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QANAT's Artistic Engagement with Morocco's  
Water Stress: Practising Ways of Living Together

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Master in Human Rights and Democratisation:  
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*The Institute of Political Science at Saint Joseph University does not intend to give any approval or disapproval to the opinions expressed in this thesis. These opinions belong solely to their author.*

## Abstract

This thesis examines how the Marrakech-based collective QANAT reframes the commons through its artistic response to Morocco's water crisis. Guided by the principle of the 'poetics and politics of water,' QANAT addresses the commons as both a central theme and an organising structure. The research is based on ethnographic fieldwork using participant observation, interviews, and document analysis, informed by actor-network theory to describe the relations between human and non-human actors within the collective. Additionally, a diffractive analysis is used to show how QANAT's public work and organisational practices are intertwined in their understanding of the commons. Engaging with debates in political ecology and artistic responses to the climate crisis, the thesis highlights QANAT's focus on local knowledge systems, particularly those of women in Marrakech's Medina. Over time, QANAT has developed shared artistic methodologies that contribute to creating a knowledge commons. By experimenting with community gardens and engaging with Marrakech's history, the platform links concrete practice to broader discussions on the politics of water and critiques of neoliberal food systems, fostering collective responses to water politics and urban challenges.



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## Introduction

In the wake of Morocco's urgent water crisis, different actors seek to engage with the issue. One of them is QANAT, a multi-disciplinary arts collective based in Marrakech. It consists of researchers, activists, and artists, profiling itself as "a collective platform that explores the politics and poetics of water in Morocco and beyond to reflect and act upon the multiple contextual understandings and forms of (re)production of the commons."<sup>1</sup> Their practice is not easily pinned down to one singular thing; they organise workshops, lectures, screenings, and artistic interventions and are actively involved in community organising. They operate locally in collaboration with cultural institutions such as Dar Bellarj and LE18 and present their work in partnership with international partners and on global platforms such as Documenta XV.

The practice of QANAT, as a collective intersecting politics and arts, in their case by addressing political issues of natural resources in the context of the climate crisis, is not a stand-alone in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). For example, in Palestine, the collective Sakiya is framing its ecological work on seed preservation within artistic practices and discourses, and the artistic collective Yamaa-Al Yad in Lebanon is taking collective action as the starting point for their artistic practice. What these collectives share is their direct engagement with politics through artistic methods expressed through the notion of the commons. This thesis seeks to understand the merging of these two practices: the artistic and the political. It will do this by focusing on the case of QANAT and its artistic methods of engaging with water issues in Morocco by exploring how they reframe the notion of the commons.

Their research-based artistic practice intersects two entry points into the broader field of studies building on political ecology. Political ecology is a research field that seeks to understand ecology within a broader web of power relations, inquiring how global hierarchies and economic systems impact climate change and environmental degradation.<sup>2</sup> The first entry into the debate on political ecology is the body of work that addresses water stress in Morocco through a political lens, highlighting a.o. the marginalisation of women,<sup>3</sup> the relevance and

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<sup>1</sup> "QANAT," *QANAT*, accessed August 6, 2024, [https://qanat.org/QANAT\\_INFO](https://qanat.org/QANAT_INFO).

<sup>2</sup> Jason Roberts, "Political Ecology," in *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Felix Stein, facsimile of the first edition in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (2020; 2023): 1-17, <http://doi.org/10.29164/20polieco>.

<sup>3</sup> Dina Najjar, Hanson Nyantakyi-Frimpong, Rachana Devkota, and Abderrahim Bentaibi, "A Feminist Political Ecology of Agricultural Innovations in Smallholder Farming Systems: Experiences from Wheat Production in

lack of representation of local knowledge (systems),<sup>4</sup> and the negative consequences of the modernisation of agriculture.<sup>5</sup> It highlights the urgency to research different knowledge systems and represent local knowledge in the context of climate adaptation, especially the knowledge and practices of women.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, there is a field of studies that seeks to understand the artistic projects that engage with the climate crisis, intersecting the humanities, ecological research and social sciences. While this growing body of work covers many regions worldwide, the MENA region is understudied, with only a few publications available despite the urgency of the climate crisis in the region. This study will focus on the common ground between these approaches: the concept of the commons. While this notion is central in the discourse and practice of QANAT, scholars also call for the urgency to reimagine new directions of the commons within the urgency of the climate crisis while highlighting the role of the arts in reimagining these new directions.<sup>7</sup>

Building on these discussions, I seek to address the following main- and subquestions within this thesis:

- How does QANAT reframe the notion of the commons through its engagement with the poetics and politics of water?
  - How can we understand the collective in the way QANAT functions as an organisation?
  - What is the relevance of the relationship between QANAT's local embeddedness and its international relations?
  - How does QANAT approach knowledge production, considering how it integrates different knowledge systems (local, academic, and artistic) in its interdisciplinary practice?

This thesis is structured in three chapters. In the first chapter, I will discuss the academic debates mentioned in the previous paragraph in more detail. In the first section of this chapter,

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Morocco and Uzbekistan," *Geoforum* 146 (2023), 103865: 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103865>.

<sup>4</sup> Peter J. Jacques, "Civil Society and Survival: Indigenous Amazigh Climate Adaptation in Morocco," *Global Environmental Change* 81 (2023), 102682: 1-26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102682>.

<sup>5</sup> Annabelle Houdret, "The Water Connection: Irrigation, Water Grabbing and Politics in Southern Morocco," *Water Alternatives* 5, no. 2 (2012): 284-303.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Kmoch, Tim Pagella, Matilda Palm, and Fergus Sinclair, "Using Local Agroecological Knowledge in Climate Change Adaptation: A Study of Tree-Based Options in Northern Morocco," *Sustainability* 10, no. 10 (2018), 3719: 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10103719>.

<sup>7</sup> Amy J. Elias, "Art and the Commons," *ASAP/Journal* 1, no. 1 (January 2016): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2016.0008>.

I will review the literature that takes on a political ecological approach to the water stress in Morocco by addressing, firstly, the general insights of the field, secondly, analysing the insights on recent agricultural policy, the Morocco Green Plan, and lastly, showing how historical research highlights some of the political roots of the current water stress. In the second section, I will address the debate on artistic engagement with the climate crisis. I will discuss the little literature on the MENA region that points towards some central topics: the problematic binary between modernisation and tradition, the garden, and the commons. Finally, I will integrate these insights to illustrate from a theoretical point of view how the role of aesthetics can contribute to the formation of a knowledge commons.

In the second chapter, I will lay out my research methodology. In this thesis, I will follow Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as laid out by Bruno Latour as a methodology. This will be used to initially organise data and trace the different actors involved in the assemblage that makes up QANAT. However, since ANT has been criticised for its relativist position I will build on the ontological insights of Donna Haraway as developed within her seminal concept of situated knowledge. Following this ontological perspective, I will deploy a diffractive reading of my data in addition to ANT. Diffraction takes two (or more) seemingly different patterns or differences and studies how these differences interfere and create a new pattern that is not reducible to either one of these differences. Understanding diffractively, on the one hand, how QANAT is organised, and on the other, the work they present, we get an understanding of how QANAT explores new pathways of the commons.

The third, and last chapter, entails the analysis of the gathered data. This chapter is structured in three sections. In the first section, I will provide an overview of the origin history of the collective and illustrate their general modus operandi, illustrating how they shifted over time from a public program towards a collective platform. This will answer the first subquestion. In the second section, I will address the question of the global/local nexus, illustrating how one fundamental aspect of their practice evolves around the way their work is embedded within the locality of Marrakech while at the same time operating within an international context. I will show how they connect local issues to a global conversation by unpacking their relationship with Palestine and South Africa. In the third part of this chapter, I will unpack their approach to knowledge production answering the third and last subquestion by analysing their understanding of knowledge as situated, their methodologies, and the way how they make knowledge accessible through their practice of archiving.

Integrating these insights, I argue this can contribute to an understanding of QANAT as a knowledge commons where theory and practice meet. It shows how the platform focuses on local knowledge systems, especially representing the knowledge held by women living in the Medina of Marrakech. Drawing on relational aesthetics, over time, it developed shared artistic methodologies that can be seen as an ideational resource that, together with their archiving practice, lay the groundwork for becoming a knowledge commons. By practising ways of living together, they seek to overcome ontological differences to establish collective desire in their central engagement with the politics of water and the politics of the city in particular. Materialised in its experimentation with community gardens and Marrakech's history tied to it, it connects a concrete practice to critical discussions on the politics of water and neoliberal food systems.

# Chapter 1: The Politics and Poetics of Water

## Introduction

*In February this year, the Moroccan government announced a ‘water-rationing campaign’ including the decision to limit the opening days of the public hammams to four days a week.<sup>8</sup> This announcement sparked a lot of criticism, including an open letter from The National Federation of Associations of Owners and Managers of Traditional Hammams and Showers contesting the decision, stating that it wouldn’t have any effect as people would shift to washing at home.<sup>9</sup> Media outlet Hespress underlines this claim by stating that it will impact the 200.000 employees in the sector, while the sector makes up only 2% of the direct water consumption, compared to 87% by agriculture.<sup>10</sup>*

*The Water Museum in Marrakech takes the visitor on a tour through the history of water management in Morocco. The museum tour starts with some bold facts on the unsustainable management of groundwater resources and the threats of climate change, followed by a celebration of traditional irrigation methods. In the end, the exhibition culminates in an overview of water management by the Moroccan government, celebrating the extensive dam projects of Hassan II, the initiation of the Water Conference, and the way Mohammad VI took over the legacy with his agricultural reform policy.*

*On November 1<sup>st</sup>, the YouTube channel Visit Morocco, owned by the Moroccan National Tourist Office, published a video called ‘Discovering Figuig, Morocco's Hidden Oasis.’ The video’s description tells us the following: “Nestled within the Sahara Desert, this desert paradise charms with its mesmerizing beauty and tranquil allure. Lose yourself in the surreal sensation of serenity as you wander through the ancient palm groves, and soak in its timeless charm and unspoiled nature.”<sup>11</sup> November also marks the start of an ongoing series of protests in the same oasis town rejecting the privatisation of water.<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Safaa Kasraoui, "Drought: Morocco's Water Restrictions Extend to Hammams, Car Washes," *Morocco World News*, January 25, 2024, <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2024/01/360373/drought-moroccos-water-restrictions-extend-to-hammams-car-washes>.

<sup>9</sup> Imane Lechheb, "Morocco's Restrictions on Public Baths Sparks Debate Amid Drought Crisis," *Hespress*, February 6, 2024, <https://en.hespress.com/79352-moroccos-restrictions-on-public-baths-sparks-debate-amid-drought-crisis.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Visit\_Morocco\_, "Discovering Figuig, Morocco's Hidden Oasis," YouTube video, 5:21, November 1, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g4NoS99NLY>.

<sup>12</sup> Ilhem Rachidi, "Figuig: The Rebellious Oasis Town Fighting Water Privatisation in Morocco," *New Arab*, March 1, 2024, <https://www.newarab.com/features/figuig-and-fight-against-water-privatisation-morocco>.

These three vignettes illustrate some of the complexities, contradictions and challenges of water management in Morocco. The first two paragraphs give some insight into the approach and discourse of the government of Morocco. The issue of water stress is undeniable, and the Moroccan government acknowledges the impact of climate change and actively seeks ways to adapt. At the same time two of the country's main industries, agriculture and tourism, are seriously implicated in water stress, creating tensions between financial interests and water security. In line with this urgent crisis, the water crisis, the academic discourse on Morocco's water management is diverse, ranging from depoliticised management approaches to more critically engaged research challenging power dynamics. In this chapter, I will provide a review of the existing academic literature in order to situate QANAT within this plurality of voices on water.

Following QANAT's focus on the poetics and politics of water and the broader engagement with the notion of the commons, this chapter will be structured in two sections. The first section will address the literature on the politics of water. It will provide an overview and critical reading of the knowledge produced concerning water stress and a presentation of the academic debates and theoretical concepts concerning the political challenges that come with it. The second section will engage with the poetics of water by laying out the broader academic discussion on artistic engagement with the climate crisis. Following QANAT's artistic practice and its framing as a collective platform, I will develop a theoretical framework connecting the concept of relational aesthetics to practices of artistic knowledge production and the notion of the commons.

## 1.1 The Politics of Water

### 1.1.1 Political Ecology

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have often been portrayed as a dry, homogenous geographical area with infertile land and poor water resources where issues such as water stress and a lack of food security are blamed on the natural conditions of the area.<sup>13</sup> However, this view does not take into consideration that the way how agriculture is practiced, and therefore the way how water is managed, is by no means coincidental. This is illustrated by scholars Roland Riachi and Giuliano Martiniello, who highlight that this depiction of the

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<sup>13</sup> Roland Riachi and Giuliano Martiniello, "Manufactured Regional Crises: The Middle East and North Africa under Global Food Regimes," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 23, no. 4 (October 2023): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12547>; Clemens Hoffmann, "Environmental Determinism as Orientalism: The Geo-Political Ecology of Crisis in the Middle East," in *War, Revolt and Rupture: The Historical Sociology of the Current Crisis in the Middle East*, special issue, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 31, no. 1 (March 2018): 94-104.

MENA region portrays water scarcity as a natural consequence leading from the area's climate and does not consider the power dynamics that underpin food systems.<sup>14</sup> To oppose this image, they present an overview of the different paradigms that shaped agriculture in the MENA, illustrating how colonial interests led to mono-cropping, how self-sufficiency became an objective during the Cold War, and how recent and current agricultural policy is market-driven and shaped by neoliberalism.<sup>15</sup> Such an approach provides a lens to understand the food and water crisis as a *manufactured* crisis, instead of a natural crisis, a management crisis, or a depoliticised explanation of climate change. Understanding ecological concerns as manufactured more broadly builds on the theoretical concept of political ecology. This notion stems from anthropological research that seeks to understand how power relations and economic structures enhance environmental change and differs from an apolitical understanding of ecological concerns.<sup>16</sup> It is a contextual approach that understands ecological systems as power-laden and implicated within a broader international network of actors.<sup>17</sup> The analytical approach of political ecology has been widely adopted within different fields of study. It, therefore, becomes the point of departure and a pivotal notion within this thesis, as it has its ramifications within the context of water stress and management in Morocco. At the same time, the concept is also adapted in order to understand the relation between ecology and aesthetics and reoccurs in the discussion of the notion of the commons. It, therefore, forms a common ground between the different academic debates that situate QANAT's practice.

### **Political Ecology within the context of Morocco**

The notion of political ecology has become a significant concept in the debate around ecological issues, agriculture and water in Morocco. As the field has its origins in cultural anthropology, in the Moroccan context several ethnographic field studies have been conducted. For example, Dominguez et al. illustrate how the decline of the *agdal*, an agro-sylvo-pastoral governance system, in the High Atlas Mountains can be linked to the replacement of local worldviews driven by socioeconomic and cultural-political forces.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Roland Riachi and Giuliano Martiniello, "Manufactured Regional Crises: The Middle East and North Africa under Global Food Regimes," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 23, no. 4 (October 2023): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12547>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Roberts, "Political Ecology," 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 13.

<sup>18</sup> Pablo Dominguez, Alain Bourbouze, Sébastien Demay, Didier Genin, and Nicolas Kosoy, "Diverse Ecological, Economic and Socio-Cultural Values of a Traditional Common Natural Resource Management System in the Moroccan High Atlas: The Aït Ikiss," *Environmental Values* 21, no. 3 (2012): 277-296, <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327112X13400390125939>.

Echoing the vulnerabilities of local knowledge systems, other scholars highlight that traditional knowledge of women in Morocco is an integral part of the production of natural products, while it's not officially recognised by employers and national legislation.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, local knowledge is widely considered relevant within the context of climate adaptation.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, within Amazigh communities, poverty and social marginalisation are experienced as the biggest threats and obstacles to climate adaptation.<sup>21</sup> In North Africa at large, Morocco is considered the most vulnerable to climate change because of the significance of agriculture for the country's economy and poor communities in particular.<sup>22</sup> Several studies have been conducted that highlight the exploitation and marginalisation of small-scale farming practices and the struggle over (ground)water resources.<sup>23</sup> Reoccurring in these analyses is the notion of gender, for example, showing how new modernised and subsidised farming favours traditional gender roles benefitting a small group of young men, making others, including women, invisible.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, scholar Dina Najjar challenges the modernisation discourse in relation to gender, illustrating, among other reasons, how women are less likely to adapt to technological innovation, due to gender dynamics in the household and due to the stereotype that women are not farmers.<sup>25</sup>

Many of these studies focus on specific regions and do research with rural communities seeking to understand how they negotiate water access and how they are affected or trying to adapt to the climate crisis, often highlighting the role of women and, in particular, the necessity of including their knowledge. While some studies have been conducted on water quality in the urban context of Marrakech,<sup>26</sup> research that focuses on communities in the city

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<sup>19</sup> Bernadette Montanari and Sylvia I. Bergh, "Why Women's Traditional Knowledge Matters in the Production Processes of Natural Product Development: The Case of the Green Morocco Plan," *Women's Studies International Forum* 77 (2019): 102275, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.102275>.

<sup>20</sup> Kmoch, et al., "Using Local Agroecological Knowledge in Climate Change Adaptation," 1-17; Bernadette Montanari and Sylvia I. Bergh, "Why Women's Traditional Knowledge Matters in the Production Processes of Natural Product Development: The Case of the Green Morocco Plan," *Women's Studies International Forum* 77 (2019): 102275, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.102275>.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques, "Civil Society and Survival," 1-26.

<sup>22</sup> Janpeter Schilling, Korbinian P. Freier, Elke Hertig, and Jürgen Scheffran, "Climate Change, Vulnerability and Adaptation in North Africa with Focus on Morocco," *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment* 156 (2012): 12-26, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agee.2012.04.021>.

<sup>23</sup> Houdret, "The Water Connection," 284-303; Pierre-Louis Mayaux and Amal Ennabih, "Troubled Waters: The Fraught Political Economy of Wastewater Reuse in Morocco and Tunisia," *Water Alternatives* 16, no. 2 (2023): 541-562.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa Bossenbroek and Margreet Zwarteveen, "New Spaces for Water Justice?: Groundwater Extraction and Changing Gendered Subjectivities in Morocco's Saïss Region," in *Water Justice*, ed. Rutgerd Boelens, Tom Perreault, and Jeroen Vos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 341-342.

<sup>25</sup> Najjar et al., "Feminist Political Ecology," 1-17.

<sup>26</sup> Sana Chaoua, Samia Boussaa, Abdelhay El Gharmali, and Ali Boumezzough, "Impact of Irrigation with Wastewater on Accumulation of Heavy Metals in Soil and Crops in the Region of Marrakech in Morocco," *Journal of the Saudi Society of Agricultural Sciences* 18, no. 4 (2019): 429-436,

and the representation of their knowledge seems to be lacking. This thesis aims to illustrate how QANAT's artistic practice engages with local knowledge of women in the Medina of Marrakech in relation to water stress.

### 1.1.2 The Green Morocco Plan

The literature mentioned above works through case studies zooming in on particular communities to understand the political dynamics at play within regions of the country. More broadly, the academic debate around agriculture and water accessibility largely focuses on the Green Morocco Plan (GMP), an investment plan launched by the King of Morocco in 2007. This investment plan bears the promise of green innovation and sustainability, and with GMP The Kingdom of Morocco has been able to position itself internationally as the forerunner of environmental sustainability and has been lauded for its green policy.<sup>27</sup> This green image that Morocco seeks to create internationally is not without other agendas, as Katharina Elisabeth Nicolai explains that “[p]romoting environmental sustainability has become a public relations coup for the Kingdom and Morocco’s assertive propagation of environmental sustainability policy has become a robust component of creating outward legitimation, with King Mohammed VI at its green heart.”<sup>28</sup>

While the GMP allowed the King to promote a green image of Morocco, the negative consequences of the GMP have also been extensively discussed in academic literature. Nicolai highlights as well that two aspects of Morocco’s economy are at odds with their green (foreign) policy: “Mass tourism and intensive export-oriented agriculture, two sectors of central importance to Morocco’s economy, further aggravate pollution, environmental degradation and water scarcity.”<sup>29</sup> While these industries conflict with the sustainability ambitions, tourism and profit-driven agriculture remained a priority.<sup>30</sup> This is precisely what we see in the vignette of the introduction of this chapter. While the pastoral communities of Figuig are protesting against further water privatisation, the Moroccan government is promoting the area for touristic purposes.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssas.2018.02.003>; Yassir Barkouch, El Khadiri Mohy Eddine, and Alain Pineau, "A New Approach to Understanding Well Water Contamination by Heavy Metals at a Mining Extract Region in Marrakech, Morocco," *Polish Journal of Environmental Studies* 25, no. 3 (2016): 1347-1351, <https://doi.org/10.15244/pjoes/40146>.

<sup>27</sup> Katharina Elisabeth Nicolai, "A Green Gambit: The Development of Environmental Foreign Policy in Morocco," *The Journal of North African Studies* 27, no. 4 (2022): 733, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2020.1865931.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 731.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 727.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 727.

One could argue that despite the international agenda and this balancing act between different financial interests, the government at least seeks to respond to the climate crisis. Nonetheless, several scholars have criticised the results of the GMP from several perspectives. It has been criticised for being at stake with food sovereignty, as it has destabilised small-scale agriculture, while increasing water scarcity and the need to import food.<sup>31</sup> From a policy perspective, without critically engaging with the set motives, Nicolas Faysse shows that “the aim of the Green Morocco Plan (...) to transform rural areas through improved economic performance [was not met], due to inaccuracies in its rationale, its focus is generally limited to enhancing agricultural production.”<sup>32</sup> More critical perspectives illustrate how “the entangled set of ideological, material, political and technical processes embodied within the Green Morocco Plan favours a reductionist view of agricultural development as increasing yields and profits. In so doing, such a view perpetuates efforts to ‘modernise’ smallholder/family farming.”<sup>33</sup> While in reality this aim to modernise small-scale farming leads to destabilisation. In line with this critical perspective, a case study on the consequences of the GMP highlights how rural women, who are intended to benefit from the GMP barely or don’t profit at all from the plan.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, while the GMP campaign is focused on attracting foreign investors it creates tensions with traditional agricultural approaches that see natural resources as common properties.<sup>35</sup> In line with this critique on the production of water-intensive crops, Abdelmajid Saidi and Mohammed Diouri, remark that, despite some positive results such as the reduction of the poverty rate and the improvement of the Agricultural Gross Domestic Product, the GMP is in tension with the food sovereignty of Morocco, as it makes Morocco “increasingly dependent on the world market either to export its agricultural products or to import its needs for cereals.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.,” 728.

<sup>32</sup> Nicolas Faysse, "The Rationale of the Green Morocco Plan: Missing Links between Goals and Implementation," *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 4 (2015): 622–34, doi:10.1080/13629387.2015.1053112.

<sup>33</sup> Andrea Mathez and Alex Loftus, "Endless Modernisation: Power and Knowledge in the Green Morocco Plan," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 6, no. 1 (May 16, 2022): 94, doi:10.1177/2514848622110154.

<sup>34</sup> Bernadette Montanari and Sylvia I. Bergh, "A Gendered Analysis of the Income Generating Activities under the Green Morocco Plan: Who Profits?" *Human Ecology* 47, no. 2019 (July 10, 2019): 409–417, doi:10.1007/s10745-019-00086-8.

<sup>35</sup> Lisa Bossenbroek, Hind Ftouhi, Zakaria Kadiri, and Marcel Kuper, "Watermelons in the Desert in Morocco: Struggles around a Groundwater Commons-in-the-Making," *Water Alternatives* 16, no. 1 (2023): 104.

<sup>36</sup> Abdelmajid Saidi Saidi and Mohammed Diouri, "Food Self-Sufficiency under the Green Morocco Plan," *Journal of Experimental Biology and Agricultural Sciences* 5, no. Spl-1-SAFSAW (2017): 38, DOI: 10.18006/2017.5(Spl-1-SAFSAW).S33.S40.

One significant topic of policy is the question of water management. It is commonly accepted that the accessibility of water is a question of management.<sup>37</sup> However more critical voices nuance this idea, as Houdret argues that: “water management is deeply rooted in established social and political relationships at national and local levels, facilitating or hindering, but always affecting governance.”<sup>38</sup> In addition to this, Kuper et al. state that groundwater management has been rather a dynamic interplay between formal rules and informal practice, but instead of focusing on sustainable use, have been focused on maintaining socio-political compromises.<sup>39</sup> This interplay is illustrated by Bossenbroek et al., who did research on the social and commoning practices around water sharing in the context of the Drâa Valley where watermelon production has expanded rapidly.<sup>40</sup> They highlight that research that seeks alternative ways of groundwater governance remains rare, despite the relevance of pluralising existing ways of groundwater management, and therefore calls for investigating the “messy everyday social practices of groundwater communities.”<sup>41</sup> Although the everyday practices around groundwater management, in particular, fall out of the scope of this thesis, the work of QANAT does engage with the commons on the one hand and the everyday social practices of local communities on the other.

### 1.1.3 Historical Analysis

Lastly, there is a significant body of work that roots the current water stress historically, tracing some of the issues faced today back to the colonial protectorate phase and the state-building period after independence. After Algeria in 1830, and Tunisia in 1881, Morocco lost its independence to France relatively late, in 1912. The main chief figure of France’s protectorate over Morocco was Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey, whose policies and vision, according to historian Susan Gilson Miller, shaped France’s forty-four-year reign.<sup>42</sup> His ruling was characterized by his belief that the protectorate structure gave France the opportunity to bring Western progress, without changing the fundamental ‘soul’ of the people.<sup>43</sup> Regarding agriculture, and hence water, Lyautey sought a different approach than France had executed in Algeria, opposing intensive rural colonization. Yet, despite his aim to not intervene in

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<sup>37</sup> Houdret, "The Water Connection," 284.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>39</sup> Marcel Kuper, Hichem Amichi, and Pierre-Louis Mayaux, "Groundwater Use in North Africa as a Cautionary Tale for Climate Change Adaptation," *Water International* 42, no. 6 (2017): 725-740, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2017.1351058>.

<sup>40</sup> Bossenbroek et al., "Watermelons in the Desert in Morocco," 16, no. 1 (2023).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>42</sup> Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 89.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 90.

Morocco's identity and to limit colonisation of rural land to a 'superior' class of 'gentlemen farmers' it led to a wave of migration that was accommodated by a massive transfer of land, in which Makhzen, tribal, and even privately held land shifted from Moroccan to European ownership.<sup>44</sup> Miller continues to explain:

Much of the newly acquired land was put into grain production, with the intention of turning Morocco into the breadbasket of France; cropland planted to grain increased sixty percent in the decade between 1919 and 1929, without regard for the fact that growing grain in drought-prone Morocco was an expensive and risky plan.

Meanwhile, thousands of acres of collectivized land changed hands, leaving whole tribes without a means of livelihood.<sup>45</sup>

Following, in 1930 the world price of grain dropped enormously and Morocco was faced with a massive plague of locusts.<sup>46</sup> This led to the decision to abandon "the dream of recreating 'the granary of Rome,' and turned instead to the model of a 'French California'"<sup>47</sup> that entailed the cultivation of high-value citrus fruits and vegetables on irrigated lands. A shift that Miller considers as having important consequences for Morocco's agricultural future.<sup>48</sup>

In line with agricultural reform and the expropriation of agricultural land in favour of facilitating the settlement of foreign colonists in rural areas, two major changes in water management can be marked: a change in ownership of water resources, and the establishment of large water reservoirs through hydraulic installations.<sup>49</sup> Along with this 'modernisation' of infrastructure, also traditional methods of water sharing and ownership changed.<sup>50</sup> This legal change not only deprived the indigenous communities of their access to water, but also affected the land and juridical cultures that gave meaning to the social practices connected to the sharing of water resources.<sup>51</sup> More recently, scholars have argued that "deforestation and soil erosion are the long-term results of the introduction of private property to the Gharb and the very ecological crimes for which European scholars had been condemning nomadic

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>49</sup> Carmen Ascanio-Sanchez, Miguel Suárez Bosa, and Juan Carlos Almeida Pérez, "Tradition and Modernity: The Water Sector in Morocco during the French Protectorate (1912–1956)," *African Historical Review* 51, no. 1 (2019): 68, DOI: 10.1080/17532523.2019.1628491.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>51</sup> Adam Guerin, "Disaster Ecologies: Land, Peoples and the Colonial Modern in the Gharb, Morocco, 1911–1936," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59, no. 3 (2016): 333, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43919278>.

groups for decades.”<sup>52</sup> So, the agricultural reforms with its human and environmental consequences “were not accidental but central to the realisation of a particular brand of colonial modernity in Morocco.”<sup>53</sup> More concretely, one of the legacies of the protectorate is the shift to an export-oriented agricultural sector.<sup>54</sup>

Several scholars analyse how certain narratives or imageries that are rooted in the colonial protectorate phase continue to shape agricultural policy after independence. Scholar Diana Davis illustrates how the agricultural policy of the Late King Hassan II was built on the idea that the privatisation of land to specialise and invest in one or a few crops for export led to higher productivity, making it more efficient to import other crops than aiming for food sovereignty. With loans from the World Bank irrigated agriculture focused on export crops expanded, while “investment and development of the ‘traditional’, non-irrigated sector stagnated.”<sup>55</sup> In addition to this, there was also another pervasive narrative that was adopted to justify further land privatisation. It was said that nomadic farmers and herders would have over-abundant livestock that leads to overgrazing and therefore to environmental degradation such as erosion and soil degradation, despite support of data demonstrating this.<sup>56</sup> So despite the lack of evidence for these narratives, they formed the basis for agricultural reform, that resulted in a vast ‘modernisation’ of building large dams disrupting hydrological systems and traditional water distribution networks.<sup>57</sup> This modernisation of the irrigation sector “has raised the water table in places, causing salinization and water logging, and it has lowered it in others making water more difficult and expensive to obtain.”<sup>58</sup>

In line with these narratives, also the imagery of the Californian Dream contributed to shaping today’s agricultural policy. This idea, based on Californian agriculture with irrigated land in an arid area, remained a pervasive imaginary after independence. This image was used to justify the plantation of water-intensive crops such as citrus fruits.<sup>59</sup> Despite growing evidence of being fundamentally unsustainable this imagery led to a particular type of agriculture that is still in place today. Also Mathez and Loftus argue that these ideas of comparative

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>54</sup> Diana K. Davis, "Neoliberalism, Environmentalism, and Agricultural Restructuring in Morocco," *The Geographical Journal* 172, no. 2 (June 2006): 90.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>59</sup> Marcel Kuper, Pierre-Louis Mayaux, and Ahmed Benmihoub, "The Persistent Appeal of the California Agricultural Dream in North Africa," *Water Alternatives* 16, no. 1 (2023): 46.

advantage remained pervasive and are also reflected in recent agricultural reforms such as the MGP.<sup>60</sup> This reaffirms the aforementioned thesis of Riachi and Martiniello of how regional crises, such as the food and water crisis, are manufactured and do not stem from the naturally dry climate of the region.

So to sum up, at the intersection of these three approaches to the water stress in Morocco, literature building on political ecology, an analysis of the GMP, and the historical situating, some urgencies arise. The first section illustrates how political ecology has been deployed as a concept to understand some of the power relations underpinning the politics of water and how these politics affect communities. To central urgencies appear, on the one hand, women are often marginalised within the political dynamics of water accessibility and agriculture, and on the other hand, local knowledges are not widely recognised, despite its relevance within a.o. climate adaptation. These urgencies fit also reoccur in the debate on the GMP and within historical analyses. There, it is shown how neoliberal policy and modernisation often bear the promise of progress and development, while in reality, it affects water accessibility, food security, and social practices of rural communities. It shows a tension between modernisation and local knowledge systems and traditions. We can recognise this tension for example in Lytautey's approach in which he created a binary between the 'Moroccan identity' and French modernisation. Similarly, this approach has been perpetuated in the narratives that shaped agricultural reform, including the GMP. It shows the urgency to research initiatives that offer alternative narratives and imageries to the modernity discourse that shaped contemporary agriculture. This shows the relevance of QANAT's work, engaging with communities in the Medina of Marrakech and their everyday practices.

## 1.2 Aesthetics and Ecology

In this second section of this chapter, I will address the relationship between ecology and the arts to offer a framework for understanding QANAT's artistic engagement with water.

QANAT's work has been studied academically before. It occurred in a PhD study done by Alexandra Kollárová based on ethnographic work between 2017 and 2020, studying power dynamics in the visual art scene in Marrakech.<sup>61</sup> Kollárová positions QANAT as an important and alternative initiative "that has been tremendously missed in context of 'luxury good producing' art environment."<sup>62</sup> At the same time, she also addresses, based on participation in

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<sup>60</sup> Mathez and Loftus, "Endless Modernisation," 94.

<sup>61</sup> Alexandra Kollárová, "DisORIENTation: Ethnography of Power in the Visual Art Scene of Marrakech" (PhD diss., University of West Bohemia, 2020).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

2018 the ‘methodological vagueness’ and the lack of embeddedness in the local context of Marrakech.<sup>63</sup> The phase studied marks the first steps of the initiative, and in the meantime, the project has taken a very different shape. My thesis will show how QANAT further developed overtime and will also take a different conceptual approach, situating the work of QANAT in a different discussion. Accordingly, this section will develop a theoretical lens to understand QANAT’s work, divided into two parts. In the first part, I will present the growing body of literature addressing the way artists engage with the ecological crisis, first by presenting some of the pivotal concepts, to then dive deeper into the specific topics that are addressed in the region. In the following section, I will explore the theoretical concepts and debates that help to understand and situate the artistic work of QANAT in the broader discourse on aesthetics ecology. Building on this I will illustrate how the concept of relational aesthetics can be connected to knowledge production and the concept of the commons.

### 1.2.1 Arts and Ecology

In recent years, within the academic debate on the arts and within the Humanities at large there has been a wider discussion on the role of research and knowledge production of the Humanities in relation to the ecological crisis. As the Humanities historically have been studying human thought and culture taking itself, and in particular the white heterosexual man, as a central reference, philosophers such as Rosi Braidotti have addressed the urgency to move away from anthropocentrism, calling for a more interdisciplinary approach to the Humanities.<sup>64</sup> In a similar vein scholars such as Bruno Latour, Karen Barad, and Donna Haraway challenged the ontological understanding of nature and culture as separate categories by proposing a relational ontology<sup>65</sup> and coining the neologism naturecultures.<sup>66</sup> Herewith, they emphasise that nature and culture are interconnected and should not be understood and, hence, researched as separate categories. These concepts allow for new analytical tools to understand the complex and layered relationship between human culture and nature, and challenges dualist and Enlightened ideas of human superiority and mastery over nature.

Building on these critical approaches and ontological understandings, a field of studies arose that engages with arts from an interdisciplinary perspective. A leading scholar within this field, who has published several books on the topic, as well as editor of *The Routledge*

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>64</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 143.

<sup>65</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 815, <https://doi.org/10.1086/345321>; See Actor-Network theory as explained in the second chapter.

<sup>66</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

*Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change*, is T.J. Demos.<sup>67</sup> He seeks to position the role of arts within the axis of social movements and ecological degradation, aiming to “contribute to an increasingly urgent, multidisciplinary research formation and to intervene critically and productively in the ongoing development of the environmental arts, humanities, and social sciences.”<sup>68</sup> This growing body of work covers many regions in the world ranging from regions including but not limited to Southeast Asia,<sup>69</sup> Latin America<sup>70</sup> and Oceania.<sup>71</sup> However, apart from incidental publications that address artistic projects situated in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, the MENA region at large is not widely represented and does not occur at all in the several anthologies published on the topic,<sup>72</sup> despite the extensive literature on the issues the region faces due to the climate crisis. Within the study on the relationship between arts and ecology, the notion of political ecology is a pivotal concept as well. Despite the wide variety of approaches and different logics underpinning ecological art, the research done shares a common ground of scientific-cultural interdisciplinarity and philosophical criticality.<sup>73</sup> They provide insight into artistic works of many different forms, such as artistic projects that seek legal rights for nature, work that address the colonial context of the mastery of nature, or direct intervention in daily practices.

The little literature published on arts that deal with political ecology in the MENA region points towards some central themes and practices that are relevant to understanding QANAT’s work as well. Sheila Sheikh for example illustrates in her analysis of Jumana Manna’s *Wild Relatives* how film can work as a counternarrative, or in her words ‘countermagic,’ against a neoliberal modernisation discourse. Sheikh unpacks the paradoxical logic of seed banking that Manna brings to the stage in her film tracing the complex political dynamics of the transaction of seeds between the Svalbard Global Seed Vault and the Beqaa

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<sup>67</sup> T. J. Demos, Emily Eliza Scott, and Subhankar Banerjee, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change* (London: Routledge, 2021).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Edwin Jurriëns, "Intertwined Ecologies: Environmental Aesthetics in Indonesian Contemporary Art," *Third Text* 33, no. 1 (2018): 59-77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2018.1538037>.

<sup>70</sup> One influential work is the artistic project *Forest Law* by Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares in which the duo investigates the possibilities of bringing the Amazon to court and have rights of nature. For a peer-reviewed discussion of the work by the artist, see: Ursula Biemann, "The Cosmo-Political Forest: A Theoretical and Aesthetic Discussion of the Video *Forest Law*," *GeoHumanities* 1, no. 1 (2015): 157-170, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2015.1075359>.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Ballard, *Art and Nature in the Anthropocene: Planetary Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2023).

<sup>72</sup> Demos, Scott, and Banerjee, *Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art*; Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, eds., *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> T. J. Demos, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology," *Third Text* 27, no. 1 (2013): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2013.753187>.

Valley in Lebanon in the context of the Syrian civil war. Sheikh highlights the paradoxical logic of seed banks, illustrating how they function as a pharmakon, a cure that is poisonous at the same time. The improved varieties of the seeds stored by the seed bank, when distributed, rule out the wild relatives where they stem from, while the wild seeds are usually adapted to local contexts naturally and develop traits such as drought tolerance and pest resistance.<sup>74</sup> Sheikh illustrates how the modernist and neoliberal critique doesn't succumb to the pitfall of the binary of modern and traditional; or rather the post-colonial trap of Orientalism: "*Wild Relatives* prompts us to translate this desire for an emancipation that is based on a careful, non-Orientalist reconstruction of multiple 'modernities' to the complexity of Syria."<sup>75</sup> This highlights the role of arts in a way that is very relevant to the debate on water and possible futures in Morocco as well. We can recognise the same issue as mentioned before in Lyautey's policy that sought to preserve the traditional values of Morocco while implementing his modernisation policies. Similarly to Morocco, where, as mentioned, women do not always have the same access to new technologies, or whose knowledge does not always get recognised, Sheikh highlights how the film points towards this same question: Who has access to and is involved in scientific development? Whose and what knowledge is considered and who benefits from it? Who can make claims on the conservation and preservation of nature?<sup>76</sup> Films such as *Wild Relatives* can address these power dynamics and overcome the binary between modernisation and an orientalist understanding of tradition that is still perpetuated in (post)colonial societies. This we can, for example, also recognise in the vignette on the narrative of the Water Museum in Morocco, which celebrates the exoticism of traditional farming systems while presenting modernisation plans as the real solution.

Similar topics reoccur in the work of the Palestinian collective Sakiya. Educator and artist Nida Sinnokrot explains in an article on behalf of the collective how Sakiya functions. Located 7 kilometres west of Ramallah in Area C of the Westbank, where 99% of the use of land and natural resources is prohibited by the Israelis for Palestinian use, they seek a way of fostering a progressive academy, residency program, research hub, and farm: "By grafting local agrarian traditions of self-sufficiency with contemporary art and ecological practices, we seek to create new narratives around our relationship to land, knowledge production, and the

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<sup>74</sup> Shela Sheikh, "'Planting Seeds/The Fires of War': The Geopolitics of Seed Saving in Jumana Manna's *Wild Relatives*," *Third Text* 32, no. 2–3 (2018): 200–229, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2018.1483899>. 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22.

commons.”<sup>77</sup> Ecology, politics, knowledge production, and the arts are all sides of the same coin. He illustrates this by referencing James C. Scott who suggests that historically the domestication of plants and animals implied also the domestication of ourselves, in the sense that the history of agriculture is a particular way of narration of the land.<sup>78</sup> The way monoculture is cultivated comes forth as a way of understanding and narrating agricultural history.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the relation Sakiya has to their land is manifold. They consider the garden as a classroom project, both as the practice of sustainability and, at the same time, a way to create new mythologies that can foster the imagination.<sup>80</sup>

Together with the analysis of Sheikh, Sinnokrot’s reflection gives insight into the topics and practices within the arts dealing with political ecology in the region. Some common ground can be found in the works. Both analyses bring forward the idea of the commons, in the case of Manna in a critique of modernised seed banks that replaced the exchange of seeds that functioned as a commons, while Sakiya is seeking to create new narratives around the commons. At the same time, this questions the relation of humans with nature and its supposed mastery of it. This is brought into practice by Sakiya’s questions on (re)wilding, seeking ways of fostering ‘wild’ nature, for example, through commoning wild seeds. The concept of fostering wild nature shows the complexity of the binary between nature and culture, as humans also have a cultural relation with ‘wild’ nature. Both bring up the notion of knowledge production within the framework of agriculture, questioning who has access to knowledge, whose knowledge gets recognised, and who can benefit from this knowledge. In line with this, it challenges the binary between modernisation and tradition within the context of (post)colonial societies. Here, the arts take a central role in imagining new narratives that stay true to one's identity and history without orientalising it. In Sakiya, all these topics come together in the garden as a learning space, both for practical learning of agricultural knowledge and for imagination.

Silvia Bottinelli in her recent book *Artists and the Practice of Agriculture: Politics and Aesthetics of Food Sovereignty in Art Since 1960* situates these practices in a historical context. She explains that from the 1960s the definition of art changed, blurring the boundaries between art and life. Art, being framed as an experience rather than as an object,

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<sup>77</sup> Nida Sinnokrot and on behalf of Sakiya, "Rewilding (at) Sakiya," *Journal of Architectural Education* 76, no. 2 (2022): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2022.2097498>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

created the context for agriculture to experiment with new forms of communication.<sup>81</sup> So she highlights: “Artists that engage with agriculture embrace it as a tool for both political critique and aesthetic expression. Their work deconstructs the inequality of food systems and proposes alternative agricultural models to achieve food sovereignty”.<sup>82</sup> Botenelli’s book shows that the work of Sakiya, and QANAT as well, fit into a longer tradition in art history, while at the same time offering a framework to understand such artistic practices.

More specifically, these conversations happen around reworking the notion of the garden. Ros Gray and Sheila Sheikh bring up the question of the garden in a special issue on artistic practices that intervene and explore the political dimensions of soil. They highlight that in the Western imagination, gardens often bear a utopian idea, but in practice, they incorporate many ambivalences that imply questions of displacement and exploitation of labour.<sup>83</sup> They illustrate this by tracing the colonial roots, showing how the garden space, as a predecessor of the imperial botanical garden, became a place for practising the scientific ideal of comprehending nature with the religious motivations of recreating the garden of Eden.<sup>84</sup> This combines the Enlightened idea of the mastery of nature, fostered by the idea of the utopia, while in reality, these garden spaces are built on imperial and hierarchical epistemologies that exclude other histories and knowledge systems.<sup>85</sup> Also, art historian Giovanni Aloï in his analysis of the work *Garden* by Marc Quinn illustrates how the artist challenges the utopian idea of the garden as “the artistic incarnation of man’s desire to control nature, to select, and organize what we find beautiful in it, to make this beauty visible, and most importantly, to prevent it from ever fading.”<sup>86</sup> Instead, Quinn’s work opens up the contradicting narratives of the garden space as “a space heavily riddled with symbolism, defined by specific power/knowledge relationships, and driven by often implicit and problematic aesthetic desires for purity and perfection.”<sup>87</sup> It illustrates how the garden is a contested space with a particular narration in which the relationship between humans and nature, knowledge production and aesthetics reoccur. Because of these qualities and histories, the garden space is a symbolic entity with the potential for critical intervention. It therefore becomes a site to reimagine

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<sup>81</sup> Silvia Bottinelli, *Artists and the Practice of Agriculture: Politics and Aesthetics of Food Sovereignty in Art since 1960* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Ros Gray and Sheila Sheikh, "Editor's Introduction: The Wretched Earth: Botanical Conflicts and Artistic Interventions," *Third Text* 32, no. 2-3 (2018): 163.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>86</sup> Giovanni Aloï, ed., *Why Look at Plants? The Botanical Emergence in Contemporary Art*, *Critical Plant Studies* 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

narratives on land and agriculture in which artists can interrogate knowledge systems and aesthetic conventions.

To sum up, building on interdisciplinary approaches within the humanities, a field of studies, seeks to understand the relationship between arts and ecology, building on the notion of political ecology. While extensive literature on the MENA region is lacking, the few existing analyses point towards some common topics and questions that find resonance within a longer tradition in art history. Throughout, reoccurring topics within these artistic practices are knowledge production and the notion of the commons. In the next section, I will further conceptualise these topics and illustrate how these topics are interlinked.

### 1.2.2 Aesthetics and Knowledge Production

As illustrated in the previous section, the artistic practices that blur the dynamics between artistic practice and social life, as happens, for example, around gardens, fit in a longer tradition in art history. This turn within contemporary arts, from a focus on the creation of objects to an immaterial practice taking social relations as the starting point, has been famously conceptualised by Nicolas Bourriaud in 1998 as relational aesthetics. This concept depicts "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."<sup>88</sup> By critically negotiating the commodification of artistic objects, relational aesthetics blur set categories as 'arts', and 'social practice.' These practices can intervene, become part of, or build on day-to-day practices or seek actual social change rather than just commenting on it. This also challenges the idea of the artist as the author, as relational aesthetics often rely on a collaborative and participatory effort. Within the context of ecological concerns, or in their words, sustainability, Heather Sealy Lineberry and Arnim Wiek suggest that such artistic practice can offer a different model of dealing with such sustainability challenges. Other than the traditional knowledge-to-action approach, where scientific problem analysis leads to subsequent decision-making, these artistic practices can both subvert and engage individuals and communities, which can lead to creative and unexpected results.<sup>89</sup> Again, here, the notion of scientific knowledge is used with critical remarks suggesting that the arts can fill a gap that is not covered within academic research.

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<sup>88</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998), 113

<sup>89</sup> Heather Sealy Lineberry and Arnim Wiek, "Art and Sustainability," in *Sustainability Science*, ed. Harald Heinrichs, Pim Martens, Gerd Michelsen, and Arnim Wiek (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016), 312.

Artists that develop an aesthetics building on an ethics of relationality often rethink notions of collectivity.<sup>90</sup> It is, therefore, that Amy J. Elias seeks to rethink how the arts and contemporary challenges new directions of the commons, so she states: “Constructing new commons involves constructing publics in new ways, and both artistic and critical practice today seeks to make visible previously vehicles of discursivity that may lead to redefined conceptions of the commons.”<sup>91</sup> The notion of the commons becomes a conceptual tool to rethink notions of collectivity in socially engaged art. But before exploring some of these redefined conceptions, it is important to highlight the history of and critiques on the commons. The concept has a long history but got wider attention after the research of Elinor Ostrom in 1990, in which she illustrated that humans are capable of sharing resources communally without depleting them.<sup>92</sup> Since then, many scholars have built on and debated the concept, both within, but not limited to, ecological research, artistic practice, and political science. The notion has been critiqued from an anti- and postcapitalist perspective highlighting that the notion of commons is still too often discussed within a capitalocentric context, wherein even immaterial commons still play a role in capitalist accumulation: “In the capitalocentric framing, the politics that emerges remains linked to an abstract and vague multitude – the coming community of commoners. When this framing is linked to the understanding of commons as a form of property then politics focuses on struggles against enclosure and privatisation.”<sup>93</sup> Instead, Graham Gibson et al. characterise it as a practice of “communing as a relational process – or more often a struggle – of negotiating access, use, benefit, care and responsibility.”<sup>94</sup> Similarly, feminist scholars highlight how the literature on commons within ecological research has stressed how “[m]uch of the discourse on collective action in relation to climate happens without much attention to the consensualisation and depoliticisation of climate change.”<sup>95</sup> What they add to “political ecology’s concern for social justice issues in environmental change is a feminist analysis of gendered power relations and difference.”<sup>96</sup> In this way, commons become a way to critically think about collective action within the context of climate change. At the same time, it’s important to consider the limits

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<sup>90</sup> Amy J. Elias, "Art and the Commons," 4.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>92</sup> Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 4. .

