bridge made of palm tree in Chenini.

first response should be to ask: Who has cracked a similar question in the past? How might we learn from, or piggyback on, their success?" (2008, n.p). This is in line with the words of Giuseppe Lotti (2013, 2017), who works on the theme of Mediterranean design; the Italian researcher, who is quite familiar with the context of the southern shore of the Mediterranean (Tunisia but also Morocco and Algeria), explains that the South, even with all its problems, still has more to teach today than ever.

The various points I will make in what follows come both from certain readings and, above all, from a direct experience on the field through observations and discussions with farmers, civil society activists, officials in the Groupements de Développement Agricole (GDA-Tunisia), or researchers at the Institut des Régions Arides (IRA-Tunisia) etc.

Images 5.1



### 5.1.1 *A Model of Sustainability: A little story about Resilience*

#### ***The Oasis Effect: Fulfilling Ecological, Social and Economic Functions***

Usually when Europeans think about the desert, they imagine dunes of sand and camels (which are in reality dromedaries). In the imagination of North Africans, the first idea that we have when we think of the desert is that of an oasis. The word oasis comes from Ancient Greek: ὄασις, óasis, which in turn is a direct borrowing probably from Hamitic (compare Coptic wahe, ouahe: oasis, literally dwelling place, from ouih: dwell). The same Egyptian source produced Arabic wahah (Harper, n.d). In modern usage, the term can mean an area in a desert where there is water and plants; a pleasant place that is surrounded by something unpleasant; a time or experience that is pleasant and restful (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d).

In the oasis, almost anything can grow, this characteristic makes it a place with the highest rate of intensification including an exceptional wealth of floral and faunal biodiversity. For example, the oasis of Gabes counts more than 300 varieties of palm trees, some of which are staggered maturity, several varieties of olive trees, pomegranate trees, which has obtained the “appellation d’origine contrôlée (designation of origin)”, several varieties of fig trees, vine, apricot tree and other tree species such as apple, pear, peach, plum, mulberry, quince, lemon, pistachio, castor, some local varieties of banana trees (GIZ, 2012). As for fodder crops, there is alfalfa and sorghum, as well as a long list of market garden crops, some of which are local varieties. Cereals, henna, tobacco, jute plants, condiments, mint and floral plants such as the rose and various other crops of lesser importance such as the sour orange tree, the jujube tree, the carob tree, the medlar tree and the cherry tree grow in the shelter of these oases. Water, shade and multiple food resources offered by the oasis thus allowed some animal species to survive and propagate and others (migratory birds) to rest, restore themselves, recover their strength before continuing their route to the migration sites. They are in fact the resting place for many species of migratory birds.

The oasis and its mythical tree, the palm, are the product of a remarkable combination of man’s agronomic genius and nature’s aptitu-

des and resources in an arid, Saharan environment. In the Saharan and pre-Saharan regions, the date palm is the essential element of the oasis ecosystem (Sedra, 2003). It is the keystone and symbol of this system and its presence symbolizes water in the desert (Granada, 2013). The oasis contains an exceptionally rich biodiversity thanks to the “oasis effect” or the practice of multi-level cultivation. Multi-level cultivation is one of the ways to adapt to climate change and to make better use of natural resources. Crops are grown on three levels. The first tier is made up of date palms, the second of fruit trees and the third of vegetable and fodder crops. This method/practice allows the oasis to develop an oasis effect microclimate that reduces the effect of hot, drying wind, evaporation, aggressive solar radiation, provides shade for several crops and makes better use of water and soil.

This bioclimatic phenomenon generates a spring microclimate thanks to the density of the plant population and its multi-level agriculture. In the oases of the Sahara, date palms are important allies. Highly tolerant to heat, they reside at the top of the plant edifice and reach a height of 15 to 30 meters. They are a kind of parasol that provides shade for the lower floors. But they also have their feet in the water and humidify the air by transpiring almost 5,000 liters of water per hectare per day. Oases thus function as powerful natural air-conditioners, capable of generating conditions conducive to agriculture in a desert environment. More than that, the oasis effect is also believed to influence the regional climate and increase the likelihood of rainfall. Rich biodiversity is here considered to be one form of adaptation to climatic hazards. (GIZ, 2012).

In the oasis, there is a thrifty management of resources and a valorization of the by-products of the oasis. The soil improvement is ensured by recycling (valorization of all) possible organic waste (animal manure and manure from sanitary pits) which were expected to pollute. The conservation of food products is essential and the diversification of activities (crafts and trade with the outside) is a great contribution. All the by-products of the oasis and especially of the palm tree are valued. Nothing is lost. In the oasis exists a particular microclimate contrasting with a hostile desert environment and harsh climatic conditions and where human life is very difficult. These oases hinder the advance of desertification, play a role in the ecological balance, maintain biodiversity and are real lungs of

oxygen for the cities and villages near them. The tireless work in the palm groves means that the oasis is the work of continuous human effort and community solidarity. Indeed, Laureano (1988) defines the oasis effect as the establishment of a virtuous circuit capable of self-propulsion and self-regeneration; this to explain the centrality of the human and social element in the oasis. The process can be taken as a model and one can generalize the term oasis to all situations, even in non-desert areas, of creating islands of livability. An oasis would then be a human settlement in inclement geographic situations that uses rare, locally available resources to trigger an increasing amplification of positive interactions and realize a fertile, self-sustaining environmental niche whose characteristics counteract the unfavorable surroundings.

The oasis is the perfect example of resilience against the arid climate that surrounds it. In conditions of great aridity, man has built a civilization around water. For thousands of years, man has developed in the oases an ingenious know-how at all levels to make the most of this ecosystem, to satisfy the majority of his needs (speaking about self-sufficiency), in a strategy of sustainability and adaptation despite the vicissitudes of human history and the fragility of the ecological context; a perfect example of resilience when thinking about the climate challenges that humanity will have to adapt (and is already adapting) to in the Anthropocene. This system of floor cultivation, recycling (of everything), valorization of local materials and frugality, are the basis of Permaculture which “claims to be designed agriculture, so that the species, composition, array and organization of plants and animals are the central factor” (Mollison, 1988).

The oasis ecosystem thus fulfills many ecological functions and provides a multitude of natural, social and economic goods and services (UNDP, 2013). The self-sufficiency guaranteed by the oasis is not only related to food but it also plays an important economic role through the production of dates which participates in the arboricultural production, in the vegetable production and in the agricultural exports, the breeding of goats, sheep, cattle and poultry which valorizes the fodder crops, mainly alfalfa and through the Saharan tourism. Besides, palm wood can be used for construction and furniture making. The palm leaves are used in the basketry industry. Oases play a significant social role thanks to the jobs they can create. About 50,000 farmers produce dates. The oases provide about

10 million days of work per year for 71,796 farmers and family helpers and for about 100,000 casual workers (Khammessa) and permanent employees, not counting indirect jobs in trade, transport and packaging. (GIZ, 2012).

Oases are thus anthropized and cultivated spaces within vast arid or even desert areas for thousands of years. Since their existence, oases have played an important role in the development of the local economy and in maintaining ecological security. The different components (climatic, hydric, edaphic, vegetal, animal and human) are strongly interdependent and interact with each other, which makes the oasis system both complex and fragile (Sandron, 1997; Skouri, 1990). They are therefore found in most of the world's major dry regions: around the Sahara, in the Maghreb and Sahel, in the Middle East, on the west coast of Latin America and in Central Asia. It is difficult to know exactly how much land they occupy in the world, but it is estimated that about 150 million people live in oases (Jouve, 2012).

In conclusion, we can say that oases are intensive agricultural production areas in a region dominated by an arid climate. They have been present for centuries, even millennia, and have been able to adapt to the many shocks (climatic, political, economic, etc.) that the region has experienced during its history (Cheneval & Michel-Queirel, 2015). Today, they remain a symbol of sustainable management of rare natural resources in a hostile environment. In the arid territories of the Maghreb (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), which represent more than 75% (Le Houérou, 1975) of the region's surface area, oases play a central role. Characterized by a system of cultivation in stages (phoeniculture, arboriculture and herbaceous stages with market gardening or cereals), they create a microclimate favorable to the development of crops in a region where agricultural land is limited. These domesticated ecosystems, share a certain number of very original characteristics: multi-level cultivation systems, a layering of vegetation whose dominant stratum is often made up of date palms, very intensive cropping systems, and a collective organization of space (Battesti, 2005). Indeed, the oasis is not a simple juxtaposition of gardens but a grouping of interests that are both supportive and competing, whose structure is inscribed not only in space but also in time (Trousset, 1986).

### ***A Complex Social Organization around Water: Sustainable by Definition***

As explained, the oasis is an intensively cultivated area in a desert environment; a specific ecosystem adapted to extremely arid areas (Vidal, 2005). For me who was born in an oasis context (Gabes), it is a place of life where humans, animals and plants cohabit in an interdependent manner around the most precious of resources: water. As Trouset (1986) explains: “[in] the oases, everything revolves around water, sedentary life and nomadic life. In a variable geometry space where various forms of power are exercised, they are nodal points par excellence, where the real wealth is not the land, but the water” (p.164).

The oasis is an agroecosystem whose structure depends mainly on the desert-oasis-river components (Yang et al., 2010). Generally, oases develop along rivers and water tables (Zella et al., 2006). Indeed, the existence and functioning of palm groves has always been linked to the presence of water and the practice of irrigation. Water is the spatial and social organization of an oasis. Oases are places where the appropriation of water, a scarce resource in these areas, is exercised and where the inhabitants compete with each other in ingenuity to ensure that its use and their way of life continue (RADD0, n.d). For thousands of years, the oasis society has been able to develop traditional knowledge in the management of oases’ resources adapted to the arid climate, particularly with regard to water, biodiversity and soil fertility. The oases have especially excelled in the field of water. The oases have developed a great ingenuity in the collection, routing and equitable sharing of water and practice of irrigation. Thinking about the Anthropocene and climate change, it is worth noting the work of the LabOasis Foundation, which explains that oases were born in the wake of an ecological disaster caused by climate change and the depletion of natural resources: “Starting from 4000 BC the Late-Neolithic communities (...) develop and fine-tune new practices for new survival strategies, and this is how – in the shadow of a primordial catastrophe which bears the seeds of re-birth – the Oases civilization will arise” (LabOasis, n.d).

The oasis civilization - small communities guarding extended territories - would thus have developed at the same time as the so-called hydraulic empires of Egypt and Sumer, which were born thanks to

the large migrations of the populations of the Sahara towards the Nile valley and of Arabia towards Mesopotamia. The civilization of the oases is thus based on a model of socio-economic organization that is fundamentally antinomic to that of the hydraulic empires based on an administrative bureaucracy and the centralization of power. Battesti (2018) recalls the “oasis theory” proposed by Childe (1928) at the beginning of the 20th century, considering oases not as essentially anthropogenic spaces but as refuges or relics of wetter times. The argument of Childe runs that, as the climate got warmer and drier in the early post-glacial period, people, plants, and animals became concentrated in relatively few and increasingly restricted fertile areas. Battesti explains that this model has largely been abandoned and invalidated (Hole and McCorriston; 2009; Price and Bar-Yosef, 2011). “The Neolithic revolution in the Sahara did not take place in oases or necessarily give rise to oases: oases are more likely to be favorable nodes (water, geography, pedology), points of control that are regularly conquered and lost, over the desert or over other social groups” (Battesti, 2018; p.124).

For Trouset (1986) the durability/perennity of the oases, some of which have continuously traversed the history of the Maghreb from the time of Herodotus to the present day, having in particular retained their Berber name barely Latinized, barely Arabicized (Tacapae for Gabes; Capsa for Gafsa; Nepte for Nefta; Tusuros for Tozeur), depends first of all on that of the springs around which the original hydraulic communities were organized. The durability/perennity of the oases is thus reflected in the proper allocation of resources, the existence of a qualified workforce available to maintain the palm trees, harvest the dates, keep the irrigation and drainage networks in good condition or clear the perimeters of sand in the event of a storm. This is the result of a very hierarchical community work in which everyone has a place. This reading of the need for a strong and inflexible organization in a difficult but predictable environment is classic, but essentially emphasizes the agronomic and ecological conditions of the oasis (Sandron, 1997). It is therefore from the inside, from the water distribution system, around the very principle of their organization, that we must try to define what these microcosms could be and not from the outside (Trouset, 1986). It is logically around water that the traditional oases were organized. The survival of these oases depends on the mobilization of water. Technically, this can be done in different ways, either

by diverting water from rivers or by pumping water from more or less deep underground aquifers as in the Tunisian oases of Djerid, Nefzaoua or Gafsa, or by draining groundwater upstream of the oasis using underground galleries: this is the system of the Khettaras of southern Morocco, the Foggaras of Algeria or the Qanâts of Iran (Jouve, 2012).

These oases are characterized by their diversity, but they can be classified according to water collection techniques that have evolved according to geography; in each context, oasis communities have developed specific techniques for collecting water resources. In an Atlas of Saharan and Arab oases, the LabOasis Foundation offers a guide for the classification of oases by typology; identifying 776 traditional oases in 11 national states. Traditional oases are differentiated from modern palm groves that practice date palm monoculture rather than multilevel cultivation. Four oasis variants can be distinguished, defined on the basis of the hydro-geomorphological configuration of the land surface:

**Mountain oasis:** the village and the oasis are located halfway up the slope on terraces or in the foothills. Water is collected by artificial underground drainage galleries.

**Wadi oasis:** the village and the oasis are located on the banks of ancient rivers (Wadi being the Arabic term for river) that are now almost dried up. This is the most common typology where communities build drains, sluices and dams to capture the intermittent flows of the wadi.

**Erg oasis:** the village and oasis are located in the middle of the desert, Erg (meaning vein in Arabic) being the name of the dune. Water is drawn from two long underground galleries or by excavating Ghouts, artificial basins where palm trees are planted.

**Depression oasis:** the village and the oasis are below sea level on the shores of a Sebkhâ or Chott (endorheic salt lake). Water is collected by intercepting the underground micro-flows converging towards the depression, i.e., the Sebkhâ.

In Tunisia, we can find all of those types of oases. Therefore, the oases are islands of greenery in the middle of the desert, a symbiosis

exists between the oasis, the desert regions, the mountain regions and even with the sea (for the case of the oases of Gabes which are the only maritime oasis in the Mediterranean).

It was over water and not over land that property rights were established, as Penet (1913) indicates. The limited room for maneuver allowed by the oasis ecosystem means that the management of these water rights is particularly complex and strict, since the survival of the community depends on it. They have set up complex forms of social organization through water rights and uses. By definition, the traditional oasis is 'a society where the control of water constitutes a pillar of the very hierarchical oasis organization, an expression of a general consensus in some cases but more of a power struggle in others' (Battesti, 1996). The development of the oasis culture was organized around a management of local resources that was communal but not egalitarian (Sandron, 1997). Troussset speaks of the great capacity of communities to structure their space and self-regulate, drawing an analogy with the "hydraulic communes" mentioned by Brunhes (1902) in relation to the Spanish huertas. Thus, the more precious the water, the more its distribution among the irrigators is subject to meticulous regulation whose application is entrusted to specialized institutions. This organization of the oases, the traditional regulation of irrigation, would therefore be the most solid and most respected. Numerous authors in the social sciences who study the relations between water, territories and societies have shown the permanent links between hydraulic installations, their form, their functioning and the exercise of power. Thus, in anthropology, Bédoucha (1987) speaks of water as the friend of the powerful and underlines the correspondence between the hydraulic framework and the structures of power in a southern Tunisian oasis. According to Attia's (1985) analysis, traditional oasis society is highly segmented. In simple terms, it is made up of owner-operators and Cheriks, employed by the former.

The general organization of the oasis is decided by the council of notables (jemaâ or myâad), whose members are representatives of the locally dominant families or lineages. The personal interests of these farming families are thus intertwined with the general smooth running of the oasis. Agricultural production and social reproduction are thus intimately linked through the control of water. As explained when the water table is not artesian, drainage galleries

(Khettaras or Foggaras) were dug to collect the water from the surface water table and bring it up by gravity to the palm groves. For other oases, diversion dams were built to carry the water, or, in the case of oases located in the middle of the desert, Ghouts were dug. Community organization imposed strict rules for good water management. The oasis community organized chores for the periodic cleaning of springs and canals. The Amine (water guardian, called Gayed wad in Gabes) monitored compliance with the water management rules and took legal action against offenders. The irrigator had to use all his skill to make the gutters and troughs properly, to distribute the water on the plot during the time allotted to him and to ensure that the water was not lost. The construction of gutters and boards allows for a better use of water. Water from drains is sometimes used to supplement irrigation.

Thus, depending on access to the resource and the social organizations established, the historical oases have seen the implementation of various water management methods. This management includes five main stages: water collection, storage, distribution, allocation, control and conflict management. At each stage, a trade-off is made between the collective and individual spheres. More recently, the creation of boreholes and the use of motor-driven pumps that tap directly into the groundwater. Today, water management is entrusted to watering syndicates; in Tunisia, it is the Groupement de Développement Agricole (GDA) which could be considered as emanations or substitutes of the old jemaâ or miyâd. Thus, the entire ecological support system, i.e., land, water, Seguias (canals), Nachia or Khandeg (drains), is managed by a responsible authority that ensures its operation on a purely local basis (these same GDAs are now facing numerous difficulties). This heritage is used on a daily basis, and its resilience is proof of its efficiency and its adaptation to environmental conditions. (Janty, 2015).

Over the centuries, oasis farmers have developed ingenious techniques adapted to local conditions, but also forms of social organization that are closely adapted to them (Guillermou, 1993). The mobilization of water, the maintenance of irrigation works, the methods of distribution and allocation, the techniques of measuring and accounting for rights, and the settlement of conflicts are all based on customary law. The whole community identifies with this law and these practices (Bédoucha, 2000). The knowledge, techni-

ques and irrigation practices associated with this law constitute a major element of its cultural and technical heritage. One can state that these practices of commoning where water is a common but not the only one. Commons are at the center of every facet in the oases. At patrimonial level, the Oases can be considered as a common good in several ways. They constitute a rich and varied historical and cultural heritage. This heritage relates to culture, biodiversity, architecture, religion, farmers' know-how in irrigation and crop management, literature, poetry, theology, art, crafts and original culinary habits. The oasis is probably the agro-ecological environment where the richness of biodiversity is the most amazing. This oasis development can be described as sustainable by definition. This sustainability is the result of ecological viability (presence of water, efficient organization of agricultural and environmental work), economic viability (market value of the date product) and social viability (general organization of the oasis based on social relations). In all these areas, changes have taken place to give way today to a different oasis culture (Sandron, 1997).



### 5.1.2 Oases in Danger: Facing Development and Climate Change

Although most oases have existed for several hundred years, it has been observed that in different regions of the world these complex agro-ecosystems are in crisis and in decline (Dubost, 1988). Indeed, many threats weigh on the future of oases and lead to the question of their sustainability. But the problems posed by this sustainability are partly dependent on the geopolitical situation of these oases (Jouve, 2012). Indeed, during my stay in Kebili I was able to meet several officials of the Commissariat Régional au Développement Agricole (CRDA) that operates under the supervision of the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture, Hydraulic Resources and Fisheries. I also met researchers and officials of the Institut des Régions Arides (IRA) of Kebili. This was an opportunity to get an overall idea of the evolution of oases from the colonial period to the present day, as well as the present and future challenges and risks they face. I will attempt here to summarize their comments in a coherent narrative, citing at the same time several works by researchers that corroborate each other's statements.

#### ***Deep Mutations of the Oasis System: from the Collective to the Individual***

The colonial period brought about important changes, mainly by asserting the predominance of private property and by modifying water extraction techniques. Historically, in Tunisia the ancient oases that drew their water resources from natural springs gradually gave way to modern oases around the beginning of the century. The drilling technique enabled them to expand, until a new phase in the 1980s when a rehabilitation and creation plan was put in place. Thus, throughout the Maghreb, there is a common dynamic of establishing a new production model through the establishment of new laws and the development of new irrigated areas. In Tunisia, new oases appeared, replacing the old Ghouts and Zira (from the word Jazira, island). These new oases also helped to fix the semi-nomadic populations of the region. Generally speaking, the colonial period corresponds to a reorganization of space in favor of a production system turned towards the metropolis and export.

#### Images 5.2

Oases of Gabes suffering the effects of pollution, water scarcity, urbanization and climate change.

1. shot with Google Earth.

2. source: <https://crevette-diplomate.fr/la-face-cachee-des-engrais-petrochimiques-leur-fabrication/>

The borders became a reality and were militarized, making it difficult for the population to move, particularly nomads and caravans. Saharan trade, which was an integral part of the oasis system, was undermined and the economic centers relocated to the coastal fringes. The oases became marginal areas to be pacified, of little interest. Thus, export agriculture is developing with large modern productive farms. Although governments try to act in the oases, this is rarely done in the existing areas. Indeed, the oasis system is so complex in terms of power and organization around resources that the colonial empire does not seek to control it (Battesti, 2002). The creation of these new perimeters on apparently virgin land aims first of all to extract and emancipate itself from the local complexity (Leservoisier, 1994) on aspects linked to water management, land management and labor. This approach will continue in the following periods, illustrating the difficulty of trying to move from a food system to a productivist system without transition. However, the creation of users' associations in Tunisia to replace the traditional management groups is an interesting specificity that continues today. Thus, the AIC (Association d'Intérêt Collectif), was created in 1933 on the model of a users' association.

After independence, the Maghreb states became independent and wanted to put the economy, and therefore agriculture, at the service of new national projects. It was with this in mind that state agriculture was set up. In Tunisia, the collectivist experiment of the 1960s definitively abolished the principle of acquired water rights and introduced the principle of wage labor for the oasis workforce. However, this experiment proved unsuccessful and from 1980 onwards, a specific program for oases was set up to rehabilitate old oases and create new ones through deep drilling. Decentralization actions were also carried out in order to disengage the State in several areas, including water. The AIC evolved in GIC (Groupement d'Intérêt Collectif) then in GDA (Groupement de Développement Agricole) These institutions (AICs, GICs, then GDAs) are still often dependent on the State, on a technical, financial and political level. These (AICs, GICs, then GDAs) are still often dependent on the State, on a technical, financial and political level.

Today, the performance of these GDAs is considered mediocre (El-loumi, 2011) for various reasons. The various officials I met within the GDAs (in Kebili, Douz, Jemna and Chenini) spoke of a lack of de-

cision-making power devolved to the GDAs, a centralization of power and a lack of reorganization of relations between the state and the farmers. During the interviews I was able to conduct, the members of the GDAs also criticized the slowness of the CRDA and the lack of technical and financial management of the irrigated areas. The GDAs face enormous financial difficulties, due to unpaid bills, as their income comes exclusively from the sale of water services. GDAs face many difficulties and it is often difficult to understand the specific and often complex situations in which each GDA finds itself.

I had the opportunity to discuss this with Houcine Rhili of the Tunisian Water Observatory (OTE) - with whom I had also discussed the SSE issue (see section 4. 3) and Ala Marzougui of the Nomad08 association; in response to the water crisis, OTE and Nomad08 launched a project in 2019 called "Citizen evaluation of the legal and legislative framework for water in Tunisia", following a participatory approach with all stakeholders in the water sector. The idea of such a project was, according to them, to make the water issue a matter of public opinion. They succeeded in doing this because at a time when the organization of the work of the GDAs in rural areas is becoming the demand of several parties, the parliamentary commission for agriculture, food security, trade and related services has decided to abolish the role of these structures in the framework of a new water code that is currently being discussed.

Thus, between the growing industrialization and the creation of new palm groves, the possibility for the oasis workers to be salaried and thus to escape the constraints of the traditional oasis system, sometimes a source of inequality. This massive exodus of labor accelerates the decline of the old oases where the large landowners can no longer find the labor to maintain their plots. These public policies have been carried out with the aim of revitalizing agriculture, but it is the large modern farms that are favored because they are less vulnerable to competition on the international market. Moreover, as the cost-of-living increases with the absence of subsidies for basic commodities and as oasis products do not follow inflation, the purchasing power of households in these regions decreases. Only intermediaries and large producers have enough clout to sell their products on international markets. On the one hand, export-oriented agriculture is developing, exacerbating the issues related to water management through the multiplication of deep drillings;

in Tunisia, the Jerid springs are drying up. On the other hand, the material and social conditions of small-scale oasis agriculture are worsening, accentuated by the fall in agricultural prices and the increase in the price of inputs. The great drought of the 1980s accentuated this phenomenon by pushing producers to acquire their own wells. Finally, the oases are experiencing significant demographic growth and are witnessing the development of urban areas and, in some places, industrial activities. Competition for water, but also for land, is becoming increasingly strong, as in the case of the Chenini Gabes oasis in Tunisia, where the creation of a phosphate factory and a dozen or so boreholes has led to a drop in the water table and pollution.

In general, the development of new means of water extraction has made it possible to free oneself from a collective water distribution system which itself defined the limits of the oasis, the cultivated area being proportional to the quantity of water available. Henceforth, access to water can be individual and the development of new perimeters is possible outside the traditional areas. This individualization of farm management transforms social organization, which is now based on investment capacity and means of access to resources. In regions where arable land is limited, access to land is also an essential element in the development of these agro-systems. For a long time determined by access to and management of water resources, land is now facing new problems in the context of agricultural expansion. Oasis land, in the same way as water resources, is at the center of concerns. In the same way, social organization conditions access to land, the development of which depends on the possibility of access to water.

The evolution of water and land issues in the oases thus reveals two distinct areas: (1) traditional oases and (2) new or modern palm groves: (1) Traditional oases have been in sharp decline for several decades. In addition to external factors such as droughts, urbanization and the rural exodus, they have to deal with constraints specific to their operation. The issue of inheritance, for example, leads to a high degree of land fragmentation and small-scale farming, which is not profitable enough to meet the needs of families. The overlapping of plots prevents farms from being in one piece, and thus complicates the management of crops and water turns. Operating costs remain high (labor and water collection) and production is not suffi-

ciently valued and is therefore not very competitive. The separation of water rights and land rights can lead to blockages by preventing access to the resource that is essential for agricultural development.

Finally, the absence of land title can prevent access to certain state aid. For some years now, the scarcity of water resources has put this ecosystem in danger (in Tunisia, artesian springs have completely disappeared). Thus, if farmers do not have the capacity to invest in more efficient pumping (which is the case for the majority of them), they can no longer irrigate their plots properly and are less productive; (2) Alongside these traditional oases, there are new perimeters, the first of which appeared during the colonial period and have since developed. They are either located on the periphery of the historical palm groves or constitute new palm groves. It is important to distinguish two types of agriculture in these areas. The first are modern palm groves where a productivist and capitalist agriculture is practiced on large surfaces with access to the intercalary water table which allows large-scale irrigation. These farms are often geared towards export and therefore date cultivation. The second are medium-sized family palm groves, generally operated by new owners who want to escape the constraints of traditional oases. These farms can call on additional labor depending on their period of activity and sell primarily for the local and national markets.

On these farms, water management is individual and the modern means of pumping amplify the pressure on resources and their scarcity. This situation also affects the traditional palm groves and contributes to the increase in salinization problems. The older people explained to me that access to water has gone from surface wells, which were present until the beginning of the last century, to artesian wells, to collective artesian wells set up by the French colonists, and that these wells were to be individualized in the 1980s. During the 1990s, these illegally dug individual artesian wells gradually dried up, which led the locals to use oil-fired motors; in the 2000s, these motors were replaced by electric motors. Today, the better-off use solar panels, pumping water in the middle of the day. The IRA researchers I met speak of an ecological aberration. Finally, the absence of land titles for many farms, especially those created illegally on new perimeters as in Tunisia, does not allow farmers to access credit, preventing them from improving their production tools.

Urbanization and demographic growth are also important issues in the situation of oases. Indeed, construction is encroaching on agricultural land, which is already scarce in this region, thus increasing the pressure on land. In addition, these factors affect water reserves, both in terms of quantity, with increasing consumption, and quality, with pollution from industrial activities and wastewater. Industrialization and mass tourism have the same effect. Thus, there is increasing competition for water between the different sectors of the economy. Economically, the monoculture of deglet nour responds to short- and medium-term profitability and export demand. It presupposes a consistency in consumer preferences, which had already shunned traditional date varieties at one time. Another implication of monoculture is the increased risk of specific diseases. Beyond this threat, the loss of genetic diversity is frequently presented as an ecological damage in itself. Ecologically, the current pace of oasis development appears to be very problematic. The multiplication of official and, above all, illicit areas is leading to the overexploitation of water resources and their non-rational use, which is threatening the fossil aquifers with salinization and exhaustion. This is a real ecological disaster.

Public authorities are often torn between short-term socio-economic priorities and medium- and long-term ecological concerns that will then have repercussions on the population. This is clearly evident in the current system of water use in the oasis environment. It is difficult to reconcile the ambition of balanced regional development, the avoidance of a rural exodus and the problems of managing a non-renewable resource. The situation seemed less complex when water alone dictated the law. Now it is seen as a constraint. Some explained to me that in the region there were no longer farmers but date producers. Associations are replacing the old lineage solidarity in this scheme. Water is obviously still of prime importance, especially as it is now a non-renewable resource as a result of drilling. The situation that has arisen today can be summarized in the following points:

(1) The water resource is now pumped from deep (non-renewable) aquifers. These deep aquifers are called "hot springs" by the locals. The misuse of this water causes hydro-pedological problems; in the case of Jemna, for example, there are 8 palm groves (official or legal) and the deep groundwater pumping system supplying water to the

“Atilet” palm grove has been out of service for over a year. This state of affairs has favored the development of illicit perimeters (called extensions by the locals) which have developed exponentially since the 1980s. On the one hand, the farmers demand the legalization of their situation, on the other hand the state refuses. When I met Mrs. Rebeh Riahi, director of the agricultural development studies division, but also of the statistics department, I understood that there are no official figures for these illicit extensions to date — which corresponds to hundreds of thousands of hectares —. For her, “stopping the extensions is a necessity”, the problem being the increased individualization of water use.

(2) The state is heavily involved in regional and agricultural development. It owns the water and participates in the future of the oases through the development offices. Riahi explained that the problem was linked to an increased centralization of power in Tunisia and a lack of coordination between the actors on the territory (CRDA, CTD, IRA, AFA and APIA). For her, the recognition of family palm groves is a necessity, the real problem being that of capitalist exploitations developed for the most part by foreign investors.

(3) The opening up of the oasis economy to the market has led to specialization in one variety of date for export, to the detriment of genetic diversity. Hammadi Hamza, a researcher at the IRA, explains that this genetic diversity is in itself a defense against the effects of climate change, particularly against diseases that could affect the palm trees. In Jemna, the IRA has set up a support station where researchers are trying to conserve this genetic diversity by keeping the different varieties of palm trees that used to exist.

(4) Oasis societies are now more diversified than before in terms of sources of income, making the population less dependent on agriculture, but this has also led to a crisis in the oasis labor force. In Jemna, the majority of the workforce is seasonal, mostly coming from El Hamma (Gabes) or Tozeur; the latter are only in the town during the harvest period (around September) and the pollination of the palm trees (during spring). During the rest of the year, the landowners limit themselves to irrigation activities. I am talking about Jemna here because I was able to have tangible field experience, but these observations can be extrapolated to the whole region.

(5) The family and traditional communities are gradually disinte-

grating in the face of rising individualism. Many of the locals I met regretted the solidarity of the past but felt that there was no going back.

The IRA researchers spoke to me about a return to old practices and the need for hybridization with modern techniques, particularly the use of IoT and precision irrigation. CRDA officials insisted on the need to coordinate efforts between state structures and civil society. Farmers consider that they are left to their own devices, hence the need to improvise solutions; for them, the CRDA is more of an obstacle than a source of proposals, and the IRA researchers are not playing their role of guidance and advice. Water has lost its economic and symbolic power, which made it the social link of oasis societies. It is no longer a question of survival. Sustainability is now a necessity to ensure the maintenance of populations as well as to pursue the occupation of arid zones and the fight against desertification. Water resources and land management appear to be the two pillars of oasis conservation.

### ***Climate Change: Accelerating the Decline***

For centuries, oases have succeeded in making certain areas of the desert green. Over time, oasis populations have been able to create a prosperous living and production space in the oasis environment despite the vicissitudes of human history and the fragility of the ecological context. However, the current situation shows the limits of the oasis system due to the socio-economic evolution of oasis societies and the degradation of water resources which is the basis of oasis agriculture. Thus, oasis areas are facing major environmental and socio-economic challenges that threaten their survival and thus their sustainability. While many oases have persisted for several thousand years, many others have been abandoned, often in response to changes in climatic or hydrological conditions (Jones et al. 2019). Increasing biophysical impacts of climate change can exacerbate desertification, land degradation and food insecurity. Desertification has invaded oases and drought has intensified, and fires have destroyed many of them. This decline has prompted many inhabitants to migrate to nearby and distant urban areas. As a result of ecosystem degradation, oases no longer provide adequate livelihoods, and oasis populations are forced to resort to seasonal migration and are increasingly dependent on income from migration. In

the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, climate change is expected to have substantial and complex effects on oasis areas (Abatzoglou et al., 2007; Ashkenazy et al. 2012; Iknayan and Beissinger 2018).

Desertification, salinization, soil erosion, Bayoud disease (fusariosis), silting of cultivated land and climatic conditions have all contributed to the decline of oases (Riou, 1990; Belarbi et al., 2004; Vidal, 2005; Besser et al. 2017). Waterlogging and soil salinisation due to rising saline water tables, coupled with inefficient drainage systems, have become common to all continental oases in Tunisia, most of which are concentrated around saline depressions, locally called chotts (Ben Hassine et al. 2013). This results in the abandonment of practices adapted to the oasis area, leading to a loss of environmental services. Oases are currently facing the additional challenge of climate change, which may lead to even greater stresses (water scarcity, extreme weather events). Rising temperatures, worsening drought and increasing desertification are threatening the water sources on which oases depend.

However, the common cause of the regression observed in all palm groves is the degradation of water resources essential to the survival of these oases (Jouve et al., 2004). Rhili (2018) explains that the available water resources per capita are estimated at about 460 cubic meters per year, while the consumption rate in the Middle East and North Africa is 550 cubic meters. This is low compared to the annual per capita consumption recommended by the World Health Organization, which ranges from 700 to 900 cubic meters per year. The agricultural sector is the largest consumer of water resources, as the same study indicates that 77% of water resources are monopolized by the agricultural sector, while industry accounts for 8% and tourism for 1.5%, while the percentage of drinking water consumption is only 13.5%. In 2016, the percentage of drinking water consumption was 470 million cubic meters, while the percentage of water resources consumed by the agricultural sector increased to 2.2 billion cubic meters.

According to the Réseau Africain du Développement Durable des Oasis (RADD0), oases are generally characterized by low and erratic rainfall with an average of less than 300 mm; coupled with global warming and increasingly frequent droughts, oasis desertification is increasing. By 2060, the IPCC predicts an alarming future for arid

zones, including oases, with a decrease in precipitation of up to 50% and an increase in temperature in the Maghreb from 2°C in winter to 5°C in summer. This is in addition to a number of environmental challenges, starting with the extremely serious situation of water resources: overexploitation and degradation of the quality of water resources, competition for the resource and poor management. The greatest challenge to the sustainability of oases is undoubtedly that of water resources.

The combined effect of warming and drought is expected to lead to a widespread increase in aridity and consequent desertification of several terrestrial ecosystems in the Mediterranean region. Warming of 2°C or more above the pre-industrial average is expected to generate climatic conditions that many Mediterranean terrestrial ecosystems have not experienced in the past 10,000 years (MEDECC, 2019). Deserts will expand in southern Spain and Portugal, northern Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Sicily, southern Turkey and parts of Syria (Guiot and Cramer, 2016). In the dry regions to the south and east of the Mediterranean, oases are also impacted by current climate change, despite their potential to tolerate the various abiotic stresses found in arid environments (MEDECC, 2019). According to a World Bank (2014) report entitled “Turn Down the Heat”, this trend is affecting the entire Maghreb region. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) climate zone is now one of the world’s most water-scarce regions. Between 1960 and 1990, MENA countries experienced a temperature increase of 0.2°C per decade. Since then, the pace of warming has accelerated; with temperatures rising by up to 2 degrees, MENA countries will experience heat waves during 30% of the summer months (World Bank, 2014).

A study entitled “Tunisia’s oases to be protected against degradation and the effects of climate change” conducted by the Ministry of Environment of Tunisia and GIZ (2012) states that southern Tunisia will be the most affected in Tunisia by climate change, through increased temperature and decreased rainfall. For the oasis zone, an average warming of 1.9°C by 2030 and 2.7°C by 2050 is projected, and a decrease in precipitation of 9% in 2030 and 17% in 2050. An increase in potential evapotranspiration of 8% in 2030 and 14% in 2050 is projected. Oases will be greatly affected by climate change. This will increase the water needs of crops, resulting in a worsening of the water resources situation with a continuous decrease in the

static level of boreholes, increased salinity of water and increased pumping costs. The study also explains that this will lead to a gradual rise in sea level, allowing marine water to intrude into the aquifer in coastal oases and making the natural flow of drainage water more difficult. Climate change is already reported to have an impact on certain tree species such as the Gabes pomegranate tree, in addition to increasing the diseases that attack palm trees.

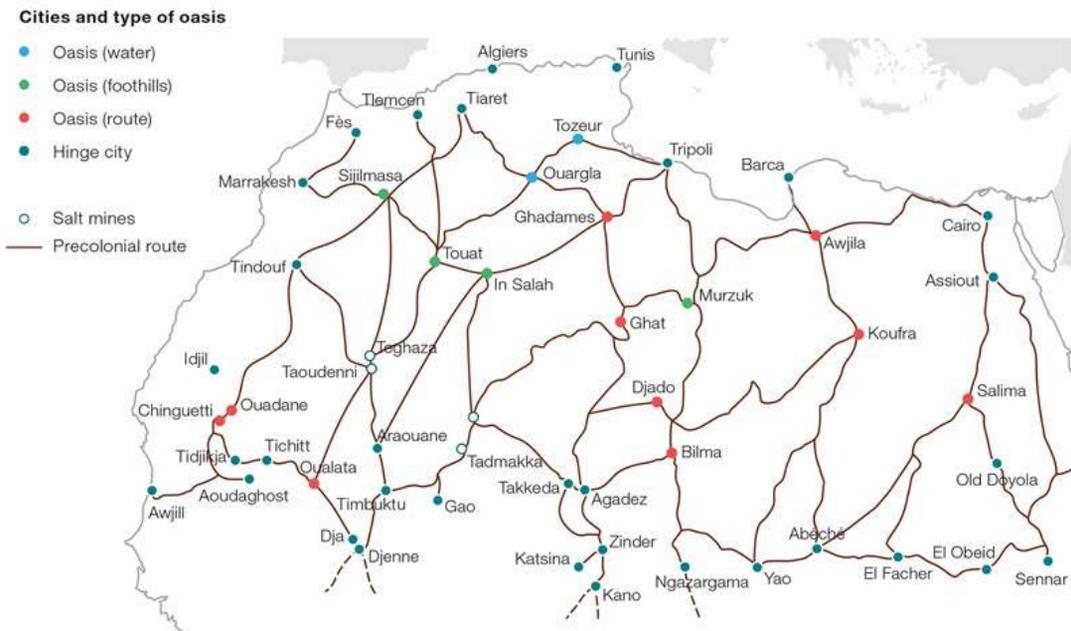
According to the PAN/LCD (Plan d'Action Régional de Lutte Contre la Désertification), in Tunisia, the part of the national territory considered as not affected by desertification represents only 6%, while the part qualified as desert occupies 21.5%, the one highly affected by desertification covers 17.2%, the one moderately affected spread over 23.2% and finally 32.1% is considered as weakly affected. According to a study carried out by the National Center for Agricultural Studies (CNEA) in 2007, the national territory is 17.1% desert, 40.2% very sensitive to desertification, 31.7% sensitive and only 5.5% moderately sensitive. It is undeniable that desertification is a very worrying phenomenon that is becoming a threat for the future. Indeed, the desertification sensitivity map recently carried out in Tunisia has confirmed this worrying finding. It considers that only 1% of Tunisia's soils are considered stable, while the rest are moderately to highly sensitive to desertification.

It seems certain that extreme meteorological phenomena (droughts, winds, floods) will increase in frequency and intensity, particularly through the succession of very dry years. The social and economic consequences can be dramatic. They range from the loss of crops, abandonment of certain crops to an increase in the risk of major fires, all of which can have repercussions on the economy and society. These oasis communities have developed under complicated conditions and have invented techniques that have proven to be sustainable. But it is less clear that these adaptive techniques can continue to keep the desert at bay. On a personal note, even though I was born in an oasis (Gabes), it was very difficult to conduct the field research, especially in the Nefzaoua region (Kebili, Jemna and Douz). The heat was unbearable, reaching 57°C, during quite long episodes (almost two weeks); longer than in the past according to the inhabitants. The long heat spells were coupled with frequent water cuts and also power cuts due to overloading of the electricity grid because of the use of air conditioners throughout the region.

There was only a slight cooling at night when sleeping on the roof. This in itself is a legitimate reason for many people to leave the area.

During my visit to Kebili, I interviewed several IRA researchers about the effects of climate change on oases. Nissaf Karbout explained that a return to good traditional agricultural practices would be the most effective way to protect oases from the effects of climate change; “the oasis micro-climate guarantees the maintenance of soil moisture (...) a return to the philosophy of ancient practices, of three-tiered agriculture, of water as a common good would be part of the solution, but with new means (...) a sort of mix between ancient practices and new technologies (...) we need to find a way to protect the oases from the effects of climate change. ) a sort of mix between old practices and new technologies (...) we guarantee an egalitarian, systemic and orderly division of water (...) I am not advocating a return to the anarchic practices of the GDAs (...) we could create ‘smart cards’ (...) a system already used by a GDA in Guettar (Gafsa).” These words were shared by his colleague Hadi Ben Ali, who spoke about the use of IoT (Internet of Things) for precision irrigation. According to these researchers, the technical solutions exist, what is missing is the awareness of both citizens and politicians to put them into practice.

## PRECOLONIAL ROUTES



Sources: Ki-Zerbo J., Histoire de l'Afrique noire 1972; Retailé D., Études sahariennes 1986a; Austen R.A., Trans-Saharan Africa in world history 2010; Retailé D. and O. Walther, L'actualité sahélo-saharienne au Mali : une invitation à penser l'espace mobile 2013

Extract: OECD (2014), An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security, OECD Publishing, Paris

© 2014. Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD)

### Images 5.3

Ki-Zerbo, J. (1972). Histoire de l'Afrique Noire : D'hier À Demain. Paris, Hatier. Source: <https://www.oecd.org/swac/maps/maps-atlasofthesahara-sahel.htm>

## 5.2 Not islands but a Network: Oases as a Model of Cosmopolitan Localism

In this section I draw mainly on the work of Vincent Battesti, an anthropologist/ethnologist and researcher at the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) in France, based at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle. Battesti is a specialist of oasis contexts and I take up here some of his ideas and observations to make a connection with the theories of Cosmopolitan Localism and Communalism.

### 5.2.1 *Oases as Islands: A Colonial Conception*

If we focus solely on the oasis as a place of agricultural production, we run the risk of failing to understand its modes of evolution. Indeed, in the Saharan case, this perspective alone leads us to consider the oasis as an isolate, whereas it is in fact a formidable place of human and commercial mixing. For centuries, sedentary and nomadic trans-Saharan traders met there to exchange products. It was in this context that local date production allowed the building of family fortunes (Sandron, 1997). Historically, they were most often created to constitute relays along the caravan routes and the major intercontinental trade routes (Toutain et al., 1989). This age-old agricultural system experienced its golden age during the period of the caravan trade, making the oases veritable “Saharan ports” for trade between Europe, North Africa and the Sahel, particularly between the 13th and 16th centuries. Their importance in the caravan system ensured the sustainability of these hyper-structured societies.

Battesti (2018) examines this comparison often made between oases and islands. Firstly, comparing oases in the Sahara to islands in the maritime domain may seem self-evident; even though an island is an emergent land surrounded by water and oases are the exact opposite, water surrounded by arid land. He explains that both refer to the idea of isolation where the sea and the desert are only “empty or almost empty expanses, horizons that have no other vocation,

for the men who use them, rather than to be crossed. These one-dimensional spaces are intervals, in-betweens, suspensions that tolerate little other activity than crossing' (Battesti, 2018; p.106). However, rather than talking about isolation Battesti believes that insularity should rather be associated with physical discontinuity and remoteness.

Battesti dismisses the idea of the insularity of oases developed by Bruhnes (1902); he cites the work of Febvre (1922) and Le Lannou (1949), denouncing the ideas of a "law of islands" and "small geographical worlds" dear to Brunhes. The anthropologist explains that what makes the oasis is not only a situation in an arid environment, developing the idea that a comparison between oases and islands is based on Western imagery and culture rather than on the realities experienced by oasis societies. For him, since oases were created for a specific purpose, that of cultivation, it would be more legitimate to ask the question for whom and why? Battesti (2018) thus develops the idea of oasis ports rejecting that of autarkic agriculture. "The roads created the oases as much as the oases created the roads" (p.113). Oases were stopovers for travelers and pilgrims from the 7th century onwards. As stopovers, oases thus ensured the provisioning of caravans, which in turn ensured the provisioning of oases with goods, but also with news, ideas and languages also with linguistic contacts between Berber, Arabic and sub-Saharan languages (Souag, 2010).

He describes the oases as systems of "overproduction", partly specialized in the type of production to be exported, considering what local household consumption could absorb. This exchange was and remains an essential part of their economy, with the caravans and any pastoral populations (in the form of trade or predation, for that matter). Battesti therefore speaks of a "colonial oblivion of exchange", explaining that probably merchant and especially intellectual activities were underestimated and the nature of agriculture underestimated. The introduction of European colonial authority and mechanized transport systems therefore greatly reduced this aspect of the oasis economy. "It is because the colonial armies discovered the oases at a time when this trans-Saharan trade had largely diminished, and because of their very presence in arms, that their anchorage in networks was underestimated by the new colonial authorities, and that they overestimated oasis autarky" (Battesti, 2018; p.115).

### 5.2.2 Oasis Connectivity: A (Re)Prefiguration of Cosmopolitan Localism

Consequently, the oasis is as much integrated into its desert environment as it is emancipated from it by a singular ecosystemic structure (Battesti, 2012). For Battesti, one should rather speak of “artificial islands” given their highly anthropic character. The anthropologist therefore defines them as anthropic bubbles where Saharan trade is intimately dependent on the oases and vice versa; a system that precisely allows oasis communities to abstract themselves from the surrounding climatic conditions. Battesti also proposes the notion of the “little (but) efficient” characteristic of the oasis system, where the essential exchange activity within the oases is largely exceeded, in terms of the number of working hours, by the agricultural activity: a small activity (that of trade), certainly, but one that has an essential impact on the Saharan island economies. The oases can therefore be considered as a kind of network node. “It may seem paradoxical, but it is precisely because they are isolated that oases are inescapable for humans crossing the desert” (Battesti, 2018; p.131).

To introduce his term “oasis connectivity”, Battesti invokes a kind of functional connectivity, where spatial contiguity is not required, as it is human societies that ensure the crossing of the desert barrier for most of the oasis biodiversity, and arguably the entirety of the oasis agrobiodiversity. Although the caravan trade has virtually disappeared from the Sahara, the desert is still crossed and the desert is also a space for movement, migration and transport that always transcends national borders. Battesti explains that new centers of development have appeared in the Sahara, in particular hydrocarbon sites, but also agricultural development zones.

Citing the work of Brachet (2009), Battesti explains that migration in the Sahara is not only trans-Saharan migration, but migration to and through the central Sahara, as most people do not cross the Sahara, but go there. In his view, this demonstrates the error of European states in wanting to combat irregular immigration from sub-Saharan Africa by encouraging the Maghreb states to stem the flow of migrants to the Sahara (Brachet, 2009). For him, the oases therefore remain functional nodes of networks, even if people are nowadays transported more than goods. The recent events of the

post-Arab revolutions (from 2011 onwards) have given new relevance to these island issues. The island function as a network node is partly inscribed in the geography of oases. It only takes particular situations to reactivate them. The instability of the central powers has recently favored, in the 21st century, a resumption of activities on these routes between these former caravan ports; continuing with the maritime metaphor, he explains that “the desert also has its pirates and its pirate islands”, referring to the smuggling traffic and its intensification in 2011-2013.

“Oases, despite their classic designation as small islands of greenery, do not live isolated from the world: they participate in it (...) they are always populated and thus remain by definition, the center of a world” (Battesti, 2018; p.141). This connectivity of oases remains a fundamental aspect of oases where trade is an essential articulation of its sustainability. It is these features of oases that I would like to highlight as possible fields of action for design. This is, of course, only a hypothesis that I will unfortunately not be able to verify in this doctoral research.

Following Battesti’s idea of “oases connectivity”, it seems they are in essence an example of cosmopolitan localism (Sachs, 1999) seen as a global network of mutually supportive communities that share and exchange knowledge, ideas, skills, technologies, culture. For Manzini (2014), Cosmopolitan Localism could help generate a new “sense of place”. It also recalls the Communalism of Bookchin and his libertarian municipalism (see section 3.2.1) but in reality, the concept of “oases connectivity” only reminds what is called African communalism (Olasunkanmi, 2011; Ikuenobe, 2018), i.e., the traditional way in which rural areas in Africa have operated in the past. In Africa, society has existed for decades without formal hierarchies, with equal access to land and river for all, in a way that resembles forms of egalitarianism and socialism. According to Miñolo (2011) “Cosmopolitan localism is another expression of pluriversality as a global project (...) Euro-American concepts of cosmopolitanism have the right to exist but do not have the right to expect to be universal. Cosmopolitan localism means the multiplication of nodes, the active intervention of the local cosmopolitan project of the whole world and the reduction of Western cosmopolitanism to its own local history” (p.43). One could conclude that the answers to the future challenges of the oases probably lay in their past.

## 5.3 Preparation: Establishing Initial Contacts

During the first phase of field survey, I quickly noticed some tensions between different actors but also understood that the local community in Chenini but also in Jemna were somehow disillusioned (rightly or wrongly) with the role played by some actors of the civil society, especially those coming from the capital to give lessons reviving the resentment between the South/Interior and North/Coast of the country. Not having any real anchorage in Chenini yet, this could play against me since I ran the risk of being attached to this and that association. For these motives but also for budget and logistic reasons, I was advised to go alone to establish the first contacts.

### 5.3.1 *Chenini: Agonizing Traditional Agroecology & Water Commoning*

#### ***Gabes: A Stricken City and Eco-Social Protest***

Gabes is the capital of the governorate of the same name. A major port in southern Tunisia, with a population of 150,000, it is home to a large industrial complex for the processing of phosphates, which are extracted from the Gafsa mining basin and transported to Gabes by rail. For a long time, the economy of Gabes was based on agriculture, fishing and its status as a hub. According to INS figures in 2018, it had an unemployment rate of 25.4%, compared to 15.4% at the national level (this rate would rise to 18.4% for the third quarter of 2021). Industrial activities were created at different times and are managed by different combinations of public and private actors. In Gabes, a chemical industry has existed since 1972. The product of a public industrialization policy fueled by a modernizing ideology and promoted as a means of decolonization (Signoles, 1985), it is today structured around a public company, the Groupe Chimique Tunisien (GCT), which transforms the phosphates extracted from the mining basin into phosphoric acid and fertilizer. A few private companies have joined the complex. During the dictatorship, little or no research was done on the eco-

logical disaster that has been raging in Gabes for nearly 50 years. Under the dictatorship of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, for a long time, this issue remained taboo. It was not possible to denounce the environmental crimes committed by this complex under the pretext that it represents a source of national wealth. The city is devastated because of this pollution. As a result, the inhabitants also suffer from many ailments due to this pollution. Chronic fatigue, respiratory problems, degradation of water, soil and subsoil and threatened biodiversity. The pollution is even thought to be the cause of an increase in cancer in the region, which the authorities deny. Aljazeera journalist Thessa Lageman (2015) described Gabes as Tunisia's cancer hotspot, while the FTDES (2017) called it the little Chernobyl of Tunisia. The former governor of Gabes, Mongi Thameur, used to deny any causal relationship between diseases such as cancer and asthma and the pollution caused by the chemical complex. For many, the government will never admit the effects of pollution caused by the industrial world in the region as its phosphate mining and (resource-extraction) activities are considered a crucial industry for the economy of Tunisia and this to the detriment of the quality of air and land of the city formerly known for being a spawning ground of the Mediterranean.

No need for a scientific opinion since I am talking about a real-life experience. The context of Chenini and the oases of Gabes is in no way foreign to me; on the contrary, I know it only too well since I was born there. I was born with an acute form of asthma that my parents linked without any particular doubt to the presence of the chemical industry in Gabes. The Gulf of Gabes in Tunisia is indeed listed among the "pollution hotspots" in the Mediterranean and has been suffering from the effects of severe industrial pollution for 50 years (since the 70's). The intense industrial activity of the region, dominated by the presence of the GCT generates hazardous waste, such as phosphogypsum affecting the state of fauna and flora, and degrading the health and well-being of local populations. Every day, the production units of the GCT discharge 14,000 tons of phosphogypsum into the sea, according to the authorities. In addition to this environmentally harmful sludge, the plant releases phosphoric acid into the air. (AFP, 2017). Today, more than 95% of the region's air pollution comes from GCT's plants (GIZ, 2012).

Ben Ali was forced to flee following the 2011 revolution (Arab Spring) and since then, the liberation of speech has replaced the ambient silence. This is why several protest actions have been organized in Gabes to demand an end to the rejections and the relocation of the complex. The Tunisian revolution of 2011 allowed the associative field in Gabes to explode. Indeed, since 2011, a wide range of local associations have joined the Association pour la Sauvegarde de l'Oasis de Chenini (ASOC) which was founded in 1992 and is probably one of the oldest associations still active on the territory; including Gabes Action, SOS Environnement Gabes (founded in 2011), the Tunisian Association for the Environment and Nature of Gabes (founded in 2012), the #StopPollution movement (active since 2012 and probably the most publicized) and also the Association for the Protection of the Oasis of Chott Essalem (founded 2013). A petition denouncing the pollution suffered by the governorate of Gabes and demanding the right to a healthy life, was launched by the Stop Pollution collective on social networks. Under the slogan "Stop Pollution, I want to live", this petition addressed to the head of government comes after the fire that occurred on 13 March 2021 in a private industrial unit, located in the industrial zone of Gabes and which caused five deaths and one injury. The collective claims that this fire is the latest in a long series of disasters that have shaken the city, including the fires that occurred at the ammonium plant of the GCT in 2020. The collective claims that no safety measures have been taken despite calls from civil society and environmental associations to check the compliance of the region's industrial units with safety standards, especially after the explosion that occurred in the port of Beirut on 4 August 2020.

The collective considers that the lack of compliance with safety standards coupled with the great deterioration of the quality of infrastructure in the majority of industrial units and ammonium and natural gas storage units in the region, threatens not only the health of citizens, but the existence of a whole city and increases the possibility of disasters. Through this petition, the Collective demands the opening of an investigation into the fire that occurred on 13 March 2021, the prosecution of those responsible, and support and moral and material compensation for the families of the victims. It also demands a change in the development model of the governorate of Gabes based on polluting industries with little employment capacity and the implementation of a new model that respects the

environment and human beings and is capable of creating jobs. The collective also calls on the State to honor its commitments by implementing the decision of 29 June 2017 on the immediate cessation of phosphogypsum discharges into the sea by phosphate processing plants, the closure of the polluting units of the Tunisian Chemical Group and the fight against all forms of pollution resulting from industrial activity.

The authorities have confirmed that they are aware of the problem. In 2017, the former head of government Youssef Chahed had even announced the gradual dismantling of the industrial complex's units and its replacement by a new industrial zone in line with international environmental standards. However, according to the governor of Gabes, the managers of this chemical complex and the Ministry of Energy were never convinced by this proposal because the solution is costly. For years, decisions have been taken, promises have been made but they have never materialized. The movement seemed to lose momentum especially during the covid crisis. On 13 March 2021, an explosion in an asphalt storage tank in a factory in the industrial zone killed five people. This event rekindled tensions and protests by activists and residents forced the president to travel, who had described Gabes as a martyred city victimized by industry. However, no tangible solution has been found.

The oases of Gabes are the only coastal oasis in the Mediterranean and one of the last examples of this type of oasis in the world. In addition to its remarkable geographical position, the oasis concentrates a rich biodiversity thanks to an oasis microclimate and an exploitation of resources adapted to the territory. The oasis of Chenini is one of the several oases of Gabes but is the one that best resists the effects of pollution. In the imagination of Gabesians Chenini remains a kind of exception. In the context of the degradation of oasis agro-systems and the crisis of regional development models (Abdedaiem & Landy 2009), rising conflicts and social demands for fair access to resources could be observed well before the revolution. Local mobilizations were mostly organized around environmental issues, as this was the only way people could exercise some freedom of expression in an authoritarian context (Battesti 2012). Thus, mobilizations around water problems were often used as an excuse for political expression, and oasis farmers' discourse tended to develop a general criticism of public policies, but in the framework of local

claims. Thus, farmers' criticisms were mainly about constraints to accessing water resources. For many years the Association de Sauvegarde De L'Oasis De Chenini Gabes (ASOC), which is part of the RADDO network, has been helping local farmers to preserve ancient techniques and develop agroecology. ASOC also encourages farmers to breed their own seeds to create diversity for more resilient crops; plant-breeding techniques to strengthen their crops against rising temperatures and low rainfall. A seed bank has even been created to preserve the local seeds.

### ***The Association de Sauvegarde de l'Oasis de Chenini (ASOC)***

It was with this in mind that I chose to focus on the case of the Chenini oasis and the ecological, social, economic and especially political challenges faced by the local population. Nevertheless, I had to have some sort of anchor in Chenini itself. A local figure with notoriety and a tangible knowledge of the territory; my uncle Adel who was born and raised in Chenini-. Talking to him, I learned a little about the history of Chenini, including his childhood memories of an oasis where water was abundant. Since his retirement years ago, he had taken over the family estate, buying back the plots from his brothers and sisters to avoid its fragmentation. In a methodical way he gradually replanted varieties of palm trees that are in danger of disappearing. The maintenance of the plot costs him more than the sale of his production could bring him, but Uncle Adel considers it as a big garden and does it only to preserve a heritage, an effort for memory, probably mixed with nostalgia for the oasis of his childhood before the setting up of the Bort (port) referring to the Chemical Group. I told the latter about my project dealing with the Commons, food sovereignty and the implications of climate change on Tunisia especially on Gabes and Chenini and he had directly expressed his interest in the subject. He therefore helped me to establish the first contacts with (ASOC).

I already knew about the association, but during my research, especially on the internet (because of the confinement I was stuck in Italy), I realized the importance of the work carried out by the association both at local (in Chenini) and transnational level. Indeed, the "digital" research also led me to read publications of the "Réseau Associatif du Développement Durable des Oasis (RADDO)" and realize that the ASOC was the focal point in Tunisia. I met Abdelbasset

Hamrouni, who was for many years (around 13 years until the revolution in 2011) the president of the ASOC. This was a first opportunity to learn about the past of the oasis but specially to establish a first list of contacts. We also discussed about the RADDO of which he was a founding member. For him the objective that the network has set itself, since 2001, was to give life back to the oases. Abdelbasset had long since left the association but still seemed aware of the reality on the ground. He did not exactly understand what design I wanted to practice but seemed informed about workshops and the participatory approaches. ASOC and RADDO kept working on it with European NGOs, associations and researchers that were interested like us in the case of Chenini and the Saharan oases in general.

The inhabitants seek to restore their agricultural land and show their strategies to face the challenges and difficulties that the oasis faces in adopting agroecological practices. Agroecology is the focus of the efforts, described as a set of techniques and practices used to promote “a return to the earth of what came from the earth”, with natural and eco-friendly production agro-systems. One of the actions emphasized is the manufacture and use of compost. Other activities such as the valorization and exchange of local knowledge and traditional practices, peasant experimentation, seed preservation and solidarity economy through ecotourism projects are also considered. According to Abdelbasset the chemical industry was an obstacle but not the only one; the reluctance of people to change their behavior and mentality was one of the challenges I had to face. He explained that water disappearance provoked the collapse of the whole ecosystem of collaboration and solidarity that was around for centuries; but for him the biggest threat was the absence of a long-term vision. This confirmed the hypothesis that: Design has a role to play in dealing with a crisis of imagination through the processes of radical imagination and future studies.

I had also contacted Irene Carpentier, a geographer, whose papers I had read on the case of Chenini. Her doctoral thesis, focused on the new forms of development of oasis territories in southern Tunisia, had proposed a reflection on the questioning of agricultural development models and natural resource management in the post-2011 context. Having lived in Chenini and knowing the context well, Irene proposed the idea of touring the oasis with a different person

each time and we discussed, among other things, the advantages and risks related to my knowledge of the context and the risk of missing some details. I had to see the oasis from another angle, other angles different from mine. This way I hoped to create a pluriversal vision trying to hear all sides of the story, integrating even superficially several perspectives on the reality of the oasis.



Images 5.4

Dian Robert, Reportage à Gabès:  
Immersion au cœur de la lutte  
citoyenne contre la pollution.  
*Stop Pollution* Protests in Gabes.  
Source: [www.nawaat.com](http://www.nawaat.com)

Images 5.5



### 5.3.2 Jemna: Peasant Resistance and Contested Commons

#### ***Jemna and the Struggle for Recognition***

First of all, I contacted Mohamed Kerrou, a Tunisian sociologist and political scientist who was interested in the case of Jemna. I wanted to have an idea of the context before going there. Kerrou is the author of a book entitled “Jemna, l’oasis de la révolution” (Jemna, the oasis of the revolution) published in 2022. At the time of our meeting the book was still in the publication phase, but during the desk-research phase I had watched videos of lectures and read some of his writings. Kerrou was very interested in the design perspective and its intersections with anthropology. He appreciated the political aspect of the research; the political understanding in its broad definition and the foundations of politics and Aristotle. As I explained the goals of the research, he considered that the design I wanted to practice included a perspective related to sciences of complexity. For Kerrou, Jemna’s experience is exemplary in terms of the emergence of a local and pluralistic civil society, the learning of participatory democracy and the pioneering experience in Tunisia of the social and solidarity economy. He explained that the community, however, faces several difficulties that could hinder the perennity of the model that it proposes.