<sup>95</sup> Clement et al., "Feminist Political Ecologies of the Commons and Commoning," *Int. J. Commons* 13, no. 1 (2019): 3.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 4.

and the power dynamics within the collective and relational practices, as well as the power dynamics addressed within a political ecological understanding of the role of the commons.

Although the commons are often associated with the sharing of natural resources, they can also take immaterial forms. For example, language can also be understood as a commons, as something that we collectively nurture and from which we collectively benefit. By building on an understanding of immaterial commons, Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman link the notion of aesthetics to the notion of knowledge commons. In the book *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth* they seek to theorise the role of aesthetics in (political) investigation. They give the example of an aesthetic commons that can be developed through shared ideational resources, which happens as for example in hiphop: “in the collective development of beat structures and rhythms, that in turn prompt differentiation, or as sets of techniques for achieving the marvellous.”<sup>97</sup> Building on this notion of ideational resources, they develop a more specific definition of aesthetics, which they understand as a form of sensing and sense-making: “*Aesthetics* thus concerns the experience of the world. It involves *sensing* – the capacity to register or to be affected, and *sense-making* – the capacity for such sensing to become knowledge of some kind.”<sup>98</sup> From here, they build on the idea of aesthetics to develop, and work through some of the challenges, the idea of a knowledge commons:

Constructing an aesthetic commons requires socialising the production and dissemination of what comes to be understood as evidence. (...) Creating such an epistemic community means recognising and bringing together, debating, a plurality of experiences and means of sense-making. The need to understand an incident is what can bring together such a concrete plurality.<sup>99</sup>

Exploring collectivity in relation to aesthetics and knowledge production, inherently means that it's necessary to work through epistemic differences. Individuals might have different ontological perceptions and therefore have different epistemic ideas of what counts as evidence. However Fuller and Weizman, in quoting the Cameroon philosopher Achille Mbembe point out that “knowledge can only be thought of as universal (...) if it is by definition pluriversal.”<sup>100</sup> With the concept of relational aesthetics on the one hand, and Fuller

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<sup>97</sup> Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth* (London & New York: Verso, 2021), 199.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

and Weizman's understanding of aesthetics as sensing and sense-making, we can start to rethink how artistic practices can function as a commons within knowledge production. In bringing together a plurality of voices within the reimagination of human relations and social contexts, one can benefit from each other's perspectives and methodologies.

In brief, these different concepts and theoretical approaches form a framework that offers a lens for understanding artistic and collective practices in relation to knowledge production. We saw how relational aesthetics depicts an artistic practice dealing with social relations, blurring categories of the arts and social life. This can resonate with the notion of the common, which is both a practice and a conceptual tool, which helps to critically think about the formation of the collective, taking into consideration how it always remains a struggle and negotiation for access, benefit, and care. Linking these two notions to knowledge production and Weizman's and Fuller's understanding of aesthetics as sensing and sense-making, we understand how this negotiation also relies on exploring epistemic differences. However, reframing this through the notion of the commons allows for an analysis of how a plurality of voices brought together can negotiate, share, exchange and take care of ideational resources. In doing so, commoning practices can bring together different ontological understandings and epistemic differences to reach a pluriversal understanding of knowledge production.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 209.



## Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodology of this thesis. Following a qualitative research approach, I will lay out an ethnographic method underpinned by the theoretical concepts of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and diffraction. First, I will introduce ANT, a theory and methodology developed by Bruno Latour that functions as a way to gather and structure information. This will be followed by a summary of my fieldwork, an overview of the data I collected, my approach to interviewing, and the limits of this research. The third section of this chapter addresses the ethical considerations and my position as a researcher. I reflect on these aspects through the concept of situated knowledge, as developed by Donna Haraway. However, this concept can also be read as a critique of the relativist position of ANT. I will, therefore, build on ANT through the notion of diffraction. Accordingly, ANT functions as a way to describe the social body of QANAT, tracing the different actors involved. Additionally, for a deeper understanding, I will deploy a diffractive analysis, as laid out in the last section of this chapter.

### 2.1 Actor-Network Theory

The premise of this thesis is that QANAT illuminates a unique and particular approach to engaging with Morocco's water stress. Their approach to the commons and artistic engagement with the political ecology of water in Morocco is singular but finds resonance within debates on artistic engagement with the climate crisis, critical approaches to knowledge production and the commons. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to understand qualitatively QANAT's way of organising in relation to the leading motive of the *poetics and politics of water*. As Bruce Berg explains in his introduction to qualitative research, this type of research refers to "the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things."<sup>101</sup> In line, qualitative procedures, such as ethnographic approaches including participant observation, interviewing, listening and document analysis, allow the researcher to access unquantifiable facts that, as a result, let the researcher explore how people structure and give meaning to their lives.<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, the methodology of this thesis follows ethnographic procedures.

More specifically, its research design is conceptually based on ANT, as developed by Bruno Latour. ANT proves to be a suitable method to deal with the interdisciplinary approach of

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<sup>101</sup> Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), 3.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

QANAT due to its understanding of the *social*. Latour has a broader understanding of the social than what is usually meant by the term. He understands the social as an assemblage of actors and limits ANT as a methodology for tracing the new associations within this assemblage.<sup>103</sup> In that sense, it is a descriptive methodology that aims to follow the actors who assemble the social. Important within this understanding is that Latour does not limit himself to human actors but instead extends the word to human and non-human entities. For example, as I will later illustrate, within this research, gardens play an important role in assembling the social fabric of QANAT, both as a place of collective labour and as a symbol for their work in challenging food systems. In that sense, the garden becomes an actor as well.

Within ANT, it is important to highlight that the network is the entity that *does* the tracing and the inscribing.<sup>104</sup> The network is an ontological understanding of how actors, human and non-human, relate to each other. The position of the researcher has to be modest and follow the actors in the way they trace and inscribe these connections. This research aims to describe the practice of QANAT and the way how they explain the relations between the different actors involved (the artists, the organisation, the communities they engage with, their public communication, the gardens they work in, water, the palm groves, public space, etc.) As the commons can take different forms, material and immaterial, and involve different actors, human and non-human, ANT is suitable to qualitatively understand QANAT's approach and reimagination of the commons as a concept that integrates different practices: the artistic and the political.

## 2.2 Data Collection

During a period of four months, from February until May 2024, I conducted field research in Marrakech to collect data. Concerning data gathering, Berg underlines the necessity of triangulation: "By combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements."<sup>105</sup> Accordingly, I will use three approaches to gather data: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. However, one of the challenges in structuring fieldwork is the question of sampling: "Field researchers need to consider where to observe, when to observe, whom to observe and what to observe. In short, sampling in field research involves the selection of a research site,

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<sup>103</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>104</sup> Bruno Latour, "On actor-network theory: A few clarifications," *Soziale Welt*, 47, no. 4 (1996): 372.

<sup>105</sup> Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 4.

time, people and events.”<sup>106</sup> Some of these aspects are structured by pragmatic aspects based, among others, on my availability. The main activities of QANAT take place in, but are not to, Marrakech. During and shortly after my fieldwork some QANAT participants also went respectively to South Africa and Switzerland. For financial and pragmatic reasons, my fieldwork was limited to Marrakech from February until the end of May. This allowed me to participate in several activities, including Ch[a]rita and an Aterliers Collectif Workshop that will be explained in detail in the third chapter.

The primary data exists from semi-structured interviews with the collective's core members and long-term collaborators. These interviews, in general, seek to document the experiences of contributing to and participating in the creation of a knowledge commons, with additional questions to have a deeper understanding of the specific practices of individual members. Regarding the sampling aspect of ‘whom to observe’ and ‘what to observe,’ my fieldwork relies on a key informant, Francesca Masoero, the main initiator and still driving force behind QANAT. As Burgess explains: “Key informants not only provide detailed data on a particular research setting but also provide the researcher with introductions to other informants and to other situations.”<sup>107</sup> Masoero introduced me to many other old and recent QANAT participants, as well as in Morocco and abroad. Additionally, she included me in her working structure and, accordingly, QANAT’s activities that took place during my fieldwork. Considering the significant role she takes within QANAT, Masoero has been crucial in this research.

In total, I conducted seven interviews with six different people. One interview was conducted in the Netherlands, one interview was conducted online, and all the others were conducted in person in Morocco. Except for one interview that was conducted in Dutch, all interviews were conducted in English. One of the limits of this research is my lack of speaking French and Arabic, which formed a restraint to talk with some significant people that either are part of or worked with QANAT, as well as to access some literature that is only available in French. The interviews conducted were semi-structured. This, in line with Jonathan Skinner’s introduction to interviewing techniques, entails an approach with prepared research questions while, based on the undertaken fieldwork, allowing the researcher to “judge the questions and critique the answers, such that the conversations and follow-ons were probing and the answers

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<sup>106</sup> Robert G. Burgess, "Elements of Sampling in Field Research," in *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*, ed. Robert G. Burgess (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 115.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

consistent with previous conversations.”<sup>108</sup> This allowed me to understand the particular (artistic works) of individuals in relation to the broader collective work of QANAT. All interviews work with informed consent, stating the purpose and way how the interview is used at the start of the interview.

As the collective focuses on archiving, documenting, and producing knowledge, a wide range of data is available. LE18 released a series of magazines called Chergui that features essays on issues related to Marrakech and reflections on their methods and practices written by long-term QANAT collaborators. I will also use secondary data comprising articles and material written on them, ranging from public materials from funding bodies, reviews and journalist reports, external interviews, and material of partners of QANAT. Since the vast scope of this material, I will limit myself to the material that contributes to the understanding of their practices as a collective and the knowledge they produce on water. Again, language forms a restraint here, as much of their work is, in addition to English, either French or Arabic. Additionally, I will discuss and analyse the specific (artistic) work of a few selected members to represent some of the work they have done.

Lastly, I participated in the activities they organised during my field research. This approach falls under the category of participant observation. This research strategy is characterised by the submersion of the participant observant in which they are resocialised in a society that is not their own.<sup>109</sup> This approach seeks to gather information not by asking questions but by participating.<sup>110</sup> The limits of participant observation are also prevalent, as it can only be applicable to small groups that might not be representative.<sup>111</sup> This is the case for me to a smaller extent; I could only participate in workshops and events during my time of fieldwork that might not be fully representative of all their work. Therefore, it is important to triangulate and see how my experiences relate to other documents and what my interviewees tell me. A more significant problem with participant observation comes from ANT, which assigns a modest role to the researcher. However, when actively participating, you inherently become an actor yourself as well. ANT does not provide an answer to the positionality of the researcher, which I will explore in more detail in the next section.

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<sup>108</sup> Jonathan Skinner, ed., *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 2.

<sup>109</sup> Ronald Frankenberg, "Participant Observers," in *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*, ed. Robert G. Burgess (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 75.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

### 2.3 Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Although ANT is a suitable method to describe the social fabric of QANAT, it also has its limits. ANT assigns a modest position to the researcher, putting little focus on reflexivity and positionality. To build further on ANT, I will turn to the ontological assumptions laid out by Donna Haraway in her seminal article *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. In this article, she reclaims the notion of objectivity, challenging both a positivist understanding of objectivity that claims to see from nowhere and a structuralist and relativist position that essentially does the same by claiming to be everywhere while being nowhere.<sup>112</sup> To conceptualise objectivity from location, she develops the notion of situated knowledge to highlight, similar to Latour, that “Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge is pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of “objective” knowledge.”<sup>113</sup> However, she differs from Latour, who considers himself a relativist and stresses that “reflexivity is added as a bonus once the frames of reference are granted back to the actors.”<sup>114</sup> Instead, Haraway considers it crucial “to attach the objective and theoretical to our political scanners in order to name where we are and where we are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space.”<sup>115</sup> This means understanding the power dynamics that underpin interactions and, hence, the production of knowledge. It acknowledges that “The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another.”<sup>116</sup> While other scholars would see it as biased or lacking in neutrality, political awareness always lies at the forefront of research for Haraway.

Accordingly, this thesis does not aim to present a ‘god-trick view from above,’ meaning that the researcher is not present in writing but that it is written from a specific position, mentally and physically. This demands an ongoing reflexivity on my position vis-à-vis the collective. I am a white cis-men from the Netherlands who grew up as an atheist in a secular society. Since the age of sixteen, I have participated in different socialist and activist groups, which shaped my political consciousness. Professionally, I have been working as a curator in the field of

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<sup>112</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 584.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 592.

<sup>114</sup> Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory," 377.

<sup>115</sup> Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 582.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 586.

music for six years, and hence, I am familiar with discourses on curatorial practice. At the same time, my expertise lies in music and sound art rather than contemporary art; however, I have been interested in collective practices within the arts, which brought me to follow QANAT. Academically, I have been educated in philosophy within an interdisciplinary context, with a growing interest in critical theory. Critical theory acknowledges, as implied within concepts such as situated knowledge, the value of lived experiences. From my position, I often do not share the same experiences as the people I engage with in this research. Before this fieldwork, I had not been to Morocco, and I acknowledge the limits of understanding culturally specific dynamics. ANT, therefore, is a suitable approach that follows the actors and limits the position and interpretation of the researcher. However, at the same time, ANT can also be criticised for its relativist position as ‘being everywhere without being anywhere’, which is incompatible with the ontological position laid out here. Therefore, I will build on ANT through a diffractive analysis, which I will develop in the next section.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Following the ontological position underpinning the notion of situated knowledge, I will follow a diffractive reading to structure, code, and analyse the data. Diffraction is a concept introduced by Donna Haraway and further worked out by the physicist and feminist scholar Karen Barad. She develops the phenomenon into a concept to think with. Diffraction is the physical phenomenon in which different light, sound, or water waves interfere and create new waves. For example, when you simultaneously drop two rocks in a pool of water, both stones will create a ripple. At some point, the two different ripples will hit each other and create a new pattern together. This pattern of interference is what’s called diffraction. Barad developed this into a conceptual methodology “of reading diffractively for patterns of differences that make a difference.”<sup>117</sup> Diffractive reading means seeking how patterns of difference created a difference, but also how a specific text itself creates a difference elsewhere. In that sense, it “allows you to study both the nature of the apparatus and also the object,” as it seeks to describe not only the ‘wave’ itself but also the new pattern it created. This is particularly relevant in the context of QANAT, as content (the work they produce on water) and form (the way they organise as a collective) are constantly interacting and not easily separated. How they organise collectively is closely linked to their work on water. How

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<sup>117</sup> Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 49.

one individual member works might influence another one, and vice versa, including non-human actors such as, for example, the garden site.

My codebook will be structured based on both ANT and diffraction. To decide on the specific codes, I will use an inductive approach. This aligns with ANT, in which the actors do the tracing. During the interviews, for example, several topics came up that I didn't foresee, such as cartography, archives, and memory. In total, I derived nine central themes that are divided into more specific subcodes. I will use the software Taguette to code the interviews and trace the different actors mentioned. This software is also helpful for a diffractive analysis, as it allows the addition of multiple codes to the same quote. This helps to illustrate that QANAT's practice is not reducible to one single actor, or 'pattern', and hence becomes a way to show both the 'nature of the apparatus' as the 'object'. This allows to distinguish between the actors that made a difference and the results of the concrete work presented. The coding accordingly helps to analyse two different layers: a first layer to follow the tracing of the network that makes up QANAT, and the second layer of a diffractive reading that considers how these actors interfere with each other and create new patterns of difference, including my position as a researcher. The list of themes with specific codes, including definitions and examples, is included in the appendix.



## Chapter 3: Analysis

This chapter will situate the work of QANAT in the context of the first chapter, on the one hand, within the context of knowledge production on water-related issues in Morocco and, on the other hand, in relation to a broader framework on the notion of aesthetics within ecological art. The chapter will start with an introduction of the platform, presenting an overview of its history, mapping the network of its most relevant partners, and laying out its leading principle of *the poetics and politics of water*. This illustrates how their relation to the political is formed and how their practice of establishing the collective is rooted in everyday practices of living together. Based on this, I will continue in the second to address a crucial aspect of how the platform operates: the dynamic between local rootedness and international ramifications. This shows the importance of the local/global nexus that lies at the heart of the platform. The platform is inherently connected to the locality of Marrakech but seeks to knit their local struggles and knowledge within the experiences of other localities. At last, I seek to answer the question of whether QANAT can be typified as a knowledge commons. I'll illustrate how QANAT's approach to knowledge is interdisciplinary and draws on an ontological position based on situated knowledge. Building on this, I show how their methodologies create a shared aesthetic and become an ideational resource. Additionally, a crucial aspect of their approach to knowledge is archiving, both through a practice of documentation in addition to existing, as well as topically. Lastly, I argue how the garden site becomes a way to materialise the above.

### 3.1 Who and What is QANAT?

#### 3.1.1 QANAT: A Collective Platform

QANAT is an initiative that started in 2017 as a public program and exhibition initiated by the Marrakech-based art space LE18. In the past seven years, it became an independent entity that is hard to define in one word. It can be understood as an arts collective, a platform, or a grassroots network, but neither of these conceptualisations fully covers their practice. In their own words, they define themselves as a “collective platform that explores the politics and poetics of water and beyond to reflect and act upon the multiple contextual understandings and forms of (re)production of the commons.”<sup>118</sup> Explained in institutional terms, this can be described as a grassroots network that connects different actors, individuals and institutions under their central focus on the politics and poetics of water in Morocco and beyond. By

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<sup>118</sup> "QANAT," *QANAT*, accessed August 6, 2024, [https://qanat.org/QANAT\\_INFO](https://qanat.org/QANAT_INFO).

connecting different types of actors, individuals, such as artists, researchers and activists, and institutions, such as NGOs, universities, arts organisations and other grassroots initiatives, it functions as a platform for anyone who works on the topic of water and related issues. This facilitates an exchange of knowledge and offers a platform for the work of individuals.

In the seven years of the existence of QANAT, it underwent several transformations to arrive at the form it has today. For clarity, I will separate its origin story into four sections that can be distinguished as follows: the first phase as a public program, a second phase of transformation into a collective, a third phase of redefining during COVID-19, and a fourth, current phase that can be typified by its local rootedness on the one hand and its international recognition on the other. After this, I will unpack their leading principle of the poetics and politics of water.

### 3.1.2 First Phase: From a Public Program Towards a Collective Platform (2017-2019)

In this first phase in 2017, QANAT was initiated as a public exhibition in the framework of a program called KIBRIT. KIBRIT was a collaborative project across the Mediterranean involving cultural organisations based in Tunis, Algiers, Barcelona, Ramallah, Casablanca, and Marrakech, focused on the reactivation of cultural heritage and collective memory.<sup>119</sup> Within this international framework, each institution curated individual projects in their local context. QANAT was the project initiated in Marrakech by the cultural space LE18, curated by Francesca Masoero and Laila Hida. In this public exhibition, presented under the title *Qanat: On the politics and poetics of water* some of the central topics and methods can be already recognised. For example, some of the central issues of water and the historical khettaras were addressed through the lens of collective memory and ancestral traditions using methodologies such as participative walks and cartographies. These broader themes and methods that keep recurring in the work of QANAT will be analysed in more detail later on. This section is focused on how the form of QANAT took shape into the collective platform it is today.

In the interview I conducted with Francesca Masoero, she explains how, during this first phase, she realised the broader potential of the topic: “After this first edition, I was very interested in trying to keep QANAT existing and try to rethink what could have been its mission, it's new configuration. Beyond this sort of programme, without a beginning and

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<sup>119</sup> “Kibrit Booklet,” Kibrit, 2017, 3, [https://www.academia.edu/37497834/Kibrit\\_booklet\\_pdf](https://www.academia.edu/37497834/Kibrit_booklet_pdf).

end.”<sup>120</sup> So initially, she continued to host residencies within the context of QANAT by reinventing artist of the first iteration to continue doing their research. The pivotal moment that moved QANAT towards a more collective approach happened in 2018 by trial and error. In a public program called *Performing Change from the Margins*, Masoero invited people together, not necessarily under the broader topic of water, but rather people working in Morocco, particularly in Marrakech at that time. The common ground on which they were invited was the similar approach in their methodologies that she describes as grounded participatory research. Although Masoero was satisfied with the public program, the dynamics of this week didn't meet her ambitions of a project without a beginning and an end. It was a learning moment in which her approach to establishing group dynamics didn't work out. This shift towards a more collective approach happened in 2019, which is recognised across all interviews as a turning point.

### 3.1.3 Second Phase: Becoming a Collective (2019-2020)

All interviewees who have been long-term collaborators of the collective mention two important and closely linked aspects that changed the form of QANAT: a grant from *Stimuleringsfonds* and the involvement of the Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk. *Stimuleringsfonds* is a Dutch state-funded foundation that funds projects in the fields of new media, digital culture, design, and architecture. One of their funding opportunities offers the possibility for an international artistic research exchange. The grant is structured in two legs: the first preliminary research phase, granted €15.000, and the second execution phase of €50.000. In the end, QANAT also received a third grant of €20.000 to publish the project results.

Jeanne van Heeswijk is an artist whose artistic practice evolves around building communities. In the words of Masoero, she “has a practice as an artist that has the primary focus on building communities and building alliances and bringing people together in a creating a collective vision where a collective vision doesn't exist yet.”<sup>121</sup> This is echoed by another interviewee, Heidi Vogels, who explains how van Heeswijk “works in structures.”<sup>122</sup> She builds communities from an artistic approach, which follows the logic of relational aesthetics, as mentioned in the second chapter. Masoero explains that she had attended a workshop with van Heeswijk before but had never had the opportunity to work with her. So, when she came

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<sup>120</sup> Francesca Masoero, interview by author, Marrakech, Morocco, 6 March, 2024 (appendix 2).

<sup>121</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

<sup>122</sup> Heidi Vogels, interview by author, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 5 June, 2024 (appendix 8).

across the grant opportunity of Stimuleringsfonds, she reached out to her to apply for this grant together.

Under the title *QANAT: a training for the not yet*, they applied for a multi-year research trajectory focused on water and the commons.<sup>123</sup> By focusing on memories and desires, they seek to improve the water infrastructure of the city of Marrakech.<sup>124</sup> The project evolves around questions such as ‘How can we collectively design our living environment and encourage exchange between communities?’ ‘how can we influence design processes, regulations, and policy-making?’ and ‘How do we take responsibility within these processes?’<sup>125</sup> The title builds on van Heeswijk’s long-term research project and conceptualisation training for the non-yet. In an essay she wrote in 2016, she elaborates on the concept. Her starting point is agency, which she defines as the way we can act upon the desire to have a better life.<sup>126</sup> Within the training for the not-yet, she is led by the question: “How can people feel that they can have agency as a collective body and act upon that when they don’t know the collective body yet?”<sup>127</sup> A challenge in finding this collective body is withholding subjectivity, so she explains. It is a learning process, not only by hearing “what the other has to say but becoming sensitive to how someone else is.”<sup>128</sup> In practice, this can happen every every day, for example, when sharing food or spending time in each other’s places. However, the notion of the not-yet is underpinned by a broader political understanding than ‘merely’ finding a collective body. The not-yet implies an understanding of non-linear growth instead of a capitalist understanding of growth with a clear aim and focus on success. In that sense, the not-yet is an open-ended becoming, a collective practice without moving towards a fixed point in the future.<sup>129</sup> Accordingly, it’s a way to break out of the neoliberal framework, which can happen at the scale of the local. As Heeswijk specifies, the local is not necessarily a specific place but rather a condition that entails global conflicts site-specifically.<sup>130</sup> Working and finding the collective on the scale of the local has even bigger potential. Although this potential is not clearly outlined (yet), it has the potential of knitting

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<sup>123</sup> “qanat: a training for the not yet | Jeanne van Heeswijk, Le 18,” Stimuleringsfonds, accessed 6 August, 2024, <https://www.stimuleringsfonds.nl/toekenningen/qanat-a-training-for-the-not-yet-3>.

<sup>124</sup> “qanat: a training for the not yet | Le 18, Jeanne van Heeswijk,” Stimuleringsfonds, accessed 6 August, 2024, <https://www.stimuleringsfonds.nl/toekenningen/qanat-a-training-for-the-not-yet-2>

<sup>125</sup> “qanat: a training for the not yet | Jeanne van Heeswijk, Le 18.”

<sup>126</sup> Jeanne van Heeswijk, "Preparing for the Not-Yet," in *Slow Reader: A Resource for Design Thinking and Practice*, ed. Ana Paula Pais and Carolyn F. Strauss (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016), 42.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

different localities. So van Heeswijk states: “So I believe that these small, local forms of resistance could be practised everywhere, and then at the moment when it is needed, they should also work as a netted cell system by sharing knowledge and skills.”<sup>131</sup>

Reading van Heeswijk's essay and, hence, her vision of the notion of the collective diffractively through the interviews, we can start to understand how her work is a difference that makes a difference in the formation of QANAT. The stories of the interviewees strongly echo van Heeswijk's essay. On the one hand, they all stress that the workshops of van Heeswijk were a turning point. On the other hand, they also describe it as an organic process, which affirms van Heeswijk's approach of establishing the collective body as an open-ended becoming. The story of long-term collaborator, artist and agroecologist Louisa Aarrass illustrates this period well. She explained to me that she joined QANAT around 2019, but never in a formal way. After visiting some film screenings at LE18 and discovering the shared interest, it was suggested that she join the monthly team meetings. “It was never like at any moment when someone was like, would you like to be a member?”<sup>132</sup> The way she describes it gives the impression that QANAT at that time was not formalised. There was a structure of regular meetings, but it hadn't identified itself as a collective or a platform.

This sense of belonging happened later: “I guess I started feeling part of it when we did a residency in Utrecht at BAK,” Aarrass states. BAK is an arts space in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where van Heeswijk invited nine QANAT participants for a week-long training session. Before the training session, she had already been involved in a series of workshops, Ateliers Collectif, developed in collaboration with Dar Bellarj. Dar Bellarj is another cultural space in the Medina of Marrakech that organises cultural activities with a particular focus on preserving heritage, closely working with the neighbourhood inhabitants, especially women and children.<sup>133</sup> That she felt more part of it indicates rather a shift in what QANAT became than her personal involvement. Also, Heidi Vogels highlights the organic aspect of the collective: “QANAT has never been strongly formalised, like you're in, or you're out. It was rather something fluid.”<sup>134</sup> This interpretation is also supported by how Masoero explains the turn into a collective:

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>132</sup> Louisa Aarrass, interview by author, Marrakech, Morocco (online), 16 April, 2024 (appendix 5).

<sup>133</sup> Francesca Masoero, “When the Arsat Ceased to Be an Arsat Anew to Become an Arsat Anew,” *Chergui*, #3, June 2022, 30.

<sup>134</sup> Vogels, interview.

I never thought of building a collective, you know, or that thing would have become a collective. But then, I don't even know how we started calling it a collective. Just the result of that process was an intention and desire: a shared intention and desire to create a collective platform, a collective.<sup>135</sup>

Like Masoero, who uses the same vocabulary as van Heeswijk, such as collective desire, Aarrass echoes the words of van Heeswijk's essay. She explains how many of the conversations that happened during the week in Utrecht revolved around cooking and what she calls collective labour: "I think, in general, it's one of the overarching things I'm interested in, like work and collective work. Like labour (...) that takes the form of cooking, cleaning, gardening, building, like different forms of construction, just sweating and working together with some form of a common goal."<sup>136</sup> The practice of working together can form a common goal or already entails a common goal.

Also, the way QANAT exists, or *is* together, is a way to connect to other contexts. So Aarrass elaborates on how the locality of Morocco informs their practice and how it becomes a way to connect to other localities:

So I think, well, a lot of people who we interact with closely and who are like part of QANAT (...) are Moroccan, some aren't, but either way, because we know each other from a specific context, which is mostly Marrakech or greater Morocco, we have ways of being and working together. (...) When we work with people and other projects and in other places beyond Morocco, we bring our form of working and being together, which is quite close. (...) Over the years, every time we have residencies, or even people visiting and whatever. Most of the time, they're sleeping in one of our houses. And even though we have budget for a shitty hotel, we always think it's nicer to stay close to each other and spend time and eat together and hang out and stuff.<sup>137</sup>

This provides much insight into how QANAT's understanding of the collective was shaped. One crucial aspect that precedes understanding their public work is their understanding of work as a way of living and being together. This is brought forward in van Heeswijk's essay and then affirmed in the interviews. The collective body, the collective understanding, or the

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<sup>135</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

<sup>136</sup> Aarrass, interview.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

shared desire arose in being and living together, and Jeanne van Heeswijk's involvement has been recognised in many interviews as very formative.

The above is the internal story. However, the experience and formation of a collective are also very closely knit with their public program. At this time, the number of public presentations also peaked, with presentations in Marrakech, the first internationally curated exhibitions, research lines, and workshops. At that moment, some of the institutional collaborations that last until today have been consolidated; the main one is QANAT forming a bridge between LE18 and Dar Bellarj through the workshop series Ateliers Collectif. The content and other public work will be discussed in more detail in this chapter's second and third sections.

#### 3.1.4 Third Phase: COVID-19 (2020-2021)

COVID-19 unavoidably marked a turn in the way how QANAT took shape. This period, leading up to the involvement of LE18, including QANAT as well, at *documenta fifteen* in the summer of 2022, can be considered a shift from establishing a collective understanding towards the collective platform it is today. The Stimuleringsfonds grant lasted during 2020 and still allowed the continuation of QANAT. Still, simultaneously, the forced distance also resulted in some people moving on, as Masoero explained in the interview.

In 2020, the main public activity, QANAT CURA, was an online exhibition that offered a framework for individual and collective members to propose works. The curatorial statement introducing the project on the website builds further on and perpetuates the discourse that can be recognised as well in the second phase, speaking of QANAT's "collective body", "Testing a new form of being together in times of 'social distancing'", and "QANAT CURA responds to an ongoing process of collective-making which asks each of us to (un)learn from, and root in each other's world(view) as a way to interlace together and allow (even temporary) fragile collective grammars to emerge."<sup>138</sup> The range of projects varies a lot and shows the diversity of the collective members, where some present research they've done, others have a more curatorial approach, bringing together the works of others, while some present extensive work involving many other artists, such as the project SAFINA which also reoccurs in later international exhibitions and which will be discussed in more detail below. One notable thing about the QANAT CURA exhibition is that it clarifies how QANAT functions as a platform. In total, eight collective members proposed a project, but each included artists from outside the collective. For example, in SAFINA, as an exploration of the coastal town Safi, Amina

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<sup>138</sup> "QANAT CURA," *QANAT*, accessed August 6, 2024, [https://qanat.org/QANAT\\_CURA](https://qanat.org/QANAT_CURA).

Lahrach brought together eight young artists from his hometown to reflect on the city. So, where during the first phase, QANAT was an initiative partly carried by European artists, as it evolved, it became more and more rooted in Morocco and offered a platform for Moroccan artists, bringing in the communities of all the individual collective.

Despite the efforts of QANAT CURA and the explorations of being together in times of social distancing, 2020 also is a year where a lot gets postponed, and as mentioned, people moved on. So, much of what was scheduled for 2020 happened in 2021 in a more condensed way. Ch[a]rita is a yearly program initiated in 2018, initially by the Madrassa Collective, of which Rim Mejdji and Francesca Masoero were both part. Later, it was adapted and funded by Dar Bellarj, and therefore, it was involved within the QANAT framework. Ch[a]rita refers to the children's game in which children draw lines on the street and create a virtual world to play in. This idea of having an imagined reality projected on public space becomes the starting point for hosting artistic interventions, conversations, film screenings, and workshops, all taking place in public space. The scale of the project in 2021 was unprecedented compared to anything QANAT had done before, as captured in Masoero's words: "Then, because of COVID, it [Ch[a]rita] was postponed. And we got a little bit ambitious, so I've basically curated a biennale, just to give you a sense. The amount of people that we involved was insane. Completely insane. It was beautiful, but insane."<sup>139</sup> While in the process of exploring different forms and experimenting with ways of being together, QANAT slowly gets more recognition internationally.

### 3.1.5 Current Phase (2022-today)

2022 is marked by the invitation of LE18 to *documenta fifteen*, that evolved around collectives. The curating collective ruangrupa invited collectives from all over the world to the 5-yearly contemporary art exhibition in Kassel, Germany. Although this is technically a story of LE18, as it was LE18 that was invited, it is important to understand the evolvement of QANAT as well. For one thing, it required Masoero's involvement, which, despite efforts to share the collective labour, is still the main driving force behind QANAT. Secondly, despite LE18 being the curator of the iteration, QANAT could also present workshops and work. Heidi Vogels explains: "I think documentee fifteen was an important moment because it allowed them to position themselves next to similar initiatives."<sup>140</sup> Also, Hida affirms that the

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<sup>139</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

<sup>140</sup> Vogels, interview.

Documenta allowed for new connections but additionally gives insight into how QANAT operates:

But then, after Documenta, where we met with *the ungovernable* from South Africa. There was a connection, and now Francesca is in South Africa, so it has the power of attraction. (...) QANAT also has the possibility of adapting itself. Even for grant making, for grant applications, it is a format that is so flexible in a way. I mean, it's always, of course, the same core project. It doesn't compromise on the project itself.<sup>141</sup>

This quote illustrates a lot about QANAT's potential and modus operandi, and how they are organised is entangled with the central topic of water. From 2022 onwards, QANAT collaborates more often internationally, either with similar collectives, such as the ungovernable from South Africa or other arts institutions worldwide, such as the Centre for Contemporary Arts Glasgow in 2022 and 2023. On the one hand, they address an issue that is universal and can connect to many different contexts; on the other hand, their fluid approach allows them to adapt as well to various institutions, either because of the locality of collective members or because of the expertise of the individual members.

In that sense, QANAT is more taking form as a platform than a collective in the traditional sense of the word. On how QANAT operates today, Masoero explains:

I think I lost the capacity to push for that group to be together in the same way. I was like, whatever. I cannot force a certain thing to happen. So we'll do with those that are in, for whatever is there. And so basically since then what has happened is that a lot of the work in Marrakech has kept happening somewhat through the frameworks of the collective workshops and Ch[a]rita.<sup>142</sup>

So after COVID, it found a form where both Ch[a]rita and Ateliers Collectif can continue to take place on a sustainable scale. At the same time, some of the long-term collaborators spread across the globe but are still open to being involved in projects. So Hida observes: “She [Masoero] is always in conversation with many people. Now, I guess the pool is smaller. There's collaborators that are more regular. And she has created this very long-term relations with certain people, that became friends.”<sup>143</sup> This creates a hybrid approach, which I will analyse in more detail in the next section. On the one hand, QANAT, as it is today, is locally

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<sup>141</sup> Laila Hida, interview by author, Marrakech, Morocco, 20 March, 2024 (appendix 3).

<sup>142</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

<sup>143</sup> Hida, interview.

rooted, working very closely with both LE18 and Dar Bellarj and their communities, especially *Les Mamans Douées*, a community of women living in the Medina of Marrakech affiliated with Dar Bellarj. On the other hand, QANAT is part of an international conversation within the contemporary arts field, collaborating, exchanging, hosting and visiting collectives and institutions around the globe.

### 3.1.6 The Poetics and Politics of Water

As Laila Hida mentioned QANAT has the power to adapt, but it never compromised on its core. Throughout these years, their central focus and point of departure remained *the poetics and politics* of water. This period of time brought light to a political ecological understanding of a wide variety of topics related to water, the mass tourism and commodification of the city, the colonial roots of some of the current issues, neoliberal agriculture and, of course, the downfall of the historical irrigation system, the khettaras, that give the name to the platform. Their politics always have been twofold: on the one hand, on a discursive level, producing and presenting knowledge, and on a practical level, experimenting with new forms of living together, seeking forms of resistance in the everyday.

Their understanding of politics is not necessarily a confrontational and activist approach, so Masoero explains what she means by working on the politics of water: “I think it's less about working on the actual water distribution shortage in the field of the farmers. I mean, I guess it's less about organising the protest with them, or it hasn't happened yet. And probably wouldn't. (...) Instead, it's a matter of learning, first of all, about the political implications of a resource.”<sup>144</sup> In that sense, their focus lies rather on knowledge production, starting from an understanding based on a political ecology of water. Also Aarrass sees it as the core of QANAT, and what binds it together: “When you discuss Marrakesh and its histories. Its current condition is... The current reality is that everything is tied to water: the allocation, the access, and the distribution of water are highly political.”<sup>145</sup> This concerns, as she mentions, a variety of topics, for example, “the hundreds of hectares golf courses,” “the loss of urban green space,” “a neocolonialism that's just tourism,” and the “loss of urban green space.”<sup>146</sup> Not all of the work they did on these topics remains accessible, and this thesis is too short as well to present all of the work that they did on all these topics. I will now illustrate on the

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<sup>144</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

<sup>145</sup> Aarrass, interview.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

basis of two documents how their practice departs from a political ecology of water within their work.

The political understanding of food production and its entanglement with water is shown in the third issue of *Chergui*, published in 2022. This issue is completely dedicated to food and contains an assemblage of different contributions ranging from essays, photo reports, conversations, maps and more. In the essay *When the Arsat Ceased to be an Arsat to Become an Arsat Anew* Masoero links the history of gardens to food systems, the development of Marrakech, and tourism, in which she situates QANAT's practice around community gardens. She explains a shift in the access of gardens in the city: "The 'enclosure' of some of Marrakech's historic gardens within walls was part of a culture of protection and care, never preventing access and redistributing their fruits to those cultivating the land."<sup>147</sup> While nowadays the closing of the gardens is of a different origin:

Today, the archetype of the exoticised tourist city, Marrakech, has, in fact, experienced an explosive growth of hotels and luxurious residencies, all equipped with privatised lush gardens and pool areas, coupled with at least fifteen golf courses. Having tripled in size particularly over the last thirty years, next to these gated and exclusive 'green paradisiac oases,' Marrakech today rather looks like an ocean of often poorly constructed housing complexes that have eaten up almost entirely its green heritage, both within and beyond the medina's walls.<sup>148</sup>

As part of the vision of a green Morocco, the authorities invested in green in the city, but mostly in water-intensive flowerbeds, or at best, but rarely, in playgrounds, so she explains.<sup>149</sup> At the same time, the palm groves, with its historical irrigation system, are left to disappear. Except for the gated and privately owned areas, the area is left to turn into a quite dystopic area, as I witnessed during a field trip as part of an Ateliers Collectif workshop. Tracing the aesthetics of architecture and infrastructure, the Western garden style aesthetics of green for its visual pleasure, and the degradation of the palm groves are a way to retell the story of water scarcity. The scarcity that Masoero summarises as: "In fact, over the past couple of decades, agricultural export-oriented competition from the periurban and rural surrounding areas and the profound impact of the emergence of the *hotel-cum-pools&golf* complexes have produced both a dramatic drop in the water table and the abandonment of many agricultural

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<sup>147</sup> Masoero, "When the Arsat Ceased to Be an Arsat to Beocme an Arsat Anew," 29.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

lands.”<sup>150</sup> While the work presented is diverse and can vary from the very personal to the collective, this essay illustrates the baseline from which they depart. Its engagement with the politics of water builds on an understanding that water is implicated in many power dynamics, with mass tourism and neoliberal agriculture at its heart.

Although their practice does not directly engage with the struggle of the farmers on the ground, Chergui does amplify the voice of the farmers and their struggle on the ground. The zine features an essay by Fayrouz Yousfi titled *The True Cost of Eating Cheap Food: Women Farmworkers’ Struggle for Dignity in Southern Morocco*. Here, she addresses the vulnerability of farmworkers during COVID-19, who protested the unsafe working conditions in farms and packing stations.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, Yousfi states that “many agribusinesses took advantage of this particular context to lay off hundreds of farmworkers with little or no compensation, exacerbating their vulnerability.”<sup>152</sup> Based on a case in the Souss Valley she argues that it’s the transformation to capitalist agriculture that created spaces for resisting marginality. So, she argues that the transformation to export-oriented and investment-based agriculture created more precarious employment and poor working conditions. It also went hand in hand with new forms of resistance, mobilisation and unionisation.<sup>153</sup> Although technically published by LE18, this zine shows that QANAT addresses the topic as food (and water) through a political lens, as the curation of the zine juxtaposes personal narratives and histories of recipes (which are not necessarily apolitical either) with explicit essays on the implicated power dynamics and struggles.

Chergui is a concrete documentation of the political point of departure of QANAT. Although it is formally a publication by LE18, it features many of the long-term collaborators of the platform, as well as participants who presented their work more incidentally. For example, Yousfi participated in three iterations in 2018, 2021, and 2023 but has not been involved on a regular basis. These essays illustrate a clear position based on a political ecology of water that takes the many aspects into consideration that impact the alarming water table levels, including, but not limited to, the history of the city, neoliberal agriculture, labour rights, and mass tourism. Although QANAT might not organise actively with the farmers, they do amplify their voices while seeking an answer to these political dynamics.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Fayrouz Yousfi, “The True Cost of Eating Cheap Food: Women Farmworkers’ Struggle for Dignity in Southern Morocco,” *Chergui*, #3, June 2022, 25.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 26.

### 3.1.7 Subconclusion

In its seven years, QANAT underwent many transformations and, therefore, has become difficult to grasp as an entity. In the most active period during the grant of the Stimuleringsfonds and the involvement of Jeanne van Heeswijk, it managed to develop something of a collective purpose. Although people moved on, it built on this legacy, gaining international recognition. By doing so, it can function as a platform and resource that can provide a stage for others. At the start, many of the artists and researchers involved were European, but over time, QANAT got increasingly knitted in the fabric of Marrakech, with Dar Bellarj and LE18 as its most important partners and pillars. Within this network, it manages to organise the Ateliers Collectif workshop and Ch[a]rita sustainably without funding other than Dar Bellarj. This forms a basis for ongoing visibility for QANAT as a platform while it gets invited or seeks collaboration internationally. Central to QANAT's work is an understanding of politics. This occurs in their form of organising, inspired by van Heeswijk's conceptualisation of the not-yet as an open-ended form of resistance to neoliberal growth. Discursively, some of their publications make explicit what they understand as the politics of water, linking the dropping water table to neoliberal agriculture and tourism, with a central analysis of tracing the closure and change of the gardens of Marrakech while bringing attention to the struggles that are experienced on the ground. Although they might not actively organise with the farmers, they seek a political answer to these dynamics. As van Heeswijk envisions, resistance in the every day can happen at the scale of the local, with the potential of knitting different localities. The following section will dive deeper into this dynamic: how the platform, on the one hand, is rooted within the city dynamics and of Marrakech, while on the other, connecting the locality of Marrakech to an international conversation and other localities.

## 3.2 Local and International

After introducing the background story of QANAT and its main activities, this section and the following sections will address a more in-depth discussion of themes that reoccurred during the interviews and in the analysis of their work. This both concerns the way they work, or aspects of how QANAT as an organisation functions, as well as the (artistic) work they present. Following a diffractive approach, form and content are presented in conversation, as the way QANAT operates cannot be seen as separate from the artistic work, and vice versa. In this section, I will discuss the dynamic between their local rootedness and international character in more detail. I will first explore the connection with Marrakech. The platform's name is derived from the historical irrigation system, named the khattaras or qanat, of Morocco and Marrakech in particular; accordingly, the work and themes addressed can't be seen apart from their local context. At the same time, the city and its dynamic have often been mentioned in the interviews as an actor part of the assemblage that makes up QANAT; in paragraph 3.2.2, I will discuss this in more detail. After understanding the locality of Marrakech, I will address how this speaks to an international context: in the region itself, ranging from at least Mauritania to the Levant, in (Western-)Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa. I will illustrate this by exploring their connection with Palestine, South Africa and the Netherlands.

### 3.2.1 Local Rootedness: Formative City Dynamics

At the start of 2017, the public program featured both Moroccan and non-Moroccan artists. I was able to interview Moroccans, Europeans, and Moroccans from the diaspora, and all of them relate to Marrakech, but each in their own way. One of the interviewees, Rim Mejdî, who grew up in Marrakech, relates to the city and the themes of QANAT motivated by personal experience of the palm groves around Marrakech: "I go there, and my heart breaks because 20 years ago my parents used to take me there to play with my sister. Two years ago, it was a palm grove. Now there's nothing." This direct experience of the drought and the degradation of the drought-stricken landscapes in and surrounding Marrakech is a motivation to dig into the past, reflect on the present and speculate on possible futures. Much of Mejdî's work engages with the palm groves by using archive material and documenting memories. Using literary methods such as speculative fiction, she takes a critical position on the possible futures of the landscapes of Marrakech. The notion of memory and affiliated methodologies will be discussed in more detail in section 3.3.2.

For Masoero QANAT has been a way to respond to the politics of the city. Not in a confrontational way, but rather as a response to the city dynamics, so she explains:

In many ways, QANAT has been a way to try to tackle and engage more deeply with the politics of the city. Basically, (...) living in the Medina, and you are also experiencing that, the level of dispossession there has been accumulating over the years. It's making it quite an unliveable place for the majority. So finding a small place, where you can breathe, whether it is by gathering at Dar Belarj or LE18, or maybe in the future having a little green area, where you can reconnect to traditional historic ways of relating to the land or the use of water, growing food or building a brick wall, is I guess, what the attempt is.<sup>154</sup>

This citation is multi-layered, as it situates the motivation of QANAT within a specific context of Marrakech. It has been a way to engage with the city's politics, but the way of doing so is not only by creating a space. It is by creating a space that offers to reflect on the city as well. At the same time, it is not only reconnecting to the past but also speculating on how tradition can inform practice and new ways of relating to land and water use. Within an essay in the first Chergui, published in 2019, she responds to Gramsci's often-quoted statement that the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born. Within this context, she poses that the struggle ahead is "one over our capacity to reimagine and image anew our lives in common."<sup>155</sup> This requires not only thinking differently but also doing differently. The radical imagination that this takes, in Masoero's words, demands "to create alternative spaces, times and modes of social reproduction to allow ourselves and others to be affective and affected, to be sensitive to one another, to listen and take some risks of getting off-track, of leaving on the side part of our own subjectivity (and indeed authorship) and to let in some traces of the others."<sup>156</sup> In that sense, central to her response to the political dynamics of the city is a way to look for the collective, both in social relations and directly by creating material and immaterial spaces that allow for these relations to happen.

More concretely, a way of bringing this into practice was through one of the projects proposed by agroecologist Louisa Aarrass named Entangled Ecologies. This was a series of

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<sup>154</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

<sup>155</sup> Francesca Masoero, "Imaged and Imagined Communities: A Political Economy of Imagination," *Chergui #1*, 2019.

[https://www.academia.edu/39224848/Imaged\\_and\\_Imagined\\_Communities\\_on\\_the\\_Politics\\_Aesthetics\\_and\\_Ethics\\_of\\_Space\\_and\\_Place\\_Making](https://www.academia.edu/39224848/Imaged_and_Imagined_Communities_on_the_Politics_Aesthetics_and_Ethics_of_Space_and_Place_Making).

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

workshops aimed at understanding food sovereignty in the context of Marrakech. The workshops evolved around mapping the understanding of Les Mamans Douée, the community of women affiliated with Dar Bellarj, of types of gardens and imagining what a desired garden looks like. Aarrass explains: “We had a few different days where the women brought in a lot of different seeds and herbs, and we would map together the knowledge that the group had around their uses.”<sup>157</sup> In addition to the invitation of experts over the year, Masoero explains that “Entangled Ecologies evolved around taking care of and learning with the garden and keep sort of growing things, testing things; some things work and others didn't.”<sup>158</sup> The garden became, therefore, an actor that allowed to talk about topics such as food sovereignty while at the same time experimenting with different models and building on the knowledge that is already present within the community.