He stated that the Association pour la Sauvegarde des Oasis de Jemna (ASOJ) has successfully introduced a new model of social and solidarity economy. At a time when citizenship in Tunisia is going through a deep crisis linked to the weakening of the State and the destructuring of social bonds, the initiative has been perceived as a political and civic lesson to the center of power. Part of the income was invested and served to improve the situation of the oasis through various local investments. Before him, Mohamed Elloumi (see section 4.3) had spoken to me about the limits of the agricultural model in Jemna, a monoculture of date palms; “life is not easy for them either with all the conflicts with the authorities”. For Elloumi, the population of Jemna has inherited a heritage that is productive, the SSE economic alternatives are there, but in the end the real actors of the oasis are somewhat excluded from the decision-making process. Kerrou considered that the new law on SSE had its limits, but that the real obstacles were at another level.

#### Images 5.5

1. “Jemna success of an experience... Success of a revolution”.

Sign in front of the land taken over by the inhabitants.

Source: [www.shemsfm.net](http://www.shemsfm.net)

2. Auction of the harvest of the land taken over by the inhabitants of Jemna in 2016.

Source: [www.capitalis.com](http://www.capitalis.com)

Kerrou spoke of the artistic and poetic side of the experience which is not emphasized. He considered that the Jemna experience has evolved from a protest movement to a social movement. He nevertheless spoke of a quasi-social movement. The question for him would be to “understand why such a movement around the demand for Commons was made in Jemna and not in other oases. He explained that the idea he was trying to translate in his book “is that Jemna does not fall from the sky (...) we are talking about the science of complexity, and we cannot in any way define all the determinants and indeterminates that led to the Jemna experience (...) Jemna should be situated beyond the idea of the exception as the Tunisian exception that many adopt. It is a particular *sui generis* experience (...) particular does not mean exceptional.

I then asked the question of a possible duplication, scaling up of the Jemna model in other oases. For Kerrou, “the question does not arise, because it remains a particular context (...) it is up to each person to invent their own experience. For Kerrou, it is necessary to go beyond exceptionalism and duplication by trying to understand the substrates that allowed “Jemna to emerge as Jemna”. To understand the case of Jemna Kerrou considered three conditions:

(1) Knowledge of history; if one understands the historical genesis of Jemna, he would realize that an experience similar to the present one, took place in Jemna in the 19th century. According to Kerrou, the local population knows this and recognizes it, but those interested in the case have not been able to listen to them; (2) Anthropological element that allows us to understand the context in its globality because it is not only the question of the Henchir; (3) Reflecting on Jemna is not only reflecting on a specific case but rather reflecting on Tunisia. The case of Jemna is neither exemplary nor duplicative, but the case is illuminating on the whole. It sheds light on the limits of the revolution. It is only a political revolution that has changed only the facade. The slogans around a supposed systemic change “the people want the fall of the regime” or “the people want their land back” are pure fiction.

For Kerrou, the issues of access to land and water have not yet been addressed. The case of Jemna would allow us to reflect on these problems in their globality. “For the last 10 years Tunisians have been navigating with the eyes of the actor and researchers, both gover-

ned and governed, we do not know where we are going, given the absence of a strategy and a global vision". Kerrou explained that in the current context of Tunisia, "everyone has (at best) a fragmented vision of the problems as well as the solutions". The main problem would be linked to the absence of dialogue between the different actors; "what is missing is the political debate (...) it is up to civil society to propose alternatives but it remains very fragmented (...) the democratic transition is unfinished, unfinished (...) the legal and political vision which considers that by building the institutes one solves the problems is in itself a truncated vision because there are also questions of culture, mentality, learning about citizenship (...) what is lacking is a citizens' revolution, hence the problems linked to otherness and respect for the other, for minorities and for women, which is characteristic of the Tunisian context."

For Kerrou the experience of Jemna offers the opportunity to reflect on why the transition is blocked. One of the elements of the answer is the presupposition that Jemna is a social movement, although he considers it as a quasi-movement, not a real movement. They have the characteristics of a movement but the issue can stop and the experiment is currently out of steam because there are no alternatives and the subject of my research is interesting because it allows us to discuss alternatives. Kerrou referred to the work of Axel Honneth (1992) - the struggle for recognition - who introduced the paradigm of recognition. For Kerrou, Jemna is a living example of this struggle for recognition. On the one hand, the community seeks to be recognized and to have the experience recognized, while on the other hand, the Tunisian state refuses to do so. For Kerrou, "Recognition by the state would mean challenging its centralized authoritarian and marginalizing model (...) in Jemna recognition therefore remains amputated. Kerrou explained that there were three forms of recognition: (1) recognition through love which generates self-esteem "to love oneself in order to love the other"; (2) legal recognition which the people of Jemna are trying to achieve; (3) political recognition (in the broad sense of the term which is that of social solidarity) which the Jemna experience has succeeded in obtaining through its media visibility.

According to Kerrou, this recognition through love only exists in appearance. Kerrou explains that love should not be understood in its subjective dimension but as a social relationship; a relationship to

oneself and to the other which, according to Kerrou, is now being called into question in the Tunisian context. It is the absence of this dimension (recognition through love and self-love) that explains, according to Kerrou, the power relationship between the community of Jemna and the central power. The issues related to migration and the predisposition of young Tunisians to leave the country even at the risk of their lives would be another proof of the absence of this recognition through love. Even more profoundly, this could explain the relations between men and women, which, according to the sociologist, are relations of tension. As in many contexts, even in Europe, this relationship is conflictual, but in Tunisia there is sometimes a questioning of women's achievements, something unthinkable in Western countries. Kerrou thus takes up the question of women in the context of Jemna. While most of the work on Jemna has focused on the agricultural and land aspects, Kerrou considered that the question of women was central to understanding the dynamics and reality of Jemna, which is neither a rural nor an urban reality as such. "The question of Jemna is peasant but not only (...) the question of the woman is central when you reflect on her absence/presence (...) because she is not absent from Jemna, she is even very present even when she is invisible (...) this gives an idea of the question of the woman and her condition in Tunisia, which in general is free, but not liberated".

### ***The Association de Sauvegarde des Oasis de Jemna (ASOJ)***

The oasis of Jemna in the southwest of Tunisia, in Nefzaoua more precisely, located south of Kebili and north of Douz, the main region producing date of the country. Attached administratively to the governorate of Kebili, it constitutes a municipality with 7,194 inhabitants in 2014 and belongs to the delegation of South Kebili. The oases have long lived under the pressure of population growth which explains the large diaspora of "Jemnians" in other regions of the country and abroad. It also explains the large scale of illegal growth of palm groves in the governorate of Kebili, whose regional economy is not very diversified.

I had already discussed several times with Taher Tahri, president of the Association de Sauvegarde des Oasis de Jemna (ASOJ). Taher Tahri, is one of the major figures of the movement of Jemna. I was able to meet him for the first time in (July 2019). In March 2012, the

ASOJ obtained the legal status. This legal status made it possible to formalize land ownership on the land that the youth of Jemna had taken over by force during the revolution of 2010/2011. On January 12, 2011, in the midst of the popular revolt against Ben Ali's regime, dozens of Jemna's inhabitants headed to the STIL (Tunisian Dairy Industry Company) farm and took it by force to put an end, according to them, to "a long history of injustice". When the "revolutionary legitimacy" imposed itself, the inhabitants of the city managed to realize their dream and take back "the land of their ancestors". This was the origin of the opposition between the population of Jemna and the Tunisian state; one could then speak of Jemna as a case of Contested Commons (Ben Slimane, 2020). Tahri asserted that legal texts in the form of ancient notarial acts demonstrate that the land of the Oases of Jemna belongs to the ancestors of the community (through two historical lineages) and not to the Tunisian state.

According to Tahri, the origins of the farm case go back to the colonial period. Indeed, the French occupier confiscated the land and gave it to a large French farmer (as was the case in all regions of the country). After independence, the inhabitants tried to recover the land. They paid half of the amount demanded by the former governor of Gabes (since the actual region of Kebili was affiliated to the one of Gabes in that moment). In the middle of the 60s, the State preferred to use the money into dividends scattered among many regional projects such as the hotel "Oasis" or the Commercial and Agricultural Society of Southern Tunisia (SCAST) which, at the time, operated the farm of the STIL. Tahri also explained that ten years later, in the 1970s, the state forced the region's supervisory council to give the land to the Société de Développement Agricole et des Dattes (SODAD), a subsidiary of the STIL company. Years later, in 2002, this public company went bankrupt and the authorities decided to lease the oasis or what local call the Henchir to the private sector via a 15-year contract. The derisory rental prices were tangible evidence of corruption between local authorities and entrepreneurs who have taken advantage of the oasis. Tahri put forward the social aspect of the alternative the community was proposing and its opposition to any individual exploitation of such a great wealth.

To mark the break with the past, the new managers of the oasis dedicate the profits of the oasis to the benefit of the local community. Indeed, since the revolution, the farm's revenues have been used to

pay the salaries of the workers, who have increased in number, to optimize the productivity of the land and to launch development projects for the benefit of the inhabitants of Jemna. A management in the image of a real “popular nationalization” through collective management and participatory democracy where the power of exploitation of agricultural land has changed sides: from a vertical private capital to a participatory and collective civil society. Thus, this shift in power has allowed the benefits to go directly into the pockets of the hungry, who have built their own projects and improved the quality of their lives.

Faced with its conflict with the Tunisian state, Jemna’s experience has seen a campaign of support for its cause develop throughout Tunisia, such as in 2016, with popular mobilizations of Jemna in Tunis. A political, cultural and intellectual support that has manifested itself through sit-ins, petitions, press articles, and seminars on the issue of collective land. Indeed, the experience of Jemna is integrated in a post-revolutionary situation in Tunisia, and by its local impact, revives the processes of social-economic changes through the social and solidarity economy and the associations of the civil society, and not the political parties.

This first encounter was an opportunity to get to know Tahri and talk to him about the research I wanted to deploy. He seemed curious about the incongruous relationship I was trying to establish between design and the fight that the community of Jemna was leading for the defense of their land. I had, in a way, developed a narrative around the evolution of design and the interest in its social, political and ethical aspects since Papanek and Maldonado. I also discussed about the issues of food sovereignty and climate change which beyond the central issue of legal status du Henchir what seemed most pressing to Tahri was the issue of climate change, the effects of which have been felt since that year with the appearance of new diseases that threaten date palms and consequently the entire local economy.

I noted the will to return to traditional modes of organization and ancestral irrigation techniques but also the recognition in permaculture of a sustainable alternative towards transition in facing climate change. The case of the occupation in 2012 of the oases of Jemna in southern Tunisia is a particularly representative example

of that protest. The notion of Commons is not (or barely) mentioned in Tunisia where we talk instead about social and solidarity economy. During the revolution, the question of land was the perfect representation of fierce struggle in the Oasis of Jemna. A struggle that has prepared the basis of the social and solidarity economy law now in Tunisia. Actually, the Jemna experience can be seen as an experience of land commoning.

About my intention to inhabit Jemna for the purposes of the research, Tahri confirmed his complete availability. I must admit that the notoriety of my parents and in particular my mother made my task much easier. Since the 80s my mother, my father and my uncle have been part of a musical group called "Al Bahth al Moussiki" (the musical research in English) that led an experiment of engaged/protest music against the dictatorship in Tunisia. They were famous in the student environment and their songs were often chanted during the revolution of 2010/2011. Their songs have marked a whole generation of which Taher Tahri is a part, but they have also had a particular echo in the south in Kebili. In Jemna and the region of Kebili in general I knew almost nobody. I had decided to rent an apartment or a room in a guest house, but it turned out to be complicated. The simplest and most logical solution was to rent an apartment in Kebili (administrative city) north of Jemna or in Douz (tourist city) further south.

## References Chapter 5

- Abatzoglou, J., Nespor, S. and Oreskes, N. (2007). Climate Change: What it Means for Us, Our Children, and Our Grandchildren. [online] Google Books. MIT Press. Available at: [https://books.google.fr/books?hl=en&lr=&id=PXJIqCkb7YIC&oi=fnd&pg=PA65&ots=m1PgvJeTRL&sig=yggLXjfqKrantzV1-NpNWs48ykXU&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.fr/books?hl=en&lr=&id=PXJIqCkb7YIC&oi=fnd&pg=PA65&ots=m1PgvJeTRL&sig=yggLXjfqKrantzV1-NpNWs48ykXU&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false).
- Abdedaïem, S., & Landy, F. (2009, January 1). Mutations socio-agro-spatiales et mode de gouvernance de l'eau dans les oasis "périurbaines" du gouvernorat de Gabès (Sud-est tunisien) : de la raréfaction d'une ressource à la crise d'un patrimoine. Theses.fr. <http://www.theses.fr/2009PA100035>
- Ashkenazy, Y. Yizahaq, H. Tsor, H. (2012) Sand dune mobility under climate change in the kalahari and Australiun deserts. *Clim change* 112:901-923
- Battesti, V. (2002, February 7). Les jardins d'oasis : des natures en construction. Halshs.archives-Ouvertes.fr. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00204142/>
- Battesti, V. (2005). Jardins au désert: évolution des pratiques et savoirs oasiens : Jérid tunisien. In Google Books. IRD Editions. [https://books.google.fr/books?hl=fr&lr=&id=XTXQYLprA\\_cC&oi=fnd&pg=PA435&ots=QsY6Vcw8BI&sig=CFBXPpHUuEnRD\\_VLccTVG5UWH6w#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.fr/books?hl=fr&lr=&id=XTXQYLprA_cC&oi=fnd&pg=PA435&ots=QsY6Vcw8BI&sig=CFBXPpHUuEnRD_VLccTVG5UWH6w#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Battesti, V. (2012). The Power of a Disappearance: Water in the Jerid Region of Tunisia. In: Johnston, B., Hiwasaki, L., Klaver, I., Ramos Castillo, A., Strang, V. (eds) *Water, Cultural Diversity, and Global Environmental Change*. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1774-9\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1774-9_6)
- Battesti, V., Gros-Balthazard, M., Ogéron, C., Ivorra, S., Terral, J.-F., & Newton, C. (2018). Date Palm Agrobiodiversity (Phoenix dactylifera L.) in Siwa Oasis, Egypt: Combining Ethnography, Morphometry, and Genetics. *Human Ecology*, 46(4), 529–546. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-018-0006-y>
- Belarbi A, Boayad A, Diaou M., Kaassis N., Tidjani Miliki M. (2004). Agrobiodiversité et durabilité des systèmes de production oasiens dans la palmeraie d'Aoufous, ICRA, INRA, 167 p.
- Besser, H., Mokadem, N., Redhaounia, B., Hadji, R., Amor, H., Hamed, Y. (2017). Groundwater mixing and geochemical assessment of low-enthalpy resources in the geothermal field of southwestern Tunisia. *Euro-Mediterranean Journal for Environmental Integration*. 3. [10.1007/s41207-018-0055-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s41207-018-0055-z).
- Brachet, J. (2009). Chapitre 7 - Des migrants en transit : sociabilités et territorialités dans le Sahara nigérien. Dans : Geneviève Cortes éd., *Les circulations transnationales: Lire les turbulences migratoires contemporaines* (pp. 109-124). Paris: Armand Colin. <https://doi.org/10.3917/arco.corte.2009.01.0109>
- Brunhes, J. (1902). L'irrigation, ses conditions géographiques, ses modes et son organisation dans la péninsule ibérique et dans l'Afrique du Nord. Université de Paris, Paris, C. Naud, p. 427. 7.
- Cheneval, J.B. & Michel-Queirel, C. (2015). L'eau et le foncier au cœur de la question oasienne, RADDO
- Childe, V. G. (1928). *The Most Ancient East. The Oriental Prelude to European Prehistory*, Londres, Kegan Paul & Co., 1928 ; ID., *Man Makes Himself. On the Beginnings of Civilisation*, Londres, Watts & Co., 1936
- Febvre, L. (1922). *La Terre et l'évolution humaine, Introduction géographique à l'histoire*, Paris, La Renaissance du livre.
- FTDES (2018). OST: Rapport janvier 2022 des mouvements sociaux, suicides, violences et migrations - FTDES. [online] <https://ftdes.net/>. Available at: <https://ftdes.net/ost-rapport-janvier-2022-des-mou>

- vements-sociaux-suicides-violences-et-migrations/ [Accessed 27 Apr. 2022].
- G. Toutain, G., Dolle, V. and Ferry, M. (1989). Situation des systèmes oasiens en régions chaudes. Les cahiers de la recherche-développement.
- GIZ. (2012). Les oasis de Tunisie à protéger contre la dégradation et les effets du changement climatique République Tunisienne Ministère de l'Environnement. Ministère de l'environnement.
- Grenade R. (2013). Date palm as a keystone species in Baja California peninsula, Mexico oases. *Journal of Arid Environments*, V94:59-67.
- Guiot, J. and Cramer, W. (2016) Climate Change: The 2015 Paris Agreement Thresholds and Mediterranean Basin Ecosystems. *Science*, 354, 465-468. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aah5015>
- Harper, D. (n.d.). OASIS. In *Ethimology online*. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/oasis>. Oasis.
- Hassine, D. B., Abderrabba, M., Cazaux, S., & Bouajila, J. (2013). Contribution to the Chemical and Biological Study of Eucalyptus Leaves Extracts: Effect on Frying Oil. *Journal of Medical and Bioengineering*, 2(4), 242-247. <https://doi.org/10.12720/jomb.2.4.242-247>
- Hole, F. & McCorriston, J. (2009). The Ecology of Seasonal Stress and the Origins of Agriculture in the Near East. *American Anthropologist*, 93 (1), 2009, p. 46-69.
- Honnet, A. (1992). La lutte pour la reconnaissance.
- Iknayan, K. J., & Beissinger, S. R. (2018). Collapse of a desert bird community over the past century driven by climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(34), 8597-8602. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1805123115>
- Ikuenobe, P. (2018) Human rights, personhood, dignity, and African communalism, *Journal of Human Rights*, 17:5, 589-604, DOI: 10.1080/14754835.2018.1533455
- Jones, M.D., N. Abu-Jaber, A. AlShdaifat, D. Baird, B.I. Cook, M.O. Cuthbert, J.R. Dean, M. Djamali, W. Eastwood, D. Fleitmann, A. Haywood, O. Kwiecién, J. Larsen, L.A. Maher, S.E. Metcalfe, A. Parker, C.A. Petrie, N. Primmer, T. Richter, N. Roberts, J. Roe, J.C. Tindall, E. Unal-Imer, and L. Weeks, 2019: 20,000 years of societal vulnerability and adaptation to climate change in southwest Asia. *WIREs Water*, 6, no. 2, e1330, doi:10.1002/wat2.1330.
- Jouve P., Loussert R., Mouradi H. (2004). La lutte contre la dégradation des palmeraies dans les oasis de la région de Tata (Maroc). Colloque international, les oasis: services et bien-être humain face à la désertification
- Jouve. P. (2012). Les oasis du Maghreb, des agro-écosystèmes de plus en plus menacés. Comment renforcer leur durabilité ? *Courrier de l'environnement de l'INRA* n°62, décembre 2012.
- LabOasis Foundation. (n.d.). Oasis en danger. LabOasis. Retrieved September 13, 2021, from <http://www.laboasis.org/fr/home/oasis-in-danger/>
- Lageman, T. (2015). Is help on the way for Tunisia's cancer hotspot? *Www.aljazeera.com*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/29/is-help-on-the-way-for-tunisia-cancer-hotspot>
- Laureano, P. (2001). *Atlante d'Acqua. Conoscenze tradizionali per la lotta alla desertificazione*.
- Le Houérou, H-N. (1975). Problèmes et potentialités des terres arides de l'Afrique du Nord, In *L'aménagement des zones arides*, CIHEAM, p. 17-35, Options Méditerranéennes, n°26
- Le Lannou, M. (1949). *La géographie humaine*. Paris. Flammarion.
- Leservoisier, O. (1994). *LA QUESTION FONCIÈRE EN MAURITANIE - Terres et pouvoirs dans la région du Gorgol*. Harmattan.

- Lotti, G. (2008). Il letto di Ulisse. Mediterraneo, cose, progetti. Gangemi
- Lotti, G. (2013). A quatre mains et plus. Design per la ceramica della regione di Tanger-Tétouan in Marocco Design et poterie dans la région de Tanger-Tétouan au Maroc. Edizioni ETS.
- Manzini, E. (2014). Design for social innovation vs. social design, Retrieved April 12, 2019 from: <http://www.desisnetwork.org/2014/07/25/design-for-social-innovation-vs-social-design/>
- MedECC. (2019). Risks associated to climate and environmental changes in the Mediterranean region. A preliminary assessment by the MedECC Network Science-policy interface - 2019
- Mignolo, W. (2011). Cosmopolitan Localisms. The Darker Side of Western Modernity, 252–294. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394501-008>
- Ministère de l'environnement. (2019). Plan d'Action National de Lutte Contre la Désertification aligné aux horizons 2030-2018. Rapport Principal 176 p. Document [online] Available at <[www.environnement.gov.tn](http://www.environnement.gov.tn)>
- Mollison, B. (1988). Permaculture: A designer's manual. (2nd ed.). Sisters Creek, Australia: Tagari.
- Olasunkanmi, A. (2011). Economic Globalization and its Effect on Community in Africa. <http://www.krepublishers.com>
- Price, T. D., & Bar-Yosef, O. (2011). The Origins of Agriculture: New Data, New Ideas. *Current Anthropology*, 52(S4), S163–S174. <https://doi.org/10.1086/659964>
- RADDO. (n.d.). L'oasis, quest-ce que c'est? [online] Available at <<https://www.raddo.org/ecosysteme-oasien/L-oasis-qu-est-ce-que-c-est>>
- Rhili, H. (2018). Eau et justice sociale au bassin minier. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Riou, C. (1990). Bioclimatologie des oasis. *Option Méditerranéennes*, V A 11: 207-213.
- Sachs, W. (1999). Planet dialectics: Explorations in environment and development. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publications.
- Sandron, F. (1997). L'eau n'est plus le lien social en milieu oasien. Tunis : ORSTOM, 7 p. multigr. Agriculture et Développement Durable en Méditerranée : Séminaire International, Montpellier (FRA), 1997/03/10-12.
- Santos, B. S. (2014). Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide. New York. Routledge
- “Sedra, M.H. (2003). Le palmier dattier, base de la mise en valeur des oasis au Maroc : techniques phoenicicoles et création d'oasis, 265 p. Institut national de la recherche agronomique, Rabat, Maroc, voir : <http://fr.scribd.com/doc/66115812/Le-Palmier-Dattier-Base-de-LaMise-en-Valeur-Des-Oasis-Au-Maroc>.”
- Signoles, P. (1985). Tunis et l'espace tunisien / Signoles Pierre - Sudoc. [Wwww.sudoc.fr](http://www.sudoc.fr). <https://www.sudoc.fr/00682692X>
- “Skouri M. (1990). Eléments de synthèse et conclusions. In : Dollé V. (ed.), Toutain G. (ed.). Les systèmes agricoles oasiens. Montpellier : CIHEAM, 1990. p. 331-335. (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 11). Les Systèmes Agricoles Oasiens, 1988/11/19-21, Tozeur (Tunisia). <http://om.ciheam.org/om/pdf/a11/CI901508.pdf>”
- Souag, L. (2010). Grammatical Contact in the Sahara: Arabic, Berber, and Songhay in Tabelbala and Siwa. London. PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2010.
- Thackara, J. & Despond-Barré, A. (2008). In the bubble : de la complexité au design durable. Cité Du Design Éd.

- Trousset, P. (1986). Les Oasis Présahariennes Dans l'Antiquité : Partage de l'Eau et Division Du Temps. *Antiquités Africaines*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1986, pp. 163-193.
- UNDP. (2013). Human Development Report 2013 | United Nations Development Programme. [online] Available at: [https://www.undp.org/publications/human-development-report-2013?c\\_src=CENTRAL&c\\_src2=GSR#](https://www.undp.org/publications/human-development-report-2013?c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR#) [Accessed 28 Apr. 2022].
- Vidal, M. (2005). Ajustement entre des systèmes irrigués et des systèmes de culture diversifiés. *Fonctionnement de deux oasis du Tafilalet* Mémoire de Master 200 p.
- “Walker, A. (2021, December 15). dictionary. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dictionary>”
- World Bank. (2014). *Turn Down the Heat: Confronting the New Climate Normal*. Washington, DC: World Bank
- Yang, G. & BaishengYe, X., Lihua, Z. (2010). “Dynamics of oasis landscape in inland Shule River basin in arid northwest China,” *Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium (IGARSS)*, pp.922, 925, 25-30 July 2010.
- Zella, L.& Smadhi, D. (2006). *Gestion de l'eau dans les pays arabes*. Larhyss Journal, pp.157-169.



## CHAPTER 6 Inhabiting the Oases through Design Practices

### ABSTRACT

The sixth chapter is a continuation of the exploration/verification of a design as/for/in Common(s). The research investigation was undertaken following an action research approach according to which the knowledge gathered and processed during the desk-research phase was applied in the organization of the field-research phase, specifically a workshop that allowed the validation of the results through precisely an inductive process. Among the possible research approaches in the field of design, this doctoral work can be categorized predominantly as Research through Design (RtD) as it aims to produce new knowledge through the activity of design, investigating with the tools of the discipline a field of action (Frayling, 1993; Finedli 1998). The chapter talks about the experience I had (as a designer/researcher) on the field both in Chenini and Jemna. Once the contexts and actors have been identified (chapter 4 and 5) the question was to find the right approaches, methods and tools to adopt. An approach that would challenge the capitalist, colonial and patriarchal roots of design. The answers came through practice since we had identified numerous approaches during the desk-research phase. Clearly there was no universal method or tool to apply as advocated by the Human Center Design (HCD) and Design Thinking approaches. We also understood that Design for Social Innovation tends to frame problems in relatively narrow spatiotemporal contexts. The aim was to make an experiment on a micro-scale that had as its objective to explore how design could contribute to the restoration/defense of other economic cultures in view of the current and especially future challenges.

Methodologically, different concepts have been merged to build the experimental framework: Participatory Design (Marttila et al, 2014); Transition Design (Irwin, 2015, 2018); Autonomous Design (Escobar, 2018); Design for Sustainment (Fry, 2009); Prefigurative Design (DiSalvo, 2016). However, these different approaches served as reference points. The chosen approach was finally that of “inhabitation” inspired by Irit Rogoff’s reflection on how meaning is produced differently through the multiple relationships that are generated when living through things (Elzenbaumer, 2013). Without the “ambition” of improving the “livability of the world” we (me and the communities) carried out a collaborative design experiment rooted in the present, adopting a post-development/feminist line of thought taking into consideration the concepts of “Epistemologies of the South” and “Situated Knowledge” as conceptual notions. In this way, the expected aim has been to develop a situa-

ted knowledge that is generated from the specific point of view and that does not distance the knowing subject from everyone else but instead engages in collective processes of knowledge production.

During the experiment in Chenini we contributed to re-figuring new/old forms of collective action that could improve the resilience of the community to the near-future climate change and water scarcity issues. Observation, conversations and unstructured interviews were developed according to the context using the EXF framework to structure the whole experience (Candy & Kornett; 2019). Through the perspectives of the Commons and radical imagination we were able to ideate in a collective manner. What had been more important was the ontological posture of the designer; of being engaged in a specific situation of struggle i.e., communities and social movements defending their territories and worlds from the ravages of neoliberal globalization (Escobar, 2018). I was convinced by the need to immerse myself in the context, to build relationships with local communities and to take time for action or inaction (Irwin, 2018). It was not about the result but about the process.

## 6.1 Which Approach? Which Method? Which Design?

### 6.1.1 *Contacting Other Design Researchers*

Before and during this period, I was looking to see how other socially and politically engaged designers actually acted. At the very beginning, I did not know what approach to adopt. However, the approaches mentioned above served as a kind of reference points. I did not have a clear or appropriate approach to adopt, however, I felt halfway between the approaches of: Participatory Design and its concepts of infrastructuring and commoning (Marttila et al, 2014); Transition Design (Irwin, 2015) for its idea of long-term intervention and visioning by providing a process for stakeholders to transcend their differences in the present by co-creating visions of a shared and desirable long-term future; Autonomous Design (Escobar, 2018) since it focuses on the struggles of communities and social movements to defend their territories and worlds against the ravages of neoliberal globalization; Design for Sustainment and what Fry (2009) calls “dig where you stand”; or Prefigurative Design (DiSalvo, 2016), a design that could make political speculation easier to live, experiment with, and ultimately implement, where designers are not themselves called to speculate, but rather, they can be called to enable speculation.

Interestingly, all of these approaches adopt a decolonial stance, which is undoubtedly the attitude taken during this field experiment. As Escobar explains, “It should be stressed that these trends often overlap; they are diverse and heterogeneous, in some cases even within each trend. Taken as a whole, however, they can be seen as decentering design from Eurocentric accounts of the field, resituating it within larger histories of modernity and coloniality; making visible previously hidden or suppressed design histories and practices; redirecting design ontologically towards decolonial and pluriversal visions; and, very tellingly, addressing the implications of these repositioning of design for design education” (2018, p. 140). What I did know, however, was that there was no univer-

sal method or tools to apply as advocated by Human Center Design (HCD) and Design Thinking approaches. I also understood that Design for Social Innovation tends to frame problems within relatively narrow spatio-temporal contexts (Irwin, 2018). To help see more clearly, I had contacted several researchers in and outside of Design working either on the same theme of the application of Design in relation to Commons or more broadly on the different design approaches already mentioned.

I managed to contact people whose work I had read about. I invited Jose Luis Vivero Pol, program manager of the World Food Programme, hunger activist, agricultural engineer and “food commoner”, to participate in a seminar where we (doctoral students) presented the topics of our research. With Jose Luis Vivero Pol we discussed the notion he had developed of “Food as Commons” and its potential role in advancing struggles for food sovereignty. I also contacted Maura Benegiamo, a political ecology researcher who has conducted research in Italy, Central America and sub-Saharan Africa on environmental conflicts, extractivist policies and agricultural development from a political ecology perspective that draws on Marxian theory and postcolonial approaches. The latter had spoken to me about prefiguration in politics and it was through our discussions that I discovered DiSalvo’s (2016) work and his articulation of prefigurative politics and design as well as his critique of speculative design which too often celebrates spectacle rather than enquiry or critique.

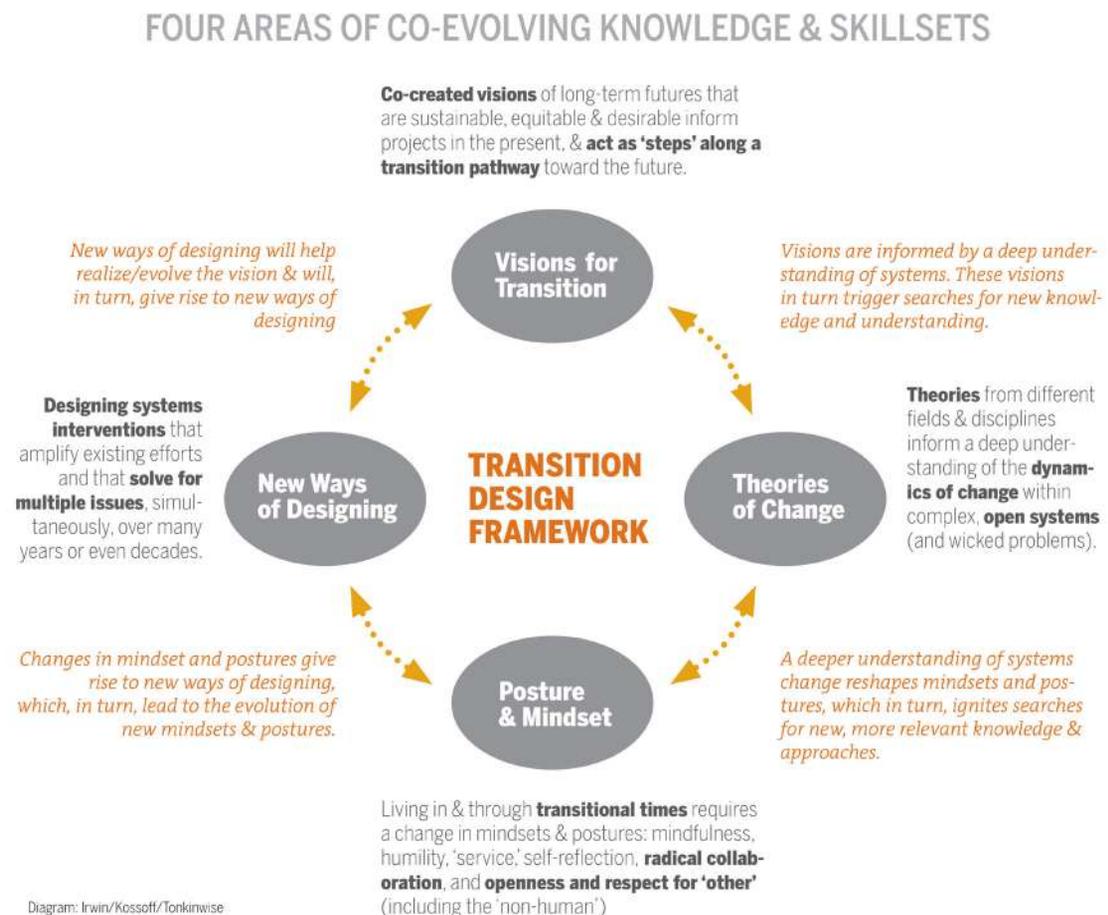
I also contacted Maurizio Teli, Associate Professor at the Department of Planning at Aalborg University, who works on Participatory Design on the Commons and commoning and is part of the P.D. Commoners collective. It was an opportunity to talk about the evolution of Participatory Design, thanks in part to a generational shift among researchers in the field, from a discourse focused on technology and computer systems to one focused on the power relations between institutions, grassroots movements and communities. Maurizio invited us to read about the research I was doing as part of a course he was teaching on “Facilitating Design Processes and Technological Innovation”. The course is part of a Master’s degree in “Techno-Anthropology” where students are not designers but are asked to study interaction design and Participatory Design while being trained to organize innovation processes in a very me-

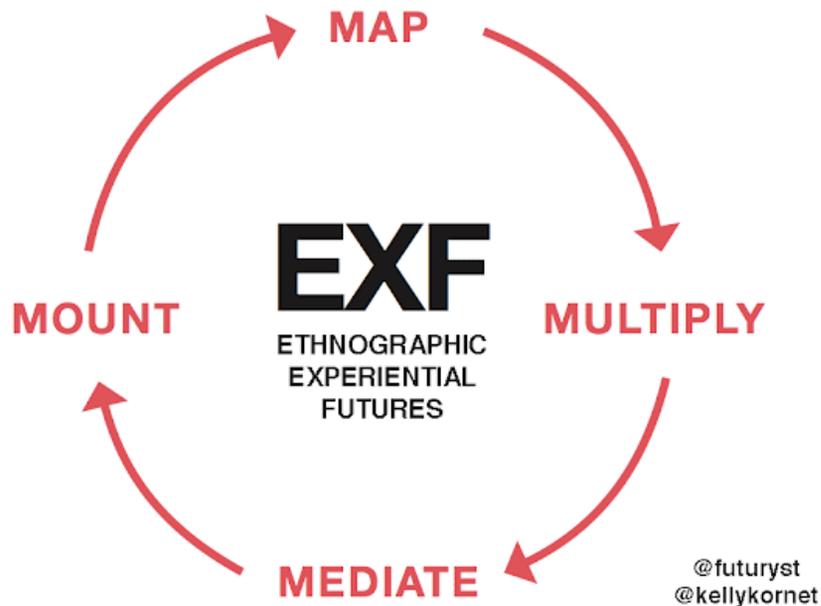
#### Image 6.1

The Transition Design Framework (n.d.). Irwin/Kossoff/Tonkinwise. Source: [www.transitiondesignseminarcmu.net](http://www.transitiondesignseminarcmu.net)

thodologically oriented course. For him, the many questions I had about the organization of my field research was a very interesting aspect in itself. So, it was a matter of making choices (or not).

Image 6.1





## Future Workshop (FW)

### (1) Critique Phase

*Determination of the current problem  
Collection of critique points*

### (2) Fantasy Phase

*Turn critique points into the opposite (bad to good)  
Performing a role play, fable, painting etc. to a fantastic story*

### (3) Implementation Phase

*Choose best concepts/ideas with regard to realistic conditions  
Build an action plan: Who does what, where, when and how?*

## Ethno.Exp.Futures (EXF)

### (1) Map

*Inquire into people's actual images of the future  
EFR: What do you (1) Want ; (2) Fear, (3) Expect?*

### (-) Multiply

*Generate alternative images (scenarios)  
to challenge or extend existing thinking*

### (2) Mediate

*Translate these ideas about the future/s into experiences;  
tangible, immersive, visual or interactive etc..*

### (3) Mount

*Stage experiential scenario/s to encounter for  
the original subject/s or others, or both.*

### 6.1.2 Future Workshops and Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF)

Finally, at the symposium Design as Common Good: Framing Design through Pluralism and Social Values, organized by Swiss Design Network in March 2021, I participated in a workshop entitled: “Untangling Social Justice: Design Futures for Systems Thinking”. The workshop was organized by Hillary Carey, PhD student in Transition Design and dealt with long-term visioning of possible futures as an important collective activity to drive change. Hillary was interested in Transition Design and Autonomous Design approaches and the benefits that Social Impact Designers could gain by using different futuring tools. After the workshop we agreed to meet (online) to discuss my research in more depth. I had hypothesized the possibility of organizing a Future Workshop in Chenini and Jemna in order to put the different actors around the same imaginary. I was dubious about the effectiveness of such a workshop and expressed the refusal to use the classic post-it notes and other tools in a context based on oral tradition and to fall into a kind of colonialism that I was criticizing. Hillary found the idea of such a workshop interesting and drew the attention to the work of Jose Ramos on linking Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Foresight (2017). Ramos paraphrasing his personal communication with Rosa explains that “PAR framework lends credence to the idea that participants are co-researchers, actively engaged in the adaptation of the research itself”. This reminded us about the work of de Sousa Santos acknowledging the importance of PAR and the figure of Fals Borda in the kind of workshops defined as co-learning experiences developed by the Popular University of Social Movements (PUSM). The two of them draw indeed on the work of Paulo Freire and his pedagogy of the oppressed (1970).

We talked about the idea of being embedded in the problem and not being an external designer regarding the ethical implications of the experience I wanted to develop. She focused my intention on the process and methodology rather than the outcome; to develop an auto-ethnography without the need to pull myself out to be the observer. We also talked about the concept of “speculative fabulation” developed by Donna Haraway and the notion of world-building in relation to the oral tradition specific to the contexts I was interested in. We also discussed about the Transition Design appro-

#### Images 6.2

1. Candy, S & Kornet, K. (2019). Turning Foresight Inside Out: An Introduction to Ethnographic Experiential Futures. *Journal of Futures Studies*. 23. 3-22. 10.6531/JFS.201903\_23(3).0002.
2. Personal elaboration. A combination between the Future Workshop and the EXF protocols.

ach and its relation to Autonomous Design; Hillary considered that the two balance each other considering that Transition Design did not have enough of a decolonizing mindset. According to her the experience I wanted to deploy could be somehow a contribution to Transition Design discourse through the its combination with the one developed by Escobar in Autonomous Design. Transition Design could provide practical tools where Autonomous Design would act as a mindset. To Hillary the two approaches had to be combined since she did not trust the ethics of Transition Design “made by three white people with an Anglo-Saxon background”. Transition Design workshops are according to Hillary much more about mapping the problems and understanding them.

My conviction was that people in the context I was visiting already knew the problems. The initial hypothesis was that the role of design was to enable speculation, co-envisioned futures that were relevant to them. I felt that one of the biggest problems in Tunisia after the revolution was related to a deep conviction that the country offers no future; to a generalized blockage of imaginaries. I had also talked about Stuart Candy’s work in the field of Future studies and the recent convergence with Design, taking business tools of futures studies to work with communities. I ended up reading about the Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) cycle developed by Candy and Kornett (2019) as an example of a hybrid framework between futures studies and design that along the way allowed me to better plan my intervention.

### *6.1.3 Auto-Ethnography, Situated Knowledge and Inhabitation: The Importance of Orality*

Ultimately, my discussion with Bianca Elzenbaumer, reinforced the belief that there was no universal method or perfect approach to the contexts I was going to work on/in. I discussed about engagement (even beyond the sphere of research) with the struggles of the communities I wanted to visit, especially Chenini. Bianca appreciated the emotional connection I had to the contexts in which I was interested and the dimension of belonging. Talking about the ancient practices in the oasis around commoning and mutual aid as well as the decolonial aspect I wanted to develop, we discussed the difficulty of finding a suitable approach. We also discussed the limits of “scientific research” and the idea of necessity of maintaining a certain distance with a context. Bianca, like Hillary, proposed to follow a process of auto-ethnography. Evoking again the work of Donna Haraway, she advised to adopt a feminist approach, taking an embodied approach to the questions of my research. In this way, the aim would be to generate a situated knowledge i.e., a knowledge that is generated from an always specific point of view and that does not distance the knowing subject from everyone else but instead engages in collective processes of knowledge production. What would be useful about this feminist approach is that it does not rely on immutable assumptions, and by fully investing one’s subjectivity, I could remove the distance that might allow for a safe and disembodied analysis. For her, I had to: “go without preconceived ideas to the field, to see the communities and try to become one of them”. The experience that I wanted to lead was for her “It seems like a beautiful start to a very long story (...) with the processes of infrastructuring and commoning with the time available in the framework of the doctorate, you will be able to put very little into practice because they are much longer processes (...) but it seems to me that from the material you have, the passion and the desire to get involved, with the thesis you are able to put a very solid base for what comes after the thesis (...) what you could do is more of an observation, theoretical-ethnographic work (...) you go, you meet people, you do interviews and you basically listen and observe in a quite humble way”.

The chosen approach was finally that of “inhabitation” that Bianca developed inspired by Irit Rogoff’s reflection on how meaning is produced differently through the multiple relationships that are ge-

nerated when living through things. “It is an approach to knowledge production rooted in feminist practice that involves entering into an issue through a process of experience and experimentation, thereby engaging in what Rogoff calls embodied criticality. This means that we enter or create the contexts we work on and inhabit them daily for periods of time”. (Elzenbaumer, 2013, p. 25).

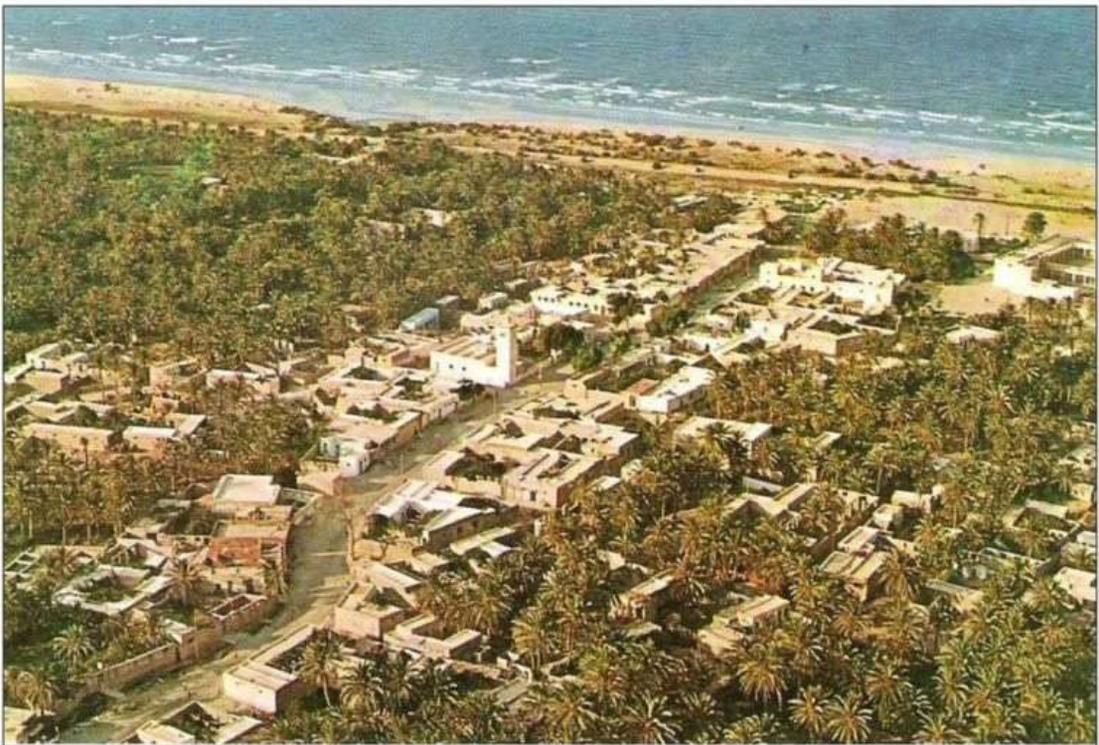
I expressed doubts about the integration of “expert” figures from outside the community and the risk of falling into giving lessons. She advised me to go to the communities with a genuine interest and enthusiasm and then to convince them to organize a meeting. We also discussed the importance of oral tradition and the difficulty to deal with such an aspect, especially for designers but in general from a Western perspective on sciences. Sousa Santos (2016) reminds the concept of orature and the African Sage Philosophy which Oruka (1991) popularized speaking about “philosophic sagacity.” Although the definition of the key terms is not always completely uniform, at the heart of this approach to African philosophy lies the emphasis on academically-trained philosophy students and professors interviewing non-academic wise persons whom Oruka called “sages,” and then engaging philosophically with the interview material (IEP, n.d). Philosophic sagacity attempts to articulate the thoughts, ideas and views of individual Africans reputed for exceptional wisdom, introducing them as authentic African philosophy. Philosophic sagacity describes the kind of philosophic activity that Momoh (1985) calls “Ancient African philosophy” Wiredu (1980) named “Traditional African thought or philosophy.” The real purpose of sage philosophy “was to help substantiate or invalidate the claim that traditional African peoples were innocent of logical and critical thinking (de Sousa Santos, 2016; p25)

#### 6.1.4 *Asking Questions or Finding Responses?*

The inhabitation of Chenini (April to May, 2021) was the initial experiment and the one of Jemna (June to July, 2021) the second, I wanted to develop in order to understand the political dimensions of working with Commons and explore the tensions and potentialities encountered when designing for (and from within) Commons and community economies (Trojal et al., 2016). The intention was to make an experiment on a micro-scale that had as its objective to explore how, as a designer, I could contribute to the restoration/defense of other economic cultures in my home country in view of the current and especially future challenges. In the words of economic geographer Katherine Gibson, how we can “take back the economy, without waiting until an ideal situation, idea or opportunity presents itself some time in an indefinite future”.

The idea was a priori simple, I did not know what design to practice or if it would still be design, but knew that in front of the future climatic risks added to the damage already perpetrated by the chemical industry for the case of Chenini (Gabes) and the loss of breath of the experience of Jemna because of legal and institutional blockages, it was undoubtedly necessary to envision new horizons. Commons, Food sovereignty and radical imagination would act as landmarks to fulfill such a project. It was then a combination of my previous research and the different discussions I had with the different researchers which led me to the idea of dividing my stay into two parts; a first part corresponding to the inhabitation of the oases and a second one where I would try to organize a future workshop gathering local actors around a common vision of the future.

During the first part observation, conversations and unstructured interviews would be developed according to the context. I also thought that the use of the EXF protocol was a good way to structure the whole experiment (even as a rough guide). In short, the idea was to create together a new/old economic imaginary in order to ground resistance in place (Tonkinwise, 2015) in the here and now. By choosing to experiment with these different aspects, I hoped that this would bring openings to the research and that they would enable to ask questions I could roughly formulate.



## 6.2 Unfolding: Inhabiting the Oasis of Chenini

### 6.2.1 Questioning Locals' Images of the Past, Present and Future of the Oasis

The stay in Gabes (city) coincided with the period of Ramadan; people were coming out of a period of confinement and were supposed to respect a curfew imposed at 8pm. These conditions played an important role in the organization on the field. The bicycle was the most convenient means of transportation through the narrow tracks of the oasis. The stay lasted 5 weeks (from April 22 to May 29, 2021). The first 4 weeks consisted of a series of bike tours where we went from meeting to meeting building up a fairly substantial address book. I planned the meetings day by day according to the availability of each one.

The “ride” from Gabes to Chenini is about 7 km, which was quite practical to explore the oasis, its different areas (urban, agricultural) as well as the borders separating it from that of el Menzel. The two oases form a homogeneous block and the separation is not obvious, especially for foreigners. Knowing the place, speaking the local dialect and having family in Chenini (and in Gabes more generally) helped a lot to make the first contacts. On the other hand, it was also complicated to maintain an objective distance during the different discussions. Very quickly I had met key people, active in civil society, who allowed us to know in depth and in a tangible way the problems of the oasis. In a way I was no stranger to the context and knew most (often superficially) of the issues. People were very welcoming and each person I met introduced us to other people of different ages: civil society actors, officials in the municipality, farmers, women artisans etc. The people in Chenini were open but as already mentioned, being a child of the region and having family ties was a great help for the first approach. Therefore, essentially, I saw people living their lives: farmers in their plots; young people mostly in late night cafes or those active in civil society; or women artisans in their store.

#### Images 6.3

1. Old photo showing the past abundance of water in Chenini.  
Source: unknown.

2. Photo showing the initial urban development of Gabes; perpendicular to the sea, following the course of the river.  
Source: unknown

I also met other researchers and activists who were interested in the case of Chenini, networking with local associations and institutions using their time to explore the city for inspiration for future work, while some plunged into making work with whatever they could find around - or in fact, depending on the length of their stay, engaging in a mixture of activities. Alexia Hariri and Léa Ovet, two French environmental activists interested in permaculture and agroecology practices, had taken up residence at Dar El Medina, a guesthouse that Mabrouk Jabri, founder of ASOC in 1992, had decided to open a few years earlier. Dar El Medina had in a way become a meeting point for all foreigners wanting to visit the oasis by offering them accommodation and creating a small economic dynamic revolving around the products and local crafts of the oasis.

Ernest Riva, an Italian activist and researcher working on the issue of food sovereignty. Ernest was trying to understand the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the activity of farmers in Chenini. I shared a lot with these different visitors who allowed me to have an external point of view on Chenini. Alexia and Léa were exploring the oasis and we often met by chance during our numerous comings and goings. They were both impressed by the agricultural practices of the locals and appalled by the impact of the chemical industry and climate change on the present and future of the oasis. Ernest had arrived several weeks before and advised to get away from the associative circles and find the farmers directly in their plots. From time to time, there would be overlaps between our activities, but generally each of us would pursue his or her own path. For example, Nada Trigui and Haythem Gasmi from the ATP, whom I had met a month earlier in Tunis, ended up organizing their meeting in Chenini; the few weeks I spent in Chenini allowed me to help them with some preparations, advising them in certain cases to avoid certain misunderstandings or clumsiness (indeed, locals had become reticent about activities organized by associations from Tunis or international NGOs).

So, while I saw all these people living their lives and fulfilling their activities, they saw me pursuing my research: meeting people, networking, conducting interviews to explore the local culture and history of commoning practices of the oasis under colonialism and subsequently under independence and the implementation of the GCT. I was also inquiring into people's actual or existing images of

the both the past and the future in order to organize the workshop convincing them about the usefulness of such an encounter. Through conversations I tried to follow a decolonial line of thought by demonumentalizing written knowledge in order to develop horizontal exchanges with locals (de Sousa Santos, 2016). In the workshop I somehow wanted to follow the model developed by the Popular University of Social Movements (PUSM) and Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. I presented the workshop as a co-learning experience considering the recognition of mutual ignorance, as one of its bases.

### 6.2.2 *Past: A Little Story about Old Practices of Communing in Chenini*

There is a deep sense of bitterness expressed by the oasis inhabitants when the past is mentioned and another of anger as soon as the water issue is discussed. Between the nostalgia of an older generation who lived the glory hours of the oasis during their youth and the youth of today for whom this past abundance of water has become a kind of mythology, I could not help but try to trace the history of this water around which these thousand-year-old oases were built. The oasis is the work of Man; it is a purely artificial creation. Chenini is an ancient oasis and Pliny the Elder, who seems to have visited it, describes Tacapæ as an oasis in the middle of the sands and admires the system of sharing irrigation water and the richness of the vegetation spread over three floors (date palms, olive trees, or fig trees, then pomegranate trees and vegetables). The philosopher Carolyn Merchant, identifies in the work of Pliny the Elder a worldview that today could be described as ecology (1980). A rather famous passage of Pliny the Elder translates the antiquity of the Oasis and the abundance of its production since time immemorial:

“One meets, when one goes to the Syrtes and to Leptis the Great, a city of Africa in the middle of the sands; it is called Tacape (XVI, 50). The soil, which is watered there, enjoys a marvelous fertility in a space of about 3,000 steps in all directions. A spring flows there, abundant, it is true, but whose waters are distributed to the inhabitants during a fixed number of hours. There, under a very high palm tree, grows an olive tree, under the olive tree a fig tree, under the fig tree a pomegranate tree, under the pomegranate tree a vine: under the vine wheat is sown, then vegetables, then herbs, all in the same year, all growing in the shade of each other.”

It is therefore necessary to go back to the Roman period or even before if we want to trace the history of the Chenini oasis. One can still see the vestiges of it without doubt the most known and obvious are the big arch El gouss, and the mill El reha which corresponds to the old Roman dam.

Like any oasis, Chenini and Gabes more generally were built around the water. Gabes is even the only coastal city in Tunisia built perpendicular to the coast, following the course of the river. Gabes is

the only coastal city in Tunisia that is built perpendicular to the sea. Historically the city had indeed developed around the wadi and the oasis instead of the sea. A saying says that “the gabesian is a ghabaji (forester)”, not a sailor; ghaba is the Arabic word for forest and the oasis people speak of ghaba to indicate the cultivated plots. The word waha, which means oasis, is used to indicate the entire oasis area in the local dialect. This reminded me of the concept of food forest dear to the permaculturists.

Chenini in Berber language would mean “the place where water abounds” or simply “source”. Based on the conversations and stories of the past I had during the stay, I will try to tell a little non-exhaustive story of the different phases through which water has passed, from abundance to scarcity. Far from me the idea to retrace this history with a precise dating, this not being my field of predilection. I noticed that the oasis (and its water) was marked by two major events: The French colonization in the first place, then at the advent of independent Tunisia, probably the most significant fact, the construction of the Tunisian Chemical Group.

The older ones told that during the French colonization Chenini was one of the bastions of the resistance and the last one to fall after Jara and Menzel. This corresponded closely to the writings of Abdelmajid Kraiem about the resistance of Gabes, calling it the last insurgent city of the Tunisian coast, to the French occupation in July 1881. For him the specific links that the city of Gabes had established with its hinterland gave its originality to the Gabesian resistance to the colonial occupation. The maritime oasis, composed of two towns, Menzel and Jara, had established particularly close economic ties with the semi-nomads of the hinterland, notably the Neffet, a Bedouin tribe. “Faced with the French occupation, two parties appeared: the party of order, comprising the notables of Jara, and the party of resistance, grouping Chenini and Menzel, under the leadership of Ali ben Khalifa, chief of the Neffet (tribe)” (Kraiem, 1988). In several conversations, the locals mentioned different episodes of resistance in Chenini and Gabes in general. Abdennasser Ben Ahmed, a young activist of barely 32 years old, talked at length about the history of “his oasis” as he called it, as well as about the resistance of Ali Ben Khalifa and the gallows of the latter, even locating the place (in the Batha, very close to the central square of the old city) where the execution of the resistance fighters had taken place.

Thus, Ali ben Khalifa would be one of the ancestors of Abdennasser who was himself a Neffet. The history of this tribe (or family) of Arab origin in Chenini goes back to the migratory waves of the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym; two confederations of Arab tribes originating from the Arabian Peninsula that had flocked to North Africa between the end of the tenth and the thirteenth centuries. The Arab origins of certain Chenini families were evoked, Berber for others (for example the Badrouchi family) but also ancient Roman as in the case of the Barbana family. Very old conflicts between certain families are still evoked in the “local mythology.” Abdennasser told the story of the “massacre of the Badrouchi by the local governor of the Hamrouni family”. For some old farmers, water was the real engineer of the oasis; Indeed, before paying the workers who worked the land and the “false-sowing” to prepare the new crops, the owners always waited for the arrival of the engineer (i.e., the water) to note its good distribution on all the plot.

Abdennasser emphasized the sensitivity of the local people and the importance of ancestral knowledge which, according to him, is the origin of modern theories in agriculture; the genesis of the sciences, would come directly from the daily life and experiences of local farmers for millennia. He also explained that foreign engineers and researchers were capitalizing on the knowledge of local farmers taking all the pride for themselves. Local farmers are for him the real experts with a deep and practical knowledge of agriculture even related to issues like climate change. This reminded of the words of de Sousa Santos (2016) asking who was the author of knowledge as most of the knowledges that prevail in our societies have no authors.

We talked about the history of Chenini and the works of Al Idrissi. The latter reports, in the 12th century, that “Gabes is a considerable city, well populated, surrounded by a veritable wood of orchards which follow one another without interruption and which produce fruit in abundance, palm trees, olive trees, etc.” During the Arab domination, sugar cane and mulberry (and thus the silkworm whose products were highly sought after throughout the Arab world) developed and then disappeared, perhaps due to lack of profitability. Palms took on great importance in terms of food and economy, as the power of Arab nomads was partly based on the supply of dried dates provided by the oases, according to the principle of “protection against supply”. The three vegetation levels of the oasis diver-

sified further with the introduction of fruit trees and ground crops, and then, in the sixteenth century, with American varieties of tomato, chili pepper, corn, tobacco, potato and prickly pear (Al-Idrīsī, *Le Magrib au XIIe siècle*, trans. by M. Hadj-Sadok, Paris, 1983).

He also evoked the first traces of Homo Sapiens in Chenini and Oued Akarit in Gabes going back to 140,000 years and the works of the Marquis de Nadaillac in the 19th century and of Gobert (1962) more recently on this subject. He considered that large parts of our history had been obscured and that what we are taught in school was influenced by the West and “colonial policies”. Abdennasser, after an experience with the ASOC was now working in Kebili with the NGO Handicap International. He was to become a key person in my stay in Chenini but especially in Jemna afterwards, as he had a deep knowledge of the history of Chenini but also the challenges that the oasis was facing. Abdennasser spoke of the sensitivity that his parents and grandparents had instilled in him and his brother Saddam for the oasis and its heritage. Proof of the importance of collective and oral memory, the history of the oasis is told from generation to generation. Trying to retrace the history of water in the oasis, he explained that like many youngsters he did not “see the water but heard many stories about it”.

Speaking about the French colonization Abdennasser explained that Chenini was strategic because of water. Taking control of Chenini meant taking control of the water in the whole area and consequently taking control of the totality of Gabes. The French would have understood from the beginning the importance of water in this region by forbidding digging or drilling in a radius of 30 km around Gabes. Apart from some bloody episodes between the resistance fighters of Chenini and the French military of which Sghaier Thebet (Haj Magtouf) told me about, everyone (locals and settlers) lived on their own. Chenini was limited to the current old city around the Rahba or central square. The water flowed at a rate of 700 L/s according to the locals and the river current was so strong in some places that a dromedary could drown. There were two wadis or rivers; the one above or “El Oued el Fogani” (the upper stream) which went to Menzel and the one below or “El Oued Eloutani” (the lower stream) which flowed towards Jara. There were two main sources, the white source or “Ain Bidha” and the blue source or “Ain Zarga.” The French, apart from diverting part of the water from the white spring to the military barracks located below, let the locals live as

they had always done. The locals call it the “Chichma” (or tap). Today there remains only an underground tunnel unfortunately partly buried according to Najib Lassouad, one of the farmers with the last varieties of local fishing almost disappeared. Traditionally, within the oasis of Gabes existed a real solidarity of work. Neighboring farmers helped each other in their respective plots: water was shared, work was divided and advice was exchanged.

Each of the three oases had a river chief or “Gayed El Oued” who was appointed by the locals; he was a trusted person who distributed the water among the different plots and farmers during a specific time. The three Gayed were accountable to the “Moudir El Me” literally water director, who was usually the largest landowner in the three oases of Chenini, Jara and Menzel. The main role of the water director was to resolve conflicts between farmers; the offender had to pay the travel expenses of the director as a fine.

Once a year, during the great autumn monsoon, everyone gathered for “Jehiret El Ouad”, i.e., the cleaning of the river bed. The people left from downstream at the level of the oasis of Jara to go up the course of the river to pass to the oasis of Menzel while going up towards Chenini where the three communities finished by rebuilding “Sodd Ettyah” being able to be translated like the falling dam. This earthen dam as its name indicates fell during each monsoon and had to be rebuilt each time by the inhabitants of the three oases. The dam in addition to a system of tunnels dug since antiquity, was used to redirect the water of the river. The water thus went up towards Chenini located more in height avoiding by the same occasion its overflow on the cultures downstream. This example of an ephemeral dam reminded me of the rope bridges made by indigenous communities in Latin America; these bridges too had to be rewoven once a year. Water was a common good and everyone had to participate in cleaning the river and rebuilding the dam. This helped to maintain the social cohesion between the three communities. This connivance amid the different communities is inconceivable today for some young people of Jara or Menzel who are at war with each other because of an adversity linked to soccer, each town having its own team.

When the question of water is raised, one quickly ends up talking about past solidarity and ancient practices of mutual aid; the elders

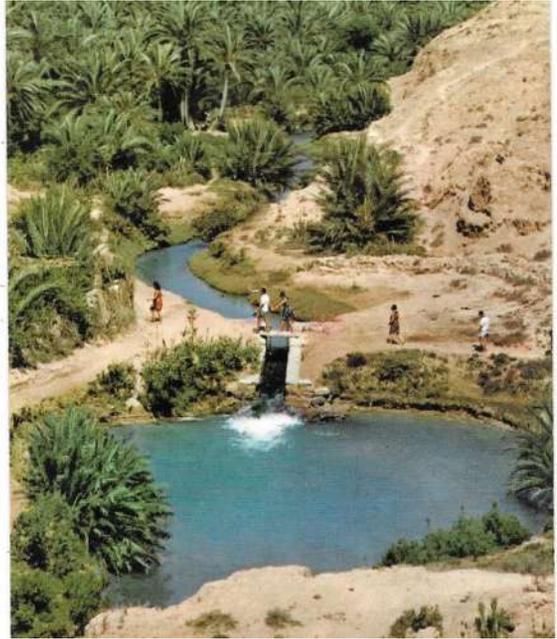
(and on rare occasions the young) speak of “Jehiret El Ouad” and “Raghata” but also of “Kholleta” (a system of contributions to buy this or that commodity) and “Hassaba” (a system of sharing the meat in equal parts when slaughtering cattle). Before the summer or during the autumn, the locals would generally organize a Raghata during which the neighbors would meet together on each other’s plots to divide the work and go faster. For example, today all meet at x’s place to pick his peaches, tomorrow they will do the same at y’s place, and so on.