At the same time, Aarrass also explains with her work how QANAT is locally oriented, not only by engaging with the particular history of Marrakech as a garden city but also focused on working with local communities: “I was very much focused on making things with our community, which is like hyper-specific. It's the community of the Marrakech Medina, and not even on the other side, like just on one side, around the neighbourhoods of LE18 and Dar Bellarj.”<sup>159</sup> It shows how the work of QANAT is informed by the local history and political dynamics of Marrakech and that the work is focused on working with local communities and their knowledge and desires.

The relationship with Marrakech is manifold; not only are the themes addressed closely related to the city's history and the work focused on the city's communities, but also the dynamic of the city shapes the way of the collective, which helps to understand the dynamic between the local rootedness and the international approach of QANAT. Laila Hida explains how every cultural institution in Morocco is inherently embedded within the ecosystem of the city they're based in. This applies as well to QANAT and its fluid dynamic. She compares Marrakech to an airport where people constantly transit, come in, and go out. This, according to Hida, shaped QANAT as well, as people have been involved for short periods to then move on.

So, the way QANAT is shaped by Marrakech is multi-layered. For some, it comes forward from an affective relationship with the city, for others, it is a way to respond to the political

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<sup>157</sup> Aarrass, interview.

<sup>158</sup> Francesca Masoero, interview by author, Marrakech, Morocco, 27 May, 2024 (appendix 7).

<sup>159</sup> Aarrass, interview.

dynamics of the city. The themes addressed and the projects put in practice are always closely linked to the history of the city. At the same time, it's the city itself that has a dynamic of flux, where people constantly come in and go out. The long-term collaborators often have moved on and brought their experiences in Marrakech to different contexts. Over time, QANAT has connected with other contexts, building on its core of the engagement with the poetics and politics of water. By exploring two different collaborations, I will illustrate how QANAT connects its locally embedded work to other contexts.

### 3.2.2 Connection to Palestine

As QANAT's roots lie in the Mediterranean network, not surprisingly, many international exchanges happen across the Middle East and North Africa. During my four months of fieldwork, I got a glimpse of the extensive network of LE18 and QANAT and the international conversation they're part of. For example, part of the same research-based, artistic scene is the festival and residency place Caravane Tighmert in the Oasis town Tighmert and its sister festival in Oudane, Mauritania; many of the artists that join these residencies of Caravane Tighmert and Caravane Oudane end up presenting their work within the context of QANAT or LE18. In LE18's film program, I could visit screenings of filmmakers from, for example, Algeria. The bookstore of LE18 imported zines from the Tunisian BROUDOU publishing on food sovereignty and food futures in Tunisia. In Ateliers Collectif, I participated in a workshop of the Egyptian architect, artist and researcher Manar Moursi, an expert in Egypt's coastal infrastructure. It shows how QANAT and LE18 at large are involved in a conversation that happens across the region. But reoccurring in every conversation, in the film programs, in the publications, and in the hosted workshops, is Palestine.

The connection to Palestine is omnipresent, and probably the most important one. Masoero explains that QANAT “has been a way to ground your work whether you are from here or not, in this locality in the complexities there are.” At the same time, “There has always been a desire or an intention to (...) create bridges of conversations across different localities. That loosely started happening through the intimate relationships that some of the QANAT diggers [longtime participants] have and I think Shayma [Nader] in Palestine is the best example.”<sup>160</sup> Nader suggested running a programme in Palestine, so Masoero explains “she wanted to bring QANAT and some of our conversations and approaches (...) to her own network in

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<sup>160</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

Palestine.”<sup>161</sup> This became *Suspended Roots*, a public program that happened in 2021: “Part of it was 100% in Palestine, and then a few things that we tried to do in dialogue. So a hybrid format with gatherings in Marrakech and gatherings in Palestine; bringing filmmakers and activist scholars from the region in conversation.”<sup>162</sup>

The suspended roots culminated in workshops, film screenings and conversations at different locations. It included film screenings of Jumana Manna’s *Wild Relatives* and Noor Abed’s *our songs were ready for all the wars to come*, happening simultaneously in Bil’in and Marrakech. It is difficult to analyse the Suspended Roots program in detail because much of the work is process-oriented and not everything is documented. However, my experiences during my fieldwork can shine a light on the relationship with Palestine. For example, this film of Abed and Manna’s work, in general, has been presented more often within the context of QANAT. Sometimes, they were selected by the same curators, Shayma Nader and Francesca Masoero, as they were screened both during the Suspended Roots program as well as during *Confluence*, a 1-year residency program and research program happening in exchange with the Center for Contemporary Arts Glasgow. The work of Abed and Manna was also shown during the workshop of Manar Moursi, in which I participated. Of Abed we watched the same film, of Manna we watched the film *Foraging*.

Moursi selected these films within the context of her workshop to explore environmental narratives relating to rivers, particularly the Oued Issyl in Marrakech. The workshop was structured by critically analysing environmental representation in several movies and texts, alternating with field visits to the Oued Issyl and the palm groves. During the workshop, the participants, with various backgrounds, including ethnography and ethnobotany scholars, artists, and women from Dar Bellarj, were asked to propose works. I wrote an essay reflecting on my experience participating in the workshop. My experience within the workshop shows how these movies have a broader, diffractive function. Not only do these movies stand on their own, but they are also entry points for a broader discussion. Moreover, within our workshop, they are the difference that makes a difference; as participants, we discussed and reflected upon these movies and then presented work relating to the same topics.

The film *our songs were ready for all wars to come* builds on Palestinian folkloric traditions portraying traditional dances and cooking rituals, supported by a nauseating soundtrack of

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

industrial electronic music. During our discussions, we explored both the artistic decisions Abed made, such as the decision for 8mm to create a timeless feel, as well as the topics she addressed, such as the meaning of folkloric traditions. This led us to explore the relationship between spirituality and resistance and how the right to land, the political struggle and the resistance fight are connected to the spiritual connection to land expressed within folkloric traditions. The acknowledgement of the value of folkloric traditions perpetuates the practice of QANAT, which focuses on documenting memories and builds further on a similar understanding of knowledge production.

A similar discussion occurred following the screening of Manna's movie *Foragers*. The filmmaker depicts Palestinian foraging communities in the Golan Heights and the Westbank, showing their relationship with the akkoub plant, a wild, thorny, healthy, edible plant. In 2005, the Israelis criminalised the foraging of the akkoub plant, declaring it a 'protected plant.'<sup>163</sup> In 2019, this law was revised, allowing the picking of small amounts for personal use.<sup>164</sup> Yet, the film portrays how the foraging communities are still constantly threatened and prosecuted, accusing the Palestinians of harvesting the plant to sell and not for personal use. In the conversation afterwards, led by Tala Khoury, a nutritionist and researcher of wild food plants and food sovereignty in Palestine, the film opened a rich discussion. We explored the aesthetic decisions made by Manna to portray the communities in the land from far and distant shots, showing the Palestinian's relationship with the plant as part of the same ecology. From there, we discussed the notions of Indigenous knowledge, as the film portrays a woman who explains that for years, the akkoub would flourish, as the Palestinians know precisely how much to take to let the plant grow back even stronger the year after. This was the case until the criminalisation of foraging, after which the plant became more scarce. Similar to acknowledging the value of folklore, these notions of Indigenous knowledge also fit in the broader discourse of QANAT. Furthermore, it led us to critically analyse how environmental narratives, in this case, the Israeli claim to protect the akkoub plant by criminalising foraging, in reality, become another tool of oppression. Khoury touches on the more frequent discussion within QANAT on the role of gardens within food sovereignty as she elaborates on the necessity of homegrown gardens in Palestine. She explained how Palestinians in the Westbank would find ways to use every aspect of their house to grow plants and nurture their

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<sup>163</sup> Rabea Eghbariah, *The Struggle for Za'atar and Akkoub: Israeli Nature Protection Laws and the Criminalization of Palestinian Herb-Picking Culture*, draft version, 107, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Eghbariah.pdf>.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

families. Despite different political realities, the practices and analyses are part of the same conversation. Despite different political realities, gardens can be an alternative approach to food systems and an answer, or even a necessity, to secure food sovereignty.

This illustrates how QANAT is part of an international conversation happening in the region. By demonstrating how, on the one hand, Palestinian artists are invited for residencies in Marrakech, and how the artistic work of Palestinian artists is shown over the course of seven years, an exchange between different contexts happens. Some of the same movies reoccur in various iterations of QANAT and are proposed by different people. These works not only become a way of transmitting knowledge on critical approaches to water and agriculture but also become an entry point into the conversation on food alternatives. As they are often embedded within a broader context, such as the workshop I participated in, QANAT, as a platform, helps to perpetuate the methodologies, aesthetic considerations and topics addressed in these works. Over the years, a discourse has been formed that centres a critical perspective on knowledge production, which will be analysed in more detail in section 3.3.

### 3.2.3 Connection to South Africa and the Netherlands

Taking place from September 2023 until 2024, QANAT developed a collective research project together with the South African collective the ungovernable and Jeanne van Heeswijk under the name *the shadow of the moon*, as well supported by Stimuleringsfonds. Led by the principles of van Heeswijk of knitting different localities, the collective research aims to map practices of resistance and solidarity in Marrakech, Johannesburg and Rotterdam, with a specific focus on local neighbourhoods, independent urban agricultural projects and cultural, pedagogical and social-cultural projects.<sup>165</sup> The project was condensed into three residencies in September 2023 in The Netherlands, January 2024 in Morocco, and March 2024 in South Africa. Each residency built further on the previous one, comprising a program of workshops, design sessions, and informal conversations. For example, the ungovernable shared their work, methodologies and insights from running a community garden in Johannesburg. QANAT, on the other hand, worked on the Riad Laarrouss parc in a speculative design session to explore new ways of using the garden with the neighbourhood.<sup>166</sup> The garden, and especially the park Riad Laarouss, is a frequent site of intervention in which

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<sup>165</sup> “The Shadow of the Moon | Studio Jeannetworks,” Stimuleringsfonds, accessed 6 August, 2024, <https://www.stimuleringsfonds.nl/toekeningen/the-shadow-of-the-moon/>.

<sup>166</sup> Shadow of the Moon (@theshadow.ofthemoon), “*Shadow of the Moon \_ Morocco’s Throwback #2*,” Instagram post, 2 February, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C20ZarcowKA/?igsh=bXBqZmVmODIxdnJ4>.

QANAT seeks to involve and create ownership by the neighbourhood. Also, during my fieldwork, I participated in events taking place in the park.

The ungovernable is a collective based in Johannesburg that, like QANAT, has a practice that focuses on community organising through creative practice and experimentation. On their website, they explain: “We are interested in what it means to govern ourselves: to be accountable to ourselves and our neighbours and to meet the needs of our neighbourhood.”<sup>167</sup> Similarly to QANAT, their focus lies on their local context, the multi-cultural and mixed-income neighbourhood of Parktown ext (also known as Parkbrow), but it is also linked to other parts of Johannesburg and the world.<sup>168</sup> They continue to explain that:

The term 'ungovernable' comes from South Africa's history and from our long tradition of creating better ways of living together. It refers to the practices of self-determination that took place during the states of emergency in the 1980s. This time was characterised by much violence and difficulty, but in the midst of the trouble it also included communities that took charge of their own lives, looking after each other, developing their own service delivery systems, building their own parks for their children to play in.<sup>169</sup>

As I experienced during my participation of the workshops during Ateliers Collectif in May with Manar Moursi, a lot of these workshops are processed based. This makes it hard to get insight into the discussions that happened during the respective residencies. However, in the interview I conducted with Mejdi, she shares some of the common ground as well as the differences in approaches and how the exchange has been inspiring: “I think it's first of all it's the common methodologies and the interests in the commons.”<sup>170</sup> More interesting is how she sees a common ground over land rights and Indigenous rights: “Although maybe with QANAT we don't express it [land and Indigenous rights] that way. Through my travel there I think that we approach this question, but in a different way.”<sup>171</sup> She continues to explain how the project in the palm groves also addresses the displacement of people and therefore entails rights to the land. However, there are also differences: “The difference with South Africa is

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<sup>167</sup> “becoming ungovernable,” the ungovernable, accessed 6 August, 2024, <https://www.theungovernable.org/home>.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Rim Mejdi, interview by author, Marrakech, Morocco, 12 April, 2024 (appendix 5).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

the political history. we don't have this. Of course, South Africa has this great history of struggle, and people are very aware of their rights.”<sup>172</sup> She elaborates that in Morocco:

It's not like the awareness is not there, but not as much. We have some minorities and struggles like in the Middle and in the South [of Morocco] people really have been fighting for years and years for their right to the land and through water usage. I think that's common in South Africa. Of course, it's not in the same frame of liberty as political liberty. Very different.<sup>173</sup>

This illustrates how different localities can have similar struggles over land rights and access to water. Yet, despite different political histories and contexts the understanding or framing of these issues can be very different, while the responses of grassroots community organising can be similar. At the same time, such an exchange enriches political consciousness and the interconnectedness of struggles, as well as the exchange of knowledge and methodologies.

#### 3.3.4 Subconclusion

This section showed how QANAT's work happens in conversations with other local contexts. Its practice starts within the locality of Marrakech, shaped by individual motivations of long-term participants, sometimes as a response to city dynamics and a way to root, sometimes to address the challenges of the city that affect on a personal level. This allows for an answer to the subquestion on the relevance of the relationship between local embeddedness and international relations. In its urban dynamics and local challenges, QANAT takes shape in the way topics are informed, but also in the typical flux of the city where QANAT as an entity is constantly redefined. Starting from Morocco's political challenges regarding access to water and food security, it has found common ground with other localities. It hosts work of other similar initiatives from the region, with a special focus on Palestine. Some films are presented more regularly and not only function as a way to transmit knowledge but also as an entry point for discussing topics and creating new artistic work. Despite differences, there are reoccurring topics in both exchanges with Palestine and South Africa. We can recognise the specific focus on the gardens and knowledge production. In doing so, it learns from local forms of resistance, as shown, for example, in the exchange with the ungovernable. Here Mejdī found inspiration in questions over land rights in the way how the South African collective approached these questions rooted in their political history.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3 A perspective on knowledge production

In this section, I will discuss how QANAT relates to knowledge production and answer how QANAT integrates different knowledge systems within its interdisciplinary practice. I will do this by first illustrating how QANAT approaches knowledge production by analysing some of the work QANAT has presented in addition to the interviews conducted. This shows how interdisciplinarity and memory are crucial pillars in QANAT's approach to knowledge production. Building on this, I'll show how there is a common aesthetic in the methodologies used throughout the seven years of QANAT. One of these methodologies is the practice of making maps and cartography; I will illustrate in the discussion of several works how cartography plays a crucial role in knowledge production and the accessibility of knowledge. In the following section, I will critically analyse how archiving is a central pillar in QANAT's practice by showing that they do important work in grassroots documentation while arguing that they lack the financial means to archive their rich body of work adequately. Following these aspects, I discuss how these approaches come together within their work around gardens.

#### 3.3.1 Situated Knowledge

In the paragraph on the connection of QANAT with Palestine, I discussed how the films of Noor Abed and Juamana Manna sparked a discussion on Indigenous and local knowledge systems. This perspective on knowledge production is not an abstract theme discussed during film screenings but is central to QANAT's artistic research and methodologies. One such way is bringing together people with different backgrounds, as Masoero did during the first iterations of QANAT in 2017 and 2018:

The point was to bring different methodologies together because some are coming from research, some are coming from pure activist work, some are coming from an architecture background, but some are working with communities. Another one is coming from a visual arts practice, but is open to work with communities and reads the stuff of academics.”<sup>174</sup>

This approach, and the leading principle of bringing people together, reflects the understanding of a horizontal approach to knowledge production. This approach is, on the one hand, characterised by interdisciplinarity, in which people from different backgrounds are brought together, and on the other, by an understanding of knowledge as situated, following

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<sup>174</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

the conceptualisation of situated knowledge as explained within the methodology section. It recognises that people speak from different backgrounds, and bringing these people together, academics, artists, activists, and local communities, can lead to a more rich understanding of water issues, reclaiming objectivity, following Haraway, or universality through pluriversality in Mbembe's words.

I experienced how this works, and more specifically, the collective sensing and sense-making, during one of the field visits during the workshop of Moursi. This workshop included participants from a wide range of backgrounds, including anthropology, ethnobotany and dance, film, and visual arts. As the pillar of Dar Bellarj and the Ateliers Collectif, also some women of Les Maman Douée joined the workshop. We visited the Oued Issyl, a river that springs in the High Atlas Mountains, flowing through Marrakech and into the sea in Safi. During our visit in May, the river was completely dry, and it had seemingly already been for quite some time. With the guidance of Moursi, we were asked to reflect personally on the river through notions of affect. Each of us would interact differently with the river, the dancer exploring it physically, the ethnobotanist pointing out some of the flowers and their medicinal uses, and the women sharing their memories of when the river would actually flood the banks and pointing out some of the traces that indicate this.

Moursi's workshop fit into a longer aesthetic or ideational commons of shared methods and approaches within the Les Ateliers Collectif workshops. Within Ateliers Collectif, experts, in the broadest sense and not limited to academics, are invited to provide a workshop open for anyone but often in collaboration with Les Maman Douée, a community of women in the Medina of Marrakech affiliated with Dar Bellarj. As mentioned, many of these workshops focused on developing a garden and building a garden using a method similar to Moursi's. One interviewee explains: "We had a few different days where the women brought in a lot of different seeds and herbs, and we would map together the knowledge that the group had around their uses."<sup>175</sup> Continuing to say: "So we work with the women and with their knowledge from their mothers and aunties, and whoever else. And collect these recipes that are like important to us and yeah, otherwise we don't have written down and then be able to use them of course, like in the garden, once it actually existed."<sup>176</sup> So, one motivation for their work is the recognition and documentation of knowledge that does not always get recognised as such: "Then often it's like so much of the knowledge we have around recipes and food and

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<sup>175</sup> Aarrass, interview.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

like medicinal uses for plants or like cosmetic uses of plants in the context of Morocco gets passed through like oral knowledge.”<sup>177</sup> Another interviewee captures it beautifully: “I mean, they materialise these commons through their bodies and cultural practices. We receive them and we reflect with them on it, and we push them to reflect. And we feel like we're really a treasure guardian somehow, because we are trusted with this. Sometimes we see things that we never thought existed.”<sup>178</sup> This illustrates some understanding of the collective and knowledge production. The notions of sensing and sense-making seem accurate to describe this practice. The knowledge of the women is embodied and part of collective social practices and collective experiences. Within the workshops, by bringing in other experts holding other situated knowledge, QANAT makes collectively sense of, for example, the Oued Issyl or agroecological uses of plants to develop a community garden.

For QANAT this is driven by the political understanding of knowledge that is too often not recognised as such. So Masoero explains “I mean water is political anyways, no matter which angle you take it, as much as land.”<sup>179</sup> Within this context, the categorisation of knowledge matters: “the categorisation of historic forms traditional knowledges, as you know from the past and to be discarded like trying to work towards. Like we bringing them into the picture as something that is actually deeply wise, valuable and yeah, rooted in a place and with a reason that is related to the place that's a political work too, you know.”<sup>180</sup> Not only does the knowledge itself matter, it also works emancipatory:

“regathering some of those practises, histories and knowledges emerging from water, water infrastructures and gardens, let's say communal infrastructures, institutions and cultures. Recognising them and bringing the people that still have them in their own hearts in a way, as Maha [Elmadi, director of Dar Bellarj] says, also makes them feel proud about it instead of ashamed.”

It illustrates how the acknowledgement of local knowledges is countering an orientalist understanding of tradition instead of perpetuating it. While modernist discourses might celebrate tradition for its exoticism, at the same time, redeem it as invalid. The validation of the knowledge these women hold overcomes the binary between modernisation and tradition

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Mejdi, interview.

<sup>179</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

and shows how building on tradition and local knowledges is valid without orientalising or exoticising it.

### 3.3.2 Methodologies

As the work of Abed and Manna reoccurs within different iterations and is curated by different people, so there is a common aesthetic in reoccurring methodologies. Within the interviews and the documented artistic works, I could distinguish three approaches that can be considered a shared aesthetic or ideational commons: cartography, speculative fiction and walking. For example, during the first public program in 2017, the Belgian artist Jérôme Giller proposed a performative collective walk following the water lines and administrative border of Marrakech, exploring natural and political borders and the implicated territories.<sup>181</sup> This approach of collective walking, an act of sensing and sense-making, also happened during Moursi's workshop, as described in the previous section. One of the interviewees also understood these shared methodologies as commons: “The commons becomes all these projects practised in all the different shapes within the locality of the place where they are situated. Walking, around which Jérômes [Giller] practice evolves, is then taken over by other projects. So walking in an area, tracing a river, as a practice, multiplies and gets shared.”<sup>182</sup> However, these influences happen implicitly. For example, when asking one interviewee who works on speculative fiction if she got inspired by other collective members using the same method, she answered that she finds the use of sci-fi and speculative fiction in general overhyped but that it fits her project in particular. This makes it difficult to make strict claims on how these methodologies work through different projects, as they sometimes happen without prior knowledge, in the case of Moursi and are sometimes not recognised as an influence.

However, there is a clear common aesthetic and approach within the work of QANAT at large. The most concrete and best-documented aspect is the use of maps and cartography as a practice. Based on three different works, *A Drop from Heaven* by Abdellah M. Hassak, *SAFINA* developed by Amine Lahrach, and *Gardens of Fez* by Heidi Vogels, I will analyse how QANAT reconceptualises cartography as a critical methodology for knowledge production and how this methodology forms a common aesthetic.

#### **What is cartography?**

The question of maps and cartography is a whole academic discipline on its own, and this thesis does not intend to address this debate. However, some of the theoretical and conceptual

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<sup>181</sup> “Jérôme Giller: QANAT,” Training for the Not-Yet, accessed 6 August, 2024, <https://trainingforthenotyet.net/trainers/jrme+giller/>; Jérôme Giller, “*Sur les bords / On the Edges of Marrakech*,” Vimeo, December 16, 2019, <https://vimeo.com/379732619>.

<sup>182</sup> Vogels, interview.

understandings of cartography can provide a point of reference for understanding the cartographic work of QANAT. In the widely influential book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explore the notion of maps in close relation to their understanding of rhizomatic networks. As the rhizome, a non-hierarchical network with no clear centre that can be entered from any point, mapping is a practice of knowledge production drawing on a similar understanding: “A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back ‘to the same.’ The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged ‘competence.’”<sup>183</sup> Cartography as a metaphor, or mapping as a practice, can be understood as a way to explore the complexity of reality, being able to reflect non-linear relations.

Building on Deleuze and Guattari, Rosi Braidotti formalised cartography in a critical methodology for knowledge production. So, she states: “A cartography is a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the present. A cartographic approach fulfils the function of providing both analytic and exegetical tools for critical thought and also creative theoretical alternatives.”<sup>184</sup> She further explains how her cartographic project is an analysis of location in terms of power, following Foucault in an understanding of power as both restrictive and empowering. Cartography then becomes a way of political positioning outlining a situated perspective both in time and space. This concerns both maps, as a traditional understanding of the word, but also metaphorical: “I think that many of the things I write are cartographies, that is to say, maps of positioning: a sort of intellectual landscape gardening that gives me a horizon, a frame of reference within which I can take my bearings, move about, and set up my own theoretical tent.”<sup>185</sup> Using this understanding of cartography, I will illustrate, based on three different projects, how QANAT uses maps as a rhizomatic entry point in the politics of water, mapping situated experiences in Marrakech, Safi and Fez.

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<sup>183</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 12-13.

<sup>184</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

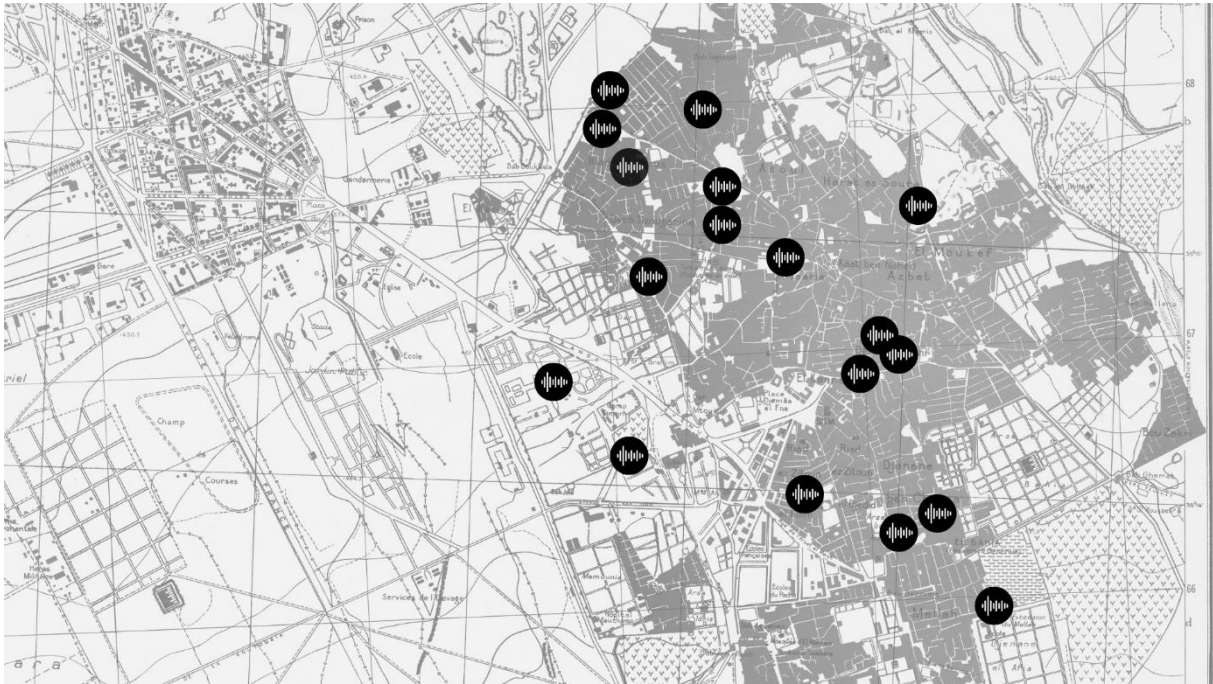


Figure 1 Map of *A Drop from Heaven*<sup>186</sup>

The work *A Drop from Heaven* is twofold, as it is both a process-oriented work that was developed in a workshop format with the community of Dar Bellarj, as well as a public work published in Chergui #3 and accessible online. Hassak explains the process and aim of the project on his website. Other than most Ateliers Collectif workshops, Hassak involved young city inhabitants, encouraging them to create a map of their city and present their perspectives on their urban environment.<sup>187</sup> During these workshops Hassak both narrowed down the project in presenting key themes, providing an ‘auditory invitation’ to contemplate ‘water, memory, and the city’s future.’ Building on Braidotti’s understanding of cartography, such an approach builds on a situated experience of the city of Marrakech, where a particular group, young city inhabitants, is invited to reflect on their experience of the city concerning a specific political issue: water. In Hassak’s own words:

The project is a dynamic and innovative instrument for valuing heritage and preserving the stories, sounds, and songs of ordinary people, city streets, and nature. It provides an opportunity for participants and listeners alike to engage with the city and

<sup>186</sup> “Cities and Memory – Sound Mapping / رسم الخرائط الصوتية – المدن والذاكرة,” Abdellah M. Hassak, accessed on 10 August 2024, <https://hassak.net/map/>.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

its inhabitants in a more intimate and immersive way while also contributing to the creation of a collective memory of the city.<sup>188</sup>

More concretely, the final result is a map of Marrakech with set out routes guided by sound files accessible on Soundcloud linked to specific physical locations. The sound recordings entail field recordings, narrated stories, edited music tracks, and other sonic interpretations of location. For example, we can listen to a field recording recorded in the Tanner's district of Marrakech. We can hear what sounds like the collecting of water from a basin, almost in a beatlike structure, interrupted with soft mumbling in the background. The description mentions the switch from historically collective water-sharing systems towards now privatised water access. Entering this topic from an affective approach by recording particular sounds that can be commonly heard during a specific time in history with an urban soundscape, the listener can be reminded of the temporality of these practices.

Other recordings are less abstract and, for example, narrate the story of a woman the workshop participants encountered who recalls the memory of a wellspring, a source for other wells. She elaborates how it initially was a rudimentary cavity, where women would not only go to get water but also gather to inhabit the space to put on henna, swim and wash. It illustrates how such a site is not only a pragmatic place where you gather resources but also a place with practices tied to them. The women continues to elaborate how the city used to have over a hundred of these springs, but that nowadays only a few are left.

Another story gives insight into how water also has spiritual importance. A man tells the existence of the Djinn in gnaoua culture, which is tied to water. He explores how some Djinn are connected to water while others are tied to the sky. He elaborates on water being a source of life and, as such, has healing powers linking it to the medicinal properties of water. He closes with an old expression of Marrakech, "Your enemy, give them water, and keep him close." The saying is a version of the expression 'keep your enemies close,' but with an added value placed on the role of the much-needed resource.

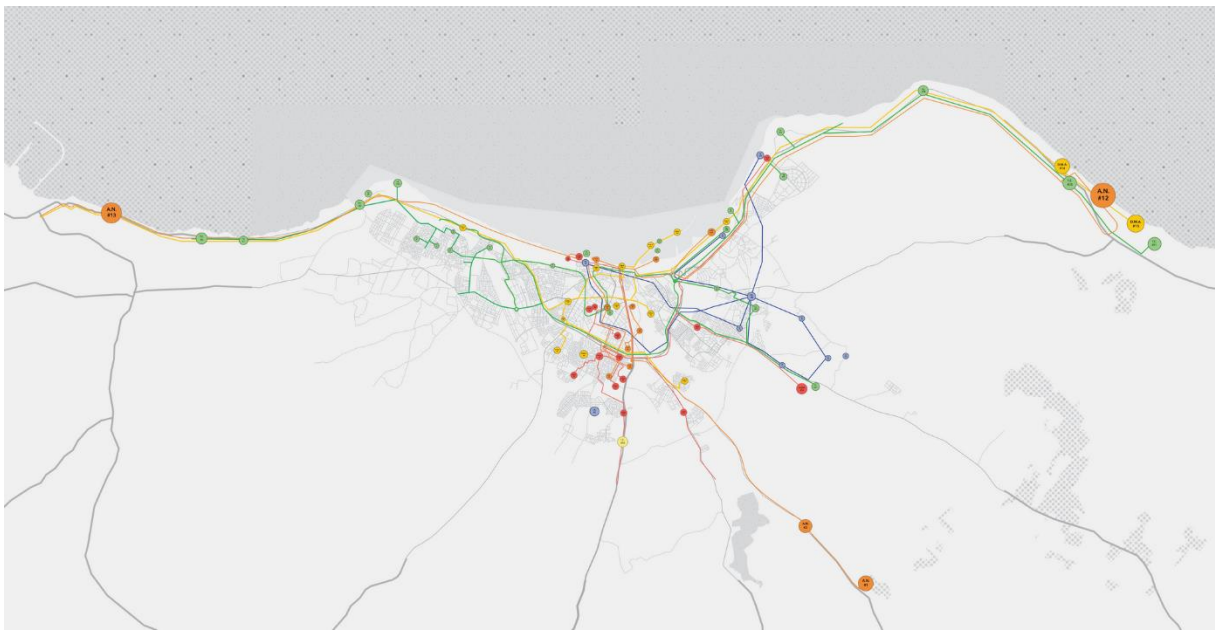
On their own, these stories might not be more than what they are, they are just nice stories. But, linked together, we see a diversity of voices that address water in all its forms: as a much-needed resource, but also linked to rituals and with the value it has within spiritual and religious beliefs. The map, therefore, links coincidental encounters between younger and older generations that share stories and imaginations related to Marrakech. Although this map

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

shows us a particular experience of the city, it links these encounters within a collective memory and a collective experience of water privatisation, water scarcity, and the disappearance of functioning wells. Yet, these conversations happen in a non-linear way and won't usually happen again. Therefore, this cartographic approach becomes an entry within this broader rhizomatic network of experiences and an attempt to document the collective memory at a particular moment in time.

### **Amine Lahrach – SAFINA**



*Figure 2 The Map of Safi within the framework of SAFINA<sup>189</sup>*

The second map is the project Amine Lahrach proposed in the context of QANAT Cura. In this project, named Safina he invited artists from his hometown Safi (or Asfi in Amazigh etymology, which refers to the idea of flooding and pouring, as explained in the introduction text).<sup>190</sup> The coastal town is known for its port and fishing industry and is promoted as the capital of ceramics and pottery.<sup>191</sup> However, it has also been the central hub of Morocco's phosphate industry since the 1960s. The phosphate industry has been repeatedly criticised for environmental pollution, including the dumping of heavy metals in the Atlantic Ocean.

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<sup>189</sup> "SAFINA: A Cartography of Memories - A Notebook," QANAT, accessed August 10, 2024. [https://qanat.org/QC-007\\_Safina\\_CARTE](https://qanat.org/QC-007_Safina_CARTE).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> "Safi, Pearl of the Atlantic Ocean," Visit Morocco, accessed August 10, 2024, <https://www.visitmorocco.com/en/travel/safi>.

Safi.<sup>192</sup> Although this is not the central focus of SAFINA, it is some significant background information on the city.

SAFINA has a similar starting point as *A Drop from Heaven*. It “emerged from the desire to generate a new wave, a poetical answer to the city’s condition, by inviting a number of ‘invisible’, underground artists that hold in common the very city of SAFI, hence the name of the project SAFI-NA: Our Safi!”<sup>193</sup> Delving into the memories and desires of these artists, SAFINA is a subjective cartography which, similar to *A Drop from Heaven*, touches on a collective memory. The mapping of SAFINA consists of five different routes, each narrated by another artist. It starts from the hyper-individual in which the artists share personal stories of where they went to school or highlight places where they used to hang out. The overarching feeling is nostalgia when, for example, the artists bring up memories of swimming at the beach, of the places where they would meet friends, and where they had formative learning experiences. But while progressing and when some routes start to intersect, memories also start to intersect, and patterns start to emerge. One recurring place mentioned is the beach and the port, with the nostalgic image of the fishermen with their rods hanging out in the sea. Another common thread is the affective and sensory relationship the artists have with the city, ranging from describing the smell of flowers to the scent of the industry, how they feel free with the sea, and the valuing of artisanship of the pottery neighbourhood. While many of the stories can be relatable or universal coming-of-age stories, by mapping them in physical spaces, the map creates an affective and sensory image of the city, bearing feelings of nostalgia. Where *A Drop from Heaven* centres the histories, myths and challenges of Marrakech, SAFINA only touches on these topics. Instead, it brings forward the affective relationship of the city and how the city shaped these individuals into the persons they are. In that way, it also has a rhizomatic approach, where it unrolls an intangible network of memories that can be accessed via individual entry points. The cartography layers and connects these personal memories, illustrating a collective memory of the city and highlighting how the people who grew up in the city feel.

### **Heidi Vogels – *Gardens of Fez***

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<sup>192</sup> Laila Belahbib et al., "Impact of Phosphate Industry on Natural Radioactivity in Sediment, Seawater, and Coastal Marine Fauna of El Jadida Province, Morocco," *Journal of Hazardous, Toxic, and Radioactive Waste* 25, no. 1 (2021): [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)HZ.2153-5515.0000563](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)HZ.2153-5515.0000563).

<sup>193</sup> "SAFINA: A Cartography of Memories - A Notebook," QANAT, accessed August 10, 2024, [https://qanat.org/QC-007\\_Safina\\_CARTE](https://qanat.org/QC-007_Safina_CARTE).

The work *Gardens of Fez* is an ongoing research trajectory and film project by the Dutch artist Heidi Vogels. Although the project is not developed within the context of QANAT, one of the iterations of the project has been presented within the first QANAT exhibition, and Vogels has been a close collaborator during QANAT's first phase and co-curated the public program *Performing Change from the Margins* in 2018. Therefore, I consider her work relevant to understanding the broader aesthetic of QANAT with regard to cartography as a methodology.

Since 2012, Vogels has been gathering material and assembling an archive of footage relating to the gardens of Fez. Within this period, in different contexts, she has presented the material in various formats, in short films, installations or exhibitions. The project started with an interest in the inner gardens of Fez, but soon, she found out how the garden space is entangled within a broader garden culture and the origin history of the city, which she explained to me in an interview. She simply started knocking on doors, asking people about gardens. This worked surprisingly well, she said, and over time, she managed to build a rich archive with memories and documentation of the gardens of Fez.

Through these perspectives, the different dimensions of the garden became tangible to her. She explains a twofold relationship between the garden and representation. On the one hand, the garden reflects a culture encapsulated in the 'microcosmos' of the physical garden space. This culture entails the uses of the garden space, its histories, and people's memories of it. On the other hand, the garden is also represented in the broader culture and history. For example, as she elaborates, within traditional Malhoun poetry, nature and the garden are vehicles used as a medium to talk about other aspects of life, such as politics, love stories, and the relationship with the divine. It's this relationship between the physical and the virtual that she seeks to capture in her cinematography, which she explains with Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*. A space that is public nor private but mediates between past and present.

In a conversation she had in the context of a public exhibition of the work in 2022, she used the concept of cartography to explain the project: "This research unfolded a cartography of spaces and practices linked through the stories and memories of the people I met in Fez about the disappearing gardens of the city."<sup>194</sup> In my interview with her, she further explained how she aims to portray the interaction between what you see and what you see and what you

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<sup>194</sup> "Things Unseen," TENT Rotterdam, accessed 10 August 2024, <https://www.tentrotterdam.nl/en/artikelen/things-unseen/>.

don't see. By filming people from close by, as if from their perspective, she seeks to open up what you cannot see: the memories and the spiritual dimensions of, for example, how people communicate with the ghosts of the water. In that sense, she builds on the concept of cartography. A map is also a virtual layer that entails information on our physical presence, and as Braidotti mentions, it provides a tool to position oneself while providing a horizon. By searching for the spiritual layer by documenting people's memories, her film work becomes a cartography of the gardens of Fez that brings together the physical and virtual aspects of the garden space.

To conclude, this section shows, based on three works that have been either developed or presented within the context of QANAT, that there are similar methodologies. Cartography can be considered a shared aesthetic and an approach to telling and documenting stories and experiences of different cities in Morocco. Understanding this cartographic approach as rhizomatic can illustrate how the individual and particular experiences can speak to each other in a non-hierarchical web of connections. Mapping the subjective creates a web of connections that speak to each other and shape a collective memory and experience of the city, including the political challenges, myths, and memories.

### 3.3.3 Archiving

“There are no archives,”<sup>195</sup> stated one of the interviewees boldly. The question of archives is another urgency relating to the accessibility of knowledge, following QANAT’s perspective on knowledge and its methodologies. Archiving, and therefore the accessibility of knowledge, is another pillar within its work. Also, other interviewees bring up this urgency. Vogels mentions how she faced the lack of archives when researching the city: “In Fez, I faced this a lot; at a certain moment, I started researching the city to see what is accessible and what is not in terms of knowledge. There’s simply no information centre about the history of the city.”<sup>196</sup> Someone else highlights how some of the histories relating to water are not represented in the national archives due to how the archives were treated after independence: “The way it was, and also colonial history and how the Khettaras, for example, were mapped and archived by the colonial administration and how the independence administration just didn't care for the archives. You know, it's disastrous.”<sup>197</sup>

The archives in Morocco have a long and complex history, and it was only in 2013 that Morocco opened the new Moroccan National Archives. As scholar Sumayya Ahmed highlights, it was in 2004 that the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) addressed the ‘deplorable state of national archives’ and even had to turn to fictional texts and a play as testimonials and documentation to reconstruct the period under review.<sup>198</sup> Within her discussion of official and alternative Moroccan archives, Ahmed also highlights the position of colonial archives. She put forward how Moroccan nationalists and intellectuals in the 70s, aware of how colonial archives will always reflect power relations, sought initiatives to decolonise the Moroccan Archives.<sup>199</sup> Ahmed positions these initiatives as the aim for collecting Indigenous archival materials concerning the current national archives. She states that the motives behind these initiatives, such as the Hassan II Prize aiming to retrieve documents that people have at home, might have delayed opening a national archive.<sup>200</sup> But it can’t explain that the national archives have a disproportionate amount of records of the protectorate phase, lacking materials of the phase after independence.<sup>201</sup> However, she concludes that Morocco is still in the process of archival and historical memory process,

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<sup>195</sup> Masoero, interview, 27 May, 2024.

<sup>196</sup> Vogels, interview.

<sup>197</sup> Mejd, interview.

<sup>198</sup> Sumayya Ahmed, "Archives du Maroc? The Official and Alternative National Archives of Morocco," *Archives & Manuscripts* 46, no. 3 (2019): 255-256, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2018.1558408>.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

which is a later stage of the decolonisation process. Some progress has been made under the pressure of the TRC, but current archives are far from perfect. Not only because of this disbalance of colonial archives but also because of a mandate that is not well equipped with enough budget, staff and physical space.<sup>202</sup>

But as the TRC also turned to fictitious texts and a play, it shows how artists can fill missing gaps within national archives. It is just one answer to the relationship between contemporary artists and the archive. For this wide open-ended question, Anthony Downey, editor of *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East*, explores art practices that create alternative and speculative archival forms.<sup>203</sup> It is within this context that he states: “The institutional, governmental, social, cultural and administrative function of the archive, its development as a body of information into an unquestioned system of applied narratives and beliefs, should not, however, overshadow the personal, dissonant, contingent and performative aspect of the archive as a contested site of enunciation.”<sup>204</sup> It is, therefore, that he reminds us how archives, building on Foucault, are a discursive system of knowledge, enabling statements and disallowing the authority of other statements to become a concern for artists as well.<sup>205</sup> While simultaneously claiming “that art does not produce verifiable knowledge as such, rather it engages in a series of ruminative gestures that give rise to non-definitive narratives and tentative forms of suppositional knowledge.”<sup>206</sup> It is within this complex relationship that artists navigate different possibilities, creating new narratives by building on existing archives and filling gaps in the current archives.

Within this context, some of the artists understand their work as an archive. For example, filmmaker Rim Mejdī works on a film series on the palm groves. So she explains: “The project would become something like an archive, a big archive that documents the palm grove’s history. So with different materials, not only video but sound. photos and drawings; archival materials.”<sup>207</sup> What is interesting is that she explains her artistic work in terms of becoming an archive. The aim of the project becomes manifold; one is to document the

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>203</sup> Anthony Downey, "Contingency, Dissonance and Performativity: Critical Archives and Knowledge Production in Contemporary Art," in *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East*, ed. Anthony Downey (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 13.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>207</sup> Mejdī, interview.

histories of the palm groves as the project works extensively on interviews she conducted in her research. She traces memories and personal accounts of the palm groves and the khettaras in these interviews. She found many stories on one particular khettaras during QANAT's research, but never personal stories. Until, by coincidence, she found someone who shared his memory of the lush green and how this particular khettara turned dry and became a dangerous place for kids with the risk of falling into the deep holes. It adds to the vast collection of materials that the collective gathered, including lectures by academics such as, for example, Thierry Ruf, who did extensive research on the history and geography of water in Morocco.

The question is how we can understand the film project as an archive or in relation to archiving. As Mejdī explains, there is always the challenge of rendering information:

Because one of the tricky things with this project, I think, is the amount of information that is really new. And to have these different experts and people and the information is scattered everywhere. How could you bring it together and render it both artistically and research-wise so it could be interesting to different audiences: for a large audience, but also for experts, artists, and researchers?"<sup>208</sup>

In that sense, it can be understood as an archiving practice. With the project, she is developing a collection with a central focus, the palm groves and the khettaras, in which she gathers different materials and brings them together in one place as a collection. However, this is, of course, not archiving in the traditional sense of the word, as the collection at large is not permanently accessible. But it does make some of the information accessible and traceable.

The archiving practice of QANAT, however, is larger than one individual project. Over time, QANAT has gathered a very rich body of information with all facets regarding the poetics and politics of water and all its ramifications, ranging from publications, cartographies, recipes, personal experiences and memories to recorded lectures by academics. In addition to what can be publicly found, there is even more material held in private archives, so Masoero shares the following: "For instance, we spent a very long time walking throughout the whole city taking photos of what is left of the green today. (...) You know, think of these small micro patches that people build where they can."<sup>209</sup> It shows a grassroots approach to documentation with a specific focus on anything water-related. In that sense, it is building a very rich archive that can become a central point of reference and point of departure for anyone interested in water.

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<sup>208</sup> Mejdī, interview.

<sup>209</sup> Masoero, interview, 27 May, 2024.

However, critical remarks have to be made as well. One of the unfortunate limits with regard to archiving is the lack of traceability of their materials. For example, the work of Hassak can be found on his personal website, while SAFINA can be found on the website that was created for QANAT Cura. Lectures that were recorded in 2017 and 2018 can be found on the Soundcloud of LE18, while there are also lectures available on the YouTube channel of Dar Bellarj. Additionally, essays and publications such as Chergui, the reoccurring zine, can be found on the Academia.Edu page of Masoero but mixed with other work unrelated to QANAT. But much, if not most, of the work remains undisclosed on private servers. Due to the lack of a structural approach to the archival of the material, much of the artefacts will be unsustainable. The first cracks already appear as some of the links on the websites of individual artists appear to be not working.

“We had all the scans of those maps and we had the intention of creating a zine. But in reality, we didn't finish it.”<sup>210</sup> It seems to be one of the recurring challenges to make some of the materials they produced accessible, such as, for example, the work they did with the Les Mamans Douées. This is mainly due to one significant actor: money. When I ask Masoero why many of the results of the workshops remain undisclosed, the answer is simple: “It's mainly because there is always very little money and very little people that are actually doing the job of following up.”<sup>211</sup> Although QANAT is a collective effort, the division of labour and working with very limited and non-structural means sometimes make it hard to grasp what a rich body of work QANAT has produced. Much of what happens, as I experienced in the participation of the work of Manar Moursi, is processed-based. Sometimes, there are concrete results, such as *A Drop from Heaven*. However, the activities are often relational and exist in collective practices such as cooking and working together. Within these relational works, knowledge exchange has a central focus, and QANAT succeeds in bringing a plurality of voices together. It can potentially become a very rich archive documenting anything related to water in Marrakech and Morocco at large. However, this requires a lot of work, and funding for something like this remains scarce and might not even be the priority.

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<sup>210</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

<sup>211</sup> Masoero, interview, 6 March, 2024.

### 3.3.4 Gardens

Throughout this section and thesis, the notion of the garden is repeatedly mentioned.

Although more sites, such as the historical irrigation systems of the *khattaras* or the palm groves, have become places of exploration and intervention for QANAT, the garden brings much of their work together. It is a place where they can bring theory together with practice, relate to the histories of Marrakech, open up conversations about water use, reimagine different models of agriculture, explore cultural practices, and lastly, explore commoning practices. In this last section, I will discuss and analyse how the garden becomes a space for critical intervention to explore the politics and poetics of water.

During the interviews, my ethnographic research and archival research, the garden as a site of intervention came up in multiple instances. In February, at the start of my research, I witnessed *Ch[a]rita*, the festival that takes reimagination of public space through play, inspired by children's games, as a starting point to challenge, rethink and intervene in the way how we use public space. Presenting workshops, lectures, relational artworks, community projects, and performances brings together a plurality of voices on an equal level. Within several projects, the garden was a central focus, of which I want to mention two.