Before the establishment of the industrial zone, the oasis of Gabes was described as a real paradise. If the oldest remember their bathing at the Roman dam in Rabraba or Chela Club, having known in their lifetime this still prosperous oasis, the youngest born from the 80s, explain that they grew up with the nostalgic stories of their parents. The water, they have only seen in photos and the imagination of previous generations. Najib Lassouad regretted the disappearance of most of the archives, photos and videos of the time. According to him, it would be necessary to look for the French archives to reconstitute the common memory.

When evoking the past of the oasis and the question of solidarity, everyone says that it was better before. But before what? All of them situate the disappearance of water around the 1970s; just after the establishment of the Groupe Chimique Tunisien (GCT) in 1972. The disappearance of water was rapid and led to the almost total degradation of the oasis according to Sghaier Thabet (Haj Magtouf), one of the oldest farmers of Chenini. It used to rain regularly in Gabes. Sghaier and the others remember for example the Tahma or big floods of 1959 and 1962. Traces of these floods are still visible in some parts of the oasis but they were even more visible in the collective memory. Some even suggested that the construction of the GCT was the reason for the decrease in rainfall in Gabes. However, there is no scientific evidence to confirm or deny this hypothesis. What was certain, however, was that the GCT was the main cause of the lowering of the water table. Taoufik Dhahri, a farmer and former GCT worker, declared that the pumping rate of the latter exceeded 1200 L/s. Sghaier Thabet declared that he had seen the “pharaonic” size of the underground pipes used to bring water to the GCT. He would have seen them with his own eyes during the construction of the site, in which he had participated.

During the stay, I was able to discover a certain (albeit biased) history of water in Chenini and see the close links between this history and the ancestral practices of commoning and mutual aid. These practices would have been lost little by little since the introduction of the chemical industry in Gabes. According to some, it is the scarcity of water that gradually led to the disappearance of these practices of mutual aid. For others like Chadli Lahmar farmer or Mabrouk Jabri, this disappearance has no direct relationship with the issue of water. They would be linked to the introduction of money and the impact that this had on the mentality of the locals. During one of our many discussions, Mabrouk mentioned the example of certain "local associations receiving large amounts of money from foreign donors, supposedly to improve the situation, but in the end only making it worse. He thus criticized the donors questioning their good faith.

In my opinion, Gabes and Chenini are simply the victims of the global capitalist system. As in all the peripheries, the local populations suffer the effects of extractivism and dispossession hidden in discourses of modernity and development (Federici, 2019). My conversations with my grandmother and other old men and women in the oasis were a real turning point during this research. These conversations brought to my mind what Federici (quoting Bonate and Auslander) called "the world of the disintegrating communal village economy, in which older women are those who most strenuously defend a non-capitalist use of natural resources (...) [and] where old men too are caught in this conflict between the values of the older subsistence-oriented communal world and those of the advancing monetary economy." (Federici, 2008; p.29) Today, some actors of the civil society are trying to rediffuse certain traditions throughout the oasis both through activities organized by various associations and individually.



Images 6.4  
Water in Chenini. Present vs Past.

### 6.2.3 Present: Identifying Actors and Challenges

#### ***A large but Scattered Panel of Associations***

Saad Idoudi, (an old acquaintance), active member of the Association Formes et Couleurs de l'Oasis (AFCO) helped taking the first steps in Chenini. Born and raised Saad knew well the reality of the oasis. Thanks to his knowledge of the civil society but also of the daily life of youngsters. Khaled Jabri, president of the association, also told about his involvement with the “stop pollution movement” and its loss of breath during the last years. The AFCO organizes every year a Mediterranean film festival, during which the cinematographic art is combined with the themes of the environment or education. The aim is to raise awareness of environmental issues among young people in an artistic and creative way. At the same time, ASOC and other Gabesian associations organize conferences, awareness days on the protection of the oasis, but also training.

For the youth, the associative life had become a kind of escape, a way to have a salary even reduced and not to depend on their families to languish in the cafes. Khaled, for example, combined his work in the association with that of a guard in the tar factory where an explosion took place, sometime before my arrival, killing several people and provoking the indignation of the locals against the state and the chemical group. Locals felt that the central power in Tunis considered them as second-class citizens. Saad and Khaled also helped us meet Mabrouk Jabri, retired teacher and founder of the ASOC. Touched by the degradation of the oasis in which he was born, and revolted by the lack of investment by the state and Tunisian institutions, Mabrouk Jabri founded in 1995 the Association for the Safeguard of the Oasis of Chenini (ASOC), with the aim of rehabilitating the oasis, safeguarding its resources and promoting sustainable development within this threatened ecosystem. In 2001, associations from four North African countries, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania, including ASOC, decided to join forces within the Réseau Associatif du Développement Durable des Oasis (RADD). This was an opportunity to talk about his commitment to the defense of the oasis. It is moreover Mabrouk who founded the AFCO in 2011 which aims to “militate through art”, as he explains. Mabrouk also spoke of the Chenini UNESCO Club created in the late 80s, thanks to which the oases of Gabes join the tentative lists of UNESCO heritage. Thanks to this visibility, the oasis of Gabes and its slow agony could be brought on the international scene, especially

through the UNESCO club.

With Mabrouk we discussed about the passage of Pierre Rabhi in Chenini, who would have given him the idea of developing a composting station recovering palm tree waste to make low-cost local organic compost. It is after his experience in Chenini that Pierre Rabhi, amazed by the oasis system, developed the concept of “oases in all places” in the 90’s; a concept that closely resembles that of Cosmopolitan Localism or the SLOC scenario (Small, Local, Open and Connected) of Manzini (2014). Rabhi is also known for having launched the Colibris Movement in 2006. I visited the composting station, considered as the pride of the ASOC and the Chenini oasis. Several videos on the internet tell of the success of the experiment. There Nizar Kabaou manages the composting station but also the local soccer club. This was an opportunity to talk about the involvement and the central role of the chemical group in the financing of local soccer clubs even feeding some animosities between the oases and towns of Gabes (like Jara and Menzel) formerly united around water and oasis. Nizar had also spoken of the tensions that had arisen between civil society and farmers. According to Nizar, the farmers felt that civil society had lost sight of its role by forgetting to put the farmers at the center of their projects. Today the ASOC and its new committee are somewhat isolated and the Covid-19 crisis has not really helped them.

Faten Barbana school-teacher and member in the ASOC office, launched an initiative to overcome this situation; a kind of collaboration agreement between the main actors working on the territory. The agreement included: The municipality of Chenini, the ASOC, the Agricultural Development Group of Chenini (GDA), the Cooperative of Chenini, the farmers’ union and the local office of the Tunisian Federation for Development and Micro-Credits (FTDMC). Thanks to the help of Faten Barbana, I met several people in charge of these different institutions and associations. To my great surprise, I have been welcomed by the mayor of Chenini, and explained the objectives of the research I was conducting. I ended up discussing about the example of the Transition Town movement. The mayor was enthusiastic about the project I was carrying out, affirming his desire to make the municipality a space for exchange for the inhabitants of Chenini. However, Abdelwahed Kabaou the Mayor explained that the budget allocated to him was barely sufficient to finance the collection of waste and the maintenance of some infrastructure. With the municipality still awaiting a decision from the central government in Tunis, the mayor said he hoped for the rapid entry into

force of the new law on local authorities voted in 2018; the latter would allow him to have increased decision-making power and greater room for maneuver.

Old farmers also often spoke of the past glory of the cooperative they had founded in the 1960s. The cooperative would even have had a sales point at the wholesale market of Tunis “Bir El Kasaa”, supplying the capital with fruits and vegetables during the whole year. Chenini was particularly famous for its production of peaches, pomegranates but also for its “Bakourat”, vegetables harvested before time, out of season, thanks to the ingenuity of its farmers. The cooperative, according to its current director Mohamed Bouraoui, had been in debt for many years; he said he had put the finances of the cooperative back on its feet and that it would regain a central role in the marketing and development of local production in the near future.

I also visited the GDA and discussed with Taher Hafdhaoui, who works as “Saâd”, the modern figure of “Gayed el ouad” or head of the river understanding the reality of water today. A Saâd therefore instead of distributing the water that used to flow naturally from the springs, has to pump the underground water and then divide it equally among the farmers. Water is no longer free and one hour of water costs 5 dinars that farmers must pay to the GDA before being supplied. Taher Hafdhaoui told me about the tensions between the GDA and the farmers because of the water turns that have become too long, his endless working days and the continuous efforts of the GDA to pay its debts. He spoke a new system of “rescue hours” for the farmers who urgently needed water for their plot. The farmers, on the other hand, had to pay 10 dinars for these rescue hours; they continued to blame the civil society and the municipality for their lack of efficiency. Hamadi Nbili one of the youngest farmers I met declared that the ASOC wouldn’t take in consideration advices from them when dealing with issues they knew more than no one.

Farmers worked on their plots, early in the morning. I quickly realized that my visits disturbed them during their work. Not all of them were farmers by trade; many were farmers by nature. Some of them are full time farmers, owning or renting large plots of land (about 1 hectare), but most of them practice agriculture as a secondary activity. Most of them own small plots of land (less than 0.5 hecta-

res) and farming often has to be accompanied by another activity to support a family. Others considered that they were doing gardening rather than farming; maintaining the plot could cost more than the possible income it could generate. Many plots of land were in fact abandoned for these different reasons but also because of inheritance issues at the very origin of the parceling out of the land.

Paradoxically, the period of confinement had a positive effect on the oasis, pushing some people, especially young people, to return to farming and take care of the land of their ancestors. Some young people have thus rediscovered the oasis, but for most, agriculture does not ensure their future or that of their families. Many prefer to look for work elsewhere, in the capital or abroad. The people of Chenini left the oasis very early on, following several waves towards Europe and France in particular; this in itself constitutes an advantage and a disadvantage. The latter certainly help their families who stayed in Chenini but some of them, wanting to keep a link with their native land, contribute to the phenomenon of accelerated urbanization that the oasis has been experiencing for several years by building ultramodern villas on their plots of land to spend their summer vacations.

There is a very active civil society in Chenini and a well-rooted associative culture. In view of the unemployment, especially after the revolution, it has been one of the refuges of the youth of Chenini. The associations are numerous: the best known being the ASOC, but we can also mention the Association for Social and Solidarity Tourism (ATSS) which promotes the work of women artisans and has helped one of them to build a guest house; or the association Volontariat Sans Frontière (VSFR) which allows foreign volunteers to participate in the development and preservation of the oasis; and finally the Association Générale des Insuffisants Moteurs (AGIM) which deals with various types of disabilities, some of which are due to the presence of the chemical industry.

### ***Numerous Challenges and Issues***

I quickly realized that there were a series of tensions on different scales between the different actors in the territory. At a macro level we could talk about the tension between the GCT and the population of the city of Gabes with its three oases (Jara, Menzel, Chenini)

which would correspond to an opposition between the Tunisian state and the local population. The GCT is indeed responsible for the pollution of the air, the sea and the excessive pumping of groundwater. It is even responsible, according to some, for the scarcity of rain. This would have led to many illnesses of which there is no scientific proof because of the dictatorship that prevented talking about it. A large protest movement was formed just after the “stop pollution” revolution, which ended up closing the GCT for 9 months. The farmers remember that at that time it was raining again and the water table had been recharged. At a smaller (or meso) scale, just at the level of the commune of Chenini, tensions also existed between civil society and farmers, who feel used and coaxed by local associations. At the micro level, one could also speak of tensions between the young and the old generation. This classification is only a draft analysis and needs to be deepened in the future with perhaps the collaboration of anthropologists or sociologists as well as other specialties of the human sciences in order to see more clearly. I confess that I do not feel equipped to conduct an individual analysis of such subjects given their complexity.

After 4 weeks of Inhabitation, I had identified the different actors of the territory using rapid ethnography, observation, unstructured interviews (more like discussions), I was able to identify 5 recurrent problems evoked by many of the inhabitants of Chenini:

1. Water scarcity and groundwater depletion
2. Land parceling and the question of inheritance
3. Increasing anarchic urbanization
4. Reluctance of young people to practice agriculture & loss of ancestral knowledge
5. Lack of coordination between the actors of the territory

A sixth point concerning the marketing (and valorization) of oasis products was also raised; however, during the workshop this last point was avoided by the majority of participants. It should be noted that the problems of the oasis are obviously much more complex, but that all of them are in some way related to the five problems identified. The interviews were unstructured and revolved around the issues of water, pollution, and climate change, but they also discussed the past of the oasis and the old practices of solidarity and mutual aid (commoning) as well as its future, following the

EFR method developed by Textor in 1976 (Textor, 1995).

The role of the state in general and of the chemical group in particular in the disintegration of the oasis, whether in terms of pollution or water scarcity, sounded for the overwhelming majority as obvious. Climate change, a source of new diseases, had become for most farmers a reality to which they try to adapt as best they can, but this remains secondary to the destruction perpetrated for 40 years by the Chemical Group or what the locals call “the Zone”.

### ***1. Water scarcity and groundwater depletion***

The population growth accompanied by an increase in demand for agricultural products in Gabes, and in the whole country, have contributed to increase the surface of irrigated areas. In addition, the establishment of the GCT in 1972 has contributed to this overuse of groundwater. Indeed, the GCT uses water to cool the chemicals during the phosphate transformation process or the production of other chemical substances. This exponential development of agricultural areas as well as the industrial use of water have contributed to the progressive depletion of the water tables. Within the oases, it is primarily the traditional irrigation systems that have been modified. The increased pressure imposed on the surface water tables have made the phenomenon of artesianism disappear. In spite of the multiplication of drilling, the gushing water of then was only a distant memory in Gabes. The resource being more and more scarce, the earthen *seguias* were replaced by concrete *seguias*, in order to reduce the losses by infiltration. However, a large number of farmers did not have the means to concrete their irrigation system, thus creating irrigation modalities with diverse incarnations and instituting injustices in access to water within the oasis.

Moreover, as the surface water tables have dried up, artesian drilling was abandoned in the 1980s and 1990s in favor of the pumping technique, allowing access to the deep-water tables. These new so-called “modern” techniques have completely destabilized the existing structures within the oasis by relegating the agricultural traditions of the Gabesians to the background. Thus, the traditional water turn has been considerably lengthened, Taher Hafdhaoui who is responsible for water distribution within the GDA said that it could take up to two months during the summer. He spoke in fact

of 4 distribution lines connected to three pumpings going up to a hundred meters underground.

As water is becoming increasingly scarce, the flooding of the plots has also become less abundant, thus marring the quality of the land. The river, surrounding the oasis, had the role of draining the water used for irrigation by evacuating the salts. But the drying up of the water table has also led to a considerable drying up of the wadi, no longer fulfilling its role as a natural drain. In fact, the agricultural plots are increasingly affected by a phenomenon of soil salinization that the locals call "merrengou". The drying up of water sources and the river, as well as climate change, which involves the progressive rise in sea level, are causing an increasing infiltration of sea water into the oasis water table. The abandonment of traditional drains and their lack of maintenance have also favored the increase in salinity of agricultural soils of the oasis.

For Salah Bchir, the so-called modernization of irrigation systems imposed on farmers has only worsened this situation destroying the ecosystem that was built around the old *seguias* in earth; indeed, plants now disappeared grew around them allowing insects and therefore birds to thrive. The new concrete *seguias* have not only disrupted this fragile natural balance, but they are also not all connected; the new irrigation networks are poorly maintained and leak, the water tightness of the plugs is not always optimal and illegal connections are multiplying. According to Ismail Hafsi, the new director of the GDA, the most urgent problem is to pay the debts that have accumulated for some time, given the cost of pumping (in terms of electricity consumed). In addition, the decrease in rainfall due to climate change does not favor the renewal of the water table. Added to this, the overexploitation of natural water tables by industrial groups, the main pillar of the oasis agricultural system is collapsing.

## ***2. Land parceling and the question of inheritance***

Another land-related phenomenon contributes to the modification of the internal structure of the oasis: inheritance and the division of plots. Most locals emphasized that the consequences of inheritance are one of the major problems for the oasis. When the father, the owner of the plot, dies or becomes too old to cultivate, his land is

bequeathed to his children who, in the interests of equality, divide the land equally. However, the smaller the area, the lower the profitability. In fact, embarrassed by these small, salty, and unprofitable spaces, many young people leave their oasis plots abandoned.

Sofian Bouzaiene for example, had taken over a good part of the family land to prepare for his retirement. Old properties were between  $\frac{1}{2}$  hectare to 1 hectare. In view of the inheritance parts were sold, once the division carried out between the many brothers and sisters of the family. His brother Nejib explained that being in Tunisia or abroad most of them could not take care of the maintenance of their plots. The case of the Bouzaiene family is the same for the majority of families in Gabes. Almost all of them considered that it was more interesting to sell the land and divide the money than to enter into long diatribes about the division of the plots and who would inherit what. In the case of some families, the heirs do not even know each other, which could complicate the operation. Several plots are thus left abandoned while waiting to settle disputes related to inheritance.

It is therefore necessary to allow those who want to buy these lands to continue the agricultural heritage of the oasis. In the local mentality, the parcel is symbolic. It is the proof of belonging to the oasis, we keep it to be able to “smell the scent of the ancestors”. Selling it is a shame in the village. The solutions therefore seem limited when it comes to counteracting the environmental degradation inflicted on the oasis of Gabes. However, determined local initiatives are flourishing both in Gabes and Chenini, and seek to promote the preservation of the oasis.

### ***3. Increasing anarchic urbanization: turning to old methods?***

Added to the fragmentation so there is the phenomenon of construction and urbanization anarchic in the oasis that destroy more and more green areas. Population growth has had adverse impacts on the preservation of the oasis of Gabes. Indeed, the lack of coherent development plans, land parcels for the inhabitant, as well as the increase in land prices create a land pressure pushing the inhabitants to the anarchic construction in their oasis plot. The low yield of oasis farmland confirms this choice. In fact, the agricultural land agency of Gabes estimates that the oasis is losing 10 ha per year sin-

ce the late 1980s, to the benefit of urbanization (Carpentier, 2017). This nibbling of oasis land also highlights the inefficiency of political and legal authorities in Tunisia. There is a substantial legal arsenal to control this phenomenon of unregulated urbanization, including Law No. 83-87 on the protection of agricultural land, which defines oases as “safeguard areas” that cannot undergo changes in status and whose agricultural character must be protected. It is the survival of the oasis that is at stake, because once built, the plots are also stripped of their palm trees. The deforestation of agricultural plots in the oasis of Gabes represented about 30% of the total area in 2011 (Ben Salah, 2011).

Ali Ahmed, a retired schoolteacher and farmer, spoke about the old ways of building that are more ecological and resilient than modern villas. Ali Ahmed and others explained that their parents lived during the six months of winter in stone houses located in the heart of the old city. These houses were made of “Terss”, a local rock that could be “cooked” to make a kind of plaster. The rest of the year, especially during the summer, they lived in “Barraka” (from baraque in French), ephemeral houses built mainly of wood (for the structure) and dried palms (for the walls). Hamadi Nbili, a young farmer, has rebuilt one in the plot he cultivates. We discussed the absurdity of having balconies and bay windows in a hot and humid climate like in Gabes. Ali mentioned the idea of a return to local materials and old building techniques such as the seaweed used by the elders as thermal insulation

#### ***4. Reluctance of young people to practice agriculture and loss of ancestral knowledge***

Before the establishment of the industrial zone, the oasis of Gabes was called “magic” described as a real paradise. While Mabrouk experienced this still prosperous oasis in his lifetime, Abdennasser, Saad and Khaled and other young people explained that they grew up with nostalgic stories from their parents. In any case, the commitments of both the older and the younger generation lie in transmission on the one hand, and in learning traditional agricultural practices on the other. The latter involves a detailed knowledge of soil structure in order to know when to plant and what to plant. The marriage of crops was an agricultural technique developed in traditional oases. Indeed, farmers and women in particular knew

which varieties to combine to optimize their growth. This is notably what Amm Salah Bchir still practices in his plot. Amm Salah is a well-known figure in the oasis and with other farmers like Zacharia Hachmi contribute to keep the old seeds that unfortunately risk disappearing. The knowledge of the fathers is currently in perdition, especially threatened by market dynamics, obsession with profitability and fodder monoculture. Over time, oasis agriculture has become individualized and is devoid of any solidarity. Najib Lassouad regretted that young people no longer know how to handle a rake.

### ***5. Lack of coordination between the actors of the territory***

The above-mentioned problems are known to everyone, researchers, decision-makers and local population. The intervention could be situated at a completely different level. I had noted the numerous tensions between the actors of the civil society and the farmers as well as the absence of dialogue. This had led to an almost total lack of coordination of efforts to preserve the oasis. After a month of inhabitation, we were able to meet again with Abdelbasset Hamrouni, the historical president of the ASOC who had worked the most for the preservation of the oasis.

This time we discussed the issue of conflicts between farmers and civil society and the generalized climate of tension, especially when it comes to water. For Abdelbasset, the problems of the oasis such as water scarcity and mismanagement, soil salinization, uncontrolled urbanization, or the issues of inheritance and involvement of young people are all related to greed and individualism of some “who only take into account the economic aspect which leads to an irrational exploitation of resources. For him, “these problems are not about to disappear anytime soon, whether there is water or not. The real problem was therefore somewhere else. What is missing in Chenini is a real community organization due to the absence of dialogue. This absence of dialogue meant an absence of a common vision around a systemic and planned project. As a designer, I clearly had a role to play in this. Commons require a community (Federici & Caffentis, 2014) and in the case of Chenini one can no longer speak of a real community rather than numerous individuals struggling in different ways to protect the oasis.



#### 6.2.4 Future: Chenini 2050 Workshop

##### ***Ethnographic Futures Research (EFR): What do you want, fear, and expect?***

I followed the Ethnographic Futures Research model, developed by Textor and his students. EFR “is a valuable if today often overlooked methodological entryway into this challenging space, offering a process for systematically mapping images of the future held by various individuals and communities.” (Candy & Kornett, 2019, p.5), in the words of its inventor:

“Just as the cultural anthropologist conventionally uses ethnography to study an extant culture, so the cultural futures researcher uses EFR to elicit from members of an extant social group their images and preferences (cognitions and values) with respect to possible or probable future cultures for their social group” (Textor, 1980, p. 10). I conducted a series of interviews to draw out participants’ projections. Instead of simply asking What do you believe is going to happen for the oasis of Chenini? The question was: Considering all the challenges and issues the oasis is facing including water scarcity, pollution and climate change, what potential changes do you want, fear, and expect? (Veselsky & Textor, 2007).

*1- It was better before: the desire for everything to go back to the way it was*

Before what? The answer seems obvious to anyone born before the end of the 1970s. With the near disappearance of water, the old practices of commoning, solidarity and mutual aid that have long constituted the social fabric of the oasis have gradually faded away. One would have wanted to maintain the old customs and ancestral practices both in terms of agriculture and social relations (and economic by extension). The reality of Chenini before the establishment of the GCT is often described with nostalgia and bitterness. But everyone was aware of the impossibility of going back. The fight was in the present to maintain the little that remains of the past glory of the oasis. Defeatism and despair, especially among the older people, was often palpable when I asked them about their fears.

##### Images 6.5

First and second day of the *Future Workshop* in Chenini.

### *2- The fear that people abandon agriculture and the oasis disappear*

The question of the young generations who have gradually moved away from nature, agriculture and everything that is the essence of the oasis was often raised. The older generation repeatedly expressed this state of affairs, which they felt would only get worse in the near future. Most of them said that the cultivation of plots that had become too small, added to the decrease in the amount of water available, rightly made farming a less and less attractive job. Farming in Chenini is no longer enough to feed a family or start a home. For young people, especially those who fight for the preservation of Chenini and its heritage like Abdennasser, the greatest fear is that of having to disappear all traces of the oasis: "As our parents tell us today that in the past there was water in Chenini, we could (we current youth) very probably have to explain to future generations, that here there was an oasis."

### *3- Everything is going wrong... Inch'Allah everything will be fine*

When asking the locals about near future, the answer was often "only God knows what the future holds." The exercise was sometimes difficult; for both cultural and religious reasons the question of the future and foreknowledge is a divine and metaphysical thing. Sometimes I had to insist, at the risk of offending the most religious among them. But many of them eventually fell for it and felt that there was no real difference between their fear and an objective view of what the future held.

A sarcasm specific to the people of the region to play down the situation. An attitude that reminded me of two documentary films on the ecological disaster that the city of Gabes is experiencing. The first film "Gabes Labess" or Gabes goes well by playing on the words in Tunisian dialect, researcher and activist Habib Ayeb who is notably president of the OSAE. The second "El Hal Zin ya Lella" is a short film by Rabeb Mbarki, a young ecological activist filmmaker born and raised in Gabes, which could be translated as Life is beautiful oh Lady, ironically takes the title of a popular local song and used to put in weddings.

The general attitude was similar to the titles of the two films mentioned above. A kind of refusal to face reality mixed with a great faith (often religious) in the future. It is with these different repre-

sentations of the future where I tried to help locals rendering their futures “visible” in words. Words were very important during the whole process since I was convinced of the importance of orality in the local culture and tradition.

### ***Finding the Right Place and Format for the Workshop***

I ended up convincing quite a number of people to come and participate in the workshop. At the end of the previous 4 weeks, I met more than a hundred people active in civil society and outside, convinced of the usefulness of the approach I wanted to adopt. I have been welcomed and adopted by most of them, but the choice of the place and the organization of the meeting had proved not to be complicated but rather delicate. I had to find a neutral place where everyone would agree to meet. The women refused to meet in the Rahba, the central square of the city, which at first sight seemed to me to be the ideal place both for its geographical centrality and ease of access but also for its historical and symbolic significance. In the Rahba indeed, there is the oldest and best-known café in Chenini; a meeting point for the locals. Unfortunately, the café is a place traditionally reserved for men and the reluctance of women was quite understandable. As for some farmers, they refused to meet at either this nor that association’s place; the risk was to see a significant number of them desert the meeting.

The meeting could not be spread out over a whole day either, because most of the participants had a lot to do: the farmers had their plots to irrigate early in the morning and late in the afternoon, as well as the food for their livestock. The women, on the other hand, had to work, take care of their homes and the children’s meals, and were reluctant to attend a meeting that would last until late in the evening. So, I did not have much time left to organize the meeting. Nor could the meeting be held in the morning or late evening. I proposed a meeting in the middle of the afternoon just after the prayer (so after 4pm) and which would finish before the dinner prayer (around 9pm). This left me with a time slot of about 4 or 5 hours.

Many young people were reluctant to come and participate, wanting to avoid confrontation with the older ones. The notion of respect is central here, because a young person cannot allow himself to contradict an older person and the discussion can quickly dege-

nerate if tempers flare. These constraints were not easy to manage but my knowledge of the local culture allowed me to anticipate and mitigate some of them. Zacharia was committed to convincing Elias Aoun and Abdelbasset Hamrouni, two ex-presidents of the ASOC (in conflict with some other participants), but also the elders such as Sghaier Thabet (better known as Haj Magtouf), one of the most experienced farmers and owner of one of the largest plots in Chenini.

Khaled Jabri and Saad Idoudi from the AFCO association helped to invite more young people who were hard to find especially during Ramadan, leaving the house only late at night to meet in cafes despite the curfew. But in reality, I knew most of the participants in person having spent many long discussions with them during my stay. I felt like one of them and no doubt that the knowledge of the terrain, the dialect and my interest in Chenini played a big part in establishing a real relationship of trust with the people I met. The oasis people are by nature hospitable but they were probably much more hospitable to us without setting up barriers, sometimes “hanging out the dirty laundry”; something that the locals would not have dared to do in front of strangers.

Many people appreciated that a child of the region was interested in the fate of the oasis and of the city of Gabes in general within the framework of a doctoral research. In the south and among the oasis people, tribal realities, even if they seem outdated, are still very much alive. For example, when making presentations, one often ends up evoking the family tree and the ancestors to situate the belonging of each one to such or such family (tribe). All these parameters had to be taken into account in the choice of the place and format of the meeting.

Since I could not make an individual choice at the risk of offending this or that party, I often asked for advice from the people who had helped us travel around the oasis and to meet the community during my stay. Zacharia Hachmi was one of these key people, “if I hadn’t seen you pedaling like crazy day and night with your straw hat and your little camera, I would never have helped you, I would have even closed doors for you” he would tell me. He had dedicated himself body and soul since our meeting to help me develop my project, abandoning his family and his plot of land. Zacharia proposed to organize the workshop in my uncle’s plot; a

person loved and respected by all who spent half of the year in Tunis and the other half in Chenini and who therefore had no problems with anyone. The plot was also one of the largest in Chenini, able to accommodate a fairly large number of people. But according to Zacharia what made the place special was especially the investment of time and money of my uncle and his passion to preserve it; well-maintained it could serve according to him as an example of good practice. It is also easily accessible and close to the main road at the northern entrance of the oasis.

The plot included a small pavilion with a circular terrace. The place was large and could accommodate up to about 40 people. I had ordered fresh juices and date cakes from Mrs. Hadia Abdelmalek, a pastry chef who had recently launched her project to promote the products of the oasis. The idea was to make the participants as comfortable as possible. The place chosen was familiar and corresponded to the imagination of all the participants. Doing it in a closed room would have made the meeting too serious or formal. The farmers would not have felt in their element. But it wasn't a classic plot where you only go to work the land either. The men would have had no problem sitting on the ground under a palm tree as we had often done in our discussions throughout my stay. But some women would not have bothered to come without a minimum of comfort (a chair to sit on, tables, water etc.). So, I specifically asked the guests to make themselves comfortable and to consider the meeting as their own.

The workshop was supposed to take place over two days; three days would have been ideal, but the majority felt that it would have been too long. It was clear that I could not follow a set protocol. So, I opted to lengthen the "Critical" phase — first of the future workshop — to almost the entire first day and compress the "Fantasy" and "Implementation" phases into the second.

Many wanted to help with the organization of the meeting. The municipality thus provided a video projector. Zaineb Lassouad member of the association AFCO brought a camera and refreshments while Khaled helped with his old car to carry the chairs and tables that Sghaier Thabet (Haj Magtouf) had rented. Hamadi Nbili one of the youngest farmers of Chenini and member of the VSFR association had helped me with the setting up of the chairs and the wiring. Sou-

maya Razgallah member of the association ATSS brought a board and markers. Her nephew Mortadha, a young 17-year-old youtuber who had filmed a series of interviews with the elders of Chenini during the period of the pandemic to talk about the history, offered to film the two days of the workshop. This allowed me to review the two days of the workshop in their entirety and to focus on the oral aspect rather than the graphic aspect. Here is a simplified diagram translating in some way the different phases of the research (inhabitation and workshop).