The first is a relational work of art proposed by the Ghanaian photographer Teresa Meka. During *Ch[a]rita*, artists are invited for a twofold residency to allow for a deeper understanding of Marrakech. Meka stayed in Marrakech in February 2024 for the first time and will return to the city in 2025 for the second leg of her residency. During this first iteration, she explored *nzaha*. *Nzaha* is a particular concept within Moroccan culture, which is hard to define but broadly refers to a social gathering, often outside, sharing a picnic with friends and family. After conversations with the women of Dar Bellarj, Meka proposed to re-enact a *nzaha*. On a Sunday afternoon, we gathered in the Menara Gardens of Marrakech, where the women cooked and shared memories they had tied to *nzaha*. On the one hand, it is a re-enactment and staged. This reenactment is relational aesthetics in the most direct sense of the word. The event was staged and announced as a public event where anyone could join. It was a way for Meka to document and photograph the practices of the women and record their memories. In that sense, it was artificial. At the same time, we blended in with all the other groups of people who came to the gardens to enjoy their Sunday. The way how we made use of public space was by no means different than all the others. Yet, it becomes performative as it happens within an institutional framework of an arts initiative and will result in a public exhibition of Meka's photographs and records at a later moment. At the same time, by

‘performing’ the use of public space, it happens with a consciousness and active reflection that might find its echoes in a different context.

In the same framework, QANAT organised a workshop that addressed the renovation of the Riad Laarouss park. A fairly small public garden just outside of the city walls of the Medina of Marrakech, but still close to LE18. This garden has been slightly neglected over the years and has been a space of intervention for QANAT in the past years. In an informal conversation, Masoero tells me how they cleaned up the park during previous Ch[a]rita editions, seeking to give ownership back to the neighbourhood. Currently, the park is in a transitional phase, and it seems that project developers are bidding to refurbish it. Within this context, QANAT seeks to negotiate the ownership by the neighbourhood. Within the framework of Ch[a]rita, they hosted a workshop provided by architect and researcher Khalil Morad El Ghilali.

Within this workshop, Morad El Ghilali worked with the women of Dar Bellarj, inhabitants of the neighbourhood, to reimagine the use of the Riad Laarous. In combination with walks in the neighbourhood with some guiding questions, he uses the online game Minecraft to reimagine the use of public space. Building on his research of using games to engage with climate change,<sup>212</sup> his assumption to use Minecraft is that an artificial space can leave preconceived notions of what public space already is. By remodelling Riad Laarous within the online environment, the workshop participants can have a more spontaneous approach to reimagining the use of public space. He seeks a participatory process in which he seeks to build on the long history of parks in Marrakech. So, he elaborates in an interview I conducted with him:

Actually, the heritage of gardens in Marrakech is quite interesting. It is quite different from gardens in Europe. We don't see the gardens in the same in Arabic or Muslim countries. Most of the gardens are nutritive gardens. They're not like decorative gardens like in France, for example. (...) What we see in recent years is the tendency that the gardens are switching to more decorative gardening. Which creates a bigger cleavage in the social appropriation of public spaces in Morocco. Before we had like a tree that could nourish a whole neighbourhood. Like dates or lemons or oranges or whatever. So everyone felt responsible.

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<sup>212</sup> Khalil Elghilali, Spiros Papadopoulos, and Iman Benkirane, "The Emergent Aspect of Climate Change in Video Games: A Historical Review," *MCCSIS 2022* (2022): 174–183.

Here, he understands the garden as an actor, and his understanding of the garden is a difference that makes a difference in the sense that it informs and shapes his methods. In his understanding of the history of the gardens and the way how they function within the food system of Morocco, the function of the garden is different and shapes social behaviour. The use of public space is linked to the type of garden and how these are communally maintained. In that sense, he seeks to work with the participants to retrieve some of the stories and uses linked to the garden to reimagine the garden anew. At the same time, he is critical of the preservation of heritage just for the sake of it:

We can't preserve something as a monument if it's not useful. It doesn't have any purpose. So, we need to preserve practices and not systems. (...) But if we start just preserving to preserve, that's more like archaeology, that's preserving some old relic or something that you can move in the museum, and that's not what we want to do with the Medina. The idea would be to be resilient and find new ways of linking people with nature.<sup>213</sup>

This shows a similar progressive relationship with tradition, as discussed before. Tradition has value for the sake of it. Opposed to the Orientalist showcasing of traditional practices within the Water Museum, retrieving practices can be a way to find new ways for natureculture relationships. The garden becomes a crucial actor in this process because of its history; it can become a space to experiment with food systems and cultural practices tied to nature.

The history of Marrakech as the garden city has been written down by Mohammed El Faiz in *Jardins de Marrakech*. Unfortunately, the book has not been translated, and I also did not manage to find a French copy or similar literature that describes this history. However, the book has been a vital source of inspiration for QANAT. Three of my interviewees mentioned the book directly as a source of inspiration, and the other three referred to the history of gardens in Morocco without mentioning the book. This historical awareness has many ramifications, as illustrated above. The most important, however, is the community garden that I described in section 3.1.3. This is the place where all of QANAT's approaches to knowledge production come together, with historical and intellectual references bringing together a plurality of voices, such as scholars, activists, artists, and neighbourhood citizens, to learn from each other. Central to this knowledge exchange is the collective labour and shared responsibility of building a community garden together. Therefore, the garden

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<sup>213</sup> Khalil Elghilali, interview by author, Marrakech, Morocco, 9 May, 2024 (appendix 6).

becomes a multifaceted actor to dig into the traditions tied to the garden, acknowledge and build on local knowledge, reimagine food systems, critically intervene in the power structures that shape food production, and, foremost, build a community.

#### 3.4.5 Subconclusion

This last part answers the last subquestion of how QANAT approaches knowledge production. Based on several artworks, interviews and my experience during my fieldwork, I showed how QANAT both produces and archives knowledge. Its ontological position can be accurately described by Haraway's concept of situated knowledge and is reflected in its epistemic methods. This starts with bringing together a plurality of voices, each with its own ontologies, although different participants have common ground in topics and methods. Over time, the Ateliers Collectif functioned as a space for experimentation where these differences could be explored and exchanged. This is often a process-oriented approach that can be characterised as a practice of sensing and sense-making, where knowledge is exchanged between people with diverse backgrounds. Some shared methodologies can be distinguished by taking more distance and analysing some works that different people have proposed at different times. The best-documented practice is their approach to cartography. This can function as a rhizomatic and non-linear way to, for example, map the collective memory of a city. With individual points of entry, it links the particular to the common, creating a map that functions as a point of orientation. These methodologies can be shared and implemented in different contexts, becoming an ideational resource. Within this framework, archiving has also become a significant aspect of QANAT's practice. Although, due to limited resources, a structural approach to archiving is hard to achieve.

In its relatively short time of existence, QANAT showed a great effort of grassroots documenting, collecting and making accessible a wide variety of materials, ranging from recipes, academic lectures, their maps documenting collective memory and more. All of this happens in multiple contexts, but the most significant and frequent site of intervention is the garden. In Morocco, the garden has a specific history and social use. This makes it both a symbolic place in which relational works of art are developed. Simultaneously, it is a place to experiment with new forms of food accessibility as they develop homegrown gardens. Finally, they directly engage with the city and try to establish ownership of the city with neighbourhood citizens, as they try with Riad Laarouss. QANAT's practice, therefore, is versatile and diverse. Knowledge production is a crucial pillar, but knowledge production is never the end goal or the only goal. It can be emancipatory, a form of placemaking, a way to

challenge conventions, build on tradition, establish communities, and practice new ways of being and living together.



## Discussion and Conclusion

After answering the subquestions, I can now discuss and answer the main question: How does QANAT reframe the notion of the commons through its artistic engagement with the poetics and politics of water? The concept of the commons appears to be pivotal within this thesis. The notion occurred within different contexts, and in relation to QANAT, it can be used to explain their practice in various ways. It is a theoretical tool that informs the way it operates but can also be instrumentalised as a conceptual lens to understand QANAT as an actor.

This starts with understanding the collective within QANAT's form of organising and their public work. As illustrated, the work of Jeanne van Heeswijk, allowed by the Stimuleringsfonds grant, has been crucial in forming QANAT. At the roots of QANAT as a collective platform lies the experimentation with everyday practices with an understanding of an open-ended becoming. It is within the everyday practices of working and living together that QANAT took shape, including the messy and chaotic challenges of the division of labour and working with limited resources. It allowed them to find a common purpose, at least for a specific moment in time. This purpose, the search for the collective desire, shaped QANAT into the collective platform it is today.

From the start until today, their leading principle of the poetics and politics of water is based on an understanding of a political ecology of water in Morocco. Their public works and the interviews I conducted show that the focal point of their work is the analysis of the different aspects of the politics of water. This includes, but is not limited to, mass tourism, colonialism, and neoliberal agriculture. Their response to the political dimensions of water in general and, more specifically, to the city of Marrakech can be understood in establishing the collective. This starts with creating spaces for these critical reflections to happen, such as a community garden through which the politics of food sovereignty are discussed but linked to the actual practice of gardening.

Over time, some people moved on, and QANAT got international recognition and remains a reference for those who have participated in the past and those who do now and will in the future. It marks the difference between an arts collective in the traditional sense of the word and a collective platform. QANAT follows the logic of a platform; it can provide a stage for others and, sometimes, very pragmatically, a reference when applying for funding applications. In general, it remains accessible, and in this sense, it follows the logic of a

commons. It is an immaterial resource that people can exploit by using the platform, but taking that stage also adds value to it and keeps the platform alive.

However, explaining QANAT in this way frames them as a form of capital, which doesn't escape the capitalocentric critique on the commons mentioned in the first chapter. You cannot direct this critique towards QANAT, as their focus on establishing a commons lies elsewhere. However, how it is organised now remains reliant on funding systems within a capitalist framework. However, you can say that QANAT's collective effort of fostering a platform logic is an attempt to democratise at least those who can have access to funding. Early career artists who participated in QANAT can use it as a resource and reference, and in that sense, it has an impact. However, QANAT's remarkable success in bringing a plurality of voices together is a testament to its inclusivity. Rarely did I see such a diversity of people in a contemporary art context, across age, gender, class and education, or background in general.

At the same time, the commons continue to inform and shape their practice, especially in the documentation and interest of memories and social practices. This is a commons that is always-already-present, but too often not acknowledged. They show how they embody a commons by working with the Les Maman Douée and articulating and acknowledging their knowledge. Not only is this an emancipatory process in that it creates pride in their knowledge, but it is also a way to build on tradition without orientalising or exoticising it. Within the context of the supposed binary between modernisation that rules out local and indigenous practices or only celebrating historical irrigation systems within a museum, QANAT chooses a third option: acknowledging history and trying to build on it to imagine new directions.

One site where all of this comes together is the garden. With its long history and the role it took within food systems and sovereignty in Morocco, it becomes a place loaded with symbolism. QANAT's relational art practice, therefore, critically intervenes within discourses on agriculture and water accessibility, not only by telling new stories but by actually bringing into practice alternatives relying on local knowledge of, for example, wild plant uses. Although the scale is still limited, QANAT's potential to materialise a commons in the traditional sense of the word is a source of inspiration. The desire and future of QANAT is at least to foster a garden space, both as a commons as well as a place to learn, similar to SAKIYA, which, different from QANAT, does have a physical space to foster.

The notion of learning, or more specifically, knowledge production, is a central pillar of the work of QANAT. As illustrated, over time, QANAT articulates a specific focus on representing local knowledge, acknowledging the value of folklore and traditional practices. As shown in the first chapter, their work is a valuable addition to academic discourses in which the relevance of local and Indigenous knowledge and every practice is highlighted but not widely represented. Zooming in on their practices and methodologies, the notion of sensing and sense-making to work through epistemic differences in collective truth-finding is an accurate notion of understanding QANAT's methodologies in knowledge production.

Methodologies such as walking and cartography form a common aesthetic within the work over time. Although inspiration might be coincidental, these methodologies form a shared ideational resource. It creates the potential for QANAT to become a knowledge commons. At this moment, I would argue that it remains a potential. QANAT is slowly building a very rich archive of knowledge and developing methodologies accordingly relating to the poetics and politics of water. In their seven years of existence, with minimal and non-structural funding, they achieved a lot and made a significant impact within the independent art scene of Marrakech. However, due to a limited budget, it cannot disclose and organise its archive structurally. Their work has a lot of potential and forms a rich addition to the documentation of the current water crisis. Yet their archiving practice is not commonly accessible, and many of the materials are not stored sustainably and efficiently traceable.

So, to answer the main question, their artistic methods and commoning practices are deeply intertwined and constantly inform each other, with the commons as a concept informing their practice as well as a notion to explain their practice. Their engagement with the current water stress largely revolves around community organisation and their relational art practice. Again, these are deeply intertwined, as their research is always a doing. It builds on the everyday practices of living and working together, and this is what they inquire about as well. They address significant questions concerning the climate crisis and the linked water scarcity and how it is implicated in global power dynamics and economic systems back to the everyday. In the end, it is the plants we grow, the water we drink and the food we eat that are affected. By engaging with the cultural practices evolving around exactly the everyday habits and connecting these everyday practices from different localities, they critically intervene in global political dynamics that shape water accessibility and food sovereignty.



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## Appendix

### 1. Codebook

For clarity, the codebook is structured in two tables. The first table presents an overview of all the themes and relates codes with definitions. The second table presents the same list of codes but with examples from the interviews.

Theme	Code	Definition
1. Origin Story QANAT		Actors that are relevant to understand the origin of Qanat
1.1	Activities	Activities mentioned, such as Ateliers Collectif, Ch[a]rita, or international exhibitions
1.2	Collective Members	When other collaborators are mentioned in a significant way
1.3	Finance	When financial challenges of opportunities are mentioned in relation to the way QANAT got shape
2. Local/International		Aspects that are relevant in order to understand QANAT's local rootedness in relation to its international collaborations
2.1	Marrakech	When the urban and political context of Marrakech is mentioned
2.2	International Collaboration	When international partners are mentioned as impactful
3. Knowledge Production		All aspects that imply a particular understanding of knowledge production
3.1	Memory	When interviewees discuss tthe relevance of memory
3.2	Local Knowledge	Forms of knowledge that arise from a lived experience in a specific context, often non-instituionalised
4. Methodologies		Formalised approaches to create artistic work and produce knowledge that reoccur during multiple instances in QANATs history
4.1	Maps and Cartography	The creation of (metaphorical) maps as artistic methodology
4.2	Relational Art	Artistic work that takes social relations as its material
5. Archiving		Mention of archiving, as a practice or in relation to existing archives
5.1	Artistic work as archive	When interviewees discuss their own or QANAT's work as archiving

5.2	Archives of Morocco	When interviewees refer issues in relation to existing archives
6. Gardens		Garden understood as an actor
6.1	Food Systems	When gardens are mentioned as alternative to (neoliberal) food systems
6.2	As place of learning	When gardens are discussed in the context as a space of learning
6.3	History in context of Marrakech and Morocco	When the history of gardens in Morocco are mentioned
7. Commons		The commons as a concept to understand a collectively shared resource (material and immaterial) that won't get depleted.
7.1	Direct reference to the commons	When interviewees refer the commons to explain their practice or as a source of inspiration
7.2	Aspects that can be understood as commoning practices	When interviewees explain their practice that can be analysed through the concept of commons
8. Ways of organising		Aspects that explain QANAT how it is organised in institutional terms, (as collective, platform, grassroots network, etc.).
8.1	Aspects that relate to the way QANAT is organised	Aspects that relate to the way QANAT is organised
8.2	Challenges in organisation	Challenges that occur in establishing the collective
9. (Politics of) Water		All aspects that show a political ecology of water
9.1	Understanding of politics	What interviewees understand as politics
9.2	Khettaras	When interviewees mentions the (downfall of) the historical irrigation systems
9.3	Tourism	Issues related to tourism
9.4	Agriculture	Critical understanding of agriculture

Theme	Code	Example
1. Origin Story QANAT		
1.1	Activities	I mean basically by early 2019, Rim and myself individually were invited to join Dar Belarj to start curating the collective workshops and also to start rerunning Charita under their support. (Interview Francesca Masoero 1)
1.2	Collective Members	Well, we were invited to be part of her [Jeanne van Heeswijk] project. This training for the not yet and it's an open invitation essentially. So her project was like inviting collectives or practitioners like duo or single person or whatever and. And then being like, you can kind of propose whatever you want, but we had a whole week long of like, just open, you know, like you can do anything. (Interview Louisa Aarrass)
1.3	Finance	Then of course, maybe there could be a different, maybe business model the one could could adopt. But you know, I mean the financial precarity is definitely has to be part of the picture because you know why there is not even the mental capacity to think of a business model, is because you have to do a 100 projects at once to, you know, get at the end of the month and this kind of stuff, you know. (Francesca Masoero 1)
2. Local/International		
2.1	Marrakech	Because. Yeah. I think for me, I mean, in in many ways, Qanat has been one, one way to really try to tackle and engage more deeply in yeah, in the politics of the city. Basically, the fact that. Like the, And yeah, living also. Yeah, living in the Medina, you're also experiencing that. The level of dispossession there has been keeping accumulating over the years. It's making it quite unliveable place for for the majority, so finding small small yeah. A bit of yeah. Pockets where you can breathe, whether it is by, you know, gathering at Dar Belarj or LE18, or maybe in the

		future have a little green area. Where you can reconnect to, you know, traditional historic ways of relating to the land or to the use of water, growing food or building a brick wall or a. Is a bit. Yeah, I guess. What the attempt is. (Francesca Masoero 1)
2.2	International Collaboration	She suggested to actually run the 1st and for now actually only programme in Palestine. Because she really wanted to bring. Yeah, to sort of bring Qanat and some of our conversations and approaches, etcetera. Also to her own network in Palestine. (Interview Franscesca Masoero 1)
3. Knowledge Production		
3.1	Memory	But what is the most important is that he is from there, he remembers the khettaras when it was working and he told us about it and how all of this, you know, used to be green and people would use the khettara. And it was really lush greenery. Very nice. And how he witnessed the downfall of it, you know the whole story of it. And he we had we had we had like some stories from this khettara, but not a personal. (Rim Mejdj)
3.2	Local Knowledge	I think that's, I mean the people we've been working with is the most. I mean they materialise these commons through their bodies and cultural practises and how we, you know, we receive them and we reflect with them on it and we push them to reflect. And we feel like we're really like treasure guardian somehow because we are trusted. Within the. With this this memory, you know, sometimes we see things that we never thought existed. (Rim Mejdj)
4. Methodologies		
4.1	Maps and Cartography	No and in that sense it is a cartography of spaces and stories and memories. Because yes that grew and it grew where there is still life then now bring it all back, But I don't have it. I always try when I have a presentation or an exhibition to unpack another piece of it and show it. (Heidi Vogels)

4.2	Relational Art	And we are very interested in using food like in a really obvious way, like eating and cooking together and those sorts of things, collective labour and that sort of thing, for like to curate public programming. (Louisa Aarrass)
5. Archiving		
5.1	Artistic work as archive	The project would become something like an archive, a big archive that documents the palm grove's history. So with different materials, not only video but sound and and photos and drawings, archival materials. (Rim Mejdjdi)
5.2	Archives of Morocco	There are no archives. (Francesca Masoero 2)
6. Gardens		
6.1	Food Systems	Histories of green space and agriculture within the Marrakesh like Medina. When you know the history of Marrakesh, maybe you you've read a little bit about it being like this Garden City and having orchards within within the like residential areas and things like that. (Louisa Aarrass)
6.2	As place of learning	The following addition so then from 2020 onwards, the Entangled Ecologies became a lot kind of taking care of that and learning with the garden and keep sort of growing things, testing things, some things worse and other things didn't work. (Louisa Aarrass)
6.3	History in the context of Marrakech and Morocco	Actually, the the heritage of garden in, in Marrakech is quite an interesting one because when we describe gardens in Europe, it's quite a different topic. We don't see the gardens in the same way more in the Arabic or Muslim countries. Most of the garden. gardens are like nutritive gardens. They're not like decorative gardens like in France or. So the idea about the idea behind putting a tree in a place is basically to give some some <i>alimentation</i> or some fruit or something that can be useful to the population. What we saw in the in these late years is the tendency that all the gardens are switching to a more decorative gardening. (Khalil Elghilali)

7. Commons		
7.1	Direct reference to the commons	I think that's, I mean the people we've been working with is the most. I mean they materialise these commons through their bodies and cultural practises and how we, you know, we receive them and we reflect with them on it and we push them to reflect. And we feel like we're really like treasure guardian somehow because we are trusted. Within the. With this this memory, you know, sometimes we see things that we never thought existed. (Rim Mejdj)
7.2	Aspects that can be understood as commoning practices	And it's it's an open collective that that is constantly changing. This flexible form is is very liberating somehow because. As an as an artist, or curator it, it gives both support. You know you don't feel completely lonely in your research or your work. But it gives you the kind of independence. Where you know like for example that with the small committee you have this. (Rim Mejdj)
8. Ways of organising		
8.1	Aspects that relate to the way QANAT is organised	But Qanat never really formalized that much of you're in or you're out. It was more of a fluid thing. (Heidi Vogels)
8.2	Challenges in organisation	But one problem was for. I mean has been that in the end the distribution of labour was never very equal. And of course I mean, I kind of gladly took a lot because in the end it was something that I was initiating blah blah. (Francesca Masoero 1)
9. (Politics of) Water		
9.1	Understanding of politics	Yeah, I think it's less about working on the actual water distribution shortage in the field of the farmers. I mean, I guess it's less about organising the protest with them or it hasn't happened yet. And probably wouldn't. I mean, we're probably not the most skillful people in in in that way of organising, who knows but. Like, It's a matter of learning. (Francesca Masoero 1)

9.2	Khettaras	<p>Yes, because now everybody else in the world is like what? It's so cool, so exotic. They celebrate it, but it's done now. It's gone.</p>
9.3	Tourism	<p>With the water system it was the foundation of the city. Till this day Marrakech is the product of all these policies and decisions, you know, that's why we have the Museum of Water. But that's also with its problems. Marrakech also as a touristic city. Like savage tourism, that is consuming and destroying the city that is nourishing it economically. It's the same thing. The thing that is destroying it. The Palm Groves has been destroyed because mainly. Of course there's climate change and we go deeper in that there is also the drought, Morocco has this drought cycle. Between 50 years. But there is also building hotels and resorts. And nobody has looked at this aspects before and decided to educate people, not even educate, not even his position, but like to reflect on it and collectively not just as an individual artist, it just it's the first time that it's done with Qanat. (Rim Mejdj)</p>
9.4	Agriculture	<p>How our friend and colleague Sara is like working on the colonisation of water and I think it's like not necessarily water itself, although sometimes it is like in the form of building dams and draining areas and putting pumps and doing whatever the fuck Like sometimes it's water seen through agriculture, you know, like or land use or private and public green space or loss of green space, loss of urban green space. (Louisa Aarrass)</p>

## 2. Interview Francesca Masoero, 6 March, 2024

Interview with Francesca Masoero, conducted by author.

Marrakech, Morocco, 6 March, 2024.

MM: Matthijs Mantel

FM: Francesca Masoero

### **Transcript**

**MM:**

OK, so hereby the interview is recorded. It's an interview as part of my thesis as a research on Qanat on the structure, on the use of arts or artistic methodologies, the forming of a collective within the context of Morocco and its water issues. So this is more of the first exploratory interview to have a bit of an understanding of the background and the most important concepts of Qanat and its origin and how it developed overtime. So yeah, before you already told me how it first started as an initial project, can you maybe go back to that period to sort of describe a bit of, yeah, how Qanat as a project started?

**FM:**

Yeah. Yeah. So it so Qanat started the year in 2000 and 16, 16, 17, as you were saying, it started without the initial intention of becoming a long term research or collective platform. It started more as a programme of one year that followed back then the typical framework of programmes that we run sometime at LE18, so that combined, and still combined to an extent, artists invited to do research in residency with a final exhibition and also a quite rich public programme. The, I don't know whether it's interesting or not, but just as a note, the Qanat was in that first configuration, somewhat our response or our proposal as part of collaborative programme, a larger one called KIBRIT, which is a match, you know, in Arabic. And Kibrit was basically a collaborative platform made of seven entities across the Arab world. I have to say, across the Mediterranean, I guess because it was two Moroccan. So LE18 and another one.

In Morocco, Maison de l'Image, in Tunis. Rhizome from Algiers, the Ramallah municipality in Ramallah, which was the only the institution or let's say public institution in the, and then JISER, which is Tunis, I mean it's Barcelona based but working a lot between Tunisia and Algeria and and CeRCCa, which is a residency space in Spain as well, which was called kind of leading the the project because Paul, Paul, CATA is a is a researcher and he was doing his PhD around different forms of cultural mobility, both with in the past and in the present. And

especially in the Mahgreb.

Anyways, so Kibrit was a programme that at large had the intention of working on different forms of reactivation of collective memory, at large. And the idea was that each partner in relationship to their own specific context, their own interest. Etcetera. Could either continue an existing programme, research line or starts up in a new within that macro umbrella team, and so Leila and I back thought that. Basically we found a common terrain of interest in thinking about the history of the Khettaras of the Qanat in relationship to Marrakesh, its transformation and the what which is still somewhat one of the, I guess, core questions or interests of Qanat. You know, like the what are the current legacies of that form of communal infrastructure that today in the city of Marrakesh is dead basically.

And there is no real possibility for it to to be reactivated a as a material infrastructure, but traces of that way of... First of all, dealing with water and to start with, but also to think with the environment to think with the landscape at large in a scale that is beyond the urban. And that are really connects, for instance, the mountains to the plain, etcetera is still very much embedded in, in small gestures or in just in, in the culture of the place. So all these blah blah to say that we decided to start Qanat within that framework.

And as I said, the the 1st edition which ran from, I mean mainly through 2000, let's say the conception started in 2016, but then we really ran the programme from May 2017 until the end of the year, as I said, had this components of a number of artists in residence, this public programme where in that occasion we really had very inspiring talks by researchers that are that that that really dedicated their life in sort of studying different components associated to the Khettaras in Marrakesh. Such as Thierry Roof, which was the closest person who worked with the Mohammed al Fais on the on the Khettaras and he was a I mean he is somewhat behind the scientific part of the water museum here.

Ben Shaban, who is an ethnobotanist there, has worked a lot on the gardens of Marrakesh. Another guy called Canton Vivo, who is an architect that did his PhD and dedicated a lot of his research career on the ways in which water has shaped the Medina especially, but also how then colonisation and the management of water at the city scale has shaped the rest anyways.

So it was, I think for me it was extremely, I mean on, on a personal I mean because there is a lot of personal stuff in this story, it was probably the first time in which I really felt, I made sense of me working in the cultural field, but also because I do come from politics as well as I

mean as a basic my academic background was that and I I think in... With that programme, I felt OK. There is something here that speaks to my interest that speaks to the urgencies of this place and there is a way to start being rooting more. For me, at least in in the city of Marrakech, should make sense of what I'm doing here also as a foreigner, you know.

**MM:**

Because at that time you lived here for four or five years?

**FM:**

So at the time. But my story is I arrived here in early 2015 March, basically I started working with Le18 in March 2015 as an intern at first. So I say three months and then LE18 has always been very quite fragile in terms of finance, so there was no, you know, there was never salaries for anyone. And so for the rest of 2015 and well, a bit of 2016 I sort of did a bit of on being on and off between here in Brussels where I was before where I finished my studies. Where basically, I started working with Leila or with this week on a project base sort of thing and actually this kibrit thing that said in 2016 became one way for me to sustain my possibility of being here because I became the programme coordinator for, for the whole thing. Besides, also running Qanat, so I like. I was coordinating the whole group of seven institutions together with this researcher Pau. So basically from 2016 onwards, I guess in 2016, I really started being based mainly here and.

And yeah, but you know, for, for most of those years, I mean, and even still and in the first iteration of QANAT, I was more. Which I still try to to be of course better I was. I was a lot more in the sort of passive absorption and and trying to follow what was done rather than be, you know, coming in and say we should do this. Yeah. Because of course it doesn't make any sense, you know. So yeah, I think basically that first edition was very important for that, but also because the. Well, some if not, maybe not all, but definitely some of the the artists. Also we work with became some very close friends to start with, but also collaborators that are kept being around for many years and I think something that. I've been doing consistently since, and that I value a lot. Is this like bringing people back, inviting people back over here. I'm talking about maybe artists or collaborators that are not based here. As a way to, basically, to root your work in the place and so for instance, two of the artists that were the first artist in residence in 2017 are Shayma Nadar which is Palestinian an artist and researcher that has been since then part of QANAT in, in many and many like crucial ways.

And also Jerome Gilet, who was extremely present and active until COVID. Then with COVID you know some so today is more of a, I don't know I guess if we think in circles is more a satellite rather than, today, let's say in the last in the last 3-4 years he has been less involved and present. So yeah, So what happened after this, that first edition I was basically, I was very interested in in trying to keep to have, cannot keep existing and try to rethink how what could have been its missions be or yeah, it's new configuration really. Beyond being this sort of programme, you know, without a beginning and end.

So what I did in 2018, well, there were a few things. On the one hand. Like both Shayma, Jerome and also another artist I'd worked with in the past, sort of came again to do research. So let's say artistic residencies or Qanat artistic residents kept happening for some of these artists to keep working on either the same projects that they've done before or new ones, but at the same time there was a sort of big, yeah, big, quite intensive week long programme that I run towards the second-half of 2018. That we entitled, I don't think I like the title anymore, but it's fine, performing change from the margins and basically. I sort of. I developed it from my end as a open, as a space where I invited a number of people that were working, not necessarily on water specifically, but they were working in in Morocco or in Marrakesh. Mainly with, in very interesting methodologies to me, so participatory grounded research, some on water, some on somewhat slightly different topics. For instance urban transformation. So these kind of things. And then I felt.

We do somewhat very similar things, but we don't talk enough, you know, then maybe there is something that we can come up with together. Maybe there are alliances that we can build. So that was somewhat my intention behind building this sort of five days programme when. Basically, the day was more internal working sessions and then an exchange and getting to know each other sessions basically and then the evenings were more public programmes with some talk, some screenings, etcetera.

That programme, I think from the outside was very rich. From the inside, the person that I had invited to be a bit of a sort of mediator within the group dynamic, like sort of to bring interesting ideas, positions together and see, yeah. She or her methodology didn't work, like the group didn't really, you know, click like, at least as a group. Like there were some, you know, people that met and liked each other, etcetera. But there were some tensions, underlying tensions that are that are emerging. That in that. Yeah, in that edition. So by the

end of it, I wasn't really sure. What to do with it

**MM:**

Cause to understand correctly. And during the first year, you have been hosting residencies with artists mainly, but also with academics.

**FM:**

The academics were more invited to give talks. Let's so be part of our public programme, not not like residents.

**MM:**

And. Yeah, I see. And then in this next public programme, you rather try to put artists and academics together in one space and or.

**FM:**

Exactly. Yeah, actually. I have a box, a personal archive box.

The intention there is exactly precisely that.

It's English.

Yeah, I mean, this was a, you know, it was designed as a handout. You know, this is really.

Yes. you can find it online as well.

But yeah, so. You're right, the idea was to have some. Yeah. Actually, if you look at the people that were involved, there were some artists, some scholars, some activists, some biologists, even architects. Yeah, a few different people working on environmental questions on. Yeah, participatory methods on urban transformations, on traditional building techniques and this kind of stuff.

But as I said. Of course, there was a whole sort of public facing part, which actually included a few sort of outdoor workshops which were like. We had already done the first Charita by then, but it was really the first moments in which also Le18 was getting out, like leaving its walls and doing, you know, things outside.

Hmm.

My intention was to to see, you know, like we do. We don't often we come from different worlds, some somehow. But in the end we are doing very similar things. Why not? Why?

Why don't we think of? Maybe there are some things that we can do together and maybe the space to imagine that can host a multidisciplinary group of people that comes together on certain things.

**MM:**

And then more concretely, where is the common ground? Is it in the topics, in the methodologies, in the political perception or?

**FM:**

More in the yeah, more in the topics I think because the point was really to bring different methodologies together because some are coming from research, some are coming from pure activist work, some are coming from yeah, an architecture background, but it is working with communities. Another one is coming from a visual art practise, but there is open to work with communities and that reads the stuff of the academics. You know like you know that.

So of course my. I mean, The thing is, I didn't want to put any like, all too many constraints. You know, it was an open invitation to be reshaped, I think, in, in that edition, in 2018, the mistakes were to put what to do too much programming. In a very short period of time, maybe also not to to. Not to be as clear in the framing of the invitation, I think the invitation was clear. I think it was just a bit dismissed because the group dynamics were a little bit awkward or it became a little bit awkward. And in reality, for instance, what what happened next is that shortly after that gathering, which was November 2018, I applied for a grant from this Stimulerings fund.

They were just launching this thing with the first phase and a potential second phase, so they still do it. And basically the idea is you get a little bit of money to do some exploratory conversations or to sort of design something more complete and you apply for the second phase, what they call the second phase for a bigger grant.

And and Stimuleringsfonds, of course, always a Dutch person involved and Long story short, the person that ended up becoming the Dutch component or the Dutch partner is Jean van Heeswijk, which is an artist that I had met previously and with whom I hadn't worked in before. But she, I mean she, I attended basically a week long seminar workshop thing with her and and she is really has a practise as an artist that is only in primary focus on building communities and and building or building alliances and bringing people together in a... Creating collective visions where a collective vision doesn't exist yet. She talks a lot about training for the not-yet preparing for the not yet and what it takes and what it means for yeah

and and not yet communal understanding of a territory or a project or whatever to come to form like how to make to bring together groups that groups or individuals that are to start with. They don't feel they necessarily have anything to share.

And so. So basically I reached out and I I told her look, the is this is grand. There is this thing I would like to try to do, like to keep pushing to see if there is a possibility to create a collaborative project with different people. Would you be interested in being part of it and and facilitate that? And she accepted so she came for a sort of second attempt in in early 2019 where, I sort of combined a few things so there was a an exhibition that I curated which was basically the 2nd exhibition of Qanat. So in March, yeah, there was this again an exhibition and a public programme that took place, but in parallel, some, like, really dedicated times for almost the same group. It's slightly differences in in people coming. To basically work together for like 3 or 4 days like closed doors, but this time with Jeanne, with Jeanne's methodologies, which worked beautifully compared to the previous attempts. And so really in that moment.

Some, I mean, I never thought of building a collective, you know, or that thing would have become a collective. But then I don't even know how we started calling it a collective, you know, like just the the result of that process was an intention and desire a shared intention and desire to create a collective platform, a collective.

And, so on that ground. The same group with some extra, came again into in a couple of months later, so in May to really finalise together the proposal for phase two. Which yeah, like working on the budget together, working on the different axes, in the direction of somewhat consolidating what Qanat had done, but also creating different containers or yeah, sort of vessels of its of its practise, let's say. Which back then were imagined to be basically was imagined to be an archive, hahaha, an archive website website basically or yeah or yeah.

In any case start working on like can we have all not only the programmes of cannot itself or the programmes that but also materials that we gather, interviews, raw materials sometimes. Gather in one place that, or at least have a bibliography of it, that people can access and stuff like that. The second one was editions, so working on publications. In different forms, the idea was to combine zines with maybe once per year, sort of journal, something more, and the third one was what we call somewhat our School of water. Or more like the ground that work with communities, the also the, the research work done by different artists, the public programmes, the exhibitions, like all the all the part in the idea of, you know, the what is done

in the school will nourish the rest. Of course the the. Yeah, the the containers which are more redistribute redistribution ones of knowledge and stuff like that.

Something that had happened in that year, so 2019 was really a general, a generative, quite transformative and rich year is that in the months just before, I think, yeah. I mean basically by early 2019, Rim and myself individually were invited to join Dar Belarj to start curating the collective workshops and also to start rerunning Charita under their support.

Why? It's because I mean or why Maha invited us? It's because in 2018 Rim and I, so Rim and I were part of another collective called Madrasa Collective that basically existed between 2015 until the last project we did altogether that we signed Madrasa was 2019. Then it died for many reasons. I don't know. I mean it died because in the end the collective came together for because there was a grant. And we want it. The group we were eight. The first group was eight people only me and Rim we're living in the same city like.

Four of us at the time were busy in Morocco, but the other four were between Cairo and France, Lebanon, Palestine and Palestine-Jordan and Cameroon. We never the eight of us, never met all together in one place, actually so. You know like. Slow. You know the first project we did it, the eight of us, the second one, we did it in five, the 3rd and the 4<sup>th</sup>, we were three. The three were me, Rim and Nouha. And Nouha is like is a person who we still work with, like this undercurrents thing that we did in the last two years it was me, Rim and Nouha, still. So it's just in, in different configurations the leftovers of Madrasa, maybe, at least are you know these. Yeah, this these collaborations.

Anyway, what happened in 2018 with the 1st edition of Charita is that one of the artists really wanted to work with women from the Medina. And so we basically hooked her up with Dar Belarj and there was a very beautiful collaboration that emerged from that encounter. And Maha was so happy with it, that was like guys, you should just work with us. I mean, we I really would like to have you?. I mean, I would. I would love to support Charita in general and I really want some of the groups that we work with and that I feel are ready and and curious and they want new and more things that are not the workshops, or the the pedagogical thinks that we do already. Why don't you bring in your community of artists so to work with them. And so that's how the collective workshops emerged.

**MM:**

Because before then you didn't work so often with Dar Belarj?

**FM:**

So we as LE18, absolutely not. Absolutely not as we do now. Now you're almost a fusional. You know, sometimes you almost know don't know where the one thing ends and then the other one starts. Until then, it was more Layla independently, had worked with Dar Belarj on some projects, but there was no, there was no institutional dialogue, let's say.

Maybe we were also smaller and not so much an institution while they were much more, but also our different audiences really did not. Interact in any form and in any way and Maha.

**FM:**

Maha has often been feeling a bit. I was feeling quite isolated, I think, and that's why she isolated from likem cut out from.

**MM:**

The cultural scene in Marrakesh?

**FM:**

From a culture from the maybe more western looking cultural thing, see what I mean? Yeah, like not being somewhat part of conversations for the with the biennial of the time or, you know, like she she I think she she never said it explicitly, but I think to me was quite clear that she had to fight for a place for that community and for the methodology she was trying and their integration in... Yeah, she was looking for alliances, basically. And she found one in with, with us. And of course I sort of, even though, let's say the invitation came for me as an individual, I mean it was already with programmes that we were running with LE18 and Leila is also very close to Maha and I mean so basically that allowed.

It was definitely one first way to bring LE18 and Dar Belarj closer and to me, QANAT was the bridge in a way somehow. Because a lot of the programme, a lot of the proposals of the collective workshop and this like became this QANAT school in a way or this idea of yeah, basically keep working on questions related to water, questions related to garden, to the absence of of liveable space, especially in the Medina, the process of gentrification etcetera, etcetera, to tackle them at that point, not only anymore with artists and academics, but also with the voices of the people that live in and come from those neighbourhoods even.

Yeah. So that's how, yeah, things sort of. So 2019 when we did this programme in a while, we were having, let's say, the internal meetings that sort of brought to that new configuration of

QANAT we were having. Also, the first workshops with Dar Belarj, so for instance Abdellah Hasak, which is a sound artist that I think maybe you met already, which is also.

**MM:**

Guedra Guedra as well, right?

**FM:**

Right, yes Guedra Guedra is his practise of DJ and then he's also a sound artist and he has been working also in the past a lot on with radio as a as a potential community tool and works primarily in and I mean or with sound.

Yeah. Or the voice. And I think that. So he was one of the first artists working with a few different workshops with the Dar Belarj community. And the first one was actually a workshop where he worked with more, say teenagers, youngsters inviting them to collect stories around water in the Medina. And then another artist, artist that is artist architect, that has been working extensively on on the Khettaras was also another. And so he was part of also this French English. Actually, Edward Source [?] was one of the other first ones who took part in that. And then in summer 2019, another very important workshop that really became a, could have become almost a project on its own is this, what we call Entangled Ecologies. Which was the 1<sup>st</sup> and maybe still today's kind of the only way, basically when something we thought was like to think about QANAT work through different research lines because the group was diverse and you know, certain people were coming in from an anthropological perspective thinking with the infrastructures and the idea of breakdowns and artists working around lines and walks, and as a way to be in a territory, somebody like there were a few different. So we were in, in those in those years those couple of years were saying we should probably start outlining some specific research lines the different members let's say are working on. Which to me, I mean multiple exist because there are different topics that are methodologies but also topics and and sort of keywords that have emerged over the years, there is also a lot of work around the speculative fiction, for instance, that Shayma brought in at one point and, and of course then from water we moved a lot, also towards land questions and agriculture, and that was, came also with the entangled ecologies in that sense. But let's say the entangled Ecologies was the only one that became more clearly defined and articulated.

**MM:**

At this point you start to talk about, you use the word members. So at this point you're also you're really. Yeah. Multiple people that initiate several projects or how?

**FM:**

Yeah, that was really the time of, as I said, from basically from March, April 2019 when that group of ten, I would say people like came together and commit themselves to at least work on this new transformation of connecting to this, you know, edition, archive and school platform. So I don't think we ever talked about how to define ourselves. I mean actually we did we, I mean we did we thought about we used the term diggers, Qanat diggers. More than members maybe/

Because this thing of yeah, it's a collective, but maybe, there have been a lot of failed attempts to find working method at one point for instance. George, who is, is my partner actually, but he's he's an anthropologist that has been working extensively in in Tangier, around the border, and the borderlands. But by working on that, he worked also a lot around the how the water infrastructure access to water sort of shaped or are entangled with the politics of the borders. He tried to really develop. How did they call it, a constitution for like in terms of functioning. Yeah, that was never really implemented.

So in terms of internal working it's true, there was a lot of, you know, people involved and enthusiasm, but one problem was for. I mean has been that in the end the distribution of labour was never very equal. And of course I mean, I kind of gladly took a lot because in the end it was something that I was initiating blah blah.

Blah. But then there were also some that, you know, put more in a certain moment and then, you know, you some tension started slowly building up. Not properly, fully said. You know, some alliances started building in, you know, smaller groups and these kind of things. And I think that together with then all the force distance that COVID brought. Had as a result that by early 2021, a few people had just sort. Moved on. Yeah. Move down now. Moved on, but without. Let's say without no, but with no bad feelings. Let's say from the end, in the sense that they'll come back also, you know, like in, let's say, to give you one, one example. Sarah Fikkesh [?], who is she's also an architect.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**FM:**

By training and she's finishing her PhD now and she has a very, very interesting work and research around water infrastructure, I mean water and water infrastructures as a lens to look into the transformations over a century of the city of Meknes, but also its lands and how they function, blah blah. So Sarah started the PhD in 2020 Slash 21. So that was also one of the factors were, you know, at one point she wasn't able to be around as much. And. But yeah, until then, she was, you know, I mean, between 2019 and 20, she was one of the kind of the pillars. She was also one of the people behind the Entangled Ecologies to start with.

And then yeah, I think between the PhD the distance. And. Maybe also some some. I mean certainly there was one person that a lot of people didn't like. I'm not gonna mention him, but there was one person that that we all had hard time to work with at times because he had some bit problematic ways of, I mean a bit colonial and race. This is, but you know, like the internal racism that you don't really realise. It is in jokes and this kind of stuff. Which was very hard for some people to digest, of course.

And yet, at the same time it. was also very. You know, active and very generous person that shared a lot of his knowledge and time, etcetera. So it was also hard at least for me personally to say this is the door. So you know, like there were I think some protocols that would have been healthy to put in place. And we didn't.

In terms of also, yeah, dealing with a group that is so diverse in terms of language, languages at large and in which language you can use more easily or effectively, you know, express yourself. It was a very, I mean a very tiring, but also extremely. I mean, it was an amazing experience also for me, like the learning curve has been crazy.

**MM:**

Yeah.

**FM:**

Also in terms of being in in a group. And working as a collective, even though it's somewhat and then I don't know. It's interesting because at one point in the into. No, no, 2019, I don't remember anymore in in the Chergoui #2. So I guess that was not 2000 and. Well, look, I don't remember 2020, maybe 21 even. There is a short article that George and I wrote associated to this Qanat manifesto that that is there and and there is one part that is to be very fair, it's much more George's contribution to it. There is a there is about. There is a very

interesting in thinking. Well, you know. How do we value, evaluate and value the failure or success of a collective and and is it and isn't it? Maybe the problem that we had in that time also one where because there was a grant, because we had set objectives in our doing workshops we're doing publications we're doing our website that we sort of. We or I can say at least I maybe lost the sense of or you know you over focus on. Making sure that those. Goals are met. And you lose the sense of what else is emerging from bringing these people together that is maybe less tangible and complete. Yeah, but that will those are already seeds for the future, hmm.

In that sense, and I think. So that's, I made mine that reflection in the sense that. There has been a failure. Of that group being together in a maybe, sort of in. Yeah, in a regular, consistent and and long term way. But actually the long term is still there, you know, like every single person in that group is I know I'm quite sure would be coming back to do something. Tomorrow, if was the the opportunity, or if I was asking them, or it's more the ground of this collective platform couldn't be sustainable also.

And yeah. And I don't know, maybe there is also a matter of, you know, at one point there is also a question of money, how much, how much can you ask a person without money to be there, you know?

**MM:**

And you have to balance becoming institutionalised versus becoming this grassroots collective in a way. Or.

**FM:**

Hmm. I don't know, I mean. I'm not sure because I think you can have money also as a grassroot collective.

**MM:**

Yeah. Yeah, no, of course no. But I mean, in the in the way what you just mentioned. Of like having a funding scheme with specific criteria, it's a form of institutionalisation, and of course you can there are many different ways of funding projects and some.

**FM:**

No, no. Then of course, maybe there could be a different, maybe business model the one could could adopt. But you know, I mean the financial precarity is definitely has to be part of the picture because you know why there is not even the mental capacity to think of a business

model, is because you have to do a 100 projects at once to, you know, get at the end of the month and this kind of stuff, you know.

**MM:**

Yeah.

**FM:**

So. But in the end, something that I find very interesting is that and that I often say when, I don't know, give a talk, is that QANAT, the project is precisely how Qanat the water infrastructure, works, you know, like it's not a one line of conduit. It's hundreds and are earthy and some leak and some get stuck and there is a new one and to dig and then another one and another. It's this rhizomatic mess, somewhat messy or not messy, but definitely not very linear system and so, so. But it didn't come by design. It came by being, you know, by being in the way. But yeah. Which I guess is also how those infrastructures came to be in the first place.

And and what did they, but I mean. What I can say is that, at least in my, that's also my perspective or perception. I think something I would be quite interested in, soon, to do is to maybe maybe something interesting. If you wanted to do a bit of this, like to know how everyone or everyone, or at least some of the people that have been 'active diggers,' you know how each one reads their story in this process? Because I'm, I'm sure the, you know, there are different, there are different stories that have been within. From my end, what, I let's say, my feeling of the evolution is that that there was a Phase 20-9, 2019, 21 and then things shifted and changed a bit in basically between 2021 and 2023 in the sense that. And sooner so COVID only one and but also the end of that grant. Yeah, were probably two factors to be considered.

**MM:**

Still the Stimulerings grant, like the second phase of the Stimulerings?

**FM:**

Yeah. stimulering, basically we got the first phase was like 3 months phase, yeah, 2000 early 2019 to do this meetings and try to design together programme. The programme as phase two lasted at least on paper, Summer, September 2019, for the whole 2020, yeah, it was basically a year and something long. Having on paper initially was supposed to be September to September and then they extended allowed extensions until December 2020. And then they still give a sort of 3rd smaller grant to... that was kind of meant more for publishing like

outcomes sharing.

In our case we did mainly 2. Or an exhibition that was somewhat an archival exhibition, or not exactly an archival exhibition. But I basically invited the group, or each one in the, each digger, to say, to, yeah, to share some of the work that had been done within Qanat. And that was hosted in the Netherlands in the place where Jeanne is involved.

There was that, and in parallel, Shaima, instead of proposing something to be put in the exhibition, she suggested to actually run the 1st and for now actually only programme in Palestine. Because she really wanted to bring. Yeah, to sort of bring Qanat and some of our conversations and approaches, etcetera. Also to her own network in Palestine. And so in that spring 2021, on the one hand, there was, yeah, this exhibition in Rotterdam and then a programme that was, part of it was 100% in Palestine and then a few things that we tried to do in dialogue, so hybrid hybrid format with gatherings in Marrakesh and gatherings in Palestine and and bringing film makers, activist scholars from the region in conversation.

And from then I basic, I would say. I kind of, I was extremely between that and shortly after there was the... Basically, the 1st edition of Ch[a]rita after the very first one. Because Dar Belarj. I mean, we were supposed to do it in 2020. And then because of COVID it was postponed. And we got a little bit ambitious and so I've basically curated A biennale just to give you a sense of. The amount of people that we involve was insane. Completely insane. Like the amount of, it was beautiful, but.

**MM:**

A bit different than this year?

**FM:**

Like. No. Yeah, it was. You're not very readable. Yeah. I mean, it was like many days and. Yeah, it was on from the 1st to the 17th, like 2 weeks of programmes some days, just a few. So just all all this to say there are. Honestly I was burnt out by spring 2021. Between that all the reporting of Stimulerings phase two and phase three that of course, who do you think did it? Like 100% me.

The financial reporting is I think that in general stresses me out a lot because, you know it's money and you know the the the person respond legally responsible was Jeanne. They gave all her trust. So, you know, I was exhausted. And I think I lost the capacity to push for that

group to be together in the same way. I was like, whatever. I cannot force a certain thing to happen. So we'll do with those that are in, for whatever is there. And so basically since then what has happened is that a lot of the work in Marrakesh has kept happening somewhat through the frameworks of the collective workshops in Charita. Yeah. Yeah. In 2022 and 23 and then two big programmes, I mean, two big collaborations came about. One in 2022, one in 2023 with partner with partners, yeah basically with curators that reached out one from Wales, one from Scotland. And in that invitation to Qanat, basically me and Shema became the curatorial duo, proposing things and involving some previous Qanat members sometimes and sometimes new people as well..

And so that's how things have sort of continued over the last few years with some like really nice and every time you, like really nice coming together of groups as much, sometimes as much as possible coming together multiple times. In different locations or configurations which has always been a little bit the... Yeah, I guess the methodology or one of the methodologies of trying to work with people. But it's true that since then, he has become less and less clear. You know who is in who is out. And and just there hasn't been time that we or I you know created to have that conversation, which would be probably healthy to work at this point.

**MM:**

But then in this timeline also the Documenta happened.

**FM:**

Ohh yes. Well. Do you mind we just move outside to the we can continue if you want.

**MM:**

Have a quick break.

**[recording pauses]**

**FM:**

Ouf, Documenta.

**MM:**

Documenta.

**FM:**

Documental was a whole other journey in the complicated life of a collective, but that's somewhat, it's a bit more specific to the dynamics of LE18 with which have evolved somewhat in parallel because, trying to be brief. So let's say LE18 was first started by Leila together with another curator, Shambo Sid, who now is based in in Tangier and in 2015. When I arrived, Isham was sort of starting moving away like he wanted to go back to Tangiers that is on project etcetera. And so the first years it was mainly Leila and me running the space and the programmes and not at some point we also had another collaborator. I mean with LE18 we always work with the you know a lot of people in dialogue, but let's say the team was maybe me and her and then another girl, another Meryem not the current one.

**MM:**

Yeah.

**FM:**

And in 2019, because we actually had a bit of a structure of funding, we were able to basically hire two more people. At first one is Amin Larach that you missed for a few days, who has been a very, very important member, both Qanat and LE18 and he has been with us since 2019 until now, basically. Now he left for a little bit to be in Belgium and in the Netherlands because he has also an artistic practise that is trying to develop. So it's kind of following a bit that for now. And the other person was at first, Soumeya Aït Ahmed, which also kind of started as an intern, working primarily with the with the artist in residence. But then she proposed, so she developed a project called AWAL with her partner Nadir Bouhmouch, who is a filmmaker and who works a lot. I mean, who had worked a lot on also water, environmental struggles. So I knew Nadir, from basically from the first residency of Shaman because they were they collaborated together, then things didn't really work out very well between the two of them. And maybe I can tell you about that later, but.

So basically in. hen was it? Yeah. Late 2019. The first the same grant AFAC grant the structure of in two years came out and Soumeya and Nadir asked us to apply as LE18 for a partial structure funding support and a programmatic one for, to develop Awal, which was and is. I don't know if they still continue it or not. A programme working primarily on oral practises and oral arts with an attempt to basically create an archive of yeah, oral practises that are about to. I mean they are endangered, by involving students and youngsters from those regions in, like, basically training them to archive and build the archive.

Anyway, all this to say that basically the two of them joined the team and from 2020 mainly yeah. From COVID onwards. And so that was a bit the configuration of LE18 that was invited the documenta. And what is funny? I mean, what is funny? One interesting thing is that documenta was invited. LE18 was invited as a collective, but the thing is that we had never really worked as a collective, until then, because something that happened in the processes that are both Awal I and Qanat had at that point a quite specific identity and sort of people working on it. And LE18, which was becoming a, I mean, had more organic programmes happening here and there, time to time, on a regular basis.

Plus, of course, exhibitions of projects that are also, Leila brought in. But so we were sort of working almost separately, you know, like the space hosted this 2, slash 3 or different configurations of people coming together. But the the core team was definitely not very close and especially Soumeya and Nadir were and somewhat are a bit complicated people to work with, so quite a few tensions had already emerged before and the, so the invitation at first I think we all felt, I know that both Leila and I felt it was a nice opportunity to sort of come together as a group. But that definitely didn't happen in the first months, partially because the first attempts that we had in trying to imagine a proposal. A common, common proposal didn't work super well and at one point, because time was sort of starting running out, we started stressing about, OK, what do we present there or how do we make our presence permanent in Kassel for 100 days, while there is definitely no budget for us to be there and neither budget nor interest of being there for 100 days.

And so towards, it was, I think end 2021, early 2022, we sort of agreed on let's have a sort of archives or display of some of the left, like passages and traces of different people and communities that have marked the history of like LE18 as a sort of exhibition. Basically, you know as a fixed space that people can then enter, learn a bit about and we will come maybe two times throughout the 100 days with some of our community to run programmes and conversations in this Council. The one problem is the while originally our, I mean, the idea that Leila and I had was to not to produce new works like was more try to work with what, with the existing. And Soumeya and Nadir were like ah, but we never work with exhibitions, so we don't have works that relate to a Awal that we can. So there was a whole conflict of starting to say Awal needs this budget and then Qanat needs this budget. And then this one needs this budget so there were a lot of tensions and the work around this stupid exhibition that nobody really wanted to do really started taking a lot of time and energy and at one point

it when we. And we really went on like we had the plans where the lights would go, like the artists involved, everyone was invited, blah blah, blah. And that thing was starting exploding the budget we had and we started facing issues with the transport of certain works because because it's documenta it has to go through formal infrastructure and protocols.

And so basically there is this famous day or evening. Not famous, but in our small little story. Basically at one point we, I remember Leila and I were in the kitchen of LE18 one evening and both quite exhausted by this whole process. And I don't know how exactly the conversation started, but I don't know if you guys said like, Oh my God, what if, like, this thing is terrible and maybe it doesn't make sense. And she was like, you know what I just spoke on the phone with M'barek Bouhchichi which is a good friend and an artist we have worked with Qanat and, but also in other programmes over the years. And he's a very wise person, you know, like he's a bit in the generations of artists we work with. He's more of an older generation that also supports younger ones and find their way etcetera. And M'barek told to Laila, Laila, I mean we are with you guys, always 100% etcetera, but I need to ask me something really. Why the fuck are you doing an exhibition? And. And he was one of the artists invited for the exhibition.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**FM:**

So when she told me that, I was like, I mean if M'barek tells you that maybe we should just cancel the exhibition. And so in that process of cancelling the exhibition was at one moment in which we all came together in this fuck this kind of.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**FM:**

Unfortunately, it didn't last long because after the euphoria of saying we're done with this, we are not doing it. Then it was like two or three months before the thing started, and we still at that point we had to still work on the whole public programme that we wanted to do. And so some of the. In the end, we never built enough trust within that group, our group, to make things work. Yeah, and so documenta itself between those internal struggles and then everything that happened in June, with the time body thing. I got. I mean, some of us, I got

COVID and spent half of it locked in a in a room. Yeah. All the programmes were cancelled. I don't know if you know this story, but in June, the first week of public programmes were all cancelled and many say because it was a sort of censorship, it was justified, partially rightly, by the commenters, because 85 or something like that percent of the team, was sick, so they didn't have staff anymore because everybody got COVID.

So yeah, it was a nightmare. Like at the end of June, we were like, why the hell are we? Do we wanna come back in August again? You know, like. And in the end, it was too complicated not to do it. Like, let's keep it. We'll come. In in August, we came back with 20 people, which was kind of cool and for instance, so in that occasion, let's say Qanat, the participation of Qanat was I basically reinvited a lot of the older all the contributors, the crew of 2000...

**MM:**

the alumni.

**FM:**

the alumni. Yeah, to propose something. And Louisa, one of them made a proposal of sort of running together series of workshops to build objects to create a final setup for a gathering and cooking and eating together. So that was one of part of it, and then a few others did. Also some talks and presentation or film screenings related to the work. So for instance Rim presented the work around the Palm Grove, Sarah that I was telling you about, presenting the advancements of our research. Yeah, that was more or less a the kind of, it was at least an opportunity to meet again with the with the some of also the older folks that are, that are of Qanat. But then it kind of stayed like that. You know, it was also very short. It, it wasn't. It didn't allow for some reflective internal reflective time, in that in that moment.

Shall we go inside?

**MM:**

Yeah.

**FM:**

Yeah. Melt.

And the aftermath of Documenta for LE18... it's very hard to evaluate in the sense that I think of course, I think for everyone probably for most collectives at the very least it offered an

opportunity to, you know, meet new people, some new people. Probably. I mean, it could have been more if in June there wasn't this whole COVID thing and maybe some, some made more meaningful connections than others, etcetera. But let's say from, for our case, the hope that the documenta artistic direction team had, which was, like using almost exploiting, yeah, or using documenta to consolidate your project locally at, yeah, your own location. Didn't really work. No, not much. Maybe some managed to make it work in a different way compared to us.

I don't know. In our case, I think there are there have been of course good, good things and it I think it has also accelerated some internal problems basically. And so I mean as a final result for instance Soumeya and Nadir left last year.

Which, I think it's also good because we weren't having the same. I mean, yeah, we couldn't come together at one point. Yeah.

That was a bit of Documenta in a in a... really needs an extra another interview.

**MM:**

I see. I see. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

No but at the same time we're now mainly talking about the structure and not even so much in detail what you have been working on, or the projects, or something.

**FM:**

I mean, there was more of a showcase of something basically and an opportunity to bring some. Yeah. For us it became more let's use it as an opportunity to bring some of the people who have been working so much with over the years or so to come and share maybe bits and pieces of their own work, or of our work at large of our of the Community we have been somewhat growing and growing with over the years more than anything else and yeah. In that sense.

And yeah, no, I guess also for the projects, yeah.

**MM:**

Yeah, I mean. Because I have mainly one, or I have multiple questions now of course. But uh, one thing that surprised me, or is that you, at no point did you mentioned the commons, which seems like, if you read your public outings, it seems like a quite a fundamental concept, and I think you could have explained what you did in the way of knowledge production through this concept, but you didn't.

So I'm [?]. It's what I'm wondering is how these different concepts like collective or collective platform or the notion of the commons, how they relate in your practise.

**FM:**

No, I mean. So I think 1 interesting thing to say in relationship to this notion of the commons is that it's true that we have been, we are, I have been using it quite a lot and yet at the same time we also had a quite a lot of internal conversations on the I guess the opportunity or the meaningfulness of the term from different perspectives. In this, like first of all because. Some already some scholars and artists, etcetera are like maybe or let's say from the radical left, let's say are sort of putting that term in question. And then specifically, I think when I. Basically, I don't think we found anything better to describe the, I guess the type of terrain we try to work in. It is still a English term, you know, so like there is a.

**MM:**

Is there like an Arabic equivalent because it has an history in Morocco so.

**FM:**

Yeah, but. I mean, he has. It does, but with its own specific differences.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**FM:**

But yeah, I mean. Maybe besides the all the terminological questions, for sure, the working in and on the communal and in the community of course and from there also the collective. Has always been at the at the heart of Canada and I think also of LE18 in a less maybe explicit sense. I think what we have been doing. What we have been doing is really creating spaces, not always. I mean LE18 has a physical space, but besides the physical space creating like the conditions for first of all the coming together of people. In an opportunity or possibility to sort of ground your work whether you are from here or not in this locality and in the complexities there is. That there are traversing, traversing it. There has always been a sort of a desire or an intention to. We just worked until some point to sort of also create bridges of conversations across different localities and that is loosely started happening through the intimate relationships that some of the Qanat diggers had and I think Shaimaa in Palestine is the best example, but of course he has not been dug as deep yet. Maybe. Just because the I guess the this first set of infrastructure is very much present here and there is not as much.

You know, presence yet there, before the. I mean the this the last year we really wanted to start fundraising to, to have a dedicated programme in Palestine. Which now is on hold for, I mean obvious reasons but also Shaima is also she's also started a PhD and she needs her own time and spaces. But yeah, to I mean, for me, it's hard to say because in a way, I feel so intimidated. You know, I feel so personal also about Qanat. And it's hard to to say amazing or whatever. I see maybe more easily the the faults than the, you see what I mean?

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Then the the successes.

**FM:**

And. In a way. But no, I mean, I think what he has done. Is. Yeah, it's really creating some maybe common grounds in different occasions and that I think definitely the the relationship that exists now and the integration that exists now with Dar Belarj is one. And also all the work that we have done on, on gardens etcetera, is to me it's really it's very, very valuable. And I hope it can translate in the future into something even more solid and tangible because at one point I think of course, I mean it's important to work on the intangible to, to work on the punctual, but it I I think if you, as you grow you know, yeah you start putting some roots, it would be nice that they sprout you know that's why I think one priority I would love to have and for us to succeed is to really try to create a garden space. That is, that is there and that people can inhabit and then take over and transform and experiment with.

Because. Yeah. I think for me, I mean, in in many ways, Qanat has been one, one way to really try to tackle and engage more deeply in yeah, in the politics of the city. Basically, the fact that. Like the, And yeah, living also. Yeah, living in the Medina, you're also experiencing that. The level of dispossession there has been keeping accumulating over the years. It's making it quite unliveable place for for the majority, so finding small small yeah. A bit of yeah. Pockets where you can breathe, whether it is by, you know, gathering at Dar Belarj or LE18, or maybe in the future have a little green area. Where you can reconnect to, you know, traditional historic ways of relating to the land or to the use of water, growing food or building a brick wall or a. Is a bit. Yeah, I guess. What the attempt is.

Yeah.

**MM:**

It's a nice future goal.

**FM:**

So, so and and and ambitious. No, I mean. I think some of it is there already. I think. I think the difficult part is. I don't know. I think it's interesting to think, how and whether it makes sense to move into, into more of an advocacy political work, because that's not really something that even Dar Belarj, which is much more connected with the public bodies and local institutions. They've also they. They've done it as long as or as far as they allow them to. Yeah, to be and exist, you know. It's less a work of we want this somewhere else, you know. And yeah, I mean I remember at one point I was having a very brief conversation with this other curator and cultural practitioner. All older than us, from Casa and. And she was telling me that she was also having these conversations and she meant to sort of open up a debate. I don't know if she did it actually around this question of, you know, visibility versus invisibility, vis-a-vis, public bodies Strategies to be. Doing what you are trying to do. Because we often think you need to be visible to be heard and to demand and etcetera. And but she was saying maybe sometimes they maybe hear the being invisible is what makes you stronger, yeah, or allows you.

**MM:**

You to do these things.

**FM:**

To do for example, the authorization during the last three days.

**MM:**

Yeah, because then claiming the politics of water, it seems like a sort of a big statement, but what, what does it mean to you to?

**FM:**

I mean, not that we claim the politics of water but.

**MM:**

Well, I mean you you claim it as a goal or it it's it's, yeah.

**FM:**

Working on the politics of water. Yeah, I think it's less about working on the actual water distribution shortage in the field of the farmers. I mean, I guess it's less about organising the

protest with them or it hasn't happened yet. And probably wouldn't. I mean, we're probably not the most skillful people in in in that way of organising, who knows but. Like, It's a matter of learning. First of all, you know about the yeah, about the political implications of a resource there, there is essential that I think you know, I mean water is political anyways, no matter which angle you take it actually as much as well as land and. But also, working also on the disappearance of or the either the disappearance or the in crease. What's the term? The, it's not denial, but the the categorization of historic forms traditional knowledges, as you know from the past and to be discarded like trying to work towards. Like we bringing them into the picture as something that is actually deeply wise, valuable and yeah, rooted in a place and with a reason that is related to the place that's a political work too, you know. And I think we have been more working on that line of like reconnect. I mean, I guess regathering some of those practises, histories and knowledges emerging from water, water infrastructures, gardens. So let's say communal infrastructures, institutions and cultures. Recognising them and bringing the people that are would have otherwise, I mean that still have them in their own hearts in a way, as Maha says, also feel proud about them instead of ashamed, you know. That's definitely one chunk of the of the work there and that that's the one very entangled with. It's the part very close to what we do with Dar Belarj

And on the other hand, I mean quite a few artists that have been sort of passing through Qanat have done research work that have really tackles political questions. Yeah. Also around water distribution, [? Othman], [Walal?], who is, if you haven't met him, you will because he's based here in Marrakech. He has been working extensively on the politics of watering is Oasis in the southeast. [?Mathis Jure] has been one of the artists. Tell me about Mauritius. She's been working a lot around tourism and from the gentrification and like different forms of labour and access to spaces and the I mean not so deeply, but also distribution of waters and water bodies in in the context of Marrakesh. The whole garden question and food sovereignty question is very political in the end as well.

**MM:**

Yes. I mean, yeah, no doubt all the questions, it's always super political. But then would that make Qanat as well political or how do you feel about the political position of Qanat itself as a platform or as a

**FM:**

I mean, I would say I think I think all cultural practise is political, I mean you can decide to be

apolitical when you as a let's say you know as an artist and you say that I'm just working on aesthetics. That's already a political position. There is nothing. I mean, there's nothing neutral in anything, you know. It's I'm to me. Sometimes it's like it's a bit of a side thing, but this organisation I'm working with for the Congress, blah blah blah. We had, we had a weird like a bit fucked up sort of conversation around a statement that some of us in the team wanted to release for Palestine and that the Board of Trust is blah blah blah refused because the problem is that instead of saying guys, this is stupid. This is just shooting on, you know, shooting in your own legs because then you know. You would lose funding instead of bringing it to a practical thing, they try to counter argue uh in terms of reasoning and they were like GDF is not a political institution entity and this is a political statement and you're like, GDF works on fucking land rights, you know, with the farmers and people that are this. Whatever I mean. What it what is not political there?

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**FM:**

It's just because we're not a party or a labour union and.

**MM:**

Same with IDFA, the documentary festival, I don't know how much you got of that? Yeah, so IDFA also refused to release a statement, but then at the same time has want to give a platform to marginalised documentary makers etcetera and.

**FM:**

Yeah, I mean, no, it's just a set aside statement on statement. I mean maybe it's true statements make little difference you know and then there are other ways in which one can show support, but OK. But it was more the reasoning I was like really shocked, I was like. OK, you're talking about. Especially when you put big words such as, I don't know, you know like this thinking holistically and across geographies because they were like it's not political. Plus we don't have programmes in Palestine. Yeah. Yeah. So, So what, like?

**MM:**

That's the political issue.

**FM:**

Anyways, just to say. That, yeah, maybe I have, yeah, in the in the use of the politics, I think there is a I guess it's a it's an expansive understanding of the term.

**MM:**

Maybe you have to look a bit at the time. Because I think it's almost.

**FM:**

Yeah, I think. Oh my God. Yeah. Yeah. If you don't mind. Yeah.

### 3. Interview Laila Hida

Interview with Laila Hida, conducted by author.

Marrakech, Morocco, 20 March, 2024.

MM: Matthijs Mantel

LH: Laila Hida

#### **Transcript**

**MM:**

OK, so the recording is on now, so I'm conducting this interview in the context of my master thesis, which is a research on Qanat, and yeah, the way they organise, they built on, or reproduce the notion of the commons and the way how they use artistic methods to do research on the politics of water or the the way they address politics and poetics of water. So in this interview I'm interested in understanding more the history of Qanat but also the way how individual members related contributed, and yeah, the way they were part of this notion of the commons or how they related to, how they engaged within a collective. And then also, how they work together with the different partners and yeah, as it all started here at LE18. And yeah, I'm curious how, what's your story of how it started?

**LH:**

Well, I think I guess of course you will have more accurate information from Francesca because she's, she's better than me for remembering, but so the project itself or the premises of what became Qanat as a project and as a collective was a response from LE18 to a call, or like a more broader project that was involving other institutions, it was a European Union grants and we were five partners involved in this project, so you know about this one.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**LH:**

I guess if I remember well the direction of that of that project was about heritage and. Yeah. Immaterial heritage related to certain contexts. So for us, because it was 2017 maybe. 17 I guess. We were already in the second, let's say, the sort of the second chapter of the LE18, where we've been through all this sort of experimentation of formats. Very intuitive, very spontaneous, not very written, except one that happened in 2016, which was [kaw-kaw?], that

we co-wrote with the curator we invited and it was a three months long, it was a six months long project with residency, exhibition and the series of programme and all framed in in the the theme of the Great Magreb as a Utopia and what happens after that? What? What, what, what? What's the remains of the utopia of the great Magreb? So we gathered people from the different countries, etcetera. So that was our very first. Like constructed project in terms of curation. And then Qanat came just after I think and we were thinking with Francesca about what would be something that would ground us within the city of Marrakesh. And looking back to what we have done before it.

And what LE18 was becoming, but also I think it was a matter of a chance I think I, we were. I mean, I remember myself reading this book from Mohammad el Faiz, this Moroccan historian. Very important.

**MM:**

Academic that worked on the khettaras?

**LH:**

Yes, he's one of the initiators of the Museum of the water in Marrakesh. But then I think the moment the museum was going to be launched, he passed away. During this period, I guess, but He wrote a book about the Le Cite Jardin, the Garden City, and to me it was a great inspiration. So there was this idea of the jardin, the cite jardin basically means water, because if you want to create a city that is based on gardens. Then you have to find ways of bringing water within the city, and then we start to dig into this history of how Marrakech became this city and and the ancestral qanats and and structures to distribute water and to drain water and to bring it to the city. Etcetera and to. And and so this have brought all the question of how the city was constructed, primarily the Medina, of course. And how people. So the social layer of it is life of people within the medina. And we know of course, because this system still exists in certain Oasis in Morocco. The sharing of water. And, all the power dynamics between and this ancient structures versus the ones that came up [different change?] to Morocco and change to a more modern way using the resources and while doing so, changing the entirely the way people function within these ecosystems and then this has become a huge, you know a huge entrance for so many layers of transformations within the city.

And then I guess what happens is that Francesca got really into that. So how's she, Yeah, she

got a real connection with this question of water. I don't really know actually, if this was already there maybe from before, if there was connections with her previous, you know? I have I you know, there's a moment where I see the project starting and I see like from Francesca getting into this Qanat thing where it becomes sort of a, a focus better sort of an obsession as well, and I understand the distance afterwards that it was also a way to build something not only as a project, as, as a theme, but Qanat as a community of people and I think this is where, this is where the project becomes interesting. It moves from, it shifts from this space as like a physical space to become becoming an autonomous space. Still very much in relation to LE18 and grounded here that it is autonomous in the way it functions. It is an autonomous because it has an autonomous community of people, but the communities are here and outside, so they they are interwoven like community LE18 and Qanat. They are, they can be the same or they can be separate, but it's, there is some sort of...

I think this project has also provoked something in the way of collaborating and our perception and our comprehension of what is collaboration and how to collaborate and the collective thinking. So it is interesting for me to because I feel that now we are advancing, you know, along together as two parallel projects, but very you know, sometimes we meet and sometimes we separate because. Yeah. One is grounded within the city and the other one is more nomadic. But one feeds the other in a way that, it's not a hierarchy anymore, where probably the moment it was embedded within LE18, it was [just] a project or emerged from a conversation, a series of conversations, etcetera. As it happened, everywhere and every projects. But at some point it starts to became, and it has challenged actually LE18. In the sense that it has challenged the way we were working within LE18, and I think this this challenging, this challenging tension have brought us also to rethink the way we were functioning within the space of LE18. From observing his fluid dynamic of Qanat that was already, you know, LE18 was also to allow a project to be within and outside, it's also to be very fluid as a, as a space as well. Which is not the case for many projects, is that if you're part of a space, you're part of the space and it's it's highly [hardly?] possible to be inside and outside, but, but I think it's it's... It is a great model of actually possible project collective, you know, space, connector, mediator. This project that mediates a lot also between spaces. Yeah. Move to make it a bit more concrete. Can you maybe go back to what you said before on how LE18 developed its relation with the city like maybe. As in the first, you said that like, in the first 3years that Qanat became a way to ground itself more in the city. Is that then a form of, Does that relate to this, this idea of mediation or?

**LH:**

Yes, I think, well, I think LE18 have grounded itself in the city by being in the city primarily, you know like existing within the city like Marrakech is already a challenge we have a big chance and privilege to have this house, which is one of our biggest opportunities.

**MM:**

Yes.

**LH:**

And we have seen a lot of projects. That started that stopped because of challenging conditions. So what grounds, for me what grounds the space of LE18 within this city is the many communities that we end up reaching and creating, and it was one of Qanat, but also one of of certain aspects of LE18, of other projects. And we were not, we're not working. I think we're not working towards having a public but rather building projects with communities. And each of us programming with different communities, so Qanat would programme with different communities and I would programme with another type of community, Nadir and Soumeya would programme with other communities, when Amin programmes he speaks to other communities, etcetera. So it was this very large spectrum of proposals that is very particular because, I guess also something to raise is that we didn't have one direction with LE18. This is something that informally have decided, I tried to not. I've. I've never wanted to be a director of this space. I wanted to do something collective. So it happened they have created some confusion at some point. Between us, because there are ways also to manage a collective. Not because of the collective, that suddenly.

**MM:**

Then you're talking about Qanat, or you're talking about the LE18 as a collective or?

**LH:**

About LE18, but it is not a collective it's collectively run or collectively managed, but it is not a collective. While Qanat is clearly a collective, and I think Francesca have very clearly identified it or defined it as a collective. Because again, she, I don't see her. I mean, I see her giving form to her very clearly her collective, you know, very community driven working process or collective thinking working for. She always is in conversation with many people when she. Now I guess the pool is smaller. There's collaborators that are more regular. And

she have created this very long term relations with certain people, that became friends. So it's also a matter of, of relations and of building something sustainable rather than just calling 1 project a collective. But this one have really built from real sustainable relations and a lot of commitment as well, from her primarily. Not always, also from other people from the collective. So at the end also this was from me from outside looking at this project growing and how sometimes it reaches certain like great epiphany moments and then some struggles. It's at the end for me it revolves around Francesca eventually. Yeah, of course it is. Although it's a collective, but it's collective that revolves around Francesca that manages to gather all this energy around the project. So, I guess it's a it's all the question of the collective and the reason why I myself I was never really driven towards the collective, but rather towards the space, the physical space which really works more as a communal. Something that you know that will always bring people together, even if they're not a collective, but it creates chances to build something maybe together.

**MM:**

The physical space?

**LH:**

The physical, as opposed to the one of the space of the collective, which is more, a non-physical space I guess.

**MM:**

But in your but your personal artistic practise also, revolves around a lot around collective thinking, right?

**LH:**

Yes.

**MM:**

So how? How do you how would that relate to either the collective or the space or?

**LH:**

To me it was rather a question of being in conversation with. Of course, it's a collective process. And I totally acknowledge the impossibility of doing certain projects if you are not in conversation with the collaborators or the people you're working with. So yeah, it's it's it. And

also here, I mean we work collectively. The difference is that. Yeah, just think that working collectively is a fluid form where you gather and then and then you know it's it's for a moment and there's this conversation and then the conversation can happen again or don't happen. But. There's not an aim of being a group. Because it's also challenging in a way. We have, I mean we have the experience of working collectively for documenta etcetera and. It have shown the limits. Limitation of this form.. But I believe a lot and in the collective process, of course this is like very central In our work. Even if I'm doing the curation I do not consider myself doing the curation by myself. Rather being in conversation or and in my artistic practise as well. But it is an unstable state of things. Yeah. It's like a matter it's something that's moving and it's, you know, it's all these particles and that are bubbles and you know, worlds and so. It is just obvious that it's it's not gonna stick together, but there's something that attracts it and then somehow it separates. With the group, or reshape the group.

And it was very interesting to like to watch it and to to see how, how this evolves and how it has in its, during this this years it have attracted other elements, so the project grows not as one community. It grows as a concept itself. So while it's growing, the concept becomes more rounded, more complex and then, I guess it creates its own autonomous life and it brings, you know, other projects and you know, people want to collaborate and.

**MM:**

Now you're mainly talking about Qanat

**LH:**

Yeah. Yeah, Totally.

**MM:**

Can you make it a bit more concrete maybe. In or like examples of ways how.

**LH:**

Yeah, I mean just what's happening now, I mean, for example, the, the. There is a way where Qanat everywhere it goes, it connects. So there's this long term connection with Jeanne from BAK.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah.

**LH:**

But then after Documenta, where we met with the [unvulnerable?] from South Africa. There was a connection and then now Francesca is in South Africa, so it has the power of attraction. Something that's you know, it's evolving and It adapts itself to contexts. Qanat has also the the possibility of adapting itself to, even for grant making for grant applications etcetera, it is a format that is so flexible in a way. I mean it's always of course the same core project. It doesn't compromise on the project itself.

**MM:**

Of course.

**LH:**

But because it is all on everything that now are so much important. Which is how to live together, how to work together, how to recreate these commons or these spaces of common. Unchallenged, this, this very dark times we're going through and I think in, in, in the way it's advancing. It is answering or giving potentially directions or or or. Yeah, just possibilities to what we can do.

**MM:**

Yeah, there was also indeed one thing that I wanted to ask, how this project is so locally embedded, but at the same time then you have all these international collaborations. Did that also affect the development of LE18?

**LH:**

It has affected or, in a good way.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah.

**LH:**

Some of the collaborations, of course, have brought so the way Francesca works is that she built a new iteration of Qanat. And it takes a new form so it can do an exhibition or a symposium or a series of residencies in a very condensed moment. So I guess this condensed moments are a way giving a form to the collective again, when somehow the collective

separate for a while and then it brings the matter together. And it recreates the collective over and over and over again. And somehow, with new people at the time.

But sometimes guests, but sometimes people that that get involved with Qanat. And of course the collaborations that she did have brought a lot of resources to LE18. In terms of content, primarily because many of the iterations happens here, so it's, It's a way to connect to, to other of working. You know, just to meet new people and to know a new community of people and some people had came through Qanat. Some people were here and entered into Qanat so.

Yeah, I guess it's. It it, it always, Qanat always feeds LE18 In a way. Because it stays, we can say that it is a project here of LE18, but then it is also a collective that is autonomous, yes. So it's it's really like part of the process here, part of the, and also through qanat, she builds this collaboration with Dar Belarj of the Atelier Collective. And this was a way to really.

Concritisé. Like make this relation more concrete. I was collaborating with Dar Belarj as an artist. I was invited in 2013 and 14 as an artist. But through Qanat it became an institutional collaboration between Dar Belarj and LE18. And the fluidity of Francesca being here and there at the same time has also created this this relationship that we have today with LE18 and Darl Belarj I guess. Relation of friendship relation of neighbourhood relation. Supporting each other when when it's possible. Recently we've been hosting a part of the programmes of Dar Belarj because after the earthquake they couldn't use the space. And and clearly to me, the vision that Francesca had on collaborations being very straightforward to like doing things with other people have allowed this kind of relations to happen.

**MM:**

And within another talk, you mentioned Qanat as an axis of research of LE18. Has, yeah, your exchange, your encounter with Qanat or the research that has been done by the collective member, the member of the collective, has it shaped your own practise as well as an artist?

**LH:**

I don't know.

**MM:**

No is also an answer of course.

**LH:**

I don't know. I I actually don't know. I just know that LE18 in general, my work here and the fact that my practise is it's conditioned by the fact that I cannot do only my practise. I have to

be here and do my work, be here, my work. I don't have this possibility of being in my studio for three months or not doing anything. I'm constantly in conversation with people constantly, with artists, with collectives, with Francesca, with the team of LE18, this really have impacted my work. That's the conversation, which is already something I mean, it's already a lot and Qanat, it's part of it, of course. Definitely. But it's. Yeah, there's something in there that have affected my work is. I think there's one thing is, uh, since Qanat, uh, the very beginning of the project. So that's really when we started thinking. About what we are going to present for this very first project in 2017. I think I started to look differently to the city. And I started to be very much interested in the dynamics of what's going on in the city of Marrakech. So in terms of conceptual direction or theoretical direction, clearly, this was the moment where I started to look into Marrakesh as my main subject and my main focus. Not that I choose Marrakesh. Suddenly I just realised I was part of an ecosystem and this ecosystem is affecting me as a person. But then it's also affecting my work. And then I was trying to create out of this experience that I was having with the city, with the people and with the space and. And so anything, anything that had come after was related to this relation. That I had and because my practise was primarily photography. Of course my, my, my interest was going towards the representation of Marrakesh and you know the the cultural and and economical and dynamic of the city and how this is affecting as well the social relations and creating social fractures within the city. So I guess I also have become more grounded in my work. It's very contextual. My work is very contextual, even if it's, it can go, you know, to other layers. But still the the very origin of my interest is starts here. And. And it's funny because it starts with an image and now in my research where I am now. It's going back to something more of the the the original ecosystem of the oasis environment and the ecology of it. Not as not properly as a as like, not as an ecologist, but rather as someone who tries to understand. How these ecosystems shapes the way people lives and the evolution of it and and the perception of it from the outside and.

**MM:**

How do you mean this exactly? I, like, it, How does it relate to your work or?

**LH:**

Well, now I'm working to in. I'm working on this project called Voyage de Phoenix the Phoenix Journey which is, the Phoenix is the date, the date palm. Is indigenous from North-Africa and the Arabian Peninsula in general. I I will, I started to be very interested in this tree

that have been transplanted and brought during the mid 19th century beginning of the 20th century to do this like avenues like planted avenues with palm trees to reproduce some sort of exoticism and then something happened in America. So they brought these tree to America and they did the same and in America, they were able to actually grow palm trees, date palms and large farms to produce dates. And to make an economy out of it. But again, what the the layer that interests me is how is is the the use and the commodification of culture in other contexts. Especially in imperial context countries that have used all the resources until.

[recording stops]



#### 4. Interview Rim Mejdí

Interview with Rim Mejdí, conducted by author.

Marrakech, Morocco, 12 April, 2024.

MM: Matthijs Mantel

RM: Rim Mejdí

#### **Transcript**

**MM:**

So yeah, as I mentioned this this research as part of my as my master thesis. The interview is aimed at understanding your experiences with Qanat, at understanding how, yeah, what the politics mean for Qanat, and the political methodologies undertaken. How your artistic work contributed and has been shaped by the collective. That's probably the focus of the interview.

And yeah, of course I've read about your work. What you've been doing. But I'm curious to hear in your own words. Because you have been part of the curator, but provided workshops, you have presented your own artistic work. How would you see your own role within the collective.

**RM:**

I don't need to present myself?

**MM:**

No, no, I read about your work.

**RM:**

I think what I like about the collective is the flexibility of the methodologies. The fact that we're many people and we don't. We collaborate on different projects. There is no obligation to to collaborate each project. And it's it's an open collective that that is constantly changing. This flexible form is is very liberating somehow because. As an as an artist, or curator it, it gives both support. You know you don't feel completely lonely in your research or your work. But it gives you the kind of independence. Where you know like for example that with the small committee you have this. This and this. [not clear 2:15] You know there's different people collaborating with you without it being overwhelming.

So this open flexible format slash methodologies is is quite are quite suitable for me. I think and for the for how artistic and the cultural work is evolving nowadays. Because it's not a

collective in the traditional sense. Like each each one of us can bring other people on a different project. New people can collaborate. That's what I like about it.

Regarding the politics and for instance [?]

**MM:**

Yeah. Yeah, we can jump to it. Or maybe because if I understand correctly. You became with part of it in 2019, but I guess you've been around already since the start.

**RM:**

Yes, yeah, I've been. I've been there. I've been collaborating with the Francesca since 2016, but not on Qanat collective, on other projects. At Dar Belarj, we have been part of the madrasa collective. And and she started the project that was really beautiful and interesting, and it nourished me even before joining because I would attend some workshops and some presentations. And actually, it's then that that it rings the bell, you know. That I thought. But wait, I have the project that really fits the the collective that could benefit from the collective experience. As well as add something new to to the collective. So I have met at that point different people, but like, among them Thierry Rouf, the geographer and the water historian, and when they were talking about the khattaras, like, somehow it was central, you know, the subject.

**MM:**

For Qanat?

**RM:**

Yeah. And then they would mention the palm groves because the khattaras, you know, crossed the budget [?] and the. But I was working on this project in 2016 fifteen, so I have a document around the palm groves and one of the ramifications was the water policy and when I got to know. More closely the collective work I thought that the project fits actually. And it made me question because the project was a traditional documentary format and it made me question the format started talking with Francesca and the other members and they they like to. Just invited me to the collective. And then I was like. I should change, I will change the format and started talking to Francesca about this idea of a web doc experimental web doc instead of one format where it could also become somehow a, create an archives for the palm grove.

The project would become something like an archive, a big archive that documents the palm grove's history. So with different materials, not only video but sound and photos and drawings, archival materials. And this you know, very this diversity of of of, of mediums would be at the heart of the project since. Since the palm groves and its history is really is very entangled and complex. And you know, so yeah, that's.

**MM:**

Drawing on like existing archives, but then. So documenting what's out there, documenting the voices that might not have been documented yet, and I see I see.

**RM:**

Using the the existing archive and creating the sort of archives of what have not the what's not has not been archived.

**MM:**

And then so I guess around 2019 was also the moment when Jeanne van Heeswijk became more involved and I guess that was quite a crucial moment in the history of Qanat. As it's more shifted from just a public exhibition or a public programme to being a collective.

**RM:**

In a collective with different you know with the with the residency, with the, with the different renderings throughout the years, not just you know, we are here, we're artists, researchers, we we do whatever we can do with the involvement of Jeanne. Even the activities were more formal. Well rendered.

**MM:**

After the. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So yeah. Funding. Yeah. And the the workshop with Jeanne as well as that. Have you participated in these as well or in these conversation?

**RM:**

I I think I have, but it has been a long time. I have a very short memory.

Yeah, I have. Of course. And after that, we started directly conducting like on set on field workshops with the the inhabitants.

**MM:**

As part of Ateliers Collectif?

**RM:**

Yes, but it's like an entanglement between Ateliers Collectief and Qanat.

Now we went there on field trips to the palm groves. Discussing with the populations who live there, all these questions, you know, so we have the experts and we want to get the voice of the marginalized population that will be displaced. And that they would actually hold the memory and the history of the place. At least since the 50s, because they come from the rural exodus.

We went there, we mapped what we could map, you know. With our participants as well and we brought other experts from The University of Marrakech, who had been working on the Palm Groves. But who we could, we couldn't, you know, invite, to invite them to give us lectures and different kind of intervention to broaden our knowledge and gather. Because one of the tricky thing with this project, I think is the amount of information is really new and the idea of you know you have these different experts and people and and and info like scattered everywhere. How could you bring it together and render it both artistically and then also in, research wise, so try so it could be interesting for more for different audiences for large audience, but also for experts, artists, researchers, audience. It's not boring. It's very interesting to us, but how could we communicate it for other people. You know that it's interesting without it being detailed you know. It's very tricky.

**MM:**

I guess in Madrassa, the notion of a school there is an important role. Is that a sort of vision or concept that also lies behind this work in presenting or in educating?

**RM:**

Education School was like the idea of, we were in this continuous process of learning from each other and from the artist we invite them. You know, for our local traditions, our local knowledge, knowledge and of course this, this school concept propagated also through the exhibition. We we thought that school as an institution. I mean I think. Working critics institution, of course, but it's one of the least, maybe problematic, since the knowledge component, you know you're there to learn and to teach is something that could somehow soften the hierarchy. That's vertical the vertical organisation, you know what I mean?

**MM:**

No not exactly.

Like the notion of being there to get knowledge, under the relations that are created in the school. Yeah, to get knowledge. Can soften the harshness of the hierarchy, you know of the of the hierarchical and vertical organisation like teacher like you know principals because of of knowledge how knowledge changes and shapes relationships. Like these other problematic components are less problematic, you know.

**MM:**

Can you make it, maybe a concrete examples of how this worked in practise for Qanat.

**RM:**

For Qanat, Qanat, Les Ateliers Collectif was found as an alternative, [unintelligible]

**MM:**

So Ateliers Collectif is not necessarily part of Qanat. Yeah. OK.

**RM:**

No, no, no, it's it's, it's a program that I was invited with the two of us by Maha to curate year long workshops programme.

**MM:**

Yeah.

**RM:**

And we came up with Ateliers Collectif which the basic idea is an alternative school. It's like night school, but like, more chaotic, more, not chaotic in a bad way, but more anarchic, you know, with the horizontal learning, with very open discussion spaces with the safe spaces, free spaces with the artist came not to teach exactly, but to create something with the participant.

**MM:**

I only understood before that it was, yeah, yeah. It wasn't initiated by Qanat.. out... as a way for sort of like LE18 and Dar Belarj, OK.

**RM:**

No, no, it's just like me and Francisca had nothing to do with Qanat. And then because some

the things with which came from us, of course, for our interests, and it intersected with Qanat at one point and.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

But it is separate program

**MM:**

And then similar like Charita, that's more of.

**RM:**

No, Charita came from Madrassa Collectif

**MM:**

OK. I guess some of the programmes, one of the one in 2019 completely set in, the Palm groves, no?

**RM:**

In 2020.

**MM:**

Ah in 2020, the Palmgrove Is yet Alive?

**RM:**

That was the Qanat, my project you know.

**MM:**

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

It was a. It was very difficult because we were in the middle of nowhere, we were really, in the palm Grove. But I think it it, it was a very important action.

**MM:**

And I'm trying to figure out how different projects relate. I guess then the matters of care program, It's also, it's not Qanat.

**RM:**

It's not Qanat. Dar Belarj. That so that we co-curate it as well, yeah. And withdrew it's the same. Actually. It's like an ongoing research in all of them. Different themes intersect because the exactly you would find, like entangled ecology coming back and water policy is coming back again. More from Francesca's side to my side is like contextual feminisms and archiving research you know. And we go back to the to these subjects because we're really interested and we when whenever we find the opportunity to to deepen the research and bring different people that bring their add something, we will do it.

Through through Charita we had like those two themes that we would go through conversations and films, so three themes: entangled ecologies, archive, like Moroccan archives, decolonizing archives, and contextual feminine. And after we did it. We had the opportunity with Dar Bellarj, the year after to create matters of care, which was like a ramification of that. All year long, not just one event like Charita, but all year long. Doing different screenings throughout the years, the year and bringing different experts and and guests to conducting like conversation around those things. But we didn't repeat Matters of Care [?]

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah. In which way?

**RM:**

It was like too many programmes at the same time.

**MM:**

I see. But you didn't want to downsize it like I mean it, I guess eight in one year. Yeah, you could have done once every three months or.

**RM:**

I mean, yeah, yeah, we were like now we're we're getting wiser at the beginning. We're crazy. We're doing too many things at the same time. Not viable. We're getting old you know.

**MM:**

OK, but then I'm might be a bit confused what is done? What Qanat presented publicly? Publicly. If it's not Charita, not not matters of care, not Ateliers Collectif?

So like for example the regular audience is regular. Yeah. What would they see from Qanat?

**RM:**

We had conversations we had. I mean, it didn't you go through the history of Qanat. We had like an exhibition. Different residencies, a lot since 2017. But of course.

**MM:**

I did. I did. I see, so I guess. More than the.. All the different collaborations also internationally.

**RM:**

Exactly. Also with the guidance of Dar Belarj, there was collaboration and with the yeah, the Netherlands and stuff.

Yeah. It's like ongoing. It's not, sometimes it's Qanat on itself, but most of the time it's Qanat with other programmes.

**MM:**

Yeah. One aspect that I'm interested in is the relation with the city Marrakech. And then as well how that, if there there's a common grounds to connect. For example, the Netherlands, or South Africa. Has Qanat. How has, did it lead you to look in a different way at the city?

**RM:**

Definitely, definitely, I think. It's the really, it's the first collective slash Project. Like, yeah, the first collective that looks at the city in a different way. With younger voices, young artists. Both digging into the history of the city, but it's present as well as its possible future from the perspective of the politics and poetics of water. You know, it has never been done when Marrakech is really in a city that has been always at the centre of these questions, at least nationally, you know. Geographically. We were next to the Atlas Mountains. So very rich region and water wise at the same time with the beginning of the deserted, semi-arid part of [?] when when your questions were at the heart of the of the foundation, like the foundation of the city is the palm groves, you know that?

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

The [?] came from the South. The legend has that they were stationed next to the Palm Grove Grove. [?] Because they were consuming their dates and throwing the seeds. So the Palm

grove will grow from there and then when they decided to create their capital, which would be Marrakech, they brought an engineer from Andalusia to create this water system.

With the water system it was the foundation of the city. Till this day Marrakech is the product of all these policies and decisions, you know, that's why we have the Museum of Water. But that's also with its problems. Marrakech also as a touristic city. Like savage tourism, that is consuming and destroying the city that is nourishing it economically. It's the same thing. The thing that is destroying it. The Palm Groves has been destroyed because mainly. Of course there's climate change and we go deeper in that there is also the drought, Morocco has this drought cycle. Between 50 years. But there is also building hotels and resorts. And nobody has looked at this aspects before and decided to educate people, not even educate, not even his position, but like to reflect on it and collectively not just as an individual artist, it just it's the first time that it's done with Qanat, I'm going back to your question.

**MM:**

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

And the relationships with The Netherland and South Africa, I think it's first of all it's methodologies, common methodologies is interest in the Commons in rights to the land in the collective methodologies. With South Africa, I would say also indigenous Right. Even if maybe with Qanat we don't express it that way. Through my my, my, my travel there I think that we approach this question, but in a different way. Like for example this project in the Palm Groves, or other ones. We always talk about the population that we're someplace and we're displaced or so it's indigenous right to the land. You know the difference with South Africa is the political history we don't have this. Of course, South Africa has this great history of struggle and people are very aware of their rights.

In Morocco we have a minority, we have. It's not like this awareness not there, but not as much, but we have not some minorities and struggles like in, in middle, you know, in the South people are really have been fighting for like years and years for their right to the land and through the water usage. I think that's common in South Africa. Of course, it's not in the same same frame of liberty like political liberty. Very different.

**MM:**

Of course.

**RM:**

Like in South Africa. Molemo could and the collective.

**MM:**

Which collective was it?

**RM:**

That's what I was getting to. They could name their collective the ungovernable, because the ungovernable as a word and as a concept is something that have been there in the struggle of the South African people to enter apartheid. You know, when people took the streets. To protest, they said, we're gonna make the streets ungovernable. So it's a word that is related to their history is very possible. So here you say the ungovernable. Not gonna make any action which you know you're gonna hide things. You need to trans... You know, transvestite in the really first meaning of the word.