### **Structure of the workshop following the EXF protocol**

*Map 1:* 4 weeks of inhabitation (discussions, observations, interviews, EFR) – identifying actors/challenges – understanding traditional practices and history of the territory – discussing about future scenarios (positive, pessimistic, probable scenarios)

*Multiply 2:* 1st day of workshop “critique” – confront/confirm/negate challenges with participants and discussion about possible/probable futures (showing videos) – showing alternative futures with existing examples – introducing community economies, Commons, permaculture, indigenous/traditional knowledge as frameworks

*Mediate 3:* 1st half of 2nd day of workshop “fantasy” – turn negative to positive / imagine new scenarios around community economies – new/traditional practices of mutualism, solidarity, commoning

*Mount 4:* 2nd half of 2nd day of workshop “implementation” – storytelling using the example of the traditional Hakawati (storyteller) about these preferable futures

*Map 5:* Inquired into and recorded responses to the experiential scenarios. Informal process using direct observation of people encountering the experiential scenarios

### ***First Day: Squeezing the Ward, Discussing Issues and Challenges of the Oasis***

Before the workshop I asked Mabrouk Jabri to help moderate the session. The respected figure of Mabrouk had helped us to establish certain rules of good session in order to establish a real climate of dialogue. Zacharia Hachmi, Nizar Kabaou and others had indeed warned about the risk of a possible overflow. All too often these kinds of meetings had ended up degenerating in the past. For example, Salah Bchir had refused to come, saying that he did not like disrespect and could not afford to lose face. It was clear that there was something unsaid and I avoided insisting too much on the origins of certain conflicts. Until the last minute I did not know if people would really come to the workshop". The notion of respect is central in our society. I do not speak from a sociologist or anthropologist perspective, but only from the popular culture one. "No more respect, no more life" or "the nose is made of glass, if it falls off, it's over" are for example well known proverbs. Mabrouk took care of the introductions and presented the problems that I had identified during my stay; problems that were well known to all and that sounded obvious and that everyone seemed to agree with.

I insisted on the fact that I was not bringing anything new to the table. For us, the locals were the most capable of defining the problems of their oasis. Mabrouk, while making the introductions, asked the participants to put their conflicts aside. The question was not to define the problems and to map them with their different levels of complexity that the locals knew as much as I did, if not more. The workshop was rather about the Transition of Chenini towards food and energy self-sufficiency by 2050, i.e., within a generation.

This first day could correspond, as already explained, to the Critical phase of a workshop of the future (Jungk & Müllert, 1987). I did not follow the protocol to the letter but rather tried to adapt it to the context. I also wanted to avoid the classic post-it notes and asked the participants to bring what they had at hand. Soumaya brought a small board and markers for me to take notes. The discussion was in Arabic and we proposed with Mabrouk to moderate the dialogue by writing on the board the different subjects that the participants would bring up. The idea was not to focus attention on the board itself but to initiate a dialogue and refocus the process around the

oral. The board was just for taking written notes, not diagrams or symbols. Since the local culture is primarily oral, I suggested that they would “squeeze the ward”(confront problems in local dialect) which made most of the participants’ smile.

I also had to take into consideration the barriers to dialogue between men/women and old/young people. It was a matter of mapping the problems and understanding their complexity, but that was not the real objective of the workshop. I wanted to push the participants to “empty their bags” and say things face to face. During the whole stay I had indeed noticed the numerous tensions that existed between the farmers and the different actors of the civil society who themselves, in spite of the establishment of a kind of dialogue platform, had not yet succeeded in overcoming certain misunderstandings to develop a real common vision. I was aware that this first meeting was only the beginning of a long series of workshops to be organized in the (near) future. Bringing together people who were not ready for dialogue was already a satisfaction. The participants chose to sit in semicircle in order to discuss and classify issues by importance but also to define responsibilities. What was the most important and urgent issue? Who is involved in each of these issues?

To the question of the marketing of the oasis’ production, some proposed to add a seventh point and the idea of its valorization by speaking of an organic production that some practiced. Not all agreed on the fact of talking about organic production given the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides by a significant number of farmers. The discussion was quite animated between some of the participants and Mabrouk sometimes had to intervene to calm things down. At one point, I proposed to combine points 6 (production and marketing of oasis products) and 7 (lack of value-added of oasis products) into one point.

The issue of the disappearance of local seeds on heritage issues but also because more resilient to the effects of climate change and pollution and the passivity of some institutions such as the IRA and the absence of researchers and experts in general of the reality of the field cloistered in their offices. Absence of field research. Where are the experts? What is their role? I had therefore asked the question of responsibility around the issue of seed preservation and whether it was that of the IRA alone. In the meantime, Ali Jabri added the

question of the enforcement of existing laws related to the protection of oasis areas and palm trees in particular, which was finally proposed to be added to point 3, anarchic construction and the non-enforcement of laws related to the oasis in general.

Fatiha Achach (ATSS) talked about climate change and its impact on the availability of water, to which Ali Jabri (President of ATSS) retorted that the real issue was the mismanagement of water resources from the GDA. The addition of a new well still not in operation and the interminable wait for the work and the lack of visibility were discussed.

#### *1- Water scarcity and poor governance*

Salah Chouki proposed to add to the issue of water scarcity that of poor governance. It must be said that the issue of water was unsurprisingly the most discussed subject. The spirits were quickly heated up. Ali Jabri considered that water is always evoked first because for most of the people of Chenini especially those who lived the period of abundance of water were nostalgic, the issue of water remained in the imagination without being able to erase it. In response to this Med Salah Jabri (current president of the ASOC) felt that it was necessary to speak directly about the industrialization of Gabes as the main cause of the near disappearance of water. The overexploitation of artesian wells and population growth were also mentioned. Is everything the fault of the chemical group? The question I asked was somewhat provocative because the first answer was obviously an almost unanimous yes.

A trade unionist, Ridha Hamrouni, called for the main perpetrators of this tragedy, the GCT and the cement factory, to be brought to justice. The farmer, population growth and all other issues were for him only details. He evoked the fact that the French colonists had realized the fragility of the water table and its balance and the prohibition they had imposed during the colonial period to practice drilling on a radius of 30 km. Najib Lassouad considered that the choice to establish the chemical industry in Gabes had been made by mutual agreement between the local population and the government. The fact is that the GCT and the cement factory and the disappearance of water have become a concrete reality. I had taken the lead in saying that the dismantling of the GCT was not topical far from it. Ridha

Hamrouni's request was not to dismantle the GCT but to force it to take its responsibilities and find appropriate solutions.

Moncef Felah farmer and member of the management of the GDA of Chenini considered that there was a disconnection between theory and practice. In practice, any strategy to remedy the lack of water was faced with a complex and complicated reality. He mentioned several problems related to the issue of water: the water table under pressure, the increase in the price of electricity that the GDA must pay for the pumping of water, the dilapidation of the irrigation network, the irregular situation of workers and workers of the GDA or the hypocrisy and absence of the Ministry of Agriculture to all GDAs throughout Tunisia. For Moncef who at that time said he was speaking as a farmer and citizen, we should no longer wait for the institutions that are too slow and the GDA alone can do nothing. For him the real issue would be related to a general awareness of the citizens and farmers of the urgency and gravity of the situation. If everyone came together with a single objective, with a view to joint planning by the community, the situation could become unmanageable.

Ali Ahmed, a retired farmer and teacher, said that he had participated in too many meetings discussing the problems of the oasis, where locals ended up crying about their fate and the glorious past of the oasis, and that instead of basing themselves on the past, they should try to build something, a future based on the conditions of the present. Around the issue of water, we noted that it was both related to climate change but also to the weakness of the water table and that the responsibility for its good governance was shared between GCT and the state in general, the GDA, farmers and citizens. Fathi Naffati wondered about the real will of the state with its various structures such as the ministries of agriculture and tourism, industry and environment as to the resolution of the problems of the oasis and its protection. For Ridha Hamrouni referring to a past project in the 90s of a water treatment plant... should we still wait for a state intervention? If the state is weak or deaf to the claims of citizens, what should we do?

The answer of most of the participants was scathing: "there is no state, and we can only rely on ourselves." The idea of community autonomy was put forward. This was an opportunity for me to explain

in more detail the ideas for which I had organized the workshop. A workshop that wants to be participatory and community where the direct concerned would take back to their own future around a common project aiming at the self-sufficiency and autonomy of the oasis of Chenini at least at the food and energy levels in 2050 without the support of the state. This reminded me of the conception of Commons seen as “the seeds of a society beyond state and market.” (Federici & Caffentis, 2014)

Adnen Abdeljawad considered that the new agricultural extensions of the big landowners (buying more than 500 hectares) all around gabes and the overexploitation of the water table by them as well as the individualism and the generalized greed should be taken into consideration. He added that he had known a former CEO of the GCT, a certain Bousenna who had commissioned a study to reduce pollution in Gabes. For Adnen technical solutions exist both for the reduction of water consumption and for the discharge of phosphogypsum into the sea. For him the political will is non-existent mainly for budgetary reasons. The biggest culprit is undoubtedly the GCT, which should be obliged to raise funds. They did not do it when they had money, they will not do it today. Referring to the past experience of the farmers’ cooperative of Chenini in the 60s Adnen estimated that civil society would be able to provide tangible solutions if it united around the same project.

Ridha Hamrouni, was at one time angry that the farmer and the citizen are only victims and did not assume any responsibility for the overconsumption of water where Salah Chouki considered that the quantities of water consumed by the latter was derisory compared to that pumped by the GCT or the cement plant. Zacharia Hachmi, farmer and activist for Food Sovereignty, highlighted the criminalization of farmers digging illegal wells to ensure their survival on the one hand and the protection of the real criminals that are the GCT and the cement factory considered as investors. Soumaya Razgallah, put forward the idea of moving to other agricultural practices such as permaculture in order to limit the effects of climate change and the resilience of farmers to the lack of water. Mohamed Rjab felt that it was necessary to find a solution with the little water available before talking about the GCT or the cement factory.

For Moncef Felah there is no separation between the different components of the problem in such a complex issue and Ali Jabri sarcastically told the anecdote of a former minister who came to Chenini wondering what “these people wanted since they had water and electricity. He criticized the disdain of the state and the disconnection of the decision makers from the reality of the community. He felt that the workshop was an opportunity for the local civil society with the help of the municipality (which is none other than the inhabitants of Chenini themselves) to organize without expecting anything from the state.

### *2- Land Parceling and the Question of Inheritance*

Ali Jabri pointed out the abandonment of land because of conflicts related to inheritance and the existence of a law allowing the delegation of the exploitation (and not the ownership) of land subject to conflict by some members of a given family, those abroad or not resident in Chenini, to other members (cousins, brothers or others) of this same family. The law that could solve these problems even allows for financing for farmers with less than 0.5 hectares, but unfortunately is not implemented by the people of Chenini. The possibility to gather the plots for an exploitation and a problem of mentality refusing this alternative. For Adnen, the land is symbolic and represents the belonging to Chenini and nobody is ready to erase this belonging even by delegating the exploitation of the land to other members of his own family. This law was implemented before the revolution... but since the weakening of the state the situation is blocked.

Nizar Kabaou spoke of the large number of laws that are not applied, but above all of the absence of a legal framework specific to the oasis. Abdelwahed Kabaou, mayor of Chenini, insisted on the absence of a specific law to the oasis areas, sometimes considered as simple agricultural land and sometimes as forest areas.

### *3- Reluctance of young people to practice agriculture and the absence of an intergenerational dialogue*

There was no particular order in the discussion of the issues and the question of youth was raised in direct relation to that of parceling and inheritance before that of anarchic urbanization. Lotfi Stit, a farmer, and Houssam Othmani, a young unemployed person (and agricultural worker when offered), explained that for young

people the lack of means at the beginning of the implementation of an agricultural project represented a major problem. Even if they had the means to invest, such a project was not enough to earn a decent salary to start a family and have a house. The small size of the land and the weakness of the production, precisely because of the parceling out of land due to inheritance issues, did not allow for sufficient profits to be made. It was decided in the process to avoid the question of the marketing and development of the products of the oasis, which was considered marginal compared to the rest of the problems.

The question of water was by far the most discussed and subject to conflict. The issue of youth was also discussed but seemed, like the rest of the issues, to be more manageable and to arouse less passion. Suddenly, tempers had calmed down and the participants were smiling again. Few young people spoke at first, leaving the older ones to discuss the issue of “their” so-called refusal to farm. This is explained by the importance of respect between generations and the fear of offending the older ones. Mohamed Rjab, a farmer and restaurant owner, spoke about the problem of the mentality of young people who refuse to practice agriculture: “We have wealthy families with large plots of land and their children have preferred to ‘burn’ (migrate irregularly at the risk of their lives) in the direction of Italy rather than take over the family land. Young people should be educated from an early age to love the land and to practice agriculture as our forefathers always did.” According to him, young people are too spoiled and have lost their sense of priorities, preferring to buy the latest phone on credit rather than helping their father to plough the land. Is it not the responsibility of the previous generation that did not encourage and educate them enough in this sense?

Soumaya Razgallah spoke about the lack of encouragement in this sense for young people who see their parents exhausted and unable to make ends meet and that it should be innovative in the way of practicing agriculture. Feeling that one spoke for them Nizar Kabaou who was part of the few young people present asked to speak and had joined Mabrouk and in front of the table. Nizar who is a very active member of the civil society considered himself as a kind of link between the two generations knowing closely the constraints of one party as well as the other. In the past, the older generations had only agriculture as a horizon. For the young people of his generation the situation is different. They have, according to most of them, followed long studies, often at the university level, which were not necessarily related to agriculture. Nizar, for his part,

studied chemistry and did not necessarily seek to work the land. Young people have other ambitions, especially when they see that farmers are lamenting the situation. The association work and its connection with farmers changed his mind.

According to him, young people could provide answers and solutions to the problems faced by their farmer parents while providing him with the means of subsistence. Farming could be the solution for many of the unemployed youth. The pandemic and the quarantine period were an opportunity for many young people to rediscover agriculture and reconnect with the land. Young people suddenly discovered a completely new world and the oasis became a kind of escape and a place to let off steam. Nizar admits that he never really knew the oasis, probably because he was too busy studying. Nizar spoke of the feeling of serenity that nature provides that most of the young people do not experience. Most young people only remember the defeatist speeches of their parents when they talk about the problems of water, seeds, livestock or budget. The real issue, according to Nizar, is related to the breakdown of the dialogue between the different generations. The dialogue between the old and the new generation should be re-established in order to imagine new solutions and new practices. This was an implicit criticism of the rigidity of the old generation with regard to the initiatives taken by some young people. Examples of good practices exist and it is time to draw inspiration from them.

Ridha Hamrouni then spoke of the importance of an economic vision that would focus primarily on agriculture. He evoked a Chinese proverb to support his point of view: "society is like a tree, agriculture is its roots, industry is its trunk, trade is its fruit and its leaves are its culture. If the roots are diseased, the fruit and leaves fall off and the tree dies." There was talk of food sovereignty and a still colonized agricultural system, and Nizar spoke again of the need to work for the autonomy of the community rather than wait for the initiative of a still colonized state. "If the state left us alone, we would be fine." Nizar's generation (which is also mine) has only known the dictatorship of a single president for more than 23 years who supposedly led us to a model of modernity whose effects are being felt today. For Nizar, a single decade after the revolution is not enough to overcome this state of affairs. The civil society should play a role in this sense and engage in a real dialogue between gene-

rations to attract young people and give them a taste for agricultural work. Associations can participate in calls for tenders and seek funding that they would redirect to encourage young people to take up the torch. Linking associative work, agriculture and ecological tourism could be a way out by talking about a social and solidarity economy model.

For Nizar, the solutions exist but they depend on a long-term work and a healthy dialogue between the different actors of the territory as well as between the different generations. Nizar appreciated the initiative of such a workshop which, according to him, should be held more often in order to establish a real dynamic of dialogue. For him, young people could bring new blood, new ideas and alternative practices in agriculture, but they must maintain the link with the heritage and the old practices that only the older generation can inculcate. Nizar's intervention was applauded by the participants who drew attention to the importance of dialogue between a generation of memory and another of new technologies and the need to find a balance between the two.

#### *4- Lack of coordination between the actors of the territory*

The lack of coordination of efforts between the actors of the territory was, in my opinion, the major problem that I had noted throughout the stay. All of them had helped to the best of their ability and all were proud of their oasis. They all had a sense of belonging and a passion for protecting the oasis. Their spontaneous presence at the workshop was living proof of this. All are concerned about the uncertain future of Chenini. I therefore wanted to talk about the platform that the farmers' union, the GDA, the ASOC, the cooperative of Chenini etc. A kind of agreement between the different associations and the municipality exists however only in theory. Moncef Felah felt that such an initiative should be valued. The new platform is still in its infancy but at least a core is already in place. All agreed on the need for a common vision in order to create a synergy between the different actors of the community. For Moncef, establishing such a practice, but especially maintaining it, is the only way for the community to find solutions to its most pressing problems.

Once again, tempers flared over the lack of initiative of certain actors and over the definition of the roles and responsibilities of each.

Zacharia criticized civil society in general for its tendency to exclude farmers from the dialogue when they are the ones directly concerned. It is not a matter of speaking on behalf of farmers but rather of listening to them and including them. For Zacharia the various associations would have lost sight of the real objectives that are their *raison d'être*; they should refocus attention on agriculture and enhance the local heritage by talking about seeds but also about old practices. Lotfi Stit spoke of the importance of the palm tree in this sense: "we have forgotten that the palm tree was the only guarantor of food security for the oasis." He quoted, a saying that his father used to repeat to him: "dhakker (pollinate) your palm tree, you do not know what the year will be made of". The word *dhakker* has a double meaning: pollinate but also the fact of remembering.

What was lacking was dialogue, what was missing was a common project based on a common imagination. My passage in Chenini only confirmed the hypotheses of the usefulness of such a workshop to bring together the people of the community in the most inclusive way possible around a project to which all could refer; a project of all for all. But before that, we had to "squeeze the ward", to put the problems on the table, to say things face to face and to overcome the misunderstandings.

##### *5- An increasing anarchic urbanization*

Abdelwahed Kabaou mayor of Chenini felt that the inhabitants of the oasis were the first responsible. This anarchic urbanization is not specific to Chenini and concerns the whole territory since the revolution. The oasis of Chenini can even consider itself lucky compared to other localities and other oases where the situation is critical. A meeting at the level of the Regional Commissioner of Agriculture to try to overcome the bureaucratic problems and conflicts of interest between the municipality and the Ministry of Agriculture in order to create a single counterpart that would study the investment and construction projects in the oasis. There was little discussion of the issue and the weakness of the municipality and state institutions in general in the implementation of the law on the one hand and the lack of civic awareness on the part of the inhabitants of Chenini on the other.

### ***Reframing Economy – The Iceberg Diagram***

During the break, several participants left the workshop to perform prayers in the nearest mosque while others claimed they had to feed the cattle. Most of them came back after about half an hour, some of them deserted the meeting which had already lasted more than two hours. When we returned from the break, I thought it would suitable to talk about the work of Meadows and the theory of collapse. The idea was to describe a possible future scenario of collapse and the risk of seeing the oasis disappear given the increase of climatic risks on Tunisia and the MENA zone in general. This would correspond to the Map (1) phase of the EXF framework, which had started in the background during the 4 weeks of inhabitation.

Soumaya wondered why nobody in Tunisia was talking about it. Lotfi Stit mentioned the urgency of a common action and spoke about the first ecologists who had come to visit Chenini and the meeting they had organized on the issue of climate change already in the 90s; a conference in which very few locals had participated, he regretted. This allowed me to refocus my attention on the reality of Chenini and to relocate the problem to the local context. I explained that Tunisia and the entire MENA zone would be among the areas most affected by the effects of global warming.

We discussed the idea formulated by Pablo Servigne of the Anthropocene seen as an era of mutual aid and the focus of the research on Commons, being able to introduce the work of Gibson-Graham and community economies by drawing the iceberg diagram on the board. The iceberg diagram is one of the tools used by Gibson-Graham to reframe the economy. The authors explain that the iceberg distinguishes between visible economic activities and those that are usually hidden. “A first step to taking back the economy is to recognize the economic diversity that abounds in this world. This means broadening the focus from what we usually identify as “the economy” to include an array of hidden economic activities (and many of these hidden activities often directly contribute to our well-being).”

So, we adapted the diagram to include all the ancient practices of commoning and mutual aid that the elders had told me about during my stay. The all-state or all-private is not the answer and

the Commons could be a way out. Once again, I was not bringing anything new and was only proposing a return to the roots. As John Thackara explains, “many of the solutions to be adopted for a more sustainable world are social practices that are old-fashioned or simply in use in other contexts.”

In my many discussions with the locals I had often resorted to videos I showed on my smartphone of experiences they could easily relate to. Everyone had a smartphone and one video in particular seemed to catch the attention of the locals; it was the example of the city of Ksar Tafilelt, an oasis similar to Chenini that had won first prize in the sustainable city category at COP22. The locals very proud and proud seemed jealous of the success of the Algerian city. Saad Idoudi and Khaled Jabri of the AFCO association had therefore proposed a screening to show some best practices and similar experiences such as Totnes in England, the first city in transition, or the watershed permaculture and water harvesting in India in the Rajasthan desert. I had welcomed the proposal thinking that this added to the discussion of the notions of Commons, community economies and the ancient practices of reciprocity and mutual aid could help to unlock the imaginations of the participants. The first day ended with the screening of a series of videos. This could in some ways correspond to the Multiply phase of the EXF framework.

***Second Day: Inviting People to Speculate for Themselves on how to take back their economy***

At the end of the first day, we had finally established a climate of dialogue and discussed the many difficulties encountered in the present. Before moving on to the Fantasy phase, I tried to link the results obtained when eliciting images of the future from a good number of participants during the previous 4 weeks, to the work of Meadows and Servigne (even in a very simplified way). The next day, new participants joined the first ones. Even if some participants of the first day were absent. On the second day we were supposed to move on to the Fantasy phase which could also correspond to the Mediate and Mount phases merged into one step as in the case of Future proof (Holler, 2017) presented by Candy & Kornett (2019) when developing the EXF framework. I summarized the speeches of the first day and stated the points we had discussed, taking care to turn them into positive points; Turn critical points into the opposite (bad to good) as starting points.

In this Fantasy phase, the participants had to imagine a preferable future given the present and future constraints. Rather than focusing this phase on the creation of artifacts, I wanted to bring back to the forefront an ancient practice of Khrafa (practice of telling tales) and the figure of the Hakawati (the storyteller) and to focus on the oral aspect. My grandmother (still her) had proposed this idea to me by talking about the important social role of the Hakawati around whom people often gathered in the evening in the street or at the house of one or another neighbor before the advent of radio and television. At the end of the day, I intended to seek feedback from the audience on the futures they have just formulated/witnessed. Far from a rigid and serious exercise, the intention would be to push the participants to imagine in a participative way their future.

This would be in line with the first phase of the Transition Design approach and the idea of co-creating visions of a shared and desirable long-term future. But the most important thing was to establish a truly decolonial practice and help community members to take back this shared imaginary, recalling the idea of nourishing design's potentiality to support subaltern struggles for autonomy (Escobar, 2018). An exercise that could prove difficult; for both cultural and religious reasons the question of the future and foreknowledge is

something of the divine and metaphysical. The idea was to imagine the future of Chenini in 2050, i.e., within a generation, by imagining oneself already in this near future. In this phase the participants divided into groups were preparing and performing a kind of fairytale. It was also an opportunity to talk again about the Gibson-Graham Iceberg diagram and the idea of reframing the economy in order to take it back. Ancient practices such as *raghata* and *jehiret el ouad* were discussed, as well as the various systems of mutual aid and reciprocity that were used in the not-so-distant past. Other systems such as *zakat*, the obligatory alms in Islam, and the affinities between neighbors that are still alive today were also mentioned. The idea was to refocus attention on commoning practices, to think of the economy in a different way; not as a wage in the framework of a capitalist market governed by supply and demand. It was thus necessary to rethink the notions of needs and value other than in its monetary form. I did not have to explain too much about what the Commons are, because most of the participants knew exactly what I was talking about. I spent more time explaining it to young people, often talking about digital Commons and the social and solidarity economy. We also brought up the idea of a dialogue between generations and the possibilities that such a dynamic offered.

Mediate 3: 1st half of 2nd day of workshop “fantasy” – turn negative to positive / imagine new scenarios around community economies – new/traditional practices of mutualism, solidarity, commoning  
Alexia and Léa had spontaneously asked to share their experiences in Chenini with the people present. They talked about their association *Clim’adapt* which works on how to adapt to climate change and therefore were interested in oases as resilient systems. They had gone to Nouaiel (Kebili), for a project funded by the World Bank as an example of good practice and discovered a modern palm grove following the model of monoculture of a single variety of date, “*deglet nour*” intended for export. Léa, who is studying at AgroParisTech, the Institute of Sciences and Industries of the Living World and the Environment, spoke about the problems associated with intensive agriculture models. They were disturbed and came to Chenini to really understand what an oasis was.

They had done some research and came to visit Chenini to try to understand what an oasis was. “The first surprise was not finding water. Because in our imagination and the pictures we saw on the

internet there was plenty of water, so they had a first shock of this absence of water which was not what we expected. Then we had the second shock which this time was positive because they were amazed by this oasis which corresponded much more to the idea that we have of an oasis i.e., vegetation everywhere and on all floors". Lea made a point of speaking about her experience in Chenini at a visit with the ASOC where she had declared that it was the closest thing, she had seen in her life to what she was taught at university in courses of agroecology. She talked about the research that is done in France and her time at the National Institute of Agronomic Research for her internship where she had never seen anything that was as close to an agroecological system based on natural balances as what can be found in a forest naturally mixed with agriculture. Alexia said she learned a lot about agriculture in Chenini "it is an ecosystem that has existed for hundreds/thousands of years with a rich know-how that must be preserved."

For Lea, in "agronomy tries to reconstitute this kind of ecosystem, making complex calculations to know where to put the flowers in the plots, creating flowery strips to try to stop the massive extinction of bees (...) engineers work hard to know where to put the trees and in Chenini it is done naturally thanks to knowledge that has been passed on from generation to generation and I feel that we have reached one of the best agricultural systems that I have seen in my life... it is absolutely necessary to preserve it." Mabrouk Jabri asked Alexia and Léa about the visit of Pierre Rabhi who lived 5 years in Chenini of the movement of the hummingbirds and the influence that it had on him to create the oasis movement in all places and the example taken is that of Chenini. Mabrouk put forward the idea that the locals don't see the chance they have while the foreigners who see it for the first time are impressed and take it as an example. Mabrouk explained that it was Pierre Rabhi who gave the idea to start the composting station project. Mabrouk ended up telling the story of the hummingbird that does its part in reference to Pierre Rabhi's famous book (2009).

"You hold a treasure of nature, it's not even archaeology, it's something exceptional, I don't know why, but I want to congratulate you almost for maintaining it. It is difficult to leave Chenini". Mabrouk spoke of the meeting in 1992 around the issue of oases: "we presented a file to UNESCO to include Chenini in the world he-

ritage of humanity and this file needs political support (...) today Chenini has been included by UNESCO in another list of the world's treasures and we need real political support and to refresh the file." Even if I had to translate the speech of the two activists, their intervention was poignant and allowed the locals to see their reality in a different light. This outside perspective, which nevertheless remained on a positive note, encouraged the participants to get involved. They had the freedom to choose the theme they preferred among the 5 points we had discussed and to divide themselves by trying to mix genders and ages.

### ***The "Hakawati": Using Oral Tradition in Creating Alternative Imaginaries of the Future***

*Mount 4:* 2nd half of 2nd day of workshop "implementation" – storytelling using the example of the traditional Hakawati (storyteller) about these preferable futures.

Each group took one of the 5 themes. After an hour and a half each group had developed a kind of story that a Hakawati was in charge of telling us on behalf of his group. Some of them chose to tell their story together in a kind of performance. I won't talk about all the scenarios developed here, but I will share the most evocative aspects.

(1) The first group to tell their story was the one that dealt with the theme "Young farmers and intergenerational dialogue". Ali Jabri, Abdelbasset Hamrouni and Hamadi were the Hakawati and told us a story where in 2050 the inhabitants of Chenini would have agreed on an "**ethical charter**" based on the principles of mutual aid and governing the passage of ancestral knowledge between generations and between genders, blurring the differences between young and old as well as between men and women. I was also told about the story of Chenini becoming a "**Smart Oasis**" where IoT would be used, of a soilless agriculture that would respond to the constraints related to the narrowness of the plots, of machines that would help farmers to pollinate the palm trees avoiding the risks related to the ascent of the latter in view of the numerous accidents that workers often suffer. This use of IoT would also allow to control the water level as well as the energy consumption in a more efficient way. This would also allow the establishment of a database from which the

locals could have an overall and detailed view of the situation in the oasis. Hamadi spoke of **pooling the oasis' production and natural resources**. The resources and the surplus of production would be shared in an equitable way between the inhabitants of the oasis.

(2) The second group dealt with the theme of “pooling of plots and large farms”. Adnen played the role of Hakawati to perfection and attracted the attention of the audience. In 2050, the inhabitants of Chenini would have voted for a **law/agreement based on good faith and transparency to pool land**. In order to circumvent the constraints linked to the inheritance of the plots, the different families (tribes) would have reached an agreement allowing **the exploitation of the abandoned plots providing work for the young unemployed**. The plots would remain the property of one family or another and the owners will be able to reclaim their plot of land whenever they wish. The seed bank would be developed further to encourage organic farming based on ancestral techniques, which has become the rule throughout the oasis.

(3) The third group chose the theme “Organized and ecological urbanization”. Mabrouk Jabri played the role of Hakawati and declared that in 2050 the houses of Chenini would be built like the old **houses of bygone days**. We would have returned to old techniques by mixing them with new ones. The materials are all local materials that are easily found in the oasis such as lime, gypsum, sand, clay or the “terss”, a type of local stone which was heated to extract a kind of paste used as cement. The “lifa” for example is used as a natural insulator for small houses of 3 floors built on stilts. The lower floor would be dedicated to chickens, the second to family members and the third to guests and tourists. Chenini would indeed be a destination for the followers of **ecological, social and solidarity tourism**.

(4) The fourth group dealt with the theme of water: “Water abundance and good governance”. Nizar took charge with Mrs. Fatiha Achach to make the Hakawati. In 2050 the local population would have succeeded after long struggles to put pressure on the GCT and the cement factory not for their dismantling; **The GCT would pay a kind of tax in order to assume their ecological and social responsibilities**. The civil society and the local people would have succeeded in **formulating a plea in collaboration with researchers and experts** of different fields to this effect. GCT and the ce-

ment company are now **funding various local projects**, including helping the GDA to improve the irrigation network and to set up a water desalination unit, as well as building a water harvesting system in the surrounding hills. The pressure on the water table having diminished, the latter would once again become a **common good shared by all in a sober and equitable manner**.

(5) The last intervention was probably the most entertaining. Soumaya Razgallah played the role of Hakawati(a) for the theme “Coordination and complementarity between the actors of the territory”. The speech was short but thoughtful. There was a hint of irony that is difficult to translate, but I have tried to get as close as possible to the original Arabic text: “Once upon a time, there was a hungry, thirsty and grumbling people came the malevolent one saying, that Chenini was lost, it is inescapable... the Bouhattmya palm tree [was] high and proud, [alongside] the banana trees, plum trees, apricot trees and other peach trees... the associations were present and the Rais Baladya (the mayor) with them, in the name of our Mloukheya (Knotweed) and our wheat, here is our new **Tansikya** (coordination) named Chenini El Beya (the queen)! A **Mahallya** (local) initiative united around the el Wahya (from the oasis) women.”





## 6.3 Unfolding: The Case of Jemna

### 6.3.1 *A Completely Different Scale*

Despite the first contacts I had established with Taher Tahri and his efforts to help me find a place to live in Jemna, I was not able to find a place to stay. No hotel or guest house existed in Jemna. I had to look in Douz (about 14 km to the south) or Kebili (16 km to the north). The deep and sincere friendship that I had established with the inhabitants of Chenini would help us to overcome these first obstacles. Abdennasser Ben Ahmed, ex-member of the ASOC, whom I had met only a few weeks before in Chenini, proposed to host us in Kebili. He was indeed working in Kebili on a “territorial development project” launched by the NGO Handicap International. The latter was in fact making many trips back and forth between Chenini and Kebili. During our first meeting Abdennasser was very enthusiastic about the research and the project I wanted to develop. Abdennasser was a kind of link between Chenini and Jemna. Despite his young age, he had a broad and systemic vision of the situation of the oases in the region of Gabes and Kebili at the same time. Activist, active member of civil society and farmer in his spare time Abdennasser is passionate about the oasis systems and seemed inhabited by the idea of their preservation.