**MM:**

I have a couple more question maybe first... How does than the collaboration, how does it look like concetely when you're going there? Is it that you're? Yeah. How does the week look like when you're collaborating with the South-African collective?

**RM:**

It's, I mean the collaboration didn't just start. Like taking its time, you know and it was through different meetings, getting to know their work. Different visits, we're getting to know the different people they collaborated with in creating gardens, community centres, in creating their own garden. It's like both field work, mainly creating gardens and I think preserving seeds as well as research funds, you know, like researching, writing, gathering information, reflecting open things, and now we're working on this publication between The Netherlands, Morocco and South-Africa. And it's gonna bring, you know, the ideas together and render somehow the collaboration and the different, at least the different interests we have.

**MM:**

Yeah. Then. And, you know, one of that more and it's sort of understanding the benefits of water but to get back to more the relation with the city, because I'm also curious how the city has changed Qanat as a collective.

**RM:**

I mean from the beginning Qanat was interested in also the urban transformation of the city you know. So we were digging into central subjects, but as well as like being very aware of what's happening in the current affairs, you know.

**MM:**

The reason I asked... Laila had a nice methaphor and I'm very curious how you experience it also. She compared the Marrakesh to an airport where so if people constantly come in and go stay but then leave and sort of being constantly in motion and that sort of that flexibility also formed the way how Qanat operates. Both in that it's very much locally rooted, but at the same time it has all its ramifications or has its sprouts everywhere across the globe.

**RM:**

Yeah, it's also, yeah. I mean, that's what I meant by open flexible collective, not. Not to close, you know, very open, like Marrakech is. But maybe I mean, I don't know, maybe I'm a bit traditional in my thinking, but I think like what we need more. We need to be rooted more. You know, I feel sometimes like very often, which is very flexible, but we need. I'm not talking about a space, like necessarily space in the traditional way. We've been thinking with Francesca about a new garden. So maybe that, you know, makes a lot of sense.

**MM:**

And then it's interesting because also it's a very international collective, a lot of people are also not necessarily Moroccans or not based in Morocco. Palestinians, French

**MM:**

So how would that look like? There's more rootedness

**RM:**

It would. It wouldn't lose like this open aspect of it, but it would make it more concrete. Like a garden, the other agents would have. You know, people from different countries in the world would come. Dirt, plants, [?] Ideas need to become matter in order for them to stay I think.

It's the primal matter, right? Dirt.

**MM:**

One of the central concepts that [?] you read about Qanat, central in this course is the notion of the commons, how does it materialise in the collective?

**RM:**

It's, I mean it materialises more as interest and work on the different members on these subjects. You know we have been researching the commons from the beginning. Water as commons, land, for memory, archives lately, we've been also working on the archive. And the memory, the memory. I think you know the memory of Marrkech. That's the most common, right? It's a common. And it's something that's belonged to everybody and we don't need to permit to access. I think it's the most precious, precious [?]. Because it's direct and it's accessible and one day it won't be there anymore if you don't access it and I don't know. I I don't wanna mistake either. Because it means like you're closing containing and, you know, put it in a museum and saying that the thing, it's not that. But like at least documenting how it leaves people and bodies and cultures and practices.

**MM:**

You use the word bodies, as in as a very material way as well.

**RM:**

I think that's, I mean the people we've been working with is the most. I mean they materialise these commons through their bodies and cultural practises and how we, you know, we receive them and we reflect with them on it and we push them to reflect. And we feel like we're really like treasure guardian somehow because we are trusted. Within the. With this this memory, you know, sometimes we see things that we never thought existed. You know, it's like.

**MM:**

Do you have examples?

**RM:**

I think now in mind, you know, pieces of information. Stories somehow that, for example, we would be, we could we were researching this khettara next to, very close to where Maha lives. So where I used to live and I was not with them there at that time, but they went down and took pictures and they cleaned the khettara. Then there is there is this man who had a coffee with, I mean its [the coffee place] named after the khettara. And then last time when we went with different Charitas, he would display for us, you know some work on the TV. They were very nice, you know. They would boost us and they started the conversation with him. And discovered that my he was the classmate of my mom, when they were kids, that was nice. But what is the most important is that he is from there, he remembers the khettaras when it was working and he told us about it and how all of this, you know, used to be green and people

would use the khettara. And it was really lush greenery. Very nice. And how he witnessed the downfall of it, you know the whole story of it. And he we had we had we had like some stories from this khettara, but not a personal. Someone from there witnessed and most of the people were some of you people were displaced, but he wasn't he stayed there and he, you know, grew up, had a job at the family and went back to having coffee there and stayed next to the khettara. Even if you know, it became a very dangerous place where kids would fall. You know, and we try to tell them that we could, with the collective effort, convince the, you know, to make it into like. Like to put some barriers and to to make it like an attraction place and preserve the material. But he was telling us they promised us this like, years ago. They never did it. Now we just want to close it because it's very dangerous. People, really, like people falling into it. And this this was this contradiction of this man. I mean, not a contradiction, but this problematic where you would remember the khettara and had pictures of it, how it was. But at the same time it it became a danger of the dangers for the the population, and they want to close it. I think that was a gift because you have access to this. We thought just this man was nice to host us whenever we want to visit the khettara, but we didn't know that you lived through the whole thing.

**MM:**

Yes, I see, I see.

**RM:**

That's why I think the memories and the and how memory even you know, inhabits bodies. It's the biggest gift.

**MM:**

And then. What did you do with this story? Did you did you document it or you will be? I see. I see.

**RM:**

It's gonna be gonna integrated.

**MM:**

In your new or in the continuation of the web doc?

Yeah. And then I guess you already touched on the politics, but how? Yeah. How do you, how do you understand politics? Because it's it can range from so many things in your history to forms organising to even more antagonistic activist politics. I guess usually what you read

in the text producers working on the politics of water. Yeah. So I don't want to make too many assumptions. So I'm very curious how you would explain it to yourself.

**RM:**

You know my own point of view or Qanat?

**MM:**

I guess it's a leading principle and as.

**RM:**

I think Qanat, Qanat approached the question more through you know investigating collective practises that used to you know manage water as a common and the communities around water and land and etcetera that that's I think that's the end of Qanat. As a collective. The way it was, and also colonial history and how the Khettaras, for example, were mapped and archived by the colonial administration and how the independent administration just didn't care for the archives. You know, it's a disastrous.

**MM:**

The Independent administration in the, after independence, 1956?

**RM:**

So they had all these precious documents we need to modernise and they went into this radical modernization policy where they would not destroy the khettaras, but let them go. Not maintenance practises or how to train you in younger people to maintain the khettaras, just leave them if they work OK. If they don't, we don't care. We need to, people need to access water, etcetera riding water. You know and put and put the the needed infrastructure correct and wait until the late 90s or 2000 where doctor Faiz started researching all of this, but it's on his own, you know.

I was like the khettaras was a thing from the past they would never. They they did nothing to maintain it. Research it to even the archives that we found, you know, of the colonial they were put in a horrible state. They were just there because they didn't know how to disclose. So that's problematic. It's a it's it's, it's a colonial complex of how we denigrate our own cultural heritage. Otherwise, in the web doc we're trying to approach, you know, policies of the politics of water, you know, water, maybe, questioning how the government. The different government reacted to the hydric stress, that is, you know, often the region not just Morocco.

You know. It's so called ? That policy that was created in the 70s, because we had drought cycles that people need the water. Two how tourism and the the development policies in the global south initiate today's landscape ,waterscape. We never thought someday the hammam would be closed, no way. It means we're really in deep shit. And maintaining all this pools. I think Thierry told me it's mostly the wells because at some point everybody was digging wells everybody. You didn't even need a permit and then the government imposed the permit, but then people didn't care. They would corrupt the local, you know, governor whatever and dig wells. was really killed [?]. Well, wells and swimming pools. The water table is is completely done, you know. We live now on deep, deep water table. So from all of this to the what is the so-called Maroc Vert.

**MM:**

Yeah. The Morocco Green plan. Yeah, the agricultural reform

**RM:**

The desertic Plan, you mean. You know. He had ther our own, the Prime Minister of today had the brilliant idea to turn the south of Morocco into this big capitalistic farm. To export, not even for local consumption, to export avocados and watermelons and and it's it's it's not just [?] it's just not viable and we see the consequences.

**MM:**

Yes and it feels so paradoxical, like like, for example, the narrative presented at the Water Museum that then, yeah, well, clearly acknowledged the issue or, like, it traces back. The water scarcitty to a long time, and it's like out there, and acknowledged.

**RM:**

From God, it's not God, you know it's the. It's like it's nearly like mythology. For me, the way they narrate this is like the God of water is decided what they not to let rain let it rain on Morocco or you know, that's why we are in in deep shit. Not because of their decision. They never state the decision. They state the climate change.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I see. I see.

**RM:**

You know what I mean?

**MM:**

yeah. What, what I mean is. Yeah, I guess what they present and at least they acknowledge this water scarcity and then of course they're promote like this dam project, but then also celebrating the khettaras actually.

**RM:**

Yes, because now everybody else in the world is like what? It's so cool, so exotic. They celebrate it, but it's done now. It's gone.

**MM:**

It's interesting that you call it exoticism.

**RM:**

It is. It is internalized exoticism. If it was not acknowledged internationally, you would never acknowledge it because the Moroccan people that acknowledge this and try to, you know, raise awareness, they didn't care about them until they died. It's now that it's internalized. [?]  
It's on an international level.

And I think yes, it's getting even more serious now. And the root problems, they're not gonna change the policy, right? Like it's been for years. They they're defending this. They can't shame themselves, you know. For me, the only way to go back to the commons. And to let people you know, manage waters the way they use to, in the communities, the problem as well now is like the urbanisation. And you you've been [?] habit. OK, people like, People have been running water in their homes. They let the water run. It's there is this notion of individual responsibility towards the commons. Watching that as an example, if when you go to the hamman. Water is running everywhere for no reason, for example, I ask someone. Please can you close that because no one is doing nothing with it, 'ah but it's. I paid. I paid to go to the hammam' you know, the mentality that has changed of course. There are the promises on the ? But also individual stuff, because it's very difficult.

**MM:**

I guess, yeah, it's it's difficult to address these issues.

**RM:**

It's very difficult, criticising [?] not even the elected government (the deep state)

**MM:**

Yeah, the Makhzen

**RM:**

Yes the Makhzen. Because they are the ones who execute. And not even execute but like choose the right [?]. The other ones are just, they just present the policy, like in a democratic way. But maybe maybe there is an awareness. Now that they know they've made mistakes. Because it's very clear now the problem I think is that the people who have to reflect and have the solutions are not linked directly to the people and the decision makers, the real decision makers.

There is no connection. There's variety [?] People in the middle. And information.

**MM:**

I guess what I understand is that. Yeah. Civil society became more depoliticised also because financial dependency on state funds. But

**RM:**

For sure, and all the most of the initiatives working on water issues are government or or like not government, royal. There's the division of where some ? have to be adopted by the royal. We have each one has like this noble mission. And and climate change environment. That's the ? that's the mission she adapted. OK, it always should be her. You know, it's also when you think about it, it's land, water, all these issues are very ? and they cannot afford. Should be linked to this struggle. This kind of noble causes always be adopted by royal family.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

If it's really in the mind of people if it's linked to common people. It would ? the struggle and make it more how do you say that? Make it more popular in the hand of the poor people would create this power problem.

**MM:**

And then how is Qanat positioned in this?

**RM:**

I think you have different points of views, not one. Because not all of them are Moroccans as well. Some that were not Moroccan, they can't claim much. They can adopt like as a

environment activist. But like activist as sensitive people, they can adopt some. It's a certain stance. And I think because we're, we're involved in different projects, it depends on what kind of projects you know. It's it's my. It's my own, what I express is my own.

**MM:**

I see. Yeah, I see. And are these sort of, reflected in Makhazin, in the Netherlands.

**RM:**

Yeah, yeah. No, in a different way. ??

So it's like a seed bank. And you know, and it's also drawing from this tradition of having, you know, seed banks.

**MM:**

Let's just have a look at the time. I don't know if you're. It almost has been an hour already.

**RM:**

Wow. Been a long time that I have talked that much.

**MM:**

Something I'd like to ask. If you still have time couple things more on your own work and maybe also how Sci-fi plays a role in the work and how. Yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

That's for your thesis, right? So it's not gonna come now. It's not gonna come soon now. It's not gonna go out.

**MM:**

No, no, no. And of course if you don't.

**RM:**

We we have to finish the project before and then... so the sci-fi points.

**MM:**

I'm more curious how.

**RM:**

It's played out.

**MM:**

Yeah, how sci-fi becomes a tool for you.

**RM:**

So I I mean I mean. I'm not a fan of if I'm really not a fan, I'm more of a like really eighteen 19th century girl. But when I at, last year I think. I was like, something is lacking, you know. The experimental approach was very, you know, nonlinear, non narrative. We would go back and forth in time you know because it's so entangled. And it was like, something is missing. So I remember that I have wrote in 2016 this short animation, 5 minutes. I made a small teaser, it takes a lot of time. It's called summer [?]. I did a story with a [?] boy. Who lived in Marrakech in 45 years, and Marrkaech is becoming a desert. And there is water is like rational rationalised. How do you say that?

**MM:**

Yeah, I guess, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

You know what I mean. They don't have running water the whole day, which which will be our case very soon. I thought it's gonna happen in 45, It's happening now. And so he he has this issue where he pees in bed, he's a kid, you know, and he makes his this dream, where he's in a swimming pool big swimming pool like gigantic. And he he would, he's swimming and he hears his father's voice, telling him about swimming pools that have disappeared. When we were kids Marrakech, who used to go to swimming pool, 5 dirham. And and the kid was, you know, astonished with swimming pools. He has never been in a swimming pool. And there's mother and he pees in the dream and he wakes up and he has like his, you know, his bed and his mother wakes him up and she's like called in him because he you know. At some point he hides in this trunk, so they're in in a very, in a poor neighbourhood. He doesn't. They they don't even have water to wash his clothes. And with his friends, they sneak into this big truck and they go into the in a gated residency, a big gated residency in the palm groves. So everything is is a desert. But in the case of resiliency is all green. But like plastic green, you know? Artificial green. And they see kids like each kids swimming, and one of them that take pool, you know, and the swimming pool. And there's very he he thought it didn't exist anymore. So in this story I show how indingenous Marrakech desert and also the social, you know the social class differences on how different people will live through these periods. Not all of us wouldn't have war, you know? And when I remembered that I thought it's not sci-fi,

but it's like a futuristic in French we say antipaction. I thought I think that that element would be interested in {?}. You know, because if you don't show people how it will become, they will never understand. You have to show. So I thought we would have this voice from the future is like a testimony, like telling us that you're destroying things. Please don't. Because there is this possibility of it becoming. It came from that.

**MM:**

That I was maybe I made some assumption like I guess also at some point, Shaymaa worked a lot on sci-fi, right?

**RM:**

Yes, but yes.

**MM:**

On speculative fiction, I was wondering is this are these sort of influence, influenced the like things that have been shaped in conversation of the collectives or not necessarily.

**RM:**

But I think, I mean, I'm not, I'm not very close to the Arab scene. But I think lately Arab artistic scene, like contemporary scene, not film. I'm more into cinema. I think Sci-fi became something very hyped.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, I guess a lot of, Octavia Butler...

**RM:**

Like this also like worldwide. And I was never into that train. I really hated it because everybody at some point. But I thought it was in my case it was very interesting. To have it to really like completely naturalise this reality. For me, it's a reality. Even when you go to the Palm groves, it's not what I used to remember, from the very different from that in like.

**MM:**

I've I've recently been.

**RM:**

It's. I go there and my heart breaks because 20 years ago my parents used to take me there to play with my sister. Two years ago. It was a palm grove. Now there's nothing, there's this big building. You should go there, we've never been. We're trying. We're trying to talk to the

man, but he never has time. It's the Observatory of the Palm Grove, it's funded by the princess.

And they have this building and they're supposed to do you know, project? But then the problem with the this this kind of foundation, they don't want collaborate like they want. They want to take the lead all the time. They don't, they don't understand collaboration, collaborations and collective work. You should have [?]. And they have all the funds. This idea of the lab, I thought. About the crazy thing, actually, after South Africa, that was totally inspired by the South Africa. So, this project, not a project, with people like took over land. The cultural land belonged to the state and they took over and they buildings had little, you know, smaller framing land. Gardens. They couldn't take them away. I thought for the lab. You know, I don't know how, but I had this idea of you know, the people who live there, who have like old houses there? They can they they came from the rural exodus. The palm groves is not states, it's not government, it's it's privately. It's people like very rich people from Marrakech who have like like big, big chunk of land and they let people live. They even pay rent.

**MM:**

I guess there's also a lot of gated parts and there are a lot of walls and very.

**RM:**

But some of the lands are privately owned and people get took over them that. But, and I mean, the owners let them do, they didn't care. But now because the government, the state is trying to displace them. They organise this census. When they count the population, so they count the people and they told them you're gonna be. They're gonna give you another house which is true like free house somewhere. Out of the palm grove, because, of course, it's very expensive. And when it happened. I don't know if it's the case anymore, but when it was happening you could go there and buy from someone who has a house, not even his house. Anyway, you can buy like two rooms or three rooms. We just ? so you could have an apartment somewhere else, you know, you understand? So I was like, maybe I can do that and within this small ? you know, I don't know small apartments apartment just, small house like a slum. And create the garden, the love garden there within the walls, no one would know. I don't know. I'm just thinking about. I was very excited in South Africa. I would like to plan it and saying to Francesca we should take over land,

**MM:**

But it's I guess more concretely. The park next to Riad Laarous, I don't fully understand, overtime, during the Charita programs

**RM:**

Yeah, but we had permits. We're not there illegally. And they're going to change it, you know that.

**MM:**

Yeah, I know. I know. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

You remember when this woman came.

**MM:**

I maybe missed this part.

**RM:**

Yeah. Yeah. We had an architect responsible of the renovation. We have installation of this. They're gonna destroy the whole they're gonna make it you know a big square. With paved with paving. Yeah, cafe. You know an Italian. They're just putting a lot of money to erase the cities identity. It's crazy. They're not gonna take away the trees. But it's gonna, you know, the whole neighborhood.

**MM:**

Maybe I got one last question. I can expect some answers. I'm curious where you see the future of Qanat go.

**RM:**

I think what I told you in the beginning is space, but not that we already have LE18, Dar Bellarj. But like the garden, something like that. Because people are, [those] not in Qanat, each one of us is doing something else at the same time, you know, and in order for the project to live through, we need new people maybe. And you know for that flexibility we need also something concrete that holds the memory of the collective, archives of the collective.

**MM:**

Yeah, I guess that's also, yeah. Sometimes it also feels fragile. If Francesca is talking about it or yeah, it seems so. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**RM:**

Because she takes a lot of if it wasn't for her at some point. And she's tired.

**MM:**

Do you think others feel? Do you? How do you feel? The ownership in the sense of being part of the collective?

**RM:**

Yeah. I mean for me from the beginning with this, it was also a space where we could question the notions of authorship and what belongs to me belongs to, you know, collective in the real sense. Where I don't see myself also only as an artist. But as someone who reflects and you know works on different projects.

**MM:**

Yeah, I think that's still hard to grasp. Yes, exactly. Yeah. I guess we have been talking a lot about the work you've done. I still find it hard how to situate, how to imagine how the conversations went, how to situate, how the collective is organised vis-a-vis your own artistic practise, yeah.

**RM:**

I mean, I came into the the collective as a filmmaker and and the curator, but I think you're going to talk about it more next time. This project has. It's the first time that that I'm gonna transition to more visual contemporary work through Qanat. Because there is an exhibition, like more of contemporary visual art exhibition coming out of the project. So it's gonna. It's gonna be so Qanat and thanks to Qanat will that I will step into another you know creative territory like for example the Maquettes visual installations. Photo texts all coming from the same project I've never touched on you know this kind of artistic practice. And I always wanted to do it. But I was thinking about waiting for the right moment, the right project and I think this one would be it. You know, it changed me a lot. Pushed me first to experiment more and to think about ? And even look at my city in a different way.

**MM:**

All right. And let's leave it to this. Or is there something that I didn't cover that might be relevant?

**RM:**

We have time. If you have any questions. I can definitely answer

**MM:**

Alright, thanks a lot for your time. Yeah, super interesting.

**RM:**

Thank you for your interest.

## 5. Interview Louisa Aarrass

Interview with Louisa Aarrass, conducted by author.

Marrakech, Morocco (online), 16 April, 2024.

MM: Matthijs Mantel

LA: Louisa Aarrass

### **Transcript**

**MM:**

Yeah. So the reporting has started. So this an interview that I in context of my master thesis on Qanat. And as mentioned in this interview is to understand your experience in yeah, in your of, your participation in Qanat and to have a better understanding of your your practise. Yeah. Both as artist, curator, and ecologist. I mean. So yeah, of course I read about your background, but and it seems very diverse. As for your engagement with Qanat it seems very diverse. So can you describe in your own words? What you did with Qanat?

**LA:**

Yeah. Uh. So I've been collaborating with Qanat since 2019. Pretty much. So it's been. It's been a while now and I'm still, it's. Yeah, I'm still collaborating and probably will for the foreseeable future. So it's like very much involved, which is interesting because yeah really, I mean we'll we'll talk about this later I'm sure, but that. I'm sure Francesca mentioned this kind of like undulating group of people and how. also right now we're having quite some reflections on like, yeah, what the collective actually means and and how we all like take part in and ownership. Also I guess in some ways of the the collective itself. But so my involvement, yeah, as you mentioned my background is in agroecology. I'm in plant science, so my first collaborations and participation in Qanat were around questions of food systems and. I agroecology within the context of Marrakesh and specifically in the context of the Medina of Marrakesh, so the urban spaces, but not onlym and sometimes, yeah, sometimes we will do together residencies and things like that. Also in the Netherlands and Rotterdam and Utrecht. And elsewhere. So yeah. But so my work is as you mentioned, I'm an artist and I do a lot of curation and I do a bit of research around. Yeah, thematics and food and, ecology, food systems, that sort of thing. And we are very interested in using food like in a really obvious way, like eating and cooking together and those sorts of things, collective labour and that sort of thing, for like to curate public programming. And so I was like. Workshops like I I for the past years have hosted lots of workshops with the women of Dar Bellarj, cultural

space. I'm sure you've been to already. The past years I've been hosting gardening workshops and then inviting other practitioners and artists and researchers. And people who have competencies that go beyond my own to host workshops as well. So a bit of curation in that and. What was I saying? But yeah, I think in general like one of the overarching things I'm interested in is kind of like work and collective work. Like labour and often, that takes the form of like cooking and cleaning, gardening, building, like different forms of construction, just like sweating and working together and with some form of common goal. And typically around. Yeah, like. UM, yeah, trying to bring in some, like, interesting, culturally specific foods and food systems or agriculture and agricultural systems. And yeah, yeah.

**MM:**

Interesting. So yeah, you mentioned that you're you're involved since 2019. How? How did you get involved? I guess you were already familiar or probably already knew Francesca. Yeah.

**LA:**

Somewhat. Yeah. Yeah. So it's funny. I mean, if you ask the others, I'm sure they have similar stories, but I like it was doing an internship with the, within the NGO we're working in the High Atlas Mountains around biocultural diversity and I then later worked for them for some years. But yeah, so when I met Qanat, the crew, and Francesca and everyone I was in Marrakech for five months or. Working on this project and I just happened to. It was when Facebook events were still a thing, like when you would find out what is happening in cities by looking like at, yeah, events near you or whatever. And I didn't have like I'm I'm Moroccan, I'm from Tangier.

So I just had I, but I don't. I didn't at the time have any friends in Marakesh. So yeah, I like looked up what's happening around cultural events. And and I saw something from from Qanat being hosted at LE18, and it sounded so good. And I was like, whoa, this is crazy. I can't believe this is happening. Like, yeah, it was like a screening or something. Yeah, video or something. And so I went and maybe that was either in 2018 or 2019. And I just met people like that and. They were like, oh, cool, that's what's up. And Francesca and I became friends first and then she found out more about my research and my interests, and then invited me to host like, a two week Long Workshop series for the for the women of the Dal Bellarj.

And it went really well. And then we just and so then we created a project. Around this it began as just like a yeah, two week long workshop series and we. It was with myself.

Noureddine Ezarraf, yeah, maybe you heard of him, and Sarah Frikesh, who is in Rotterdam and and Francesca, of course. And we we really like the collaboration and the the work and the questions we were we were bringing up around urban green space and urban Commons. Some. Yeah, just a really nice moment. And so we created a project called entangled ecologies. UM, and that's the. Yeah, that's primarily what I'm working on in the context of Qanat today, like I, I think I'm the most active when it comes to the garden and the entangled ecologies project.

**MM:**

Yeah, I want to talk about that later as well and and. Yeah, I'm wondering at which point? That you feel that you're part of a collective or what, what was the moment that you felt ownership over or within Qanat?

**LA:**

I think in 2019 we had a lot of we had a lot of public programming and a lot of projects. I think it's the first year we had the Stimulerings fund or it's just before we we got like a pretty like a a decent grant. So we were able to do a bit more. And I guess I started feeling part of it when when we did a residency in Utrecht at BAK. And I mean, even before that, because the people who I was working with and collaborating with, like at that time, we were having very frequent meetings like once a month we would have like a Qanat like team meeting. And I was kind of organically it was just like yeah, suggested that I join and I was like, OK, it was never like at any moment when someone was like, would you like to be a member? It was just. Kind of like I had a meeting.

**MM:**

Yeah, I see.

**LA:**

We're having the meeting next week. Do you want to be part of? It and I'd be like. Yeah. OK. And then joint. Yeah, I think this residency at the BAK was like, I guess the moment that we were all kind of hanging out and it was also a moment that we were having lots of conversations about like partitioning tasks and the way in which we wanted to engage with each other and and with like the general public. Like when we're talking about ourselves or the project or whatever. And and that was during that time as well. So I would say that that's yeah probably around them.

**MM:**

Because then yeah, the the the workshops of Jeanne. Yeah. What? What what? How did these workshops look like?

**LA:**

Well, we were invited to be part of her project. This trainings for the not yet and it's an open invitation essentially. So her project was like inviting collectives or practitioners like duo or single person or whatever and. And then being like, you can kind of propose whatever you want, but we had a whole week long of like, just open, you know, like you can do anything. You want. So. Because we're quite a big group, I don't remember how many we were, but we must have been like eight people or something like that. Maybe. Wait, sorry.

I think we must have been around 8 or 10. Us. And so we kind of like split into different groups based on our our interest or our past projects within the frame of of of Qanat. And so I can speak for myself, basically we each day would would organise like workshops and it was like. If imagine, like the Monday was like entangled Ecologies, so Francesca and I and Sarah Frikkech who would host. A workshop around we basically made it like this dichotomy, like rooted and uprootedness, and it was like a theme that we discussed throughout the entire week and we punctuated it with like different sorts of dinners. So like this idea of gathering around food and and cooking it together. On having a meal that's like a reflection of the conversation or the work that we were doing like prior to that, like gutee [?] as we were calling it. So. So yeah, we had like I think for Entangled Ecologies we had probably like. Three or four workshops, and each day we cooked because in BAK and maybe you know, but they also have the BAK, like the basic activist kitchen, which is an open kitchen and they they prepare meals pretty much every day. I'm pretty sure. Yeah. And that's like a big part of their work. So. The days that we were hosting, we took over the cooking for the day and. Made it part of our workshop.

**MM:**

And then. This was this also a moment where? You I'm trying to get a better understanding of of. Yeah. How the the organising of the collective looks like and partly it's if I understand correctly through these regular meetings that occur naturally. And then you have like specific more meetings or on specific projects or so it's sort of.

**LA:**

Yeah. I guess I mean it depends like it it was always, it's always something that we've like

struggled with in the end like trying to see or trying to make sure that the work is equally shared. And I don't think that we've ever really managed to do that. And So what it ends up being. And and it's more of a practical thing. It's like. Those who work on a on a specific grant because they're involved in that, like the thing is Qanat is I feel like it's more of a curation than an actual collective. In some ways, it's like and Francesca is then involved with. Yeah, pretty much every project, but sometimes a little [?]. Yeah. And so. If she's doing something and I'm not. Particularly interested or necessarily involved, then I won't be present at the planning meetings of that grant writing or public programming or whatever. So I think it's really more on a project basis.

Which is kind of the. It makes it more dynamic in the sense that. Like the amount of work that we're doing, which is consistently at a pretty like fast pace, like there are projects kind of happening throughout the year, all the time. Not all of us would ever be available for all of them. I don't think it's possible. So it's kind of like splitting up based on, on availability and interest and those who want to be involved are involved, often like. It happens in an organic way in the sense that like if it's something on food or agriculture, it's pretty obvious that Francesca will be like, yeah, like, I saw this grant. Do you want to do this or, like, we put we were proposed. Or I'll read something or someone invite me for a conference or whatever. And then yes, and yeah. So I guess that's kind of how it functions now it's like. Not a. It's not like a proper structure I guess is the answer.

**MM:**

I see and would you also feel ownership to initiate projects yourself? Or you would say I'd rather. You get invited or there's ?

**LA:**

Yeah, for sure like. I think it really depends on time and now Francesca has a job but. Before she, you know, she was full time curating and and still is. She's, you know. Yeah, I see something I like. I definitely will lean on the fact that I have like a group of people around me. And a A history of work, I guess like we we've. We've done a lot of work under the name Qanat like over the years and a lot of labour, so I. If I want. To apply for something specific, and I want to specifically collaborate like the people who I work with are also because I yeah, I our work makes sense together like. Sarah, who will be on the call later this evening for this, like climavore Food awards. It's yeah, we work really well together. It's a good friend and her competencies are like ones that I don't have, like she's a designer and architect, and so she fills in some of the gaps that I don't have. We have specific ideas around like aesthetics of the, the

work that we want. make so if yeah, like the climavore is a great example because it's happening right now. But like I saw the open call and said Francesca and she was like, hey, did you see this? And I was like, yes. And they eat. They also emailed us asking for your reply. And then we kind of like like should we apply? Yes, let's do it. And then it's like.

Yeah, immediately. I was like, OK, let's involve Sarah because she's working on these topics as well, like her research. I don't know if you've looked her up, but her research is like around the, like, colonisation of water in Morocco by like, French. And a lot of that is like heavily referencing and still researching agricultural paradigms and shifts and influences and yeah. Yeah. So in general we, we share a lot of like similar topics.

What not? But if I was doing something about the coast or I don't know what, maybe I would be like, oh, let's call. Amin, who did a lot of work in Saleh and see if he feels like doing this? For example.

**MM:**

And how how does the the notion of the Commons relate to the organisation of as a collective are these different things or?

**LA:**

That sounds like your thesis topic. That's a great question. Is that?

**MM:**

I guess, I mean what I understood is that there have been a lot of debates about this use of the commons, yet it seems the central theme. So my main question how people individually interpret or relate to this notion of the commons.

**LA:**

I think for me it it feels maybe even reductive, because I I do work with food and agriculture. So it's like, yeah, that's I think something that's like an obvious reference when you think about commons and like sharing resource and having like resource satisfied for. For everyone and everyone is able to like engage with it so. But the question was how it relates to the collective.

**MM:**

Yeah, well. Uh. In in different ways like does it does it. Could you, do you consider Qanat itself as a as a perhaps knowledge commons? Or is it better understood as knowledge

production on the commons or how does Entangled ecologies relate to it in the way you structure your your structured as a collective. I guess these are the assumptions that underpin the question.

**LA:**

That's a really nice question. I don't know that I have like a really formulated idea around it, but I think that overall and I mean maybe this is a reflection on, yeah, I guess you could say it's like a commons. Overall Qanat often functions as a platform and it like something that is can be helpful for our community. Whoever wants to use it in whichever way if it makes sense for all of us. In some ways. So like, I feel like it can be a platform. To invite people or to have conversations around specific topics. And because it's quite loose and and it shifts depending on interests also like if we're doing for in in the frame of of Entangled Ecologies. If we're doing a bunch of workshops on natural dying, which was something we did a lot last year, it's because it was something that was like brought up and asked like it was requested in in a way it was like ohh. We should. I mean the the people who we work on this garden with are. Many of them are really into crafting and making things and they're like in sewing and doing stuff like that. So like the interest was, yeah, everyone was kind of like we should get into natural dying. So then we're able to use this platform. Like, whether that's like monetary also like reallocating, like shifting funds in order to like invite someone. We invited someone, Emily Jacomo, who has done the nice research on, like, natural dyeing techniques and and plants in in the Marrakech and Moroccan region that it used for natural. Trying so we're able to invite her because we can, like, give her, like, a modest artist fee to come. So and it's. Yeah, it was kind of something we all decided. So I don't. I don't know that I really answered your question but like, yeah, I I think it can function as a platform which in some ways is like accessible and reachable pretty easily. Like we're not very like. Comment dir, like. It's not super closed off, like anyone can write and be like, yo, yeah.

**MM:**

And then I guess knowledge production or the archiving of knowledge plays an important role. Yeah, I find it sometimes hard to still grasp, grasp the research line of Entangled Ecologies. Not necessarily the topic. But how how it, functions or how it's documented.

**LA:**

Yeah, I think it's mostly based off of like collaborative or participatory research. So often starts with some exchanges or workshops essentially around a specific theme like if we're

interested in and often it's like a research process that's necessary for us because we're working on something else, like a lot of the research of entangled ecologies and this, like, yeah, participatory research and kind of like knowledge gathering and generating was. During these two weeks, like the first time we ever all hung out and started asking these questions together and a lot of it leading up to and prior to the building of a garden on the roof because we wanted to have an idea about some more practical things like. Histories of green space and agriculture within the Marrakesh like Medina. When you know the history of Marrakesh, maybe you you've read a little bit about it being like this Garden City and having orchards within within the like residential areas and things like that. So we did a nice research around like. What would be like culturally specific to the region and to like, yeah, neighbourhoods to grow, but prior to ever growing anything. So I think it's quite nice and we were able to reference that later on. Then often it's like so much of the knowledge we have around recipes and food and like medicinal uses for plants or like cosmetic uses for plant is like in the context of Morocco like passed through like oral knowledge. You know, like pastorally knowledge transmission, like an oral knowledge, you know, like now you can like Google stuff, but it doesn't always come up with the. Really clear results or like they're badly written. If you're looking for a recipe on how to use a specific plant to treat, I don't know like nausea or something. It's like you're unsure. And so it's cool. It's like, yeah. So something we were doing was like building glossaries, essentially. Like looking at these plants together and and yeah, seeing if we could dig within our own community. So like with the women we work with and with their knowledge from their mothers and aunties and whoever else. And collect these recipes that are like important to us and yeah, otherwise we don't have written down and and then be able to use them of course. Yeah, like in the garden, once it actually existed.

**MM:**

Is that's something that as well that you would consider commons and no, the recipes or memories.

**LA:**

Gardens?

I mean, I would hope so. It's always like. With this type of work. We often make like printed objects and sometimes in pretty like the lofi format. Like just a zine or whatever else that can be like shared around sometimes. Yeah, I would say like the actual transmission, like knowledge transmission could be done then through like online. And then of course, other times. It's like we'll share some of the work we've done in an exhibition or like festival or

something like that. But I would. That's less. Yeah, because it I I mean I don't know it's it's different. It's different audiences like you where it ends up like it ends up being shared with different people essentially. But I I would hope so. I would always like. I have. I mean, I I always question like this sort of thing like how best to share it or where to share it, make it accessible to other people. Like if we were ever to like. Have an ebook or something like that. I would definitely want it to be open source, for example, like whatever or downloadable printable or something like that. But I think like one of the big things we really need and it and will also help define Qanat like a collective or a platform or whatever, or a programme or whatever it is. Is like just to update or like finally finish our website which has been like in the. In the making for I don't even know since since Qanat exists like we have one that's like just for Cura. But we really need a website and then we can make a really clear like. Yeah, it would be really nice to have all of the our archives. So you could even and then see like who is involved with what and then it would be more clear like what it actually means as an art, as a collective and like, who is involved with what. And the fact that it it shifts and changes and maybe someone feels more a part of it or less a part of it like from 2019 to 2021 you did a tonne of projects and you felt really part of this collective and then like later on you started a PhD and you're less involved or something. Like that, but just to like. Honour and show that it changes the yeah. Yeah, I think that would make a big difference. And then, yeah, it will also be a a space where we could upload and and make available different works.

**MM:**

Hmm. Is is that has that been kind of? Did you experience that experience that as a as? A challenge to to make some of the work that you did within the context of Entangled Ecologies available?

**LA:**

I don't know. I haven't reflected so much. On it like I think. It would be cool if it was able to reach a wider audience, but that's often be limited due to like funding or time. Of course, like we just printed. Now it's been a while ago, but a year or so ago like, recipes, these postcards. Uh that had, like recipes on it. And yeah, we were able to have funds to translate it into that Darija like Moroccan Arabic and and English. So it's like double and we always go for that combo rather than French, but sometimes. Something might be shared more in English like a a synop like a summary of a working. I don't. Yeah, I don't know. So I think language is an interesting one. If we were able to translate also into French or like into two other languages

or into Fusha or something like maybe you would be able to go a bit farther. And then I guess my view like maybe it will shift at some point, but at least the times that I was working very closely on the project of Entangled Ecologies, I was very much focused. And like making things with our community, which is like hyper specific, it's like the community of the Marrakesh Medina not and not even on the other side, like just on one side, like around the neighbourhoods of LE18 and Dar Bellarj. And making, yeah, making stuff with them, like with these us as people. Also we live there and with our, with our neighbours and stuff and and making it for us. So like I was mostly just like making things and hoping, you know, like then putting it maybe in the bookshop of LE18 maybe if it ends up there and we have enough. Or just we shared among ourselves and then maybe it has, like some form of, like, yeah, sending to friends or whatever else. But I guess, like, what I mean is, like, the view or my. My view isn't very global like forget that, just maybe engage.

**MM:**

Yeah, I guess that that's something. Yeah, that's very interesting about Qanat is that how it's on the one hand very locally embedded in Marrakesh, but at the same time it is very global as it has has all these ramifications in the Netherlands, in Palestine, in South Africa, in.

**LA:**

Yeah.

**MM:**

So. Yeah, there are couple of things that I want to know or I'm curious about and but ones as well. How do you experience your relationship with Marrakesh within the context of Qanat? Did it change a lot or?

**LA:**

What changed a lot?

**MM:**

Your relationship with Marrakech.

**LA:**

Because of the collective?

**MM:**

Yeah.

**LA:**

Yeah, definitely. Yeah, I mean. I for sure like I started working on projects there and it basically just. Like. Pulled me back multiple times and then I unrelated to Qanat, but I had it then a job that was like based in Marrakesh, so I needed to be there, but I think a big part of it was trying to like building a life there and wanting to find a reason that I could fund, like staying there. So I found a job. Also, who was related Yeah, for sure. I don't think if I think. I think if I wasn't working on or if I wasn't involved with Qanat, I probably wouldn't have wanted to stay in Marrakech.

**MM:**

And. Since the work is a lot on the histories of of Marrakesh and with the communities of Marrakesh. Let's see how I phrase this. UM. Yeah. How was that for you from someone from Tangier was how was it to get? In that way, or were you already more familiar with these histories?

**LA:**

Depends on what histories. I mean there's some overarching realities that exist, like at in Morocco at large, so it. Wasn't like. I guess I wouldn't say anything was very shocking, but yeah, like every city has its own, its own history, and just as like whenever I'm in, whenever I move to Wagening, it's like learning about a new place. And all of the like nuance of like what it means to live in that space and how you eat and where you shop and what you do and the types of people you meet on the street and stuff like that. So I would say like, yeah. It was as moving anywhere I I learned a lot in the in the years I lived there, of course. And yeah, I think a a big part. Well, I I think like. I think if Qanat didn't exist, I would have probably still been working on other random projects with like friends in the ecosystem of like LE18 and Dar Bellarj. But if I didn't have either of those spaces. And Qanat as like a collective. I probably wouldn't have stayed in Marrakech as long I probably would have maybe worked one year with this NGO and maybe done something else. Yeah, because they're. Well, actually, I don't. Know how to say. Yeah. Yeah, I don't. Know I didn't work with like my job was quite cool, so I. Probably. Maybe I would have would.

**MM:**

And. And how is it then to? From from the work that is locally embedded, how is it to? Find the common grounds with doing the projects that you do outside of Morocco. And how does that conversation take place?

**LA:**

I mean. I do work in other places that are on similar themes and have still then the same like interest or engagement of like site specific long term, embedded work, you know, and whether it's in Marrakesh or elsewhere. That's kind of I think how I will always work because I, yeah, I don't see myself being able to do it otherwise, you know. So I guess that's like a, a something that would. Then be similar of course.

**MM:**

I see. Yeah. And are or other than significant differences? Or is it rather, Yeah. So overarching themes that you're working on that's. Yeah, that fit different contexts.

**LA:**

Are there significant differences working outside of Marrakech, you mean?

**MM:**

Depends on which angle you approach it. Is there something particular about Marrakech or is there something? That you. Within the context of Qanat that has been embedded within the Marrakech that you brought other places perhaps, insights. Because I get it, you're couple international exhibitions that you've been part of, right, like I think Estat Previ is one.

How did that did you, which say that there's something in the curation that you brought. In that exhibition? Or would is it rather that in the end that you rely on your general practise?

**LA:**

I think like. My general practise has evolved throughout the years, of course, and is heavily influenced by the projects that have, like taking up a lot of my time. A lot of it, yeah, which a lot of it is within the framework of a Qanat project or an entangled colleges project. So. Yeah, I think it's totally informed. And I mean like you are now in a university in Lebanon, right? So I. Think. I mean, you know the way how it feels to live in like a Islamic Country, North African country it's like a lot of different than like ways of being in existing in a place like the

Netherlands or something like that. So I think, well, a lot of people on who we interact with closely and who are like part of Qanat, whatever that means, are Moroccan, but some aren't and but either way because we know each other from a specific context, which is mostly Marrakesh or greater Morocco, we have ways of being and working together. I think that feel more close or warm? Then maybe a collective from the Netherlands or from like Sweden or something like that. And then so when we were working with people and other projects and in other places like beyond Morocco, we do then bring our form of working together and being together, which is like quite close, like even you know you're in our house right now. Now it's hardly our house because none of our furniture is there. But like over the years, every time we have residencies. Or even people visiting and whatever. Like most of the time they're sleeping in one of our houses or something like that. And even though we have, you know, budget for a shitty hotel, we always think it's nicer to like staying close to each other and spend time and eat together and hang out and stuff. So yeah, I think, yeah, it's like the city and Morocco generally and the cultural ways of being with others is informed by. Yeah. Informed by this, for sure, it has informed how we are with others.

**MM:**

Yeah. Yeah, I guess. One thing that I'm also still figuring out is this the politics of water, which is a very broad concept which can relate to a lot of things, so I guess each one has a has a different interpretation of of what it means. So I'm curious what what you understand as the politics of water.

**LA:**

Hmm. Well, I think that for me, I think it's like overarching theme that we discuss basically like whether we're talking about agriculture or food or. Yeah. Urban space or green space or water of course. Or or like so many other things. Uh, often it's kind of like the like the the thread that pulls everything together and. Specifically, when you discuss Marrakesh and its histories. Its current condition as like it's. Yeah, the current reality is it's like everything is really tied to water and the allocation and the access of water and distribution of water is highly political everywhere, probably, but definitely. Within the context of Marrakech like those who have access to it or those who are able to like water. Hundreds of hectares of like golf course and stuff, or those who yeah, don't have access to, like or don't aren't able to then build a. It's now like 100 metres. You have to dig to reach the water if you want to make a well, you know like.

So yeah, I think I think water generally. And specifically for us, it's like it's very political the way it's taking shape in the city, obviously from like a historical perspective, like with the khattaras and as I mentioned just a bit ago like how our friend and colleague Sara is like working on the colonisation of water and I think it's like not necessarily water itself, although sometimes it is like in the form of building dams and draining areas and putting pumps and doing whatever the fuck. Like sometimes it's water seen through agriculture, you know, like or land use or private and public green space or loss of green space, loss of urban green space. These sorts of things. So I think when I, yeah. When I tell people politics of water. For me it mostly is quite broad, but it's like a questioning of these things I just mentioned and all again awareness and the referencing of of these paradigms that exist because of the history and and also today like now rather than necessarily colonialism, it's like a neocolonialism that's just tourism and you could wrap it with tourism. Yeah, and yeah. And yeah, and I think. At large, a lot of what we talk about is is linked to like. I don't know urban sharing, sharing of resources and and sharing of like Commons when they exist or not, yeah.

**MM:**

Yeah, something I'm personally within this research I'm struggling with is what, what you want is possible to say or what is too controversial to say is this in which way? Does this also play out in Qanat? Are there topics that you sometimes won't address or that you. Address in address in a particular way.

**LA:**

In order not to be too controversial. Within, you mean within our group or in a in for like a wider audience?

**MM:**

Or mainly in public discourse.

**LA:**

Oh, I don't know that we talk much about that, like I don't think we take it into consideration. I don't know that I've ever filtered myself.

Yeah, I I mean also maybe it's because of the work that I'm doing, like I don't feel any type of like conflicting thought about talking badly about like the agricultural policies of Marrakech, of Morocco. You know, like the Maroc Vert or the whatever any of these ones are. So I speak quite freely around that, but maybe if I was working more on like right to land or something

like that, which is not my background and like yeah, geographies like if I was going to bring up the Western Sahara for example.

**MM:**

I see.

**LA:**

Maybe I will.

**MM:**

I'm sorry. I was interrupting you, but I guess with the Maroc Vert, it also plays out, right? Or you it won't be.

**LA:**

No, I I really don't think so much about it, to be honest. I'm I don't. Yeah, but yeah, if. Maybe if I? Was covering some like maybe if I was more interested in having holding workshops around something that was more contentious like the. Western Sahara, even within, you would be surprised. Yeah, even Moroccans that are the same age and and in similar circles are also like, Oh no, it's Morocco. And you're like, OK.

**MM:**

Haha, yes I had that experience.

**LA:**

It's strange. So yeah. Maybe then I would like have a second thought or something, but I've really never thought about it. No.

**MM:**

Alright. Yeah, it's it's been almost an. An hour or. I don't know. We have to move on to the next meeting with Francesca.

**LA:**

Yeah. Let me just check in with her.

Really quick one moment. Yeah, I I just wrote her. We'll see. What she what she writes back? Yeah.

**MM:**

Yeah. You know the final question and that's where would you see Qanat going in the future?

**LA:**

Where would I see or what would I hope for?

Cause they're different I think for now, but hopefully same, yeah. Yeah, I think. I think it needs a little bit of a redefining. So that it's helpful for other people to better understand because we get lost in like jargon and stuff like that. And also to just be clear about, yeah, who's involved with what and when and how then? And. What we say is a collective is a collective or not or whatever else, like just to be a bit more clear about what we're doing and to maybe. Yeah, it's a def like again. This is all practical stuff in the future I see as having a website that's like more helpful. So that, like even then, you know, if someone is interested in one of our specific projects, they can see who was actually behind it rather than like this mysterious like Qanat, not it's like it's actually lots of different people with lots of different backgrounds and competencies you. So then if you were, yeah, if you were interviewing and you wanted to only know about gardens, you could then see, like, my name or you know. Whatever or whatever, like Sarah or something. But I hope and I see that we will probably keep doing stuff for the foreseeable future. For a while. Yeah, it doesn't seem like any of us are going to stop anytime soon. And I would love if we maybe had less projects, but who were more specific or something like I would love to have really. Like yeah, really clear projects. That we're working on. Like the the project, we're applying for or the the call we're doing later. Climavore one, it's like a very specific project. It's not like us asking for funds based on an existing thing. That's kind of like messy and has tonnes of people and stuff, which is also great and nice. But yeah, I think that the capacity, the capacities we have an our interest in like having a heavily research based project like we don't have structural funding to like forever be like the sole like caretakers of garden and festival and a bunch of you know. It would be cool if we were able to think of it more of like a research. And punch more punctual project. I don't know. I'm. I'm. I. I'm actually not sure. I, like, redact all that. I I don't really know. In the future, I see. Yeah, I think we'll all hang around and still be doing projects together for quite a while. Yeah. Inchallah, let's see.