With Zacharia Hachmi, Abdennasser had introduced me to the members of the Nakhla association, which is part of the RADDO network. Since 2012, the date of its creation by Ahmed Abdeddayem, the Nakhla association works to preserve and even rebuild the oasis of Douz. The association had developed several projects around agroecology and permaculture. Nakhla has even bought some plots of land in the Douz oasis in order to restore the soil and crops and thus generate income for its members. Nakhla has succeeded in organizing training courses to accompany about twenty farmers in the exploitation of the oasis in a sustainable manner with, for example, the creation of composts, the exploitation of hot springs pumped and cooled with cold water thus valorizing the whole irrigation poten-

tial and limiting the waste of water; the creation of retention basins, the recycling of waste as well as their valorization. Thus, within the association, young people, like its current president Ibrahim Belhaj, weave social links with older people who share their knowledge.

I had a first telephone conversation with Ahmed Abdeddayem who expressed a great interest in my research. He even offered to let me stay at his house to facilitate my fieldwork. In the end, I had two houses at my disposal, the first one at Sid Ahmed's in Douz and from time to time a second one at Abdelnasser's in Kebili. Ahmed Abdeddayem who is an experienced agronomic engineer and a former agent of the Regional Commissariat for Agricultural Development of Kebili (CRDA), had a thorough knowledge of the reality of the field at both the institutional and associative levels, not only in Douz but also in the whole region of Nefzaoua and southern Tunisia in general. His advice and contacts were of great help throughout the stay. Thanks to the network of friends established in Douz and Kebili, I was able to make a long series of appointments with several people in charge at the CRDA and also with researchers at the Institut des Régions Arides (IRA). This series of meetings and the many conversations and interviews I was able to conduct allowed me to have an overall view of the situation in the Nefzaoua region. I combined, as in Chenini but on a much larger scale, the perspectives of farmers, civil society, and regional decision-makers.

Group cab trips from Douz were indeed more frequent, Kebili being administrative of the region. In the evening it was also easier to return, often by hitchhiking from Jemna to Douz since most of the civil servants left Kebili to go back to their homes in the localities and communes around. I discovered that hitchhiking was a very common practice in the region; leaving someone alone in the middle of the desert is seen as a shame by the locals. These long car journeys allowed me to have a rather broad vision of the daily life of the population in the various localities of Nefzaoua; especially that of Jemna, Douz or Kebili. I could thus note the many similarities between the various boroughs and communes of the area. The locals explained that many conflicts between the populations of several localities had broken out during the last years. For example, there were conflicts over land issues between the municipality of El Golâa and that of Jemna. Some of these conflicts are sometimes bloody and take significant dimensions, the tribal reality is still very pronounced in

the region. These tribal skirmishes, often related to access to land or water, do not bode well for the future according to Taher Tahri. I was thus able to place Jemna in a larger framework and became aware of the complexity of the problems at different scales. The problems faced by Jemna were those encountered by all the oases and palm groves of southwest Tunisia. The agricultural model on which the entire local economy is based is indeed proving its limits day by day and has been in deep crisis for years. A crisis related in particular to the effects of climate change but especially to the phenomenon of extensions called "illegal" that the region Nefzaoua (Kebili, Douz, Jemna etc..) has seen spread especially after the revolution. These extensions can be assimilated to the notion of global land grabbing (Benegiamo, 2019) defined as the increase on a global scale of investments in agricultural land since the 2007-2008 crisis, with unprecedented rates in the history of post-colonial Africa (Baglioni & Gibbon, 2013). A phenomenon that contributes dramatically to the overexploitation of the water table, which combined with the risks of large fires in the next ten years threaten a collapse of the entire social and economic fabric of the region. The many discussions I had with IRA researchers were all without appeal. The oases of southern Tunisia are all in danger of disappearing in the very near future.

In Gabes the problem was clear and the responsible for the disaster (the chemical industry) and its victims were well separated; however, in Jemna and in all the region of Nefzaoua it was difficult to distinguish the roles and the responsibilities. The level of complexity was a very arduous affair. The use of solar panels which was supposed to be something positive became a negative one; locals used solar panels to pump water during the day which meant that more than 45% of the water wouldn't irrigate the plot but simply evaporate. Large quantities of water were rejected in the sabkha (i.e.; playa) nearby (and this was not specific to Jemna, the whole region of Nefzaoua is concerned by the subject), the overexploitation of the water table and the waste of water; the non-exploitation of the old techniques of cultivation in stages (thus the monoculture), the use of pesticides, the effects of climate change and the new diseases precisely because of climate change and modern agricultural practices, put the palm groves, the population, the local economy and Jemna itself are in danger.

I decided to continue with the same EXF protocol; in order to better understand the subject, I visited the IRA (Institute of Arid Regions) conducting several interviews with different profiles of researchers. I also visited the CRDA (Ministry of Agriculture) and met several officials. The problem turned out to be a hyper politicized/bureaucratic one due to a lack of communication and coordination between the different state structures. The population criticized the passivity of the government which instead of being of help blocked initiatives “putting sticks in the wheels”. According to Nissaf Karbout researcher at the IRA and active member of the association Naklha deep changes had to be engaged before 2030 in order to save palm groves and the oases of the region.



### *6.3.2 Unfinished Research: Between Pandemic and Desert Heat*

The greatest constraint encountered was the extreme health crisis that Tunisia experienced during my field research, which peaked during my time in Jena. The entire Kebili region was severely affected during this second wave of Covid-19 in Tunisia. Initially some towns, such as Douz, were subject to lockdown, while in Kebili and Jemna, where the situation was less severe, there was only a curfew to observe. I had to remain confined and accumulated too much delay on the initial schedule; the sanitary crisis becoming more and more serious, I had to leave Kebili before a quarantine was imposed on all the region.

Moreover, the reality of the Jemna field proved to be more complicated than that of Chenini. The sanitary situation added to the particularly high heat of last summer (even according to the locals) had prevented me from completing my research. Without doubt I should have chosen another time of the year, but had a tight margin of maneuver. My knowledge of the terrain in Chenini had allowed me to save a considerable amount of time, which was not the case in Jemna. I needed more time to adapt and to discover a region (Kebili). I noticed that the tribal reality was much more pronounced in Jemna (and the Nefzaoua region in general) than in Gabes or Chenini. The area of action was also much larger. We are not talking about an oasis but rather a series of modern palm groves (monocultures) that extend over several thousand hectares. In Jemna, for example, the countless extensions (the CRDA and therefore the Tunisian state does not know the exact surface of these extensions) were difficult to access because they were located in the middle of the desert to the east and west of the city. In the city itself, there are also the old traditional oases, of which there are nine, each with its own GDA, all of which have been transformed into palm groves. The 9 GDAs have a total of 1763 member farmers spread over an area of 1078 hectares.

Moving around was complicated. It was necessary to have a means of transport adapted to the dunes. Sometimes some were kind enough to accompany me. Unfortunately, the farmers went to their fields very early in the morning and at 09:00 their day was already finished. By the time I got to Jemna, farmers would have already left

Their plots. It was complicated to meet and interview the farmers while they were working so we decided to go to the cafes in the late morning or evening. Jemna, like most rural towns in Tunisia, is built around a main road. There were three main cafes; the first at the north end towards the exit to Kebili, the second at the south end towards Douz and the third in the center of Jemna. There I met most of the members of the ASOJ but also numerous actors of the community. I moved around either on foot or by motorcycle; Touhami, a member of the ASOJ and janitor of the youth center, had indeed made himself available. Very much loved by the locals, he helped in making the first contacts in Jemna. However, I had only a very limited time; at 11:00 am already the city was deserted.

The heat being too strong, the inhabitants spent almost all their time in the shade at home. They went out in the evening (after 21:00) to meet in the cafés or in the street. This has limited me greatly. I spent most of the time doing interviews with the different visitors of the cafes. However, what was complicated was meeting the women. It was almost impossible in that very male environment to find women. On very rare occasions I was able to meet some of them. In Kebili and Douz, which are larger cities, the task was easier and women seemed to have more freedom.

### 6.3.3 An Experience around Commons that did not Turn into a Project

Despite all the difficulties encountered, I somehow established a first network of people, farmers, civil society, ministerial officials, municipal officials, researchers in Jemna but also in Douz and Kebili. The problems encountered in the oases of Nefzaoua were found to be the same as those of Gabes. Lack of water (not for the same reasons), land parceling and inheritance problems, the generation gap (which was more pronounced in Jemna than in Chenini) and the lack of coordination between the various actors despite the existence of a fairly active civil society.

The perimeter was so vast that it was necessary to limit myself to a precise context. I therefore decided to focus on the land managed by the ASOJ. The subject of the Commons was only mentioned on rare occasions. The locals, especially the older ones, told, as was the case in Chenini, about the past abundance of water and the diversity of production of the old Zira (from Jazira, which means island), islands of greenery that have now dried up. They missed the old community practices of mutual aid and solidarity but considered that “the law of the market was quite different”. For Bahim Khammar, one of the young people I met, “most of the inhabitants of Jemna were no longer farmers but rather became simple date producers. Brahim owns a hardware store that supplies local farmers with pumps and hoses to fetch water ever deeper due to the continuous drawdown of the water table. For most, the calculation is simple: a palm tree brings in about 300 DT/year per hectare, which generally contains 100 palm trees. The majority of families own between 3 and 5 hectares which brings them between 30,000 and 50,000 dinars per year. Some saw them as nothing more than *khammassa* (in North Africa, *the khammes* from the Arabic *khomoss*, meaning a fifth, is a farmer working on behalf of an owner, a sharecropper receiving a fifth of the income from the land he cultivates) for the industrialists and conditioning companies of the Cap Bon region in the north-east of the country.

The idea of practicing permaculture and agroecology or to realize a common project around the food and energy autonomy of Jemna excited several farmers and civil society actors. Others considered a return to old practices as far-fetched in view of the lack of water and the absence of support from the state. Modern needs and prevail-

ling individualism were seen by some as the main obstacle to such a project. Developing a kind of pilot project that the locals would develop from the land managed by ASOJ seemed to be a way out. However, I soon realized that there were internal conflicts between some members of the association, some of whom had resigned; there were also tensions between the association and some individuals who questioned the legitimacy of some members. The management and the members of the executive board of the association seemed exhausted by years of struggle that still did not lead to a definitive result. The association has thus gradually become isolated, even if a large majority of the inhabitants of Jemna still support them. A minority, however, believes that the current board should give way to others.

A former member of the association's board (who asked to keep his name secret) said: "The Jemna experience has remained an experiment, an idea, and has not been transformed into a project (...) this suits the government, which is not ready to lose face or make concessions with other localities and communities that would like to follow the example of Jemna."

The main problem slowing down the transformation of this "experience" into a "project" is related to a legislative blockage with the government. This reduced the room for maneuver of the association and did not allow for the development of any project in the long term. Tahar Tahri said the ASOJ wanted to redevelop a multi-level agriculture and diversify production around crops adopting the principles of Agro-ecology. The ASOJ also sought to develop a project in social and solidarity tourism, since he wanted to transform the old colonial residence into a guest house.

Unfortunately, the association found itself trapped in a long administrative process and a series of negotiations with numerous governments, most of which lasted only a few months. In 10 years, Tunisia has indeed had 14 different governments. The association has therefore invested some of its income to help other local associations, to buy ambulances, to rebuild part of the school or to set up soccer fields for the youth of the city. Some projects were criticized by the inhabitants, who spoke of bad governance and waste, referring to the construction of a hammam that never opened its doors (for lack of water). But above all, the association found itself having

to manage a piece of land whose production barely covered the maintenance costs paid throughout the year. The members of the association were convinced by the idea of developing a three-tiered agriculture, of a return to ancient practices, but seemed cornered by management problems and bureaucratic blockages in resolving their tug-of-war with the state over the definition of an adequate legal status for the land recovered by the population 10 years earlier. The Jemna experience seems to be blocked by purely legal considerations, but as in the case of Chenini, the difficulties seem to be linked to the lack of coordination of efforts around a common vision; the absence of a common imagination. People seemed to be prisoners of a state of affairs, caught in a mad race for water.















## References Chapter 6

Alldrīsī, Le Magrib au XIIe siècle, trans. By M. HadjSadok, Paris, 1983).

Baglioni, E., & Gibbon, P. (2013). Land Grabbing, Large-and Small-scale Farming: what can evidence and policy from 20th century Africa contribute to the debate? *Third World Quarterly*, 34(9), 1558–1581. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.843838>

Ben Salah, M. (2011). La palmeraie de Gabes. Issued by Phoenix Project, France-Italy 2011

Benegiamo, M. (2019). Pluralizzare Il Capitalocene, Pensare La Transizione. *Investimenti Agricoli in Africa E Nuova Questione Agraria. SOCIOLOGIA URBANA E RURALE*, no. 120, Oct. 2019, pp. 62–76, DOI: 10.3280/SUR2019-120005.

Caffentzis, G., & Federici, S. (2014). Commons against and beyond capitalism. *Community Development Journal*, 49(suppl 1), i92–i105. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsu006>

z zzz

Carpentier, I (2017). Diversité Des Dynamiques Locales Dans Les Oasis Du Sud de La Tunisie. *Cahiers Agricultures*, vol. 26, no. 3, May 2017, p. 35001. DOI: 10.1051/cagri/2017017

DiSalvo, C. (2016). “Design and Prefigurative Politics.” *The Journal of Design Strategies*, Vol 8., No. 1 (2016): 29-35.

Elzenbaumer, B. (2013, December 1). Designing Economic Cultures: cultivating socially and politically engaged design practices against procedures of precarisation. *Research.gold.ac.uk*. <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/9920>

Elzenbaumer, B., Graziano, V., & Trogal, K. (2016). Introduction: The Politics of Commoning and Design. *DRS2016: Future-Focused Thinking*. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.614>

Escobar, A. (2018), *Designs for the pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* Duke University Press.

Federici, S. (2008). Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 10(1), 21-35. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol10/iss1/3>

Federici, S. (2019). *Le capitalisme patriarcal*. La Fabrique Éditions.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

Fry, T. (2009). *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice*. In Google Books. Berg Publishers. [https://books.google.tn/books/about/Design\\_Futuring.html?id=cpxFY\\_aoieMC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.tn/books/about/Design_Futuring.html?id=cpxFY_aoieMC&redir_esc=y)

Gobert, E. G. (1962). La préhistoire dans la zone littorale de la Tunisie. *Quaternaria* 7, 271–307. Google Scholar

Holler, C. P. (2017). *The experiential futures of futureproof: A format for improvising future scenarios (MDes Project)*. Faculty of Design, OCAD University. <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1987/IEP>. (n.d.). *African Sage Philosophy*. In [iep.utm.edu/encyclopedia](http://iep.utm.edu/encyclopedia). Retrieved January 12, 2020, from <https://iep.utm.edu/african-sage/>

Irwin, T. (2015). *Transition Design: A Proposal for a New Area of Design Practice, Study, and Research, Design and Culture*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University.

Jungk, R. and Müller, N. (1987). *Future Workshops: How to create desirable futures*, Institute of Social Inventions, London, UK

- Kraiem, A. (1988). La résistance de Gabès à l'occupation française en 1881. *Les cahiers de Tunisie: revue de sciences humaines* pp.121-156, Vol 36. Issue:143-144
- Marttila, S., Botero, A., & Saad-Sulonen, J. (2014). Towards commons design in participatory design. *Proceedings of the 13th Participatory Design Conference on Short Papers, Industry Cases, Workshop Descriptions, Doctoral Consortium Papers, and Keynote Abstracts - PDC '14 - Volume 2*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2662155.2662187>
- Merchant, C. (1980). *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. Harpercollins.
- Momoh, C. S. (1985). African Philosophy... Does it Exist? *Diogenes*, 33(130), 73–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/039219218503313005>
- Oruka, H. O. (1991). *The philosophy of liberty : (an essay on political philosophy)*. Standard Textbooks Graphics and Pub.
- Pliny, *Natural History* 5.75.8. Digital version in the Packard Humanities Institute Latin Texts online: K.F.T. Mayhoff (ed.), *Naturalis Historiae, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, Lipsiae, 1906. <http://latin.packhum.org/loc/978/1/348/267-273#348>
- Rabhi, P. (2010). Pierre Rabhi, un humaniste au service de la terre mère. Michel.
- Ramos, J. (2017). Cosmo-localization and leadership for the future. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 21(4). 65-84. Retrieved October 29, 2017, from <http://jfsdigital.org/>
- Santos, B. S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. New York. Routledge
- Textor, R. B. (1980). *A handbook on ethnographic futures research* (3rd ed., Version A). Stanford, CA: Stanford University.
- Textor, R. B. (1995). The ethnographic futures research method: An application to Thailand. *Futures*, 27(4), 461–471.
- Veselsky, E. & Textor, R. (2007). The Future of Austria: A Twenty-Year Dialog. *Futures Research Quarterly @BULLET Winter Futures Research Quarterly Winter*. 23. 23-56.
- Wiredu, K. (1980). *Philosophy and an African Culture: The Case of the Akan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



PART IV

# Conclusions



## CHAPTER 7 Outcomes and Perspectives

### ABSTRACT

The seventh chapter extrapolates the outcomes of the research and the prospects of development. It evaluates how much it was possible to fulfill the initial expectations of the research. An analysis of the results of the research is proposed, on two levels: (1) Principles — focusing on results at the level of approaches and methodologies but also of the posture of designers — and (2) Practices — dealing with the contribution of this research in terms of methods and frameworks but also in redefining the role of designers —. It starts from the observation of the results obtained and how these have led to answer the research questions. Then follows an evaluation of the research perspectives through an assessment of the current and future developments of the experiments and processes engaged on the field.

On the level of principles, it is possible to identify four levels of intervention of design when dealing with the Commons, following the model proposed by Manzini and Margolin on the relation between design and democracy: (1) Design of Commons, involved in the institutionalization of the Commons; (2) Design for Commons, involved in the creation of devices/tools/means for the practice of communing; (3) Design as Commons, intended as a common good in itself; (4) Design in Commons, involved in the development of initiatives inside the context of communing to enrich the debate.

Regarding the practices, three profiles of the designer emerged: (1) The designer historian, who is interested in the past and seeks answers and solutions to present and future challenges; (2) The designer commoner, who works for the deployment of a diverse economy focused on the development of new Commons and the defense of old ones; (3) The designer futurist, recognizing the prospect of collapse and helping citizens and communities to design such a future now through radical imagination. A first tangible result of this research work is the recent constitution (February 2022) of the National Collective of the Oases of the Gulf of Gabes, which is proof that the practice of such a design is possible. The most interesting evidence emerged from this experimental activity is the possibility to generate together a different perspective able to show new path for the design research and to carry out not a simply theorized collaborative design approach, but one really rooted in the present and able to bring the involved communities and contexts in a feasible future.



## 7.1 Outcomes

### 7.1.1 Principles

From the outset of this research, I have been interested in the specific contexts of oases. The oasis context concentrates, in a way, all the problems I have outlined. In fact, these are artificial, anthropized and cultivated spaces in the heart of vast arid zones, which for thousands of years have adopted a complex social organization of solidarity and commoning around water. Oases are therefore sustainable spaces by definition, where the Commons are fundamentally a tradition. Today, oases are experiencing the effects of climate change, but also those of development and growth, which have almost disrupted the social folds around the Commons. I can say that oases are Commons economies in crisis. The field research was a continuation of the exploration/verification of design as/for/in Common(s) by focusing on the specific context of Tunisia combining the various problematic elements addressed during the theoretical research phase. Indeed, I explained how the modern/industrialized society is stuck in what Azmanova (2020) called a “metacrisis” (a crisis in crisis). The research revealed three different but interconnected levels of crisis and the embeddedness of design in each one of them:

(1) an “ecological crisis”; where design and designers are in a dual posture of guiltiness and bipolarity when facing the question of sustainability. Indeed, designers are trying to pursue a “socialist” and a “capitalist” practice at the same time in “a form of compulsion to madness, an effort to make the designer mad” (Vial, 2010; p.45). We would go so far as to say that this kind of “bipolarity” of design would be at the very origin of a sense of guilt specific to designers.

Design for Social Innovation seemed more about achieving a “feel good” effect than actually producing a meaningful political change. To this figure of Bipolar/Guilty designer I opposed the one of an Activist/Resilient one. This Activist/Resilient designer would correspond to a reactivation of what Maldonado called “speranza pro-

gettuale". Thus, in the face of the Anthropocene, a dual figure of an activist and resilient (autonomous) designer emerges. An activist designer acknowledging collapse while embracing the ideation of new resilient ways of life — starting with his own with a view to his own economic autonomy — an attitude of slowing down that would follow (like in Permaculture) the rhythms of natural systems.

(2) a "value(s) crisis" which explains the first one —i.e., ecological crisis—. Contemporary Capitalism being locked into a logic of bad infinity of endless accumulation and compound growth (Harvey, 2017) which is essentially related to a problem of values. Indeed, the problem with Capitalism is precisely that value is reduced to its money form; thus, it hides the commodification processes and exploitative relations attached to Capitalism modes of production. The bipolarity and guiltiness of designers in front of the ecological crisis are undeniably related to their entanglement in the capitalistic system. Designers are in fact at the very center of the processes of commodification on the one hand, and remain — even when driven by the most positive intentions, towards ecological and social sustainability — blocked in market logics and processes of precarization on the other. Critical social engagement in design is often being sacrificed or diminished in order to cater to the needs of the market (Elzenbaumer, 2013). To this figure of Entangled/Precarious designer, I opposed the one of a Released/Commoner designer; emitting the hypothesis of pursuing practices around Commons and commoning in order to escape processes of commodification and precarization.

(3) an "imagination crisis" which is at the origin of the two previous crises. The research shows how development (and consequently sustainable development) is seen as an instrument of colonization; growth and development are two sides of the same coin. The difficulty of imagining the end of Capitalism being related to what Santiago Castro-Gómez (2005) calls "the illusion of the zero-point epistemology." The processes of Capitalism are here related not only to physical (environmental) and economic levels but also to an epistemic one. Unblocking the imagination would thus imply a necessary shift from the rhetoric of Western modernity or what Mignolo (2009) calls epistemic disobedience. We then showed how design acts as an oppressive and a collaborative force; a lever of the zero-point epistemology. To this figure of Colonial/Colonized designer

I opposed a Rooted/Emancipatory one. I focused on the notion of Epistemologies of the South to propose the idea of a design attached not only to a specific territory but also to specific situations of struggle and conflict. Recalling the notion of radical imagination defined as a “common imagination” by Haiven (2014); this Rooted design would involve three temporalities: past (searching for Commons as a historical actuality held in common memory); present (recognizing, valorizing and defending even undercurrent Commons of today); future (acknowledging that the ultimate horizon for humanity beyond Capitalism is the Commons).

I wanted to verify if design had a role to play in such contexts focusing on the cases of Chenini and Jemna as two landmarks in the social and environmental movements that have developed in Tunisia since the revolution. The first was the Chenini oasis, located in the coastal area of Gabes, known for its pollution due to phosphate production, where farmers continue to perpetuate ancestral practices of multi-level cultivation and water distribution. The second was the Jemna oasis in Nefzaoua, the country’s main date-producing region. The oasis has become the symbol of peasant resistance and has been the scene of the emergence of a local and pluralist civil society, the learning of participatory democracy and the pioneering experience of the social and solidarity economy in Tunisia.

The open research question has been: If design was born and developed in the consumer economy, would design exist in the Commons’ economy? If so, what are the methods and practices of design to play a role in the Commons’ economy? Considering that Design for Social Innovation has always been characterized in a Western-centered economic/cultural context, that of the market economy, and where Social Innovation has always been understood as humanitarian action, is it possible to identify the characteristics of a socially and politically engaged design that takes into account the perspective of the South? What practice of design could restore hope? As explained, I had already identified the context I wanted to intervene in, but was looking for the right approach and method; an approach that would challenge the capitalist, colonial and patriarchal roots of design. During a purely theoretical phase, I had identified numerous approaches, but did not know which one to choose. What I did know was that there was no universal method or tool to apply as advocated by the Human Center Design (HCD) and Design Thin-

king approaches. I also understood that Design for Social Innovation tends to frame problems in relatively narrow spatiotemporal contexts. Following the different perspectives previously cited I managed to “inhabit” the two contexts.

Without the “ambition” of improving the “livability of the world” I carried out a collaborative design experiment rooted in the present, adopting a post-development/feminist line of thought taking into consideration the concepts of “Epistemologies of the South” and “Situated Knowledge” as conceptual notions. Regarding ethical considerations, I thus wanted to be embedded in the problem rather than having an external point of view. The experience has been developed following the concept of “speculative fabulation” by Donna Haraway and the notion of world-building in relation to the oral tradition specific to the contexts. In this way, the expected aim has been to develop a situated knowledge that is generated from the specific point of view and that does not distance the knowing subject from everyone else but instead engages in collective processes of knowledge production.

“Anti-capitalist Commons are not the end point of a struggle to construct a non-capitalist world, but its means. For no struggle will succeed in changing the world if we do not organize our reproduction in a communal way and not only share the space and time of meetings and demonstrations but put our lives in common, organizing on the basis of our different needs and possibilities, and the rejection of all principles of exclusion or hierarchization” (Federici and Caffentzis, 2014). In this statement, Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis explain how Commons could be intended as a process, rather than being only an objective. They also speak about struggle which accentuates the idea of slowness and difficulty of such a process. This could be considered as the first outcome of this research. In terms of design, it is difficult to identify a finished “product” or “project”. In the experiment I have initiated, the process seems to be in continuous elaboration; a kind of chronic iteration. It is precisely this iterative aspect that allows us to qualify this experience as a “design project.”

Methodologically, different concepts have been merged to build the experimental framework: Participatory Design and its concepts of infrastructuring and commoning (Marttila et al, 2014); Transition Design (Irwin, 2015, 2018) for its idea of intervention and long-term vision by providing a process for stakeholders to transcend

their differences in the present by co-creating visions of a shared and desirable long-term future; Autonomous Design (Escobar, 2018) as it focuses on the struggles of communities and social movements to defend their territories and worlds against the ravages of neoliberal globalization; Design for Sustainment and what Fry (2009) calls “dig where you stand”; or Prefigurative Design (DiSalvo, 2016), a design that could make political speculation easier to live with, experiment with, and ultimately implement, where designers are not themselves called upon to speculate, but rather, they can be called upon to enable speculation. However, these different approaches served as reference points. There was clearly no perfect approach, just the conviction, after being confronted by other researchers, that what I was trying to develop made sense. I was convinced by the need to immerse myself in the context, to build relationships with local communities and to take time for action (or inaction) — as explained by Terry Irwin (2018). It was not about thinking about the result but about the process.

Through radical imagination, we (me and the community) have tried to engage in a dialogue/action around the re-prefiguration of alternative ways of doing and organizing, in order to actively challenge and resist the dominant paradigms of development and growth. I speak about a re-prefiguration because I noticed that many responses to present and future challenges are to be found precisely in the past of the oases. By revealing the processes of extractivism and dispossession that are linked to development and growth (Global Capitalism and State Capitalism), the experience on the field confirmed the hypothesis formulated during the theoretical research phase about the possibility for design to work on decolonizing collective imagination.

The experiment was in some way a sort of revalorization of ancestral knowledge and practices; a revalorization of local southern Epistemologies. This turned out to be a necessary first step in order to enable possible action that would challenge the status quo. During the experiment in Chenini we contributed to re-figuring new/old forms of collective action that could improve the resilience of the community to the near-future climate change and water scarcity issues. Through the perspectives of the Commons and radical imagination we were able to ideate in a collective manner. One can thus confirm that although design was born and developed in the consumer economy, a design practice to re-configure a Commons economy is possible. Design has a potential role in activating (and

reactivating) diverse economies —in the words of J.K Gibson-Graham— and has a large set of practices and methods. All the approaches cited seem valid. Indeed, what this experience on the ground has shown is the relative importance of tools and methods. What had been more important was the ontological posture of the designer; of being engaged in a specific situation of struggle i.e., communities and social movements defending their territories and worlds from the ravages of neoliberal globalization (Escobar, 2018).

Given the path taken by this research, what overall proposal can be drawn from it that could effectively help identify the characteristics of a socially and politically engaged design that takes into account the perspective of the South? What design practice could restore hope? The proposal put forward is simple, but it has several practical and theoretical implications. The practical experience of the field confirmed the idea of a “Rooted Design”; a design attached to situations instead of objects. It is not exclusively about specific territories, but also refers to specific situations of struggle such as those in Chenini and Jemna, where the population is in direct conflict with the state. A rooted design for/by/from the South would thus adopt the long termism proposed by the Transition Design approach (Irwin, 2018), while focusing on the struggles of people and social movements (in the Global South).

Indeed, I think that designers should no longer be attached to the production of artefacts per se but should be attached to a specific context, situation, territory. This implies a change in the way designers conceive their lives and profession. Proliferating ways of imagining, doing and relating that refuse an established order, is a long and slow process. As a product designer by training, I think there is a lot to be done in the field of low-tech to solve purely technical problems, but these solutions must necessarily be contextualized. This design remains to be discovered and constructed; but it is a design put at the service of citizens in order to enable its reappropriation. In the context of the South, it is a design that supports the struggle of subaltern communities (Escobar, 2018) and eco-social movements, defined as the Environmentalism of the Poor (Martinez-Alier, 2002).

The field research was short and, in many ways, felt like a race against time, as academic deadlines, for their part, remained the

same, limiting my flexibility to deploy the field research. I am aware of the need to continue this “adventure” which has only just begun; this research is indeed only the beginning of a long-term commitment with the communities I met. My time in Chenini was, however, more conclusive than the one in Jemna. It was a first attempt to gather the different actors around the same imaginary. This could correspond to the first phase of the Transition Design framework i.e., “reframing the problem and its context in the present and future” as well as a first attempt of infrastructuring if we were to speak of Participatory Design. I would add that in some contexts (probably mostly located in the Global South) a reframing of the past is necessary. As explained, during the different stages of the field-research the past of the oasis seemed to provide in many ways conceptual and practical solutions to present and future problems.

For the analysis of the results of this research, I also followed the same path adopted by Kim Trogal, Valeria Graziano and Bianca Elzenbaumer in their article “the Politics of Commoning and Designing” (2016). The authors introduce the common as a political notion, differing from the approach followed by some designers that have begun to respond to the challenge of the common in their practices. Instead of an understanding of the notion of common as simply a resource i.e., Commons or common goods, the Feminist and Marxist approaches, adopted by the authors, focus on the concept of commoning; shifting in this manner, the focus “from properties that are intrinsic to the goods being taken into consideration to the social relations that frame and sustain their production and reproduction”. The authors explain that “these theories reject the idea that there are goods or social objects that are naturally in common: both in the case of natural resources such as water or cognitive products such as software, the common is first of all a mode of political action that challenges property as an absolute right to exclude.” The experiments conducted in the field, especially the one in Chenini, correspond to the vision of the common as “forms of organization that sustain the autonomous cooperation of the social (...) creating social spaces that subtract value from processes of capital accumulation and appropriation”.