OK. Yeah, and yeah, I hope that was helpful. I I think I was ranting a bit, so.

**MM:**

Yea definitely, no, no, no, I mean. Yeah, it's like you said, sometimes it's. Yeah, it's hard to fully grasp something and. I guess I really think every time you peel of a small layer like.

**LA:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think it'll be interesting talking to different people too. Like who have you had any other interviews yet? Or not so.

**MM:**

Until now I this is the 4th one. So of course Francesca was the 1st and then I talked to Laila and and then to Rim.

**LA:**

OK. Oh, cool, yeah. Nice.

**MM:**

Which are very different, different stories that sometimes even contradict.

**LA:**

Right. I can't wait to hear. Cool.

What's that?

**MM:**

Yeah. And you know it's it's been super exciting actually to work on it. So yeah, it's each story is. Yeah, it's really inspiring, actually.

**LA:**

Cool. That's great to hear. Glad that you're getting something interesting out of it too.

Francesca is saying I just moved next to the place where I live my it's still connecting. Take your time. I will, OK. So she's ready to start soon. I'll just.

Alright. I'll just use the toilet. And then I'll come back on and I don't know if we have a link right.

**MM:**

Yeah, I think so, yeah.

**LA:**

Cool. OK, then I'll leave this one.

**MM:**

Alright, thanks a lot and.

**LA:**

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. See you

## 6. Interview Khalil Elghilali

Interview with Khalil Elghilali, conducted by author.

Marrakech, Morocco, 9 May, 2024.

MM: Matthijs Mantel

KE: Khalil Elghilali

### **Transcript**

**MM:**

All right. So then the recording has started.

**KM:**

That's cool. Well, basically the so the the opportunity with Dar Bellarj and Charita was quite interesting because I think that was one of the first experiences with video games in Morocco about public spaces and also in Africa. There, there are not a lot of experiences like these. And and all around the world. It's like quite an emergent topic. And the idea would like to. To confront my theoretical background, like the thesis I'm developing about video games under possible impact on social social dynamics, and moreover, on how they can impact people on understanding topics, complex topics like climate change and. Moving towards public space and like kind of really complex problematics that usually are just aborted by professionals. Yeah. So the idea would like to go by a bottom up approach and understand what are the. The sites of people that are basically the more confronted and the most vulnerable to that kind of topics, to see what their insights about that kind of topics and how they're really impacted about them and how they can be aware of their political, their political manoeuvres and how they can share them through the professionals. So I think that for our first experience, it was like quite interesting to. See how women. Got engaged with that, that approach, they really liked and were like, completely immersed, basically more in the the practical aspect. Now.

**MM:**

Yeah. So the first aspect was the city walks, right? Yeah.

**KE:**

Yeah, exactly. To, to get to notice, what are the real problematics and confront them with the kind of sites we have as a professional and arguments and urbanists, what that kind of topics and then see how they experience it and what what are like really their needs not from side of

of professional but from the side of the user. And then the idea was like to project this few tools that would be like more ludic to to a citizen then and also to a professional where like really familiar with using visualisation and simulation in in the visual environments. People like that, like the more impacts to with that kind of projects are the less aware of that kind of tools. They just see the simulations and are not aware with how to fabricate a project they just. Like in the studies, they just get that that project on on their hand and they're not, they don't have any clue about what the impact that might that it might have, what are the difficulties that are professional also has what are the all the complex road that leads to fabricating this project in real life for me.

**MM:**

You are talking about city planners. Professional city planners, yeah.

**KE:**

Exactly. Professional city planners, politics and also government management, because the idea would like to will to link all of these professionals and also citizens and see what what would be the possible in input and outputs from that product. It's, it's it's a very sensitive topic because when we talk about participatory projects there are a lot of scepticism about that kind of project also for me as a practitioner. And I see that it's more like a theoretical and more like utopian. Where you're seeing how to engage citizens within a project. And when you go into the mechanisms to do that, it's really complex. You don't find any feedback, any feedback loop you don't find. Any real real product that you were using, like really participatory approach instead of using the citizens just to fabric. All the partipatory projects are quite using, people are not engaging them in the fabrication of the project.

**MM:**

Can can you make that concrete?

**KE:**

Well, when we say participatory and collaborative project, it's like everyone has the same status. You don't come with an idea and just propose it to people. Just take what people want and fabricate a project towards it. Yeah. And everyone gives like his own idea and everyone is on the same scale and you create a kind of consensus. Between all that participatory components, but all the participatory projects that are going on right now are more like some vision of a professional, of, or of the government. And they just try to participate, to communicate these ideas with citizens and get.

Hmm.

**MM:**

Yeah, they just check.

**KE:**

If it's OK or not. Yeah, exactly. Or they get the confirmation or you have different levels to it. Sometimes it's about getting the OK about the idea. Sometimes it's just engaging them as a brute force for fabricating project like Masons or people that will. That are like manoeuvre for a project and sometimes you have different scales. You'll never find that it's something that emerged from the population. And from the government at one at one time and that created like a, You will never have a politics say in OK citizens can have this. And at the same time the architects can have this and everyone can get along and really fabricate a project that makes everyone. So you always have like a different repartition of the force of fabrication. And so I was quite impressed of how it was easy for the citizens to get along with that kind of tool and to project and get confronted with what we're confronted with everyday as an architect. Well, that's basically we had a I had a really nice feedback, also the architect I had with me in the office. They weren't like really in confidence in the other side when they. Heard the project. And then when they saw the women starting to work on the computers on the Minecraft, and with the different generations. I think that was like quite interesting experience actually.

**MM:**

So something concrete that came up that you might not have heard imagined yourself?

**KE:**

This is like a first step of the of the project, yeah. One of the second steps would be like to give a whole empowerment to that population to really put in practise what they were saying. Yeah. Like we went from an ideation and exchange of ideas and put into a visualisation visualisation. But then how to engage like concretely this population in the fabrication of ongoing projects in the city is quite a big question right now, because you have like a really normative way of doing it. You just have markets that goes with some concourses and that kind of thing that goes for architects and enterprises. But what is the? What is the size of the population that lives towards this? Basically, this is a real question and can we, like, really engage them and to what level can we engage them in fabricating the public places in the city? Or how can we get their voice and just understand it in order to give the most adequate

project? The kind of questions I've been really trying to understand right now and also how to how to manage with every population in Morocco where you see that there's a lot of cleavages. Between women and the men. So how to get all these kind of problematics into simple tools that can talk to everyone? With clear purposes, without pleasing time, because one of the big issues with participatory projects is also that it takes eternity to get along. So when you engage everyone and everyone wanna have points and then it's really difficult to get along with the project. So it takes years to put it, put them in place

**MM:**

Was that also your experience during Charita?

**KE:**

In the in the moment we came up with some conclusion, but then when we faced the professional with it. There was like this big discussion about how much of your how much of what you, you've been saying can I integrate and there is also this

**MM:**

Like what concretely?

**KE:**

We presented the garden, we developed the garden in the in the old Medina, there was a lot of proposition about how to put like some shops inside of it and how to manage inside. But there was already a project plan like one year before and everything was already allocated and. To come back like one year after and just try to integrate population with their ideas would be like quite complex to do, to do like in concrete reality. So what she was saying is OK, I can see what you did but I will. I can only take some things that might not change the whole aspects of the project. But that can be really interesting too, because she already opened the gate.

**MM:**

Because. What is your relation, so that if I? Understand. Within this garden there's already. Someone working on a project to to be built, in the garden. And then at which point did you then came in]?

**KE:**

I came in. I came in actually, without knowing that there was an ongoing project because we I tried to have this information but there is like quite and it's also part of this experimentory thing because yeah, you we never know when there is an ongoing project about a place in a city. So we tried to make some questionaries ask people, and then I met the architect that that is working. And that's the one that came to the garden and we had this discussion with people. With the population and also her come in in, in the garden was quite sceptical. Because she didn't want to meet the population because it was too late, actually, and there was already a project ongoing. What is the purpose basically of meeting the population right now. And then I was like insisting you need to see maybe what you did is completely. That's why she came and we had this discussion, which is like also really positive. She opened up the gates literally, to linked to water and the gardening. So it's really a positive impact on things that might not look like architecture. And that is like really linked to architecture. It's like greeneries and water management. So since she opened the gates. Maybe there's something to do with these kind of topics. Actually in the city and maybe next time we need to know if they are like planning to do project. But this is a more complex question because we need to ask the government in charge and that's like really deep research and you need to have this information before starting everything. So we're just going into the into the beach and trying to swim inside of it instead of just, yeah, waiting.

**MM:**

Because that's. What will be the, what is the timeline of the of your residency within Charita?

**KE:**

I had I had like normally projects going on one year and then an applicable project on the second year. So now we did like. Just the first part, yeah. So the second part would be like to develop in papers the proposition that we will give to the to the architect. And maybe have her feedback about what she can integrate on this proposal and see how we can communicate about it or if we can communicate about it or just put this into practise instead. So it's like on a project on two years, one that is more like the research you saw and another year for putting into practise this research.

**MM:**

Yeah. Then, yeah, you already mentioned the relation with climate and water. Marakesh has a

very long history as the City of Gardens, as well and. Has this huge heritage. How? How do you? Do you? In which way do you relate to this heritage? When you work on this plan.

**KE:**

Actually, the the heritage of garden in in, in Marrakech is quite an interesting one because when we describe gardens in Europe, it's quite a different topic. We don't see the gardens in the same way more in the Arabic or Muslim countries. Most of the garden. gardens are like nutritive gardens. They're not like decorative gardens like in France or. So the idea about the idea behind putting a tree in a place is basically to give some some allimitation or some fruit or something that can be useful to the population. What we saw in the in these late years is the tendency that all the gardens are switching to a more decorative gardening. Which creates a a bigger cleavage in social social approaches under social appropriation of public spaces in Morocco. Before we had like a tree that can nourish a whole neighbourhood. Like dates or lemon or oranges or whatever. So everyone felt like responsible of that tree. The more you we see, like palm trees, that doesn't give anything to the population, the more the more we see that people start avoiding that place or just vandalising or just doesn't go to that kind of public spaces, so my approach would be like basically. To recreate this link that was lost and to see to what to what level we can actually recreate this thing without having anymore with the given responsibility to people to like, take care of their places instead of just waiting for the government to take care of it and also have this responsibility of taking care of water that if we cut like canals, we don't provide this place with water, so we don't have any that create this kind of microsystem. This is really complex because they're everyone is now becoming more capitalistic capitalistic, so he gets everything from a market. Now to recreate this kind of relationship we we need like also a lot of awareness from people all around the the the garden and not create a place where we can only have lunch and go out.

If you if you know the history of Zaha (?) in Marrakech, the idea would like to go in farms with farms, with the olive trees near the Manara, and eat in places that already gave gave Alimentation, that's not like gardens that are that are just here for decoration. They're like elementary, you know, elementary. Like places and. Source for source for for life actually, so this this, this relationship is what needs to be restored, I guess. And our approach is basically to recreate this awareness around public spaces that are not basically the decorative and that are like nutritional. And make people aware of the importance of that kind of green spaces and the importance of not importing. Other species and getting like really aware of the

importance of keeping what we have because that's what creates the relationship between a garden and preservation and kind of water. Also a local plant is a plant that is really adapted, not consuming water like a local Marrakchi doesn't consume a lot of water, so bring in a lot. Another species would be like, actually different. Yeah, and would have a different impact. And keeping what we already have, like medicine ones. And this is also another approach in landscaping because when we see the whole tradition of gardening places and using grass, and it was the history of it was like to just to prove that we don't need any farms, farms that were so wealthy that we don't need any farms in front of our home that we can afford to have like farms by the countryside, he said. Instead of having a garden with some nutritional things. So that's why you gardening became with grass and with palm trees that are like more California kind of trees. But now I think that's something that is questionable and that's something that we need to question also in the not only in the countryside, but also in the in the cities, the side of cities in the our own houses. Instead of planting a tree that is just decorating, we need to start like looking for that that are like also as beautiful as as other plants that might look more shapes or more, yeah.

**MM:**

Yeah. Yeah. No. So if I. Hear you? It's it's. How actually different disciplines are connected. So on the one hand you have to more the ecological concern around it, but then it's also very much linked to the social practises using public space

**KE:**

of course. Because you don't have one without the other, you need to understand what what was the relationship between between the gardening and the plants and the living systems and the water to know why it was preserved. When you don't have any need for a system, you just get rid of it when you have like clean water that comes to your home. You don't need to preserve an ancient fountain. So. So you have that kind of need. And the preservation thing that goes along with that, we can't preserve something as a monument if it's not useful. It doesn't have any sense. So. We need to preserve practises and not, not systems. Actually people make systems, so even if we understand how everything is interlinked, we can recreate things. Yeah, but if we start just preserving to preserve and that's more like archaeologies, that's preserving some old relique, or something that you can't move in the museum, and that's not what we want to do with the Medina, the idea would be resilient and to find new ways of linking people with nature. Now the question that we have right now are

quite different than the ones we had like 100 years ago here in Marrakech. We never had like private access water nor to to grass. Nor to land. It was all community

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**KE:**

Community that actually and then once we started losing this Community management, we started losing the system that comes along with them. So we had the garden system that was like a community management system and if one family starts disrupting it, then every family starts saying that there is a problem and so we get to fix this system because this is the only way to live. Now we have the choice. So how can we make people choose the right, the right system is the the big question that we need to ask actually in the cities. And also the countryside. that make them aware that and this is also a question I'm asking myself through these kind of projects. I really want to know what can make people choose that kind of plants instead of that kind of plants. When you don't need something, maybe if we don't need this, then we can afford this. But how we can explain that we need this this better this.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then, I mean. Then the way you try to engage with these issues issues is to bottom up.

**KE:**

Exactly. Then the to like I did, just to explain to them how their ancestors were linked to public space. And there are the relationship because now what what most people do is just the, this late or that they see the problematics and they don't understand why these problematics emerge, but when you understand why all of this emerged, then maybe you can fix the problem from the roots.

**MM:**

But this is the then something that they would themselves also bring up, because otherwise you it still feels somewhat like you would come with top- down ideas or.

**KE:**

No, I was. But the idea was like just to question them and ask them what were the, what were their relationship with this garden and maybe it's just opening up their eyes and not feeling like straightforward answers and that's the method I try to approach what what are the the the

problems? That you. For problems of pollution problem, neglect problem, gentrification everything, this is something that everyone can see. But again, the question was why did you see these kind of problems all in that places? What might be the problems? And then we started a lot of discussion around these topics and what is the history of this place? How was it? Why people don't go to that garden, and then we we figure out that it was like a grave place. So it was like. Linked to death. So everyone did the garden work. Yeah. So that's why people was like avoiding going there because there was a history about it. So the memory is still fresh about that kind of places, and then you can understand why. And then you can come with answers. But you cannot put also the, like, pickable everywhere if there is something linked to death, then everyone finds, even if it's in the common in the common mind or people that are using it where they won't say it, maybe they don't even remember it, but they have a tendency to avoid that place because foreign one said something like this or a neighbour said something or maybe when they were a child they used to tell them not to go there.

And so it starts replicating also in the future. But then when you understand this, then you come with the counter strategies to make this place more open. More, yeah.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah. But you first need to. Retrieve.

**KE:**

Why remove all these memories? This link to the place why they avoid it and why they don't like it? Is it because of the noise. Is it because of the trash? Is it because of the kind of people inside? Is it because no one sees that place? Or is it because we don't have any trees we have? House is full of trees.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**KE:**

Yeah, like then why people doesn't care? About them, that's the real question. We can't wait for the government to come with that kind of answers. They need to. Know. So before before it was a place.

**MM:**

Cemetery?

**KE:**

Cemetary. It was like avoided by people involved.

Yeah, well, no one will be supposed.

**MM:**

To remember your.

**KE:**

But they're like. Really neglected. If you go to all the cemeteries and and also you can't build on them. Yeah, you're like 17 years old. And that's basically the years that this garden has so. You can understand that there is also a Mausoleum (?) with a place where they do like some practises, religious practises right beside it. So people are quite sceptical and old women wrote this subject. They're like saying we have memories about this kind of place. You don't go there because scary.

**MM:**

I mean the tools you use are then. Yeah. Other technologies or especially. new, digital games. Yeah. How does that work out or how

**KE:**

the idea of digital games, which was the 1st, that you engage younger generations. To engage younger generation because they're, like completely unaware that kind of topics. I think that they're creating a whole. Kind of social system on their own, which is in the virtual. So the idea was like to go reach them where they are the most interested in and then speak to the adults that have this kind of kind a priori thing that video games are all wrong and show. Them that it's. Possible to do like great things with that? Kind of full. You just need to know what's happening there, and it's always about opening eyes or both generation about the potential of everything, like how you can use a game that's basically made just for fun, yeah. To talk about, like, really serious topics and when the women started seeing that, I think that a lot of them would let their kids play video games. They are acts in that kind of thought and that some the idea would like to break also a lot of casually, a lot of of prejudices about tools and and not only to break the prejudices, but just to open the gates for saying that a lot of people. Are moving towards other dynamics that we're not even aware of. A lot of people think that gaming is just tendency, but now it's like a real big industries, yeah. One of the biggest industries, actually, and so much money, that kind of investors and that has a lot of

impact on the younger generation, about the subject that are free to. That are linked to violence sometimes, but are also can be linked to really good topics like climate change, so we can choose the idea would be to not stop it. But maybe just orientated and as parents and as older people, we need to be aware of what's happening instead of just refusing something for refusing, it's like what happened with the the cinema and the videos and the first after the Internet. And then we have something that we need to know. So we can manage younger generation into engaging with that kind of motivation.

**MM:**

But then if I yeah if I understand your motivation to use video games. Is it to? And yeah, to do that, to challenge these prejudice towards video games and that video games can have actually have. A positive impact or is it also to to? But it's also used as a tool, right?

**KE:**

Exactly. So the idea is to first of all that. We can take off the prejudice of video games that are just a tool for fun. And there are they Are like communication tool which is like that can be like a communication tool that can be used for art. For design, for architecture, for landscaping. So this this was the first step. Then to use it, since the community of video games are so large and use it as a bottom up. So instead of coming up with the some tools that we already used to to work with and that are really complex in the architectural field. So the idea was like to go. By a ludic thing. And to tackle complex problem and that is something that is not new because we have like a green green games that are like a tendency that is going on on the rise a lot right now and that's basically the research I'm working on. And the idea was like to see how we can like concretely impact younger generation into action and not only into thinking like. How they can like go and work with what they learned through video games, and it's more like a mediation tool so it can be like they started doing this by games like cardboard games. But I found that the tool was like still too rigid. But then video games like all for like enormous possibilities you can implement, like real system linked to climate change. You can have like real data implemented in it and using like really simple ways instead of just having these big graphs that scares everyone

**MM:**

And and then in your in the workshop with the women of Dar Bellarj, how did you in which way did you use Minecraft then?

**KE:**

I used it at first sight, who came by mobilising Riad Laarous, which is the same place we visited, and then we teach the younger ones and the women there how to manipulate the game, so we have the whole. Platform. And then I pushed them just to implement what? We were discussing. What are the proposition they wanted to see in that field? So they went from an ideation to a real space projection using only cubes to. To show idea. Which can at the same time give purpose of what they want and see approximately what it might look like and also approach the professional so he can have a more concise way. How the population is fabricating the project and not just have speculation with questionnaires or drawings that might be like interpretable. When you go to the Treaty they they're saying I want this thing right here and that might be the kind of colours I wanted. They don't give you the right design of it, but then you have the whole idea. That is quite clear, and it's really so and into the into space. So that's it's quite interesting also.

**MM:**

Yeah, I'm just just trying to understand then. Yeah. In which way you see, so, In which way you seek to deal with climate change or you seek you seeking for behavioural change or you seeking to yeah, adapt more sustainable or?

**KE:**

The first. At first step I just need. I just wants to reach like learning how to. I just want people to be aware that they're they're be aware that their actions have their conclusions on reality.

**MM:**

To be aware, yeah.

**KE:**

Video game Minecraft is a first degree video game that can give this kind of approaches, but you have like more elaborated that really creates systemic links. Then on a second step is like to create a social social consensus through video games and create this kind of discussion that doesn't only implicate researchers and professionals have also people that use uses public space. Yeah. So it's learning outcomes, but also see, I don't know if it's possible for now, let's see if social impact is reachable through that. I know that learning outcomes are quite possible that then go from the learning from what we learned to application is another step. That we're working on right now.

**MM:**

So to go a bit back Charita, how did you come in touch with Charita?

**KE:**

I was. I sent a proposal because I was working on this project a while ago and then I sent the proposal to work with to work on on this, not through Charita, there was like a another project that we were working on, I think.

**MM:**

Of Qanat or Dar Bellarj?

**KE:**

I think Qanat shared the proposal approach for this and then they they answered me by saying that it goes right into Charita because it's all about gaming and.

**MM:**

Yeah. The play imagination. Yeah. Yeah.

**KE:**

Exactly. And that's when we we we tried to install this inside of this scope very well

**MM:**

Were you aware before of Qanat, the collective. Are you familiar with that work?

**KE:**

But not exactly with the work and know and with them. But I never knew exactly what they were doing.

**MM:**

I see. I see. Yeah. And right now do you know?

**KE:**

Yes, I think that's quite interesting that they will tell them as artists to to mediate and just to talk about topics into water, I think that. That's the most important topic that we need to talk about right now because the tanneries of water and of of food. Might be the next challenge that we need to face. We're not. We're a lot of it right now, but. The expansion of the cities. Will create a shortage of food. The expansion of the cities will create a shortage of water, and

so if we don't have like this, this access to food and water then like really big catastrophes can be, can be predictable. People cannot survive without food, cannot survive without water. So that like they are like basically and. We're we're watching that there is a lot of changes. What, What's happening on climate change. That both both topics. So I think that might be like the next challenge that we need to face. I think that the work is really interesting, maybe push, push things a little further through the real implementation and making people more in contact in real life contact with with what it indicates instead to instead of just making testimonies about it, I think that would be like. Really interesting to. Show them what might be the impact of neglecting that that subject.

**MM:**

Yes, yeah. If you have time still, OK. Although I don't think it will last much longer though, but. Yeah, I don't know if it's to what extent it's a sensitive topic, but. I mean, you mentioned also the government couple of times, is this a I mean also there is a lot of attention to food security and water accessibility, but yeah, this is a political dimension, is this which you relate to your work on garden? To also this political context, or is it a challenge to?

**KE:**

I mean, if you I'm the idea, would you like to? I don't know if they're, like, really aware of the dangers or if they're dealing with that kind of problems as statistics. No. When you turn everything to numbers, they tend to to be more easy to manage, but they also lose lose impact. You cannot talk about water with with Qubic metric metres. You should talk about them.

Yeah, but that's what. That's how we treat the like kind of problem in all the governments all around the world. We're talking about shortages in quantity and not in impact. And so I think that's a way of managing things that is more statistical, but I also have this problem with a lot of topics. How they manage property, how they manage. So I think that's quite general. That's a more capitalistic way of seeing. They they already. They always want numbers and quantities, but then you really lose the real link to the importance of the subject we're talking.

And also the art needs to be like quite realistic. Well, things, even if it even if it. Means like, shocking. I think that's the purpose of arts is just to show people that we're heading through a catastrophe and not ot only having like this emotional remembrance or this emotional retrospective or nostalgia about the thing to say that it's a matter of survival. Like quite shocking and.

**MM:**

But I also was plays. Out on the emotional level.

**KE:**

Right. Yeah, but it's more like a survival thing, that emotional. So here, now you can remember something and just feel nostalgic about it. That's just. But then you can remember that if you don't do this, you won't survive, and then you have a different approach for us. Need to shock and not be like just around in the I think for that kind of subject, it's a matter of life and death. It's not a matter of just making people aware or you need some time to go.

**MM:**

At the same time. The way how you approach sort of the reimagination of gardens as edible gardens as yeah, making public space more adaptable to climate, to climate crisis, it sounds very kind and soft while shocking.

**KE:**

Yeah, about this is the question. Yeah. But that's also question I'm asking myself when while I'm talking because, yeah, you can go through this like this. But also fight on other levels of more like categoric. I think that's why I told you to. What level can we give the voice to the people. I'm also working on another project on a bigger scale on the reconstruction of the earthquake that happened in the Atlas mountains and I'm working on the construction with the local materials. And you know the area that needs to be rebuilt is like 200 kilometres square. So it's like in immense area.

And then the population just want to rebuild with concrete. So to what level can we allow people to have a voice in these kind of topics. As you know there is always levels to it, the government is opening this discussion with this population. OK. Do you want concrete? OK, we can give you concrete. Do you want earth? We can give you earth. But then what is the vision of the government behind it. Sometimes you need to be also dictatorship, even if the world is quite hard, but it means that it's about survival. You cannot demolish 200 kilometre area of pure land because people demand concrete.

This is a big question that needs to be asked because they're not aware of it, because maybe no one told them that it's going to create problems for other generations because maybe there are not enough talks about it because they're they don't have any schooling about it. And then you talk because you you give this opportunity to participatory. And then everything is cooled up. So it's like giving the kid the opportunity to eat whatever he wants. So you always go for

sweets. I don't know how how this participatory approach can be really effective and to what population can be used. Can you completely slow is very big topic.

**MM:**

I see. I see. It's interesting like now, that's like the complete other side of what you were just, well, I guess that's indeed the I don't know. And on a broader level the the. Yeah, that challenge of democracy or. But at the same time, yeah, those in power have interests that they will preserve, so you need to balance it with the.

**KE:**

And they also use it. Whenever they want. They might use participatory when it serves them and not. I don't know what. Our I still. Try to find out what are the dynamics behind this kind of words. Like really big words. Talk about engaging everyone. What level are you engaging everyone? who are engaging and who is like gaining the most behind of it? Like really the population or the government or enterprises or a lobby or what are the dynamics? And all of it. And how can we make everyone on the same level? No, this is like a really big question that that. Goes above, even the government, like systemic change that needs to be done.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But if you're talking about climate or. I mean it's one of the most urgent questions like how?

**KE:**

Yeah, that's that's also one of the most abstract questions. We can't feel how can you quantify that we're living climate change. You don't have even with the data. How can you say to? Someone that is used to just eat and that is like really need that the climate is changing, that he needs to be aware of what he's doing and that. It's really important and he he's he's only only thinking about one week ahead. How can you tell him you need to think about further generations. Quite a big question.

**MM:**

Although, it's not any more future generations. I mean, if you talk about water access, it's right now every year the ? get smaller.

**KE:**

Yes, of course. But they're also like some. Contradictory things inside this whole ?. How can you say? Let's let's put it like this. How can we say let's have a community management to

system of water while you're pushing people to have like an individual land and an individual access to water with the country on on the floor? How can you think? How can you do both things You cannot offer one and keep the other. You can give the simulation of keeping the other, but you're offering something more easy for everyone. Like everyone has access with his own counter on his door with water, with clean access, and you manage to fix stock of water through dams and whatever. Yeah. And then you say there are. Shortages. Then just give access to people and let them manage this shortage.

**MM:**

Ah, I see. I see. Yeah, so.

**KE:**

There are like 2 contradictory policies. And even if. More population wants to keep this community. They're not allowed to. How can you manage a whole neighbourhood you living with the community management? It's like a real systemic change that needs to happen.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah. But then what would be the solution. You would rather want to have people engage politically to to address.

**KM:**

Basically, that's we're doing what we're doing now. Art needs to be politically engaged or to make sure we to be politically engaged. Every everything needs to be. Everything is indeed politically engaged. Either you want it. Or you don't. When you're not aware of it there, you just found the bad side of it. So that's what I'm trying like to push like to make people aware of the impact of their actions.

**MM:**

But that would be rather an apolitical approach, right? If you if. You

**KE:**

that would be what that?

**MM:**

Would be rather an apolitical approach if you address the behaviour of individuals instead of addressing the power dynamics that are behind water management, yeah.

**KE:**

The idea would be. To first get aware of the power that you have over politics. Then you decide. Yeah, yeah. There would be to not just decide without knowing that you have a political approach. That's the most dangerous thing it's going to happen that people takes decisions without knowing the impact of their decisions. And that's what's happening. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, everyone that all around the Medina know that takes decision, they they they're not aware of the impacts on climate change or whatsoever.

**MM:**

Then you're talking about an individual level, right? Or are you talking about?

**KE:**

It it, it starts on both on both levels on an individual and on the government level. It's like when we're talking about consensus. It's like the whole level that fights one another to find like an equilibrium. We don't say that it needs to be only government government. Don't say that it needs to be only governed by by population, nor by government. They need to they need to fight. an equal fight.

**MM:**

Ideally, but right now it's it's really a government that is deciding and.

**KE:**

I want. I want mine if it was going through the right path it would be like the ideal thing of course, but then maybe not. Maybe that's not what's happening. Yeah. And once again, it's not only Morocco. I think it's the biggest country, the biggest producers of climate impacts, the ones not signing for green treaties, no definitely like you have China and USA that doesn't sign for anything, and then they're they're making the population responsible for their actions.

**MM:**

Exactly. I mean, that's what I mean with the political and apolitical and political approach. Are you addressing these power dynamics or are you addressing individual's behaviours?

**KE:**

Then that's yeah. But then quitting the responsibility of an individual as a politic actor, yeah,

is also a big issue, because what made the government take? That much? These people were like not engaging in politics.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**KE:**

So it needs to be like an equal flight, so we. Need to make. People aware of the impact, as well as the population as a voice, and so they can start asking for their needs and start speaking about their. And most of the governments around the world right now are trying to do is like make people look like they're they they don't have any impact of what's happening in our world and what's really crazy. Like saying, OK, whatever you do. It doesn't have any impact.

And this and then even like this guilt thing. OK, you need to reduce your transformation of water. This is like when you you understand this kind of discourses, you know that they're like. Likes worked on and they're like really working on some psychology things, yeah.

I think that people, that's the kind of thing that they need to be aware of how to make our gate information and how to understand what are the sources that needs to be trusted and how they can analyse things. If you can do this then even if you choose a bad choice, then it's your fucking decision. So it's your decision because you you are completely aware of what you're doing.

Biggest and the dangerous, the dangerous part would be. Like to do things. Without knowing that you're doing that. And I think a. Lot of people. That's what for the year in Morocco. I think a lot of people. That's what. Happens that they act out of need, not out of awareness. Yeah, yeah. They they will ask for water because they they need water, they.

**MM:**

Exactly. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. It's not the abundance.

**KE:**

Is is something quite complex. I think that I I'm not. I can't be very ? to say that I can answer that, but yeah, they'll be like to ask questions right now and. To to know how much people can can take. And take action on what they live in. They they do believe in this, yeah.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. What everybody can do in their own specific field. So for you, urban

planning and architecture and.

**KE:**

And in architecture it's quite dangerous field. Because you have that power. You have the power to do it and to write there. Put it into paper. Yeah, let's make it fit. So when you have an unaware architect, that's even more dangerous. Because sometimes doing architecture at that moment might be to not build. Big question. That's it. Time it would be like more interesting to say no to a project or to say yes when you find someone that want to destroy a forest, then you have big money behind it. Depends what. Nothing that is this, there is a big momentum right now going on that a lot of people are quite. That in all alone, in that systematic changes, manic change, and everyone is starting to discuss this a lot, which was not present five years ago so.

Yeah. Now we're still discussing it and maybe in the coming years, people will start to say no, let maybe see something else, not just the system, but see something else. Like completely maybe see something else. That might work because of what happened is like they made that they made us believe that. No system you can work instead of this one. But maybe there are other systems that can look completely different that we didn't think about.

**MM:**

Right, I mean, yeah, I guess to make it for the full circle like there has been different systems here and there have been different ways of engaging with public space with natural resources.

**KE:**

But it was like a whole microcode. It's like going to. A. Be a honeybee place. And then they're working on and then you start teaching the bee that maybe selling your honey. Might be more interesting than just giving it for the community and then saying, OK. We're getting out of out of money and getting out of shortages of honey because everyone supposed to selling it, yeah. And then, yeah, the honey community, the big community starts to die. And because one bee started selling, I just, that's something that's quite complex to this also, at this moment, I think that these questions are. Are really important to ask in a little bit violence way in a violent way, like in a more straightforward way and not be.

**MM:**

But do you think there? Is the room and or. The space to do that in Morocco

**KE:**

Maybe. Maybe to to start doing it in a more in a more intelligent way. Bbut that can be really violent. It depends. Yeah. Violence doesn't mean breaking things, you know. Communicated it. More clear. Starting to avoid numbers. And give maybe using images like they like we do with a lot of things and. I don't know. This is the things I've tried to explore and. When we want to impact people on the other side, like on terrorists, things or on war things, we use images and images are used a lot on that. So maybe that's the tool we need to use on the other way out. I don't know this is my. This might be like things. There are a lot of artists who in there that are really I find the work like really great about on anthropocene impact and they go like for big places that are like completely destroyed by industries and give like real images of what's happening.

**MM:**

Are there artists that inspire you.

**KE:**

Yes, actually there are. Like there was one that. JR Don't know if you know him. There's a big guy outside that does like photography in the buildings and that exposes sometimes of preparation. And and then there are others like also in the cinema. And that creates the kind of. And there are. Like really interesting also with a really quite intelligent way of doing the discourse behind that, behind it being completely apolitical. But given like just the frame of what's happening, I think that right now we're in the middle of a cyclone, no? And we don't see it. We're just in the eye and everything is turning around, yeah. Yeah. So everything is turning around. But then if you get a glimpse of what's happening in a bigger scale then? Actually, video games can get you to work because you can pull. You can get in different scales. You can accelerate time, you can go back and that's something that could be really interesting if you work really on it. You can project it, but it needs to be like really well studied right now they're what's happening with the game is they turn like big topics into something funny that we want to play. We have, like, these kind of games.

**MM:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like the apocalypse.

**KE:**

Yeah, but we. Want to experience the other games. So it turns out like big topics to fun place.

**MM:**

To yeah, yeah. So this is that critical potential.

**KE:**

It's so even playing the opposite Jim Waits. I'm sharing with you just the questions about the future of what might be linked to water and climate change. And that's some topic, but it's quite complex. Maybe we? Maybe the next generation will have some other ? towards it.

**MM:**

We have to see, I think there are some interesting years coming ahead of us. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**KE:**

Also, time is going so, so fast we don't even have time to assess all the information that we get. There's a lot of linked rthings. that control in nature gives you control of time and then gives you this. The speed and urgency and waking up at work the day like don't finish and then even when you go back at home, you're still having information. But before we had this kind of moments when you just kind of first assess. What happened to you in the week now just goes like like trains or there are like link.

**MM:**

Yeah. Yeah, I guess that's also the the social practises that we lose with the.

**KE:**

The places where we can sit where we can discuss when everyone is having the microphone. How can you when you're losing like social connection, how can we discuss it?

**MM:**

Yeah. How how life is organised, yeah.

**KE:**

You know there, there's like a there's this word, a great philosopher talks about, it's called the pharmakon, it is the a great a Greek word, yeah. Like.

**MM:**

The poison that or the medicine that poisons you.

**KE:**

Yeah, exactly.

And that's exactly what's. Happening, we need to find an equilibrium. Inside, what's what's going on in the language and the techniques in the area doesn't mean that the government needs to be raised, or that the population needs to be raised to try to find a way that both of them can live peacefully. I guess.

**MM:**

Hopefully.

All right. Well, I think that's maybe what I want to ask. I don't know if there are any other things that might not have been covered, maybe related to your experience with Ateliers Collectif and Charita or?

**KE:**

I think that I really love this. To get inside of. Someone that is like practising. Also, I think that I had the chance to meet and they were quite aware and they were like quite sensitive to that kind of topic. So it was like really great experience and.

**MM:**

Did you meet some of the other artists that were in residence?

**KE:**

Yes, I don't remember them. They the girl. That made like beautiful picture.

**MM:**

Theresa?

**KE:**

Yeah. So, yeah, really excited about going to come next to see how. How people will take action.

**MM:**

Yeah. Cool.

**KE:**

All right, that's great.

**MM**

Thanks a lot. Thank you.

**KE:**

Hopefully you have something, OK.

## 7. Interview Francesca Masoero, 27 May, 2024

Interview with Francesca Masoero, conducted by author.

Marrakech, Morocco, 27 May, 2024.

MM: Matthijs Mantel

FM: Francesca Masoero

MaMou: Manar Moursi

### **Transcript**

**FM:**

Yeah. So what became then the entangled ecologies line, research line, was originally, yeah. A first proposal from Louisa, to yeah to run some workshops around like the understanding of food sovereignty in the context of of Marrakesh and. And sort of, yeah, mapping out the understandings that the women had of types of gardens and what desired garden could look like. And in that first iteration we had a quite short but very intense like week, or 10 days long workshop and it was myself, Louisa and Sarah Frikech, who is an architect mainly, but that I had already started doing research around water infrastructures in Meknes. Throughout time, trying to sort of look into also land configurations, Land Management, land ownerships from pre to colonial to post colonial times and Nouredine Ezzaraf, who is who is an artist from Armat, back then was kind of really starting also developing his own interest to yeah to plants and gardens and he has also a personal story associated to it because his dad is a. Well, it works on that, he is a has a, [?] yeah. Anyways, that first week was really interesting. I wanna see if I can find a photo.

**MaMou:**

What is the name of the architect? Who works on Meknes?

**FM:**

She's a researcher. She's a she's not an, I mean or. She considers herself as a as an artist. She's Sara Frikech

**MaMou:**

Sara Frikech?

**FM:**

So yeah, I wanna just see if I can find some photos of the problem between this and drive, I never know where to put stuff. Let's see when they want my God. They're terrible. Anyway. We. Yeah, we had a few different days where the women brought in a lot of different seeds and herbs, and we kind of map together the knowledge that the group had around their uses. And the relationship that each one held with it, etcetera, etcetera and following that first sort of yeah mapping, I guess we also started working on, yeah, this was a bit the the sort of mapping we developed. With different, different plants. Yeah. So this was day one I guess. We combine that with some well also we visited the Jnan Tzna [? 3:23] which is a bigger garden. So it's in the palm Grove. And that was more of a cooking session that we did with the, with the women and the some of the people working, working there. And then the third part of the workshop was more led by Sarah in a way, where she developed a few exercises to sort of start designing quite freely garden spaces and the kind of users that one would want between. I don't know resting or growing or things like this, and I think we have some photos here. And within the, we also visited the Jardin Secret, which has this quite interesting, like quite documented part on on what historic water infrastructures. This is the visit. Let me see. Yeah, we started working on these little very simple models that, this is Sarah. And yeah, and also mapping type of uses that one could could want for for gardens and at the very end we also developed a like actually a quite cute maquette, that used as a just as a yeah. This was another way to. Another sort of example of the, there was a sort of code for each of these spaces. So let's say this was water. This is resting areas. You know. Maybe this the sticks were resting areas and.

Yeah. So each each one developed their own sort of design. No, it was very cute. And the last day we developed this other maquette, they used basically the smaller square, not even a square. But behind here the actually the exit here where there is the fountain. So the the back exit over here, the one in front of the hammam. If you exit here in the left, it's just a subtle triangle. Where there is the old fountain that doesn't work anymore and basically nothing else. So we just use that as a as a an example to. To build. To build a little, it was more playful than anything else. So yeah. Yeah, there are some photos that are a bit nice. Yeah, this one. With the little men inside. So this was kind of it actually, as our very first workshop.

**MM:**

But then, like if you say you. I mean, when you first got gather their knowledges as a first stage, did you do you archive these things or are these?

**FM:**

We had all the scans of those maps and we had the intention of creating a zine. Hmm. But in reality, we didn't finish it.

**MM:**

Because that's that's what I was often wondering when whenever I guess a lot of the work. With the women of Dar Bellarj is is about. Yeah, working with their memories, working with their recipes with their ideas. But then it's sometimes hard to find back. And I'm wondering, like, do you make them accessible? Do you on purpose not make them accessible?

**FM:**

Yeah. No, it's not that. It's mainly because there is always very little money and very little people that are actually do the job of following-up.

**MM:**

Yeah. Of course, yeah.

**FM:**

And yeah, that's mainly it. So the like for instance, we had started doing all these scans to have a sort of base visual base for, for a specific zine. Yeah. Basically users of each one of those, but then in the end, we didn't work it out. Yeah, but we did something else later on that has a lot of that content, actually, which is, let me see if it's still on. Later on we we recorded similar stories let me see if I have a link directly here if not. No. What did I put it? I. Need to find it. We'll get back to it later. There was, I don't remember anymore, to be honest. I thought we had it here long time. Because it was 2021. Well, I mean, we have the cards actually that never printed. So we have these. There are sort of similar outcome.

**MM:**

This is...?

**FM:**

These are postcards.

**MM:**

What is on there? It's.

**FM:**

It's still what it's similar to what we had before, like, it's uses associated to each plant.

We also

**MM:**

But did you publish this or this?

**FM:**

No.

Well, I'll have to look for it. I don't know where I put it.

**MM:**

What are you looking for now?

**FM:**

I'm looking for. A set of recordings that we made and published on a WhatsApp group that was part of a kind of field exchange with a group of Moroccan women in Rotterdam, associated to Jeanne, so we had all the recordings in in Arabic and with a short English translation, that I thought I archived somewhere. But I guess it didn't. It must be somewhere else. I'll have to find.

**MM:**

And it was only published on WhatsApp or.

**FM:**

Yeah, we had it on WhatsApp and I thought I put it on YouTube, but at the moment. Yeah, well, this one. I think we recorded this whole thing.

**MM:**

Okay.

**FM:**

But I have the all the recordings in folder. I just need to figure out where it is.

**MM:**

This is public or this is an hidden video.

**FM:**

This is this is public because I just access it.

But yeah. I'd love to look, look for it if you're interested. I guess I have it here somewhere. Anyways, the first year was that and then we started working in. I mean immediately before the. We started working or we're planning to start working immediately after, immediately before COVID, but of course with COVID things got a bit stuck. But then I had the big chunk of work that we did again was from October 2020 until kind of, since then, we never stopped really. But we had a first like, too intensive two months, October, November and December. When I was able to come back and we decided to do a second big series of workshops around it with the Nouredine and Abdellah. Because yeah, Sarah and Louisa were not around at the time. And also they couldn't travel, really. And then we had a much longer set of workshops and research that we did together where we started first with mappings of non gardens, like kin(?) gardens but also trying to go back to historical gardens and their associations. With Nouredine, was very much interested also in in the idea of speculation and speculative fiction. The speculative future, so we also developed some sort of smaller workshops where we wrote like stories, and we record a lot of that and one outcome of that research became this sound cartography. That we published in multiple formats, one is on Chergui, one became a permanent installation upstairs on the terrace. We also presented it in the terrace.

**MM:**

The terrace here? Is it still?

**FM:**

No, everything is gone. Not. I mean it's it will be, I guess I don't think they threw anything away but we, I mean the terrace has been in construction since a year. And we also made it as a public walk during Charita 2021 with QR codes in different locations with the stories associated to it. And in that cartography three we integrated like basically Four. Four. Yeah, playlists associated to gardens and one associated to water and the one associated water was an earlier work that Abdellah had done in a workshop with the more, the youngsters. So it was basically 5 lines of five storylines. Narrated in in parallel, yeah, and that one. Let me see. 21. No, just just working stuff. Our recordings. You're here. All the recordings on my laptop.

**MM:**

Yeah, I think I got came across these things. These are still accessible.

**FM:**

And yeah, the only thing I need to check is the other day I saw that the links that we had online were not working anymore.

**MM:**

Yeah, some of the things that link to LE18 are dead.

**FM:**

I think Abdellah must have changed the. I think he has changed the authorization, so some of these were not. No, this is, so this is the whole playlist of water stuff. And by the way, here we have a lot of sounds that could, you know, if we wanna take any also for the workshop. I mean it's it's fine. It's it's, you know. We just need to credit him and here it's a mix. I mean, a piece of water is actually an artwork from Abdellah, but the rest of it, it's all work that it developed with the.

**MM:**

Is this the full work that he presented and during the first Qanat iteration?

**FM:**

The very, very first year developed this a piece of water as a performance, first as a as an installation later.

**MM:**

Is this the full full installation recording or?

**FM:**

I don't know. No, I think this. How long it is 3 minutes now. I think this is just a an excerpt of Cause installation if I'm. Yeah. Installation was actually composed, if not not run by 4 tracks, so we first did the performance. And I think. Maybe on his website there is the. The performance was quite long and I think based on that recording he then played played again we did to make the the sounds of the installation. Let me see.

**MM:**

A lot of the links and on his website do not work anymore.

**FM:**

I have the feeling he might have done something to his. It's an old thing, yeah.

**MaMou:**

Piece of water.

**FM:**

And here. But that's something we can ask him. No, no. So it's the three minutes. Maybe it's what he.

**MM:**

Want to make public?

**FM:**

No, but this is still what we what we had from before, I think. This is the LE18 one. Yeah, exactly. So, but yeah, I guess he changed the. How do I open? The last thing. Story history. Yeah. Anyways. Pictures. Uh, this is the installation. In theory. I don't know if it opens to anything. Yeah, no, I guess we need to ask him. He probably changed the authorizations. Yeah, but in any case, this one is, to be honest, I don't remember anymore. If it's an excerpt of the.

**MaMou:**

What was his installation? What did he do?

**FM:**

Well the performance was he he kind of captured the sound of a piece of ice melting down slowly. And the audio, was that sound together with the programme that had an algorithm or something like that. So it created a sort of symphony of yeah, water melted down and and the installation was a sort of revision of of that with four.

**MaMou:**

Ohh, I'm working on it with ice for something in the area this summer, so that's why.

**FM:**

OK. Yeah, I mean I. Think at least it's quite well described. I mean not. Not super. Yeah. You see a bit the photos here. About what he was.

**MM:**

I it was live, the melting or?

**FM:**

There was a performance and so this happened as part of the public programme before the exhibition and then he used that material to work on.

**MaMou:**

And exhibition. It was what, like the sound clips are, watch the ones that you showed?

**FM:**

I mean, the whole exhibition was the first Qanat exhibition. This was his working now. So it was very for, yeah, this is the work of somebody else actually.

**MaMou:**

OK.

**FM:**

Yeah. Anyway, so go back to Entangled Ecologies. We're saying so. Yeah, there, there was this massive chunk of work that we did here in 2020 where we collected a lot of also quite a lot of archival material that was available online mainly.

**MM:**

Your own or archive material from other archives.

**FM:**

No, no real we are real archive materials. For instance, there is a whole collection of quite interesting old maps of Marrakesh that we wanted to show tomorrow away tomorrow, later today as well. That show for instance. Like how, Yeah, how the city was a whole garden, basically. I have more but I think I put some in this mission. I have too many presentations but. Well, this is one example, but I can look for the folder. You see the kind of dramatic transformation of Marrakesh today which is entirely built, and how. This doesn't mean. I can find the real map. How? Also, how much gardens also within the walls were present. This is already when the French arrived.

**MaMou:**

You can zoom I think.

**FM:**

I had the, wait. I had found the thing I. Just had too many things. Let's see. Here there's some. Yeah, that's the kind of the same one. There are quite many others.

Yeah.

**MaMou:**

Ohh really all the brown is garden.

**FM:**

No, the Brown is is not. All the rest is not is. And there were a few more maps.

**MM:**

But so these maps are these online accessible or you went to archives and?

**FM:**

No, no, these are, there are no archives. Yeah.

**MaMou:**

Oh, what's that one? The plant one. Oh, that would be really helpful for Randa. Can you share this with Randa? Because she's. Yeah. She'll tell you today. But if you could share it with Randa, share it to me. And I'll send it to her.