This ongoing research therefore proposes to answer the call of the three researchers, speaking about the need for design and design practice “to engage its own political economy (...) within existing

parasitic and asymmetrical conditions” (Trojal et.al, 2016; p.2) in order to investigate the role of design in remaking those “very economies and relations”. The idea is to bring a small contribution to the debates already engaged. Nevertheless, there is an important dimension to take into consideration when analyzing the results of this research, which has just begun: the global health crisis that coincided with this doctoral research had a profound impact on its timing. The measures of confinement, curfew and other limitations of movement have upset the way in which I initially wanted to carry out this research, as a kind of back and forth between practice and theory.

One could here identify 4 levels of intervention of design when dealing with the Commons, following the model proposed by Manzini and Margolin on the relation between design and democracy:

- (1) Design of Commons; design involved in the institutionalization of the Commons.
- (2) Design for Commons; design involved in the creation of devices/tools/means for the practice of commoning.
- (3) Design as Commons; design intended as a common good in itself
- (4) Design in Commons; design involved in the development of initiatives inside the context of commoning to enrich the debate.

This first intervention could correspond to levels (2) and (3):

(2) Design for Commons: this is what I tried to do by applying the Transition Design and the Autonomous Design frameworks. In this way, I tested their suitability in a southern context, in particular that of the Chenini oasis. By combining them and adapting them to the EXF protocol, I was able to verify their effectiveness in a hyper-politicized context. But above all, the research confirms that the tools and methods relatively matter, the aim being to set up a process of radical imagination in itself.

(3) Design as a Commons: Design as a common good is probably the most important aspect. The idea of design by all and for all was the central point. Everyone was designing with Manzini’s concept of diffuse design in mind. Here one could put forward the idea of thinking of design as a process of sharing but also of considering it as a common good in itself. Thinking of design as Commons has

allowed people to reclaim their imaginations and the means to realize them. Design as Commons has allowed activists and residents to (re)create a common imagination. A capacity that had been lost when the water disappeared. Perhaps it was a way of learning to become a community again. The principles of solidarity and mutual aid that are the essence of oasis communities had disappeared with the disappearance of water as nobody is interested in sharing a precarious common good (water). The process of radical imagination was based on a return to these practices of solidarity. If water is no longer a common good, design could become one.

If I have to draw conclusions that can be used for design theory, I would say that I have tried to bring a Southern perspective on socially and politically engaged design practice but also a North African perspective on design. In the context of the South, it was a matter of remembering but also of valuing ancestral knowledge and popular culture that are often forgotten or denigrated; of engaging in Epistemologies of the South and a pluriversal vision of the world. This experience has shown that the designer has a role to play in creating a community dynamic, but also in initiating a group dialogue around alternative economic imaginaries through this process of remembering. I see this research as a continuation of the discourses addressed by the Transitional Design and Autonomous Design approaches, bringing in practical experience in the context of the oases of Chenini and Jemna. It also goes under the provisional category of Design by/for/from the Global South proposed by Tony Fry (2017); perhaps it could be called a North African transitional design or simply a design for/by/from the oases.

### 7.1.2 Practices

In Gabes and Chenini in particular, some farmers and activists are struggling to protect the oasis from the effects of extractivism; locals suffer from the destruction of their environment in the last 50 years which was reminiscent of the notion of Solastalgia. Some continue to perpetuate ancestral practices of multi-level cultivation and water commoning, also preserving local seeds, — thus joining the discourse around food sovereignty—; but the oasis is a shadow of its former self, and many have lost all hope. (On a personal level, the fact that Gabes is my home town was an additional motivation) Jemna's experience, despite its success in becoming a symbol of peasant resistance, and a pioneering project in Tunisia of the social and solidarity economy continues its struggle for recognition; here one can talk about Contested Commons (Ben Slimane, 2020). The passage in Jemna, although cut short by the COVID-19 crisis, once again confirmed that the issue is linked to a crisis of the imagination. Faced with institutional and legislative blockages, the experiment could not be transformed into a real project around which the local community could rally; the association and its members found themselves isolated, leading to a gradual crumbling and loss of momentum. Again, the issue is related to the imaginary. In both cases (Chenini and Jemna) it was clear that local actors had to be brought together around a common vision of the future; to have a common project.

This situation revealed more questions than responses, particularly in comparison to what I had learned from the inhabitation, interviews and time spent with local population and activists. Through engagement with the locals in the oases we not only learned more about their daily struggles for autonomy but also about the history of the oases' social and natural ecosystems. I also learned more about the past and present of these two oases, especially in Chenini, by spending time with the people involved in such struggles. It was then a combination of my previous research and the different discussions I had with the different researchers that led me to the idea I had put forward around the possibility of organizing a workshop of the future in Chenini and Jemna in order to put the different actors around the same imaginary. I chose to create a kind of protocol and decided to divide the stay into two parts: a first part corresponding to the inhabitation of the oases and a second part

where I tried to organize a future workshop gathering local actors around a common vision of the future.

During the first part, observation, conversations and unstructured interviews were developed according to the context. I also thought that using the EXF framework was a good way to structure the whole experience (even if only indicative). By choosing to experiment with these different aspects, I hoped that it would provide openings to the research and that they would allow for questions that I could roughly formulate. I somehow integrated the EFR method into broader conversations and unstructured interviews in order to map the images held by residents of not only the future but also the past and present of the oasis. This helped identify stakeholders' concerns and expectations and confirmed my initial hypothesis about the need to organize such a meeting.

The designer's iterative way of thinking is perhaps what makes them special. My intention was to understand more deeply the challenges faced by the communities in Chenini and Jemna and to identify the actors working in these contexts. I also wanted to bring these actors to the table and engage them in a dialogue around the issues of food sovereignty and the Commons. I wanted this experience to be a kind of contribution that would join the many voices calling for a drastic change in the trajectory of the economic model; voices that call for thinking about new paths for the development of the agri-food system in order to build food sovereignty and remedy the effects of a dependent (colonized) and exporting agriculture.

The protocol of Ethnographic Experiential Futures (EXF) was combined with the technique of Future Workshop (FW), in an attempt to contribute to the prefiguration of forms of collective action that aim to improve the resilience of oasis communities:

*Map 1:* 4 weeks of inhabitation (discussions, observations, interviews, EFR) – identifying actors/challenges – understanding traditional practices and history of the territory – discussing about future scenarios (positive, pessimistic, probable scenarios)

*Multiply 2:* 1st day of workshop “critique” – confront/confirm/negate challenges with participants and discussion about possible/probable futures (showing videos) – showing alternative futures with existing examples – introducing community economies, Commons,

permaculture, indigenous/traditional knowledge as frameworks

*Mediate 3:* 1st half of 2nd day of workshop “fantasy” – turn negative to positive / imagine new scenarios around community economies – new/traditional practices of mutualism, solidarity, communing

*Mount 4:* 2nd half of 2nd day of workshop “implementation” – storytelling using the example of the traditional Hakawati (storyteller) about these preferable futures

*Map 5:* Inquired into and recorded responses to the experiential scenarios. Informal process using direct observation of people encountering the experiential scenarios

The answers came through the practice and the framework of Transition Design proved to be the most useful. I obviously had choices to make and Transition Design provided a clear approach that could be followed and possibly adapted. Irwin (2018) in this sense, “emphasizes that this approach is still in its infancy and is offered here as an invitation to other researchers and practitioners to provide feedback, critique, and engagement with the goal of co-constituting a new area of design interest aimed at systems-level change”(p. 971). I therefore followed the three-phase approach proposed by the Transition Design framework as a reference, with the intention of decentering the focus from Eurocentric accounts. This first intervention could correspond to the first phase, “Reframing the present and the future.” Thus, the Autonomous Design posture served as a backdrop, even though it is particularly related to the Latin American context.

I must confess that in both cases, at the beginning, I was an external agent to the context, simply interested in the experiences and struggles of the local population. The inhabitants of the two oases were used to receiving visits from researchers, often in agronomy, and civil society activists involved in issues of food sovereignty or the defense of the environment. Maybe one could not speak about communities even though in many ways, I could see the beginnings of community dynamics. I cannot speak of clear Commons either. Water, which was, for thousands of years, a common good, has been enclosed, and old practices of commoning are now only a vivid but vanished memory. Sometimes it seemed to me that we were talking

more about the past than the future or as much. I gained a deep knowledge about the reality of the field with a quite good understanding of the complexity of the issues faced by the oases and their inhabitants. But the workshop itself did not substantially challenge the reality. Nothing yet has been made on a practical level yet, except speculating together about the future of Chenini; for the case of Jemna, the experience certainly needed much more time in order to organize an encounter. Identifying challenges and stakeholders was the first intent of this first experience of inhabitation. The second intent was to gather these stakeholders in order to arrive at a shared definition of the problem and an understanding of its complexities and interdependencies.

This experience has proven the need for oasis inhabitants and other activists working to protect their territories to unite and transcend their differences in the present by co-creating visions of a shared and desirable long-term future. I was also aware of the shift in the posture of the designer; in practice, I was (as a designer) not at the center of the project playing instead a critical role as a facilitator or catalyst (Mages & Onufawa, 2019). I played a role for which I was not trained and was dealing with issues that at first glance were completely unrelated to design practice. Speaking of new ways of designing proposed by the Transition Design framework, I recognized myself, as the experience unfolded, in the figures of the “designer questioner”.

It is with the different representations of the past, present and future that I tried to help the inhabitants to make their future “visible” with words. Words were very important throughout the process, as I was convinced of the importance of orality in the local culture and tradition. I tried to follow de Sousa Santos and the type of workshops defined as co-learning experiences developed by the Popular University of Social Movements (PUSM). The assumption was that my role as a designer was to support the inhabitants in envisioning futures that were relevant to them. Being embedded in the context and not being an external agent helped to organize such a workshop.

Through the whole process, the long-term as well as collective engagement in the issues we wanted to transform, were made clear. The elements of endurance in time and collectivity we encounte-

red, were that which in most cases allowed for the emergence of an affective dimension, a dimension of care for each other. In both cases, I have been very well received by activists and passionate people who were intrigued by the approach I was proposing. I often had to explain the approach and the relationship of design to the challenges faced by the communities in both oases. This helped the people involved to challenge their own subjectivities and question the roots of their division which was the main obstacle to protecting their oasis. In the case of Chenini, this first experience served to lay the foundations for a dynamic of dialogue and collaboration. The importance of the past, of ancestral knowledge and of ancient commoning practices are also other elements to be taken into account at the end of this field research. I thus only tried to “bring my little grain of sand”, “my share of the Colibri” (hummingbird) as Pierre Rabhi would say, in the convergence of group dynamics that are already working for the protection of their livelihood.

In Jemna, I also felt that I had a role to play as a planner. However, unlike in the case of Chenini, I knew too little about the reality on the ground and the health crisis did not help. This is an essential starting point if you want to do Design per il Territorio, Transition Design, Autonomous Design, prefigurative or whatever design it is; one should choose to be part of a context in order to help catalyze certain dynamics. To take root like a tree. In this respect, the practice of permaculture design could undoubtedly be a way out. The design practice that I tried to deploy aimed in some way to create new social relationships around the Commons and a common future, while being aware of the certainty of collapse; a collapse that is already here.

I cannot extrapolate from an isolated experience, but know that in these two visits, my role as a catalyst convinced many people. The central ideas were that everyone had a responsibility and a role to play in solving problems. Collaboration is the basis of the approach I proposed. The long-term commitment and the feeling of sharing the same struggles, reminds us that I was not outside the context. It takes time to integrate into a given territory. Such design could not be practiced by being outside the context, so the designer would have to learn to be part of the landscape before thinking of putting his skills at the service of others to create alternative economic imaginaries. In Jemna, for example, I needed much more time before I could propose any process. Imagining a future around Commons, for food and energy autonomy was the horizon around which the

workshop participants agreed. The intention was to recreate, drawing on the history of the oasis and the context itself, a community economy that allows the inhabitants to regain control of their own future in the face of the continuing degradation of their livelihoods. Three profiles emerged as a research result. The figures are: (1) the designer historian, (2) the designer commoner, (3) the designer futurist:

(1) The designer historian: A designer who is interested in the past and seeks answers and solutions to present and future challenges.

(2) The designer commoner: a designer who works for the deployment of a diverse economy focused on the development of new Commons and the defense of old ones.

(3) The designer futurist: A designer recognizing the prospect of collapse and helping citizens and communities to design such a future now through radical imagination

## 7.2 Perspectives

I therefore intend to come back and continue the process in response to the request of several participants. In Chenini many insisted on the need to develop a pilot project that would bring together the different ideas that came out of the workshop. Considering the way, the two experiments unfolded, working individually fulfilling the field-research but alongside activists and farmers in the oases, it felt like I had established strong relations with local civil society and somehow shared the struggles of people both in Jemna and Chenini. At a personal level, developing such an experiment in my home country and my hometown especially responds to the call of Fry on digging where we stand.

A first tangible result of this research work is the recent constitution (February 2022) of the National Collective of the Oases of the Gulf of Gabes initiated by, among others, the activists, farmers and craftswomen who participated in the workshop organized in Chenini. The collective has set itself the goal of registering the oases of Gabes as part of UNESCO's intangible heritage; a project that has been on hold since 2008. The collective is also organizing several workshops to coordinate the efforts of citizens, activists, civil society and all the actors present in the area to safeguard the oases of Gabes. This collective is proof that the practice of such a design is possible. The most interesting evidence emerged from this experimental activity is the possibility to generate together a new/old economic imaginary in order to ground resistance in place (Tonkinwise, 2015) in the here and now: a different perspective able to show new path for the design research and to carry out not a simply theorized collaborative design approach, but one really rooted in the present and able to bring the involved communities and contexts in a feasible future. The main question remains that of the economic viability (in the broad sense of the term) of such a design practice.

In the end, Jemna was an experience that never became a project, but after meeting the different actors present in the territory (ci-

vil society, municipality, CRDA, IRA, etc.) to whom I had told about Chenini's experience, they all understood the interest of the process I wanted to promote. This motivated them to undertake a similar approach. The idea is to create a space for meetings and exchanges between public authorities on the one hand, civil society on the other and researchers as a third component. In Douz oasis, the activists of the Nakhla association, which like ASOC is part of the RADDO network, wanted to reproduce the experience initiated in Chenini.

I did not succeed in doing so because of the pandemic, but the idea remains valid and will undoubtedly be developed in the near future. Indeed, some have even proposed to develop a project "Citizen evaluation of the legal and legislative framework of oases in Tunisia" following a participatory approach with all actors of all Tunisian oases to elaborate a national code specific to oases; an approach similar to the one deployed by OTE and the association Nomad08 for the new water code in Tunisia. Indeed, oases do not benefit from a code defining a specific legal framework for them; they are thus considered either as simple agricultural areas or as forest areas. Speaking of cosmopolitan localism, the RADDO network could be a basis and a structure already in place to set up such a process.

## References Chapter 7

- Azmanova, A. (2020) Anti-Capital in the XXIst Century (on the metacrisis of capitalism and the prospects for radical politics). *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 46 (4). ISSN 0191-4537.
- Caffentzis, G., & Federici, S. (2014). Commons against and beyond capitalism. *Community Development Journal*, 49(suppl 1), i92–i105. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsu006>
- CASTRO-GÓMEZ, S. (2005). *La hybris del punto cero: Ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816)* (2nd ed.). Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15hvx8r>
- DiSalvo, C. (2016). "Design and Prefigurative Politics." *The Journal of Design Strategies*, Vol 8., No. 1 (2016): 29-35.
- Elzenbaumer, B. (2014). *Designing Economic Cultures: cultivating socially and politically engaged design practices against procedures of precarisation*. London: Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Elzenbaumer, B., Graziano, V., & Trogal, K. (2016). Introduction: The Politics of Commoning and Design. *DRS2016: Future-Focused Thinking*. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2016.614>
- Escobar, A. (2018), *Designs for the pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* Duke University Press.
- Fry, T. (2009). *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice*. In Google Books. Berg Publishers. [https://books.google.tn/books/about/Design\\_Futuring.html?id=cpxFY\\_aoieMC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.tn/books/about/Design_Futuring.html?id=cpxFY_aoieMC&redir_esc=y)
- Fry, T. (2017). Design for/by "The Global South". *Design Philosophy Papers*, 15(1): 3-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14487136.2017.1303242>
- Haiven, M. (2014). *Crises of imagination: capitalism, culture and resistance in a post-crash world*. London, England: Zed Books.
- Harvey, D. (2017). *Marx, capital and the madness of economic reason. The concept, the book, the history*. Profile Books.
- Irwin, T. (2015). *Transition Design: A Proposal for a New Area of Design Practice, Study, and Research, Design and Culture*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University.
- Irwin, T. (2018). The Emerging Transition Design Approach. *Cuadernos Del Centro de Estudios de Diseño Y Comunicación*, 73. <https://doi.org/10.18682/cdc.vi73.1043>
- Martinez-Alier, J. (2002) *The environmentalism of the poor: a study of ecological conflicts and valuation*. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Marttila, S., Botero, A., & Saad-Sulonen, J. (2014). Towards commons design in participatory design. *Proceedings of the 13th Participatory Design Conference on Short Papers, Industry Cases, Workshop Descriptions, Doctoral Consortium Papers, and Keynote Abstracts - PDC '14 - Volume 2*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2662155.2662187>
- Mignolo, W., De, A. J., Wynter, S., Gordon, L. R., & Duke. (2009). *La teoría política en la encrucijada descolonial*. Ediciones Del Signo.
- Tonkinwise, C. (2015). Design for Transitions – from and to what? *Design Philosophy Papers*, 13(1), pp.85–92.
- Vial, S. (2010). *Court traité du design*. Paris cedex 14: Presses Universitaires de France.





## Afterword

From my early years of university, I had been particularly attracted to the idea of a socially and politically engaged design practice. Until then I was a young car enthusiast who had chosen to follow his passion. I had to continue my studies abroad because no faculty offered such a course. In Tunisia, I could either join a school of arts and crafts, fine arts or architecture. The only school that offered courses entirely dedicated to design was the Ecole Supérieure des Sciences et Technologies du Design (ESSTD). Of course, the school did not offer training in automotive design, but I could nevertheless follow a course in product design. The school had three departments: one in product design, one in space design and one in image design. In the first department, industrial design, craft design and packaging were taught. The space department taught interior design and the image department offered courses in audiovisual and graphic design. So, I naturally decided to pursue a so-called fundamental degree in product design. This fundamental degree was different from the so-called applied degrees where students specialized specifically in industrial design, craft design or packaging. In the case of the program I had chosen, the training was more focused on design theory and allowed students to pursue a research master's degree.

Most of the students chose the space and image departments, depending on the opportunities on the Tunisian job market. Those who integrated the product department were mainly interested in industrial design and there was talk of becoming the new Tunisian Philippe Starck or Achille Castiglioni. The classic history of design was taught, born after the industrial revolution and the different movements that have evolved the practice and theory of design. The inevitable Arts & Crafts of William Morris in England, the Art Nouveau in France or the Bauhaus of Gropius and others in Germany were reviewed. The definition of design and the classic duo "dessin and dessein" were discussed along the notions of *esthétique industrielle* in France, compared to the Italian *progettazione* or the German *Gestalt*. Raymond Loewy was considered to be the founder of industrial design and his famous "ugly things sell badly". But at no time during the first years of the degree did we engage in a discourse around a design that would have been our own. Design was born in the West and we, the Third World, had to catch up with the backwardness we had accumulated in all fields. This perspective was rarely questioned, even if it bothered many. Dorra Bellamine, professor of design history, was already questioning us about the

European industrial boom and its colonial roots. The materials and resources used were directly extracted from colonies in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

A rapprochement between designers and artisans was one of the objectives of the teaching program; unfortunately, the interactions with the artisan village located next to the school were very limited. This was probably because the basic degree program I had chosen to follow was less extensive than the applied degree in craft design. So, we touched on everything, a bit of packaging, a bit of industrial design and a bit of craft design. The projects were product-centered and some of them included the ecological component and speeches around sustainable development. At the end of the degree, most of the students went on to become graphic designers (with some packaging) or interior designers. For those who chose to work as product designers, the choices were limited: either they chose to integrate a furniture company/factory, or they worked for Tunisian industrialists who subcontract for large European brands, especially in porcelain or textiles (just to name a few).

I also had a lot of trouble explaining to my family what I was really studying. It was hard to understand the role of the designer. I remember a discussion with my grandfather on this subject. He asked me what I was studying and what I could do once I was in the job market. I explained that my role was to design objects, which were going to be produced in an industrial way and to draw their technical drawings taking into account among other things the principles of ergonomics etc.

My grandfather naturally thought that I was studying engineering. I replied that he was not entirely wrong, but not entirely right, because I also had to think about the consumers and the sale of the products once they were launched on the market. To my surprise, my grandfather then talked to me about marketing, and once again he was neither right nor wrong. Not knowing how to explain to my grandfather the job for which I would one day be hired, he ended the discussion by hoping that “God would help me find my way”.

But why am I telling this story? More than ten years after this banal discussion, I still have not found my way; I’m talking about design of course. Design was new in Tunisia and the school was only ten years old. The ESSTD had however managed to impose itself in the landscape and to propagate the practice of small design in the Tunisian society. If my grandfather had difficulty understanding the studies I was doing, my parents’ generation had fewer difficulties. However, my parents were already worried about the lack of opportunities in the Tunisian market. As for me, I had realized, from my first years of study, that design was a body completely foreign to the context in which I had grown up. These early years of study had also coincided with the 2010-2011 revolution, which led to the flight of the dictator Ben Ali. The Tunisian revolution had only just begun, and in the period following the president’s

flight, there was a social, cultural and political frenzy. Tunisians had taken over the street/urban space and spontaneous participatory projects were multiplying. There were intense debates everywhere, around alternatives and we all dreamed of a new Tunisia. At ESSTD too there were debates about how we, as designers and creatives, could contribute to providing solutions to the many challenges the country was (and would be) facing. Indeed, everything seemed possible; we (students) even discussed a possible redesign of the curriculum, a return to a long cycle of 5 years (instead of the Bachelor, Master, Doctorate system) to focus on the reality of the country and adapt it to the Tunisian context.

Many of us (students) considered that the design we were being taught did not correspond to us. The teachers had received the message and in November 2011, just a few months after the event that we had organized, the ESSTD was the scene of the 7th edition of the Research Workshops in Design under the theme “Design: Savoir & Faire”. A conference organized by the University of Paris-Panthéon-Sorbonne, the University of Manouba Tunis, the Higher School of Design Sciences and Technologies of Tunis, Parsons School Paris, College of Doctoral Schools University Paris I Pantheon Sorbonne, Research Center Image, Cultures and Cognitions, University of Nimes. The French Alliance of Designers (AFD) considers that “the DRAs have really made things change (...) in the context of Tunisia and in the wake of the events of early 2011, this conference had a special resonance.

I confirm that this conference, which brought together a large network of French-speaking researchers in design, made the debates we had engaged until then evolve. I discovered for the first time the discipline of a so-called “social” design. After Alain Findelli, Brigitte Borja de Mozota, Stephane Vial and Bernard Darras (to name but a few), some of my professors, notably Hayla Meddeb and Aycha Ben Salah, became aware of our infatuation with this social design practice. They encouraged us to follow this path. Today there is even a Master’s degree in Design and Sustainable Development of Local Handicrafts; a master’s degree in the framework of a Tempus project in collaboration with the University of Florence in Italy, the ESSTD and two other Tunisian schools of arts and crafts, those of Sousse and Kasserine.

I was enthusiastic about this design that finally answered in some ways my questions of an ethical nature. But “the social does not make you eat bread” repeated to me ironically by my father, who was a staunch communist. I was already aware of the political dimensions that design implied. A political abundance had indeed occupied the daily life of Tunisians during the first years after the revolution. We saw the shockwave that our revolution had caused not only in the Arab countries, but also in the West, especially with the Occupy Wall Street movement denouncing the abuses of financial Capitalism. We talked about Marx and criticized the West for its

hypocrisy and neo-colonial practices. I also participated in the different debates that took place during the thirteenth edition of the World Social Forum that took place in Tunis from in 2013. From the top of my 23 years old, it was the occasion for me to understand the colonialist aspects of Capitalism; the epistemological domination of the latter and its extractivist mechanisms. During these years I had read the writings of Papanek (1971), Maldonado (1976), but also Foster (2002). The idea of inflation of design described by Foster and its implication in the endless circuit of production and consumption already appealed to me. Design was a “part of a greater revenge of Capitalism on postmodernism - a recouping of its crossings of arts and disciplines, a routinization of its transgressions (Foster, 2002; p.25)

Manzini and his Design for Social Innovation, dealing with wicked social problems where everybody designs were a kind of revelation. So, I decided to study abroad directly at the source, where for me the debates around this social design had been initiated. I wanted to study design in Italy, where the Radical Design and Anti Design movements were born. I was convinced that I was finally going to be reconciled with design. I naively believed that Design for Social Innovation could provide answers to the damages of the capitalist system. A few years later, I was in Rome to pursue a new master’s degree in product design, which offers studios in Design for Social Innovation and deals with co-design and People-Centered Design approaches. I attended the classes of Professor Imbesi and acted as his assistant during the years that followed. During the first editions, this studio was interested in temporary communities in Rome. I had followed for years the projects of international and Italian students who developed in the framework of the “Design’IN Rome workshop series” in close relationship with local communities, research-action projects, co-designing in different areas and neighborhoods of the capital. Design’IN Rome started from the Roman context, where urban communities share traditions, habits and ideas (Weber, 2005) with the aim of involving local communities in the design of specific solutions by exploiting technological discoveries (Smart objects and IoT) to improve livability in their areas.” (Denaro et. al, 2020)

Many of the projects were ingenious and some of them were developed but most remained prototypes. Mind you, the course simply wants to instill the practices of ethnography, rapid prototyping, and speculation in design apprentices, as well as the processes of co-design and Participatory Design. During these years I had been thinking about the Tunisian context, what I could do with what I had learned and how to put it into practice in the field. These years of the Master’s program coincided with what the European media called the “migration crisis”. As a Tunisian living in Italy, I was directly concerned by the issue of irregular migration, which my home and host countries are facing. The issue of migration seemed extremely complex because of highly politicized considerations, over which a designer has no power. Like many designers during the Syrian refugees’ crisis, I was interested in the question of what design could do to such a serious problem. I had therefore, shared the daily

life of Syrian refugees and undocumented migrants in the Netherlands, where I had done my final internship. I had for two months integrated the team of Maker Unite, a social enterprise that follows a deep knowledge of co-design based on “connectivity, localism, sharing and proportionality” (Krabbendam, Schwarz, 2013). The idea was to work on the social integration of refugees. The project won the What Design Can Do - Refugee Challenge Award from the United Nations Refugee Agency and the Ikea Foundation, as well as a spot in their accelerator program. The project seeks to address the social and environmental issues of the refugee crisis by meeting the definition of sustainable design as the link between social and ecological sustainability.

The project brings together both refugees (whom they prefer to call newcomers) and local residents in the co-design of engaging products and narratives, starting with the recycling of life jackets and boats accumulated on the shores of the Greek islands, which serve as entry points to Europe and cause environmental problems. But once I returned to Rome, I never got in touch with these people with whom I had shared a lot. Not because I didn't want to, nor did they (I hope), but simply because the project I had developed, as in the case of the Design'IN Rome projects, was limited in time. I was already questioning this Design for Social Innovation which was sometimes too focused on us, the designers; we, the actors of change, while our interventions (we designers), although ingenious, innovative and often poetic, remained transient, ephemeral and sometimes superficial. The humanitarian perspective and the discourse of a design for the other 90% disturbed me. I became convinced by the idea of guilt in design, even when it is driven by the most positive intentions, towards ecological and social sustainability. I am still convinced that designers have been active promoters of ideas of well-being and lifestyles that are fundamentally unsustainable. This long tirade around my own personal journey sums up to some extent the “bipolarity” I had developed in relation to design; a practice I had become fundamentally opposed to but which nevertheless continues to fascinate me. It is in this perspective that I decided to undertake this study.



## Acknowledgements

A doctoral dissertation is the result of the contribution of several people, both scientifically and humanely. No thesis is ever the product of one person alone, this is particularly the case here. I would like to thank the Ministero degli affari esteri e della cooperazione internazionale for the fellowship that made it possible for me to focus on this research for more than three years. In this regard I would like to thank his Excellency Mr. Moez Sinaoui the Ambassador of Tunisia in Italy for his helpfulness and availability.

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor professoressa Loredana Di Lucchio, whose support on every level during the past three years has been enormous, especially in managing my moods. My further gratitude goes to prof. Lorenzo Imbesi who always knew to challenge the details of my research.

I would also like to thank all the members of the PDTA doctoral collegium, for the environment of dialogue that they were able to create despite the pandemic crisis, but also the PDTA doctoral colleagues for sharing this journey together, exchanging ideas and supporting each other.

I also wish to acknowledge the support of the associations and institutions which allowed for the development of the inhabitations that propelled this research: the Association de Sauvegarde de l'Oasis de Chenini (ASOC), the Association pour la Sauvegarde des Oasis de Jemna (ASOJ), the association "Nakhla" in Douz, the municipality of Chenini, the municipality of Jemna, the Association Formes et Couleurs de l'Oasis (AFCO), Institut de Régions Arides (IRA) in Kebili, the Groupement de Développement Agricole of Chenini (GDA), the Cooperative of Chenini, the Association pour le Tourisme Social et Solidaire (ATSS), the association Volontariat Sans Frontière (VSFR), the Association Générale des Insuffisants Moteurs (AGIM).

I would as well like to thank the researchers and activists (in design and other domains) who have so kindly accepted to help me by dedicating some of their precious time and share their knowledge: Thank you Bianca Elzenbaumer, Maurizio Teli, Jose Vivero Pol, Hillary Carey, Houcine Rhili, Nada Trigui, Haythem Gasmi, Layla Riahi, Maura Benegiamo, Irène Carpentier, Laura Centemeri, Marc Breviglieri, Mohamed Kerrou, Mohamed Elloumi, Ouassim Labidi, Habib Ayeb, Irène Carpentier, Rim Math-

louthi, Samia Mouelhi, Lotfi Ben Aissa, Ernest Riva, Abdebasset Hamrouni, Azza Rajhi, Ramla Ayadi. I value deeply the friendship and debates that have taken place.

A very special thanks goes to: Taher Tahri, Abdennasser Ben Ahmed, Ahmed Abdeddayem, Zacharia Hachmi, Mabrouk Jabri, my travel companions met during this journey, for having welcomed me, sharing their home, food, stories, ideas, dreams but also struggles and pains. I do not forget either: Saad Idoudi, Khaled Jabri, Walid Ncib, Kraiem Ben Salah, Touhami Hamadi Nbili, Soumaya Razgallah, Léa Ovet, Alexia Hariri, Nizar Kabaou, Adnen Abdeljawad and all the others.

Thanks to my parents for always believing in me and for having cultivated in me freedom and critical sense; nothing would have been possible without you.

Thank you to my grandmother Rabia for her wisdom, her ideas and her reflections which, at a certain moment, turned this research work upside down. Thanks to all my family uncles, aunts and cousins for their support.

Thanks to Ameni for an infinite number of reasons.

Thanks to Walid my lifelong friend for his omnipresence and for having shaken me when it was necessary.

Thanks to Chiara, Imed, Afif, Samantha, Thamer, Luce, Hbib and Elena for putting up with my daily antics. Thanks to Ahmed and Wajdi for staying despite my absence. Thanks to Leith for helping me when I needed a break. Thanks to Marta and Clara for supporting me even before I started this adventure. To all the above, and to friends and colleagues whose names I cannot list here and who have supported me in many possible ways: thank you.