**FM:**

Anyways, all this is in Galica in the Galica.

**MaMou:**

OK. But the plant one is there too.

**FM:**

I have no idea. It's been a long time since I downloaded it. Yeah. I mean any anyways.

**MM:**

But to how how did you access these?

**FM:**

It's a public domain, French public, Bibliotheque National de France.

**MM:**

I see, I see. And how did you then work with them?

**FM:**

It was more to get an understanding. Let's turn this is upside down because we wanted to print them. To kind of show and look together at what Marrakesh used to be, basically. So we

also had, I mean there were mainly workshop support material for us to kind of be with it, sit with it and and think with the. With a very different yeah.

**MaMou:**

Oh, this is great, can I see?

**FM:**

The Oued Issyl

**MaMou:**

Is it oh, is it? Yeah. Oh, my gosh. That was where we were well. Looks so nice.

**FM:**

Yeah. You see the, how green it was?

Like. Very different Yeah. And these were, I think, uh postcards that we found in the, how's it called. The Musee De La Photo. On their website because they wouldn't give access to anything, these bastards.

**MaMou:**

Really, that's horrible.

**FM:**

They're not. They're not nice. And then, for instance, not even a nice spent a very long time walking throughout the whole city taking photos of like what is left of the green. Kind of today.

**MM:**

Wow.

**FM:**

You know, so this funny to sort of. Yeah, I I guess, you know, think with this small micro patches that people build where they can.

**MM:**

But did you present this in any way, or is this? Or did you make this work accessible or?

**FM:**

No, that was part of the workshops I I mean it's.

**MM:**

But then like.

**FM:**

It was a it was pedagogical tools for us to think with.

This is the research of young architects that did a lot of similar mapping of of the transformation of the urban scape and was also sort of thinking how. How the future of the city can look like in terms of gardens, and he joined us in some yeah, in some workshops as well. There's also nothing. Yeah, the presence of different gardens throughout the different dynasties. Yeah, that's the kind of logic of how the the city was first built.

**MaMou:**

I love that, yeah.

Can I take a Picture of that one.

**FM:**

Sure, yeah.

**MM:**

But this this is. Just research that research that you came across or this or this, OK.

**FM:**

Oh, I know him. Yeah, we met and it was a student, master student and I invited him to be part of the workshop. So he led a couple of sessions and then he gave me access to this. This was a sort of a summary, sort of slide version of his master thesis. We also did some visits to different gardens, so we visited this one, which is the Cyber Park today, which used to be a much bigger garden. With an anthropologist that that was sort of sharing about the story and the transformations. And we also visited a few farms outside the city and then towards the end of. So yeah, in those months we had this sort of like both experts coming in and sharing stories about the past of the city. And then this work together of like sort of collecting memories, but also a few of the, one of the. In one of these, I hope this still works. I need to talk to Abdellah, because this is under his control. Well, I have it on my laptop, but. We wrote a few like speculative stories around gardens or so with the women so. So yeah, all

these sort of sound collections was basically, besides the water ones, which was coming out of a different workshop. These other OPS, these four. Were somewhat contents that we gathered together with the women and with a couple of other people that we also interviewed and out of that, yeah, we built this, this map that's in. That in 2021 we transform also in this sound walk where we would bring people around. Then we had the QR codes and listen by yourself or listen together to the to the stories. And there was a short summary, very brief summary in English of of the content with.

And in that moment, it was late 2020 where basically, we I had to close this. I had a kind of big budget for the year and there was a lot of stuff that we of course we didn't manage to do because of COVID and so we decided to spontaneously invest everything on the on the garden, on on building a garden here.

**MM:**

One building one?

**FM:**

Yeah. And so yeah, it was a quite a cool experience of yeah, creating something from scratch.

**MaMou:**

Wow. Yeah, that's amazing. It's still here in the garden?

**FM:**

No we removed them this summer. They thanks God cause with the earthquake it was have been a total disaster.

**MM:**

Why did you remove it?

**FM:**

Because it was too heavy. So no, this is this is not ours. This. We also created a the. And did you see the Zine with the audio cassette?

**MaMou:**

No

**FM:**

With the, the same sound, the same sound map is also in cassette format.

**MM:**

Ah no, I didn't see it.

**FM:**

We had a few copies that LE18, maybe they were all sold.

**MM:**

I know they're. I think I saw some cassettes when they.

**FM:**

Look, we had a few like on storage here. I don't know what happened. So yeah, this was the basically late 2020 workshop. We did this big, so work cartographic work, but trying to move away from the physical map and sort of. Yeah, this was a. This is Othmane, who made this, He did the drawing.

Again, a, a lot of you know, sort of rethinking what gardens can mean or not. And this was a a sort of game that we started doing at the beginning to bring towards the speculative fiction stuff that each one would have to choose their seed bank for the future to gift it to their kids. Some weird maps. This is the student at the, that did the research. So yeah, it was a bit of this mix again of, yeah, mappings and storytelling etcetera. And then this thing that came. Yeah. When we decided to do the garden and these two used to run an association in Casablanca, that was called the Les Etoiles Enver, the green roof basically. And so we involve them. And Suhail, which is a farmer here in the region to sort of design together the garden. And here we went to visit Suhail and his farm. His stuff and yeah, and then we go to the stuff in December and we made this massive. We started creating the whole thing. We had a three days open workshop where.

[incomprehensible; Francesca looking for things on her computer]

So anyways we had like 3 days where we had the sort of infrastructure in place where we had a bunch of people coming and filling in the raised beds and the and do the first planting, which was really nice and. Actually, we met a, one of the people that joined us, who became a collaborator in the future. I mean, the following in the following day, the following days the following. I think I have my photos on the camera. The following addition so then from 2020

onwards, the Entangled Ecologies became a lot kind of taking care of that and learning with the garden and keep sort of growing things, testing things, some things worse and other things didn't work. In 2021, it was really the most lashing year. I would say of the of the garden. We did quite a lot of Charita stuff around it also because of COVID we couldn't easily access any public space. So yeah, we use more private spaces in general.

And for instance, there is a. There are some. Let me see. I thought I saw this one here, but. With some recordings that we. I need to put it up somewhere? Maybe somehow the LE18 soundcloud? Yeah, we had some, some podcasts that we made during Charita. One was on the garden and two others were around two other topics, but yeah, I mean I guess since then this, yeah, in terms of the work in Marrakesh, that's what we have done mostly, then something that we started in parallel. Mainly. Well, I guess the beginning of the idea was in 2019, but we really started more in 2020 and 2021. Is that Rim like long time ago had had kind of had this idea of developing a a documentary around the Palmgrove. She had done some interviews like, let's say 10 years ago or something like that. Umm, and she wanted to to sort of. yeah, restart the project and the first way, which we started basically for two years, was again to integrate it in the collective workshops programme. So for two consecutive years. Or maybe one year. Definitely 2021. Maybe it was actually 2021 throughout the year. She led a sort of workshop that was really focused on the Palm grove. And again, there was a lot of experts invited. On the one hand and then like proposals for the kids to kind of more develop a performative, a performance, reclaiming the palm grove that we presented during Charita, 2021. And then she started with Othmane developing this idea. I mean, she developed the idea of the web doc, she did the first. She finished the first episode.

**MaMou:**

Yeah, she wanted to show us, maybe we should see it.

**FM:**

Yeah. Yeah, we can. If we have time to. Yeah. And that also got a little bit stuck because again, it needs much more money to be fully, I mean to be developed at a different scale. So it's yeah. So now it's kind of stuck with this first episode, but it doesn't have a sort of infrastructure. For it to exist, but something that I mean we also start. Then we decided to kind of try to be in the palm Grove more, so in 2022 Charita was fully in the palm grove. I need to see where I have most photos because at one point I started using much more.

**MM:**

I have one quick question about because then at that same time you also. Went to work with Heidi in Amsterdam, right? On her garden collective projects.

**FM:**

It's a big word to say that I work with Heidi. In reality we work.

**MM:**

Ah, OK, OK. Your name is mentioned there, so it was.

**FM:**

No, no, that's cute. But, but I mean, I haven't done a lot of I mean much work. We have been in. In dialogue since a long time. And I visited her. Definitely 2019. She was kind of quite at the beginnings, but I mean, it's sweet that she credited me, but I'm not that.

**MM:**

OK. Yeah. Because I mean it seems as if there is a link or some exchange, yeah.

**FM:**

No, no. There has been a lot of exchanges but quite loose exchanges.

**MM:**

Yeah, I see. I see.

**FM:**

OK. OK. What we did more little bit more significantly I guess, is that in two, well there were two different moments where Jeanne invited us to the Netherlands, one was in 2019, late 2019 in.

**MM:**

In Utrecht

**FM:**

In Utrecht, BAK. And that was, yeah, this five days sort of series of workshops that the big configuration of Qanat at the time developed. And then in 2000, yeah, early 2020, basically immediately after Charita, I kind of collapsed after that. You know completely devastated. Because 2021 Charita was like a massive programme. Like we put all what we couldn't do in a year and a half in that thing. It was like huge, huge and Sarah wasn't with us.

**Sarah Mounia Kachiri:**

I was a participant. It was really nice programme, yeah.

**FM:**

It was crazy like complete madness. Like. I mean, I can find the programme and show you like you would. I don't know what the 2021 was completely insane. In any case, the. In 2021, Jeanne basically invited us to to develop an exhibition in cultural space in Rotterdam. Yeah, and that was, I mean, notwithstanding, even though it killed me, I mean, the two things back-to-back killed me. It was a really nice moment where I was able to a little bit maybe. Like put some things in form. And so, for instance, we had a whole little installation associated to entangled ecologied, with some previous postcards, the map that you saw, we tried this kind of failed attempt of creating this exchange of recipes from here to the Netherlands, but at least it was when. Yeah, we kind of recorded all the all the stories and got the translations in English that I need to find. And I should put it somewhere and.

**MM:**

Some of the works that are presented are they documented or are they still?

**FM:**

The ones in the in the exhibition? Yeah, yeah, I mean, definitely photos, photos.

**MM:**

Yeah. So that that sometimes like. Sometimes I mean, there are a lot of photos accessible, but it's hard to sort of know what you're seeing if you weren't there. So I'm wondering if. Yeah, some of the, yeah.

**FM:**

We never had a catalogue, or money.

**MM:**

No, I see you in the sense, yeah. But if you yeah, you mentioned some of the maps or the postcards. Are these like, the original files are these, somewhere accessible?

**FM:**

Not publicly.

**MM:**

Could you share this with me?

**FM:**

Yeah, let me see. These are the old postcards. But to be really honest, this ones I find them, I mean the new ones that we developed in 2022 are more interesting in terms of content. I can share it, but. This poster was the one what is. This was the, based on the very first exercise we made in 2019. There were photos that Louisa made. From, was it from the workshops of 2019. But I mean it's less content. I mean I guess it gives more of a sense of the methodologies, but the.

**MM:**

Alright.

Yeah, that that's sometimes hard. Like it seems that a lot of what you've been doing is very process oriented. So if you weren't there, it's sometimes very hard to grasp what you have been doing. And that's sort of what I've been kind of struggling with in my research. Like what? What are the results or and I guess now being part of this workshop it makes much more sense or in the sense of I understand, sort of the way of working together and I guess what yeah, I mean of course the results of Saturday are just a small part of what matters, of what we have been doing, like it's much more all the conversations, that we had and in the sense this is also very process oriented and I guess that's a lot of what you've been doing.

Does that make sense?

**FM:**

Yeah, I think it's a shared story with those should have been actually this week where a lot is emerged, but very little has been archived in like you know in this accessible way from an outsider. And I think a lot of the more relational, yeah, the relational is what's, it's what is there. Either in it or you can't really. It's good. Yeah. It's a good point. Also, because there is, I mean there is also been so many connections across people that have come back and back, you know, take Islam.

**MaMou:**

Yeah, I want to see Islams work. I haven't seen it.

**FM:**

So I have.

**MaMou:**

I know he did this performance lecture but I don't know about. I didn't know until he went to the khettara, Othmane was saying that he did something in.

**FM:**

We we never got the final. We never got the video.

**Sara Mounia Kachiri:**

I have the link..

**FM:**

No. Yeah, but not the no. I'm talking about the performance in Sanobar.

**Sara Mounia Kachiri:**

Ohh. No.

**FM:**

We don't have, we don't have them.

**Sara Mounia Kachiri:**

I think we have the material.

**FM:**

Are you sure? I don't think I've ever seen it, actually. Because these are the photos, I think. Exports, what is the export. And this is the. These are short video thing, it has everything. So I mean everything, all the.

**MaMou:**

All the works.

**FM:**

All the works from from last year. I don't know if it's the last version.

[watching video]

And Islam and Yara, this was the second mirror. So because for Charita we always invite at least some of your artists twice, especially the artists that are not from Marrakesh. So ? was in the previous edition, she did a really powerful and super simple intervention in the palmgrove where she kind of got images images of swimming pools and transformed them into a sort of

puzzle. But there was also a almost like proper fix, and like people would like to combine them anywhere in this and. We were walking the other day. And like with all the kids. Putting together this, you know this fake swimming pools. I have some pictures of that. And so, yeah. Then the second year she did this workshop and she did this with Islama. Very funny video work.

[Watching video]

**MM:**

Is this video also online accessible?

**FM:**

This one now, because I'm, there's things still to be fixed and I don't have access to the file of the subtitles. Yeah, these are where some of the longer exposures that we made for the Performance.

**MaMou:**

For instance.

**FM:**

Yeah. Yeah, because somehow it, like, did, and it's quite cool with the long posures you because we were all carrying a light. And so it kind of almost looks like water flowing in a way that was. The the idea with the with the lights.

**MaMou:**

Ohh cool. Very nice. Hmm.

**FM:**

Yeah.

**MaMou:**

What did Iman do?

**FM:**

Iman, she didn't work with us.

**MM:**

No, she she was part of the Safina project.

**FM:**

Yeah. Safina was something that, so it kind of started as an online project, basically 2020 when the when the pandemic hit. I proposed to do thing what we called Qanat Cura, and the idea was basically that each member of the collective could have sort of developed a sort of online exhibition or or of any sort of type. And Amin, went quite ambitious.

**MaMou:**

Amin Lahrach?

**FM:**

So he decided that he kind of, yeah, he wanted to work around Asafi the seaside, which has a lot of environmental questions around it also. With a lot of mythologies around water, the Atlantis. Yeah, and stuff like that. So basically what it did is that he identified I think at first six or seven young artists, they were all at least originally from Assafi.

**MaMou:**

Oh, and Iman is from

**FM:**

Yes Iman, and also the other Amin.

Yeah, exactly. So they held workshops online together to sort of work around. Like the memories and desires associated to the city and then the exhibition online was that first outcome. After that he did a residency or I wasn't there though of like [? 54:44]. OK. Yeah, the residency in Assafi at the end, I think, of 2020.

And yeah, different people like sort of did different actions maybe in the in the city. And then he really want to continue the project that you tried for a couple of years to sort of find. Umm. Funds and ways to make it continue, but in the end it didn't really work so.

Yeah, these are kind of conversations that were developed in the first...

**MaMou:**

... Ateliers

**FM:**

That connects to these maps. Yeah, these are the desired ones. And the other, and this was the memory. And then the booklet. The booklet relates to each story associated to each file. We did print it at one point, I don't think we have any copy left.

**MM:**

Because then it was also presented during different exhibitions, in Rotterdam?

**FM:**

This one was presented in Rotterdam. Yeah, the booklet and the and the and the map. And then in during documenta. Amin worked on. Kind of new version of the booklet. Ohh OK, but I don't know where the. I think the copies have been stuck in Germany since.

**MM:**

Oh really?

**FM:**

Yeah. Yeah, because of costumes. So you can actually have them. Yeah, so very broken archive. So yeah, this was Safina and and. But yeah, to go back to the workshop, I mean, yeah, I don't know. There are. I have quite a few sounds associated to this if it helps. In terms of videos, I'm trying to think. I mean, I think it's more that I probably have a bunch of videos on my phone of a few places that might be. Don't know if anyone needs visual material I can. What I can offer. Of the Khetaras, I mean the one when I went down. There is this other place in Sidi Bouadman [?], which is not very far. This Islam also filmed for one of these works. And I have some definite this photos from the inside.

Yeah, let me think what, what was I thinking? Yea I mean, I can based on what people are doing, if there is any visual sound stuff that.

**MaMou:**

Yeah, that's good to know.

**FM:**

Either more rough stuff or if it's somebody's work. We can possibly ask for.

**MaMou:**

Yeah.

**MM:**

Yeah. Are there any things that are presented or talks that are that are well documented. Like the one you shared recently, like 2 days.

**FM:**

Talks. Like talks on Qannat?

**MM:**

On Qannat or presented within the context of Qannat like like you present like the one you linked two days ago of. The one of Shayma Schumer on the film with Nour Abed.

**FM:**

Well, on CC Anex all the programme we did with them are all online. This is all online. There are a bunch of recorded the talks. Of other people.

**MaMou:**

Ohe ohe, we have listened to that.

There was a talk about Nours film?

**FM:**

Yeah, I sent it in the chat.

**MaMou:**

Ohh chat, it's such a hard way to follow that.

**FM:**

Yes. So this one, this one then let me see. Maybe there is some, I don't know if anyone. Let me see if you're here. Here we have. A lot is in French, but it's also.

**MaMou:**

Talks?

**FM:**

Yeah, I mean, all the talks, all the public talks of the first two years, they're all actually here are.

See, I'm not so bad. In the end. So here are all the recipes associated with.

**MaMou:**

Amazing, beautiful.

**FM:**

This is a work from Jumana. Imila Boud [?] which is beautiful. Ohh, I shouldn't have. It should be hidden now, but it's not. No, not uploading. It's a. It's a sort of a walk that she offers from Palestine and that the people are invited to take whenever they are. Wherever they are. So you kind of with the way. It was part of Charita in the palmgrove. So with just like kind of group, but also individual work where you would go with your headphones and your.

**MaMou:**

I'd like to share that with with Francesca and with.

**Sara Mounia Kachiri:**

Here are, yeah, quite a few talks. Most of them do are in French, but these are very interesting because it's. The this ones and Ben Shaban also and Thierry Rouf are really. And also they should read it's with like professors and OK, OK. So this one is, well, it's a bit different, but it's George, my partner. But more thinking with the borderlands and breakdowns of infrastructures, and that this is Jeanne's work which is not Qannat related, but it's she's, I find her very inspiring.

**MM:**

But these talks. Were presented within the context.

**FM:**

Well, this is a mix, but I think let me see, because I had organised them slightly differently. Yeah, here's it. Because there are playlists and albums. So I don't know exactly how they're organised. These are the apps, the albums. OK, so this is the programme 2017. And this is 2018. So the playlist has everything together and in the albums. There are the the collection by year. So basically these were part of the public programme, the first public programme [1:3:42 ?] and this were part of the 2nd programme in 2018 that I curated. Yeah. And since then, we've done. A little, I mean. 2019-23. We didn't do a lot of. Like public programmes and in that same format. But then yeah, 2023 the one at CCA, it's what is available on this annex thing.

**MM:**

Honestly. If this would have been proper. It's so rich. It's only just, I mean, I know it's a lot of time, but if it would be properly described and in a proper archive, it's.

MaMou: 01:04:39

Maybe a book.

**MM:**

No, like I mean something that you can, that is searchable. And I mean there's there's so much and there's.

**FM:**

Yeah, but I have one life.

**MM:**

No, no, no, no. I know. I know. No, no, I know.

**MaMou:**

You need someone to work on it separately, yeah.

**FM:**

Managing somebody, I've tried. So many times to get people to do this for me, it's.

**MaMou:**

Really. Really.

**FM:**

Because I know it all.

**MM:**

Yeah, that's the thing. Like right now to to go back to it and to sort of, I mean you would, if you would, properly archive, you would need descriptions that are and tags and. Or someone that really wants to. Make the effort they go through everything and speaks French, Arabic, English.

**MaMou:**

That's not so hard.

**MM:**

No that no, no. But it it takes so much time

**MaMou:**

It's a full time job.

**FM:**

Yeah, three months.

**MaMou:**

But it's worth doing a book?.

**FM:**

I think I think online would make more sense. There is so much multimedia work.

**MaMou:**

Yeah, you can have stills. You can have descriptions you can have. I just find, like online things get lost. Like I just lost my website a year ago and all my content is gone and I'm not able To recover it.

**FM:**

But there is a no there is a archive.

**MaMou:**

I've not been able to recover it, so I like. I just feel like ultimately printed matter, like really it stays. It really does properly stay like really hard to. I find web. It's good to have for like promotion and knowledge like for lots of people to have access to etcetera. But it's not sustainable long term, it somehow always gets lost or not updated or link is broken or you're linking to someone else's work like you saw. Like someone can remove it and then that like it just ends up being. But a book, it's like it's there. And it's you have it.

**MM:**

Yeah. I mean as if any with archives that.

**MaMou:**

And it also has to be like intelligently done. It's not just an archive. It's like its own

storytelling, like as an object, like it's edited, it's thought of as an experience. Of the material of the. I feel.

**FM:**

Anyway, I don't see myself, doing any of this anytime soon.

**MM:**

No, don't take it as a criticism. It's rather a compliment. Like there's so much so much richness, and there's so much that it should be, that it's a pity that it's hard to retrieve for that. So take it as a compliment, please.

**MaMou:**

It's a lot of work. Yes, it's a. Lot of work, yeah.

**FM:**

No, no, but it's a shame. And I mean in 2019 when we got the first big grant, it was like the google drive is organised like this and you know. The. The pillars were publishing. I mean, like all the kind of research, workshops, actions, publishing and archive. We have a Zotero. I still have a domain I'm paying for parking domain since 2019, you know. And it was supposed to be a work by 10 people. None of them was properly paid for it. You know.

**FM:**

I'm not saying that it's impossible, but I would need to get a big rant. Say I'm I'm tossing the rice and I'll get with you.

**MaMOU:**

Yes, the grant for that. Yeah, 100%. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it's impossible with.

**FM:**

Do it whether it's online or another form and at least some of it. Yes, there is so much to go through. See what it you know like. And I'm also realising I don't remember where things are, you know, between drive, hard drive.

**MM:**

This website YouTube SoundCloud.

**MaMou:**

That's what I'm I'm struggling with this now to make my website like to prepare hand over the content to the person working with me and where where is the stuff? Where is this? That's

why I see the digital stuff. It's like I don't trust it anymore.

**FM:**

You must be very organised.

**MaMou:**

Very organised but how do you have the time to be very organised, very organised, it's a payment and time issue. It's not because you're a disorganised person, because there's no time. It has nothing to give you. It's it's a luxury, honestly.

**FM:**

No, no, that becomes the job, yeah. From Dar Bellarj, there's nothing you can get. From 25 years of history.

**MaMou:**

It's like a time thing.

**FM:**

Look how much I mean, I had done all this until a certain moment. That was for whoever the graphic designer of LE18. Do you think anything.

**MaMou:**

Like oh wow, that's great. That's a good document, yeah.

**FM:**

All the links all the stuff in English, French. Nobody ever did anything about it. I mean, I spent quite some time trying to have this thing in advance, you know.

**MaMou:**

That's good that you have that. So that document is.

**FM:**

The following thing the following website.

**MM:**

Can I use this?

**FM:**

You can sure, I think they're probably similar. But I can send you both and then. Yeah, I think

at least probably at least until here, you get. The exhibitions are the easiest thing and. Yeah, it's all the other little ones. I never do the. You know. I never went into this stuff. Yeah, I'll send it to you.

**MM:**

That'd be great.

**MaMou:**

I'm gonna go get the coffee. Yeah.

**FM:**

Yeah, me too. I had a small headache after.

**MaMou:**

Thank you so much.

**MM:**

Yeah. Thank you so much.

**FM:**

No, I mean, I don't know how it was.

**MaMou:**

No, very, very helpful.

**FM:**

For the group.

**MaMou:**

Definitely. I know that this book the medicinal herbs one with Randa. She'll tell you more about it.

**FM:**

Yeah, yeah, I know. But, you know, a general intro, I would just probably share some. Yeah, some photos of. I opened this because they're all ? presentations that I have, I'm just gonna try to see which ones have the. I mean, it's gonna be rather quick in the end. Maybe you can. I'll pull out the photos of. And this is maybe a little bit more.

**MaMou:**

Maybe the historical photos, the postcards that you showed us and the maps. If you can just show. Those and talk about like how it was before. That could be.

**FM:**

I was gonna just share a little bit of these how the Qannat functions in general. The map of Marrakech, these are the maps of the gardens.

**MaMou:**

That's great. Yeah, how it functions, right.

**FM:**

This one. Now let me see, because from here.

**MaMou:**

And if history like I. Think would be nice as well the postcard.

**FM:**

Yeah, let me find.

But those is not that is. I want to find the because those were the files.

## 8. Interview Heidi Vogels

Interview with Heidi Vogels, conducted by author.

Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 5 June, 2024.

Interview originally conducted in Dutch, translated by author.

MM: Matthijs Mantel

HV: Heidi Vogels

### **Transcript:**

**MM:**

Yes, normally, if I briefly introduce that what I am now recording is in the context of a master's thesis, which is essentially about Qanat and how they, as an art collective, are presenting a different discourse on water or conducting research on water. My thesis is, on the one hand, about their methods, including how they organise themselves as a collective and the relationships they have within Morocco and internationally. On the other hand, it focuses on the artistic methods they use to research water. I'll elaborate on that a bit more later. But I am particularly interested in your experiences with the collective, as well as the work you have presented within that context. More broadly, we briefly touched on your experiences, which are still connected to the same theme.

**HV:**

Yes, where would you like me to begin, or what is your first question?

**MM:**

Yes, well, what I've been doing now is delving into your work, and what I understand is that you initially began research on the gardens in Fez. From there, what I see in your portfolio or overview of your work is that at some point, you also started working with us in Tighmert. From there, during the first public presentation of Qanat, you presented your work in an exhibition at LE18. Since then, you've been involved in a number of new iterations, some of which have also been linked to Dutch Culture, if I understand correctly. Is that right, or how would you describe it yourself?

**HV:**

Yes. Indeed, in response, my practice spans various fields, and I try to do this in such a way that they reinforce each other. So, my work with TransArt, which is part of DutchCulture, yes, in 2018 I developed a symposium with Francesca at LE18, which was with Qanat as well, and

it was about the position of working on the margins, as that is something often addressed by residencies.

Residencies are certainly not positioned at the heart of the art world. Artists actively pursue residencies because they are important for developing their CVs. However, residencies themselves often don't carry much weight as institutions within the international art sector, despite their existence. This is also because there is very little funding or support from cultural resources directed towards residencies. And here I'm talking about the smaller initiatives, as you always have larger institutions like the Rijksakademie, De Ateliers, and the Jan van Eyck Academy in the Netherlands, which are included in the Basic Cultural Infrastructure (BIS). But, yes, the rest have it quite tough. It's always been that way, and you can actually see this in every country.

The margins were more of a lens to examine what these smaller initiatives are doing—those that work and produce in a particular area, though they are technically operating on the fringes of the centre. However, what they do becomes their centre. That's essentially the reversal, and that was what the symposium was about. It's also what Qanat does.

**MM:**

So in that sense, the focus wasn't directly linked to water; it was more about the practice of Qanat.

**HV:**

Initiatives like LE18, which is also a residency programme, served as a landing spot, so to speak. The host of Qanat, Francesca, works with a network of artists who conduct research on water in various locations. I had already become involved with them earlier on—it all came together quite naturally. My own practice, even before I started working in Morocco, has always been, and still is, about the relationship between landscape and city, explored through gardens, particularly from a spatial perspective. It's a generous subject with many directions to explore. It was purely by chance that I found myself in Morocco in 2011-12 during a group exhibition at Appartement 22 in Rabat. That's where I reconnected with a friend from Barcelona, whom I had met while doing a residency project at Hangar. Her name is Jessica Stevens, an artist originally from England who now runs the platform Cultures Vultures in Fez and Zafou[?]. With her, I began visiting Morocco more often, as she wanted to start a residency herself. Since my job at TransArt involves advising people on how to set up residencies, I collaborated with her. Through her, I experienced daily life in Morocco, not as a

foreigner, but from the inside, particularly in Fez. At the time, and even now, there was very little in the way of contemporary art and culture in Fez, but there was so much to be done. There were many opportunities in Morocco that intrigued me.

**MM:**

Do you mean Morocco in general, or Fez in particular?

**HV:**

Both Fez and Morocco as a whole. There's a lot happening in society, which provides a lot of material, or fuel, for artists to work with. Everything you do seems to have an immediate effect, at least on a small, micro scale, within the local context. I found that extremely appealing because it was something I missed in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, the art sector feels oversaturated, with so many people doing things, and it often becomes more about career planning and so on. But in Morocco, it's a different story. Plus, I was drawn to the culture and the significance of gardens in that culture, which I hadn't known before. I was simply curious. That's how I started doing research on the inner gardens of Fez, and it gradually became a larger theme. It wasn't just about the gardens as physical spaces, but rather about the entire garden culture of the city, which is closely tied to the history and development of Fez itself. Water plays a central role in that, though it's no longer as present in the old Medina as it once was, particularly since the French arrived and developed the area next to it, turning the Medina of Fez into a kind of archetypal tourist destination.

**MM:**

In that sense, it's somewhat comparable to Marrakech?

**HV:**

I think so, yes. I'll have to think about that for a moment. Was Marrakech also known as a city of gardens?

**MM:**

Yes, definitely.

**HV:**

The gardens were more like plantations—large, irrigated pieces of land that supplied the city with food. The water came from the mountains, channelled into the city through khettaras. In Fez, there are many springs underneath the city—there are said to be a thousand springs, and there's indeed a significant amount of water below the surface. The city is located in a valley

and by a river, and the water system was designed so that every house had fresh water and its own drainage system. Water was always free, of course. There was also a connection between gardens, food supply, and so on. Around the city, there was a ring of orchards and fields where food was cultivated, similar to what existed in medieval Europe. So, in that sense, it's similar to Marrakech, but slightly different.

**MM:**

You presented this work within Qanat for the first time, right?

**HV:**

In 2013, I began filming in Fez for the first time, and that became a project that led to other things. It was an endless development to make the film, partly due to financial constraints and the need to seek funding in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, I continued to deepen my understanding of the subject through collaborations with other artists and theorists, giving presentations in both the Netherlands and Morocco. As I kept presenting the project, the network of artists I got to know through the project in Fez kept growing. Even though the project in Fez wasn't complete, I continued presenting and expanding on it.

**MM:**

Yes, yes, that's what I saw on your website. It's listed as "Gardens of Fez," but it's not necessarily the same work each time, is it? More like an overarching title? How should I understand that?

**HV:** Yes, something like that. At the centre is the film, which is the core, though it's not finished—it's more like a virtual film, and I can show some fragments. So it's almost invisible, and around it are various presentations, collaborations, and further research. It became a sort of environment, which was also interesting because the theme of heterotopia came into play. That was my way into Fez. The virtual aspect of what a garden evokes and how that relates to the local culture and how people interact with gardens became central to the project. It kept growing, and through posting about it on Facebook and my website, I connected with Carlos. Since 2013, he suggested that I should visit the oases because, as I was researching gardens and water, the oasis is the archetype of those themes. We met a few times, and he invited me, and in 2017, I visited Tighmert for the first time. That was purely an exploration, to learn and see how things worked there.

**MM:**

That wasn't yet in the context of Caravan Tighmert?

**HV:**

Yes, it existed at the time, but it was smaller than it is now—still finding its way, as it continues to do. My first visit was without the gathering, just a visit with Carlos and Ahmed. I filmed there, and Jules Aubrey, a German sound artist, also showed up. He wrote a book about audio in Morocco, which I believe is available in the bookstore at LE18.

**MM:**

Oh, I haven't come across it.

**HV:**

I also shot some 16mm film, and six months later, I returned to show it during Caravan Tighmert. We returned to the field with the same people we had filmed with before, and we invited them to the screening. That was also in 2017, so I visited Tighmert twice that year.

**MM:**

And you presented work in Marrakech during Qanat's first presentation as well?

**HV:**

In 2017? No, I don't think so. What I did afterward was go on a desert trek with Carlos and a few others. When we returned, we presented that at LE18. That might have been part of Qanat. And yes, I also showed some work from Fez in an exhibition at LE18. But Qanat was never very formalized in terms of who was in or out. It was more of a fluid concept.

**MM:**

Yes, I was curious about that. From what I understand, it initially started as an exhibition within the broader context of Kibrit. And from there, it seemed to grow into something more thematic, evolving into a network. Around 2018, with "Performing Change in the Margins," it seemed like it became more of a collective.

**HV:**

Yes, I think you're right. Francesca might be able to confirm that better.

**MM:**

I'm also curious about your role in the early iterations. According to the website, you were involved a few times during the first presentation, in a panel, and later on, you gave a workshop in 2018, right?

**HV:**

That was with Ahmed and Jerome, yes, that was really part of Qanat.

**MM:**

And then there was another iteration in Brussels and later in Rotterdam.

**HV:**

Yes, exactly.

**MM:**

So during that period, did you see a lot of changes, or how did it evolve?

**HV:**

During that time, the group of artists remained somewhat constant, I think. After that, I stepped out for a while because I had a hernia and needed to focus on other projects. I believe the group dispersed a bit afterward.

**MM:**

Yes, during the pandemic, it seems like things became more spread out.

**HV:**

Jeanne van Heeswijk's involvement, along with Francesca when they applied for funding, had a big impact on the development of Qanat. It became more professional, I'd say, reaching a higher level. DOCUMENTA was also a significant moment because it gave them a chance to showcase alongside similar initiatives and gain international visibility. They also collaborated with a South African collective, along with Jeanne, which further helped elevate things.

Initially, everything was very organic, a gathering of people who just happened to be working in Marrakech. There was some funding through Kibrit and other European programs, and that came together under the theme of water, which became Qanat. A lot of artists wanted to join, and sometimes it was simply a way to get the resources to continue their work. Now, I feel they're more focused on local initiatives in the Medina of Marrakech, but I haven't been directly involved, so I can't say exactly how things are progressing. I assume they're doing well, though, even if such projects are always filled with challenges, stress, and hurdles. When you're in the midst of it, it can be intense, but you also see the benefits of what you're doing.

**MM:**

Why do you think that?

**HV:**

Because it's so unique—you're constantly trying to keep everything on track, presenting the right story to the outside world, meeting deadlines, and so on. It's exhausting.

**MM:**

It seems like the idea of a collective can sound very romantic—working together, shared ownership through a commons, but in practice, it can be chaotic.

**HV:**

Yes, but that's something that happens on different levels, simultaneously. When these levels are stacked on top of each other and there are cross-connections in between, it's easy to focus on one piece, but at the same time, there is that free space that has emerged.

**MM:**

What do you mean by that?

**HV:**

When you form a collective, a kind of commonality or space develops between you. Everyone is doing their own practice, but there is a kind of bond between you, and that's called Qanat. It has a story on the website, and Francesca is the one who articulates it well and helps to advance it. So the energy that comes together pushes it forward, and while doing that, you're also figuring out what it actually means, what it is you're doing. Sometimes it goes in all directions and then it gets brought back to a clear path, and then it progresses for a while. It's a very organic process.

**MM:**

So I understand, you observed that more from a distance rather than feeling part of it, or that came more later.

**HV:**

Well, in the beginning, I was more involved. But I wasn't always there in Marrakech, so eventually, you follow it from a distance.

**MM:**

Yes, exactly.

**HV:**

In that sense, I didn't have the whole group dynamic all the time with me, and I didn't find that too upsetting, to be honest.

**MM:**

Yes, I understand. And in 2019, you had a panel in Brussels about forming a collective, right?

**HV:**

Yes, about the benefits and added value of it, and that panel came about because Jerome was able to show work there. And it was Brussels, so I was in Amsterdam, which wasn't too far away. So it was also about pragmatism.

**MM:**

Pragmatism.

**HV:**

Yes, pragmatism, bringing together what is relevant at the time and doing that. Yes, I also took Jerome to Tighmert in 2018 to show him Tighmert. At the same time, I was setting up an art space called Bureau Postjesweg. It started in 2016 and was officially opened in 2021, but we were already programming from 2019. I met Jerome in Marrakech. He's from Brussels, and I invited him to come to Bureau Postjesweg to see if we could do something together. The original idea was to connect networks and people I knew in Morocco with Amsterdam via the art space I helped set up here, including green spaces and gardens. Garden Collectives is one of its programmes. It's different from Qanat because it's a programme where I am in charge, whereas Qanat is more organic. The idea was to let those lines resonate through it and do that. Unfortunately, Bureau Postjesweg has just closed.

**MM:**

Oh, really?

**HV:**

Yes, it's too difficult to get funding from the municipality. The district doesn't want to support it. When you have a small art space or project space, you always need various partners. You can't manage with just one fund. It had been running on a voluntary basis for a long time, from our side, from the organisation. Eventually, rent had to be paid to the developer. For a long time, rent was free so we could develop something there, but eventually, something had to come back. And then you just can't manage, and it's over. So a number of things were going on simultaneously. My own art practice started to develop, which evolved

into Marrakech, where I was part of a group of artists. That was Qanat, a community of like-minded individuals with whom you could exchange ideas about what you're actually doing in Morocco as a foreigner. It was an artistic and research-based practice. Sharing a context with others was extremely important for me as an artist to grow, become stronger, and find a language that fits. Because if you're starting something on your own in a different country and culture, it's important to find resonance with peers. That wasn't really happening in Fez.

**MM:**

And the group, because Qanat also had many international people... how was that dynamic? Were they mostly Moroccans or from outside, or a mix?

**HV:**

They were mainly Europeans. Jerome was from Brussels. Yes, I was there. Who else was there?

**MM:**

Thierry?

**HV:**

Thierry? Who is Thierry again?

**MM:**

Thierry Ruf?

Shayma Nader was involved at that time?

**HV:**

Of course, Francesca's partner was there.

**MM:**

George?

**HV:**

Yes, George. The other guy, the storyteller. He had a strong presence. He was originally from Canada or somewhere, but lived in Berlin or somewhere. I'm not sure exactly.

**MM:**

I don't know who that is.

**HV:**

But Jerome ended up in Qanat because he had a residency connected with LE18 and Kunstpunt in Brussels. So through them, he ended up at LE18 and stayed there. Then there was also that Moroccan artist who had a project with a Berber group from a village, where they were campaigning against something with water. He did that project himself but also showed it at LE18. So LE18 became a kind of hub for different projects. Through the LE18 residency, international artists came, some stayed, and others left. Through residencies, you do projects there and invest in a place, which makes it easier to stay and continue.

**MM:**

As you've also kept coming back to Tighmert.

**HV:**

Yes, indeed, that's correct. My Garden Collectives programme emerged from the fact that I was making a film in Fez. I realised how interesting it is to work in a group all the time rather than as a solo artist. The methodology of working in filmmaking is really a different story compared to making art. And because I was still figuring out how to engage with the garden or the relationship between city and green, green, city, garden, landscape, and so on, I wanted to do that with multiple people. That's why I came up with Garden Collectives, to invite other artists to facilitate their projects and collaborate, creating an exchange.

**MM:**

So, was the original intention to have an echo of Qanat in Amsterdam through Garden Collectives, as one of the intentions?

**HV:**

Yes, I'm not sure if it's an echo of Qanat. I see it more as a continuation of my own practice.

**MM:**

Yes, I mean the exchange, so yes.

**HV:**

But there is definitely a resonance with the artists from Qanat, and Garden Collectives could fit into Amsterdam.

**MM:**

And when you talk about the methodology of collective work, is that something you recognise from Qanat or something you encountered in that context? Before we went down a few side paths, you were talking about how different practices came together, and how, in the context

of Marrakech, you found a kind of resonance for your own work. Then we took a side path, but you were really talking about how different projects came together, including Garden Collectives as a line. So, did you first experience this methodology of working collectively there?

**HV:**

No, it came from that film practice. I found it interesting to collaborate with multiple people with different expertise and how exchanges have added value. I don't see Qanat as a collective in the traditional sense of the word.

**MM:**

Yes, I understand.

**HV:**

It's more about projects with a similar focus but in total diversity, with different creators, voices, and how all those sensitivities come together under the banner of Qanat. It mainly works as a kind of flywheel for the artist themselves and the subject they are working on, as it brings together a lot of knowledge, experience, and expertise. It acts as a catalyst and helps with applying for resources and funding to make things possible. So, it has a sort of agency. It's a tool, and in that sense, it has all those different layers.

**MM:**

And also as a kind of institutional logic, as you mentioned in your email about the relationship between institutions and collectives. That the collective, in that sense, almost functions as an institution to be able to apply for funding.

**HV:**

Yes, that's also an element. At the same time, the collective also turns against that. Because they are actively experimenting with other forms of collaboration, co-living, research, and relating to each other. What does art mean in the broader international art world, but also in the Moroccan art scene? There are many processes happening simultaneously that they approach with openness and curiosity. At the same time, they need a layer to access those resources, which requires a form of institutionalisation. Just because you need to be a foundation. Or, I'm not sure, but I don't think Qanat is that now.

**MM:**

Qanat is not that now. Yes, it's actually through Jeanne, through residencies, through the Stimuleringsfonds grant.

**HV:**

Yes, exactly. And before that, they had other grants, European money. But the model under Kibrit, or LE18, or Qanat, and because they are outside Europe, they might have more flexibility in those funding streams, or not? I'm not sure.

**MM:**

Yes, also a certain precariousness in the end.

**HV:**

Yes, yes. I think that's really more for Francesca to discuss. She knows everything about that.

**MM:**

Yes, I've also talked a lot with her about it.

**HV:**

So, what's your impression of that?

**MM:**

Well, part of it is this precariousness in how it functions. It revolves a lot around her and also her influence. The collective ownership that was envisioned around 2020, 2021, seems to have somewhat faded. Yet, it does exist as a reference, especially after documenta. People still use and apply it as part of Qanat. So in that sense, it definitely functions as a platform, but more as something between a platform and a network. It exists now and also partly relies on funding from Dar Bellarj, from LE18. But it has little direct funding at the moment. This sometimes has to do with the fact that Francesca is heavily involved, so when she is busy, not much happens. There are a few people who occasionally initiate things. As a platform or as a brand, it functions as a platform.

**HV:**

Yes, but please don't call it a brand.

**MM:**

No, no, no, no, no. I don't know the right word. Yes, as a reference or as...

**HV:**

No, it's not a label. It is indeed an entity, and it has real agency that it projects. But without Francesca, it would collapse. It has a very generous structure that is welcoming to makers and thinkers who are looking for connection, nourishment, and exchange, as well as professionalisation.

**MM:**

Certainly. I think it has, in the sense that I've seen in the past few months, become more entrenched in Marrakech itself, with more local makers. Although many external makers are still invited through calls, often funded by Dar Bellarj in the context of Ateliers Collectif. But the way it follows forms new opportunities for others to participate in workshops with external facilitators, creating and presenting work in that context. So, in that sense, it continues to function as a platform, particularly for local makers.

However, it remains complex to get a grip on it in the sense that LE18, Dar Bellarj, and Qanat are all independent entities but have become so intertwined that it is sometimes very difficult for outsiders to distinguish what is what, also because we are partly the same people initiating it. Qanat now runs the risk of becoming part of this and sometimes being just a small logo at the bottom of the page, which risks becoming a brand in the sense that you have Ateliers Collectif, and then a logo at the bottom of the page for LE18, Dar Bellarj, and Qanat. It then becomes unclear what exactly Qanat is, or what its contribution is, and why its logo is there.

**HV:**

What is Francesca's main motivation to continue with Qanat?

**MM:**

Good question. I think she is still looking for a physical space for Qanat, or at least from Rim, I understand that she is ultimately seeking to create a physical space where what is researched can be implemented. That is one of the future scenarios. But it's not something I can say with certainty.

**HV:**

It's also a question of whether you want to exert influence with Qanat as a platform itself or through the projects it supports as a platform.

**MM:**

Yes.

**MM:**

The singular projects of those artists are already quite well established, I think. There might be a difference between projects initiated by the artists themselves and those reinforced and further developed by Qanat. At the same time, Qanat also undertakes projects with Dar Bellarjen, connecting and intertwining through artists within the community. So, it operates on different levels. And perhaps it's not always linear. There is diffusion time. But if you're at the helm, it's indeed useful to know how to navigate that. It's also very pragmatic: how do you survive it? And as you say, the commons, Qanat represents a kind of commons, but actually, all commons are those projects practiced in various forms in the locality where they conduct research or work. Walking is something Jerome really does, and it has been adopted in other projects. Walking in an area, following a river. So, it multiplies, gets adopted, and shared.

**MM:**

Yes. You do notice that there is a certain—I'm not sure if 'aesthetic' is the right word because it doesn't quite capture it—but there is a particular method and vision on knowledge production that is an internal factor, and indeed sometimes by chance. For example, this walking is something that often comes back and sometimes by chance as well. In the past two weeks, I participated in a workshop led by Manar, and it also came back there. But that was more on her own initiative, so that's partly coincidence. But I think there is a certain starting point of just going and experiencing that is central, a central starting point or method that recurs, and how exactly to describe that. Because it's not as if everyone goes back to Jerome's work, and yet there are recognizable threads or themes that recur, such as walking, but also making maps and documenting memories.

**HV:**

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

**MM:**

At the same time, there is also a lack of resources to properly archive it. There are sometimes limits of time, energy, money. There is an incredible amount of knowledge produced and documented. But sometimes, to actually make it a knowledge commons, to keep it collectively or make it accessible as a commons, there are sometimes missing resources to properly archive it. It works through, as you say.

**HV:**

Yes, it does. It definitely works through each other's practice. It also works, I think, through the people with whom they work and with whom they work. On a local level, it contributes to a strong cultural and social fabric. And if you look at artists' initiatives throughout history, for example, what they do with Chergui, the magazine. That is something that brings all these things together, right? And also remains traceable.

**MM:**

And that remains permanently accessible. And it is still offered. Yes, yes.

**HV:**

Yes, and you can also trace it after years. So that is also a form of archive, which is really very important.

**MM:**

Certainly, yes. It's not that nothing is being archived, that's not what I mean. It's just this.

**HV:**

No. I understand very well what you mean.

**MM:**

Yes, yes, during my research, I also came across many different places... There are lectures that can be found on their SoundCloud from LE18. Certain works I have to go to the individual websites of the makers. Other things are found in Chergui. And other things are on the website of Qanat itself. Other things on the LE18 website, and so on. So, in that sense. And then there are also many things on Francesca's own Google Drive that are incredibly interesting but not traceable. And you can't blame them for that. It's just that.

**HV:**

And yes. That's also the limits of institutionalisation.

**MM:**

Exactly.

**HV:**

That it's not institutionalised.

**MM:**

Yes, exactly. And at the same time, yes, that's indeed a kind of paradox in that sense.

**HV:**

What is also very special in a country like Morocco is that these kinds of hubs are incredibly important. It's really an oasis where a lot comes together that you can hardly find elsewhere in the country. If you are a researcher or if you talk about culture and developing culture, art development, then it is indeed there.

**MM:**

Have you ever encountered those limits or challenges yourself?

**HV:**

Yes, in Fez I also had to deal with that a lot, and at one point, I started investigating the city to see what is accessible in terms of knowledge and so on. There is simply no information centre about the history of the city.

**MM:**

No.

**HV:**

It's not archived, it's not shown to the residents themselves how special it is where they live, what that heritage actually means to them. Which also results in a very distorted self-image or identity, cultural identity of the residents of that city, but I think also of the whole country, and that's where something is very wrong in the relationship with the West and with the folklore identity that Morocco uses, which is mainly about money, and the blending of French culture, which has also become part of that. Yes, it's really a big mechanism, it's not easy to describe. Yes, there is a lot of urgency and part of the problem also relates to not being seen in your existence in Morocco. And that's why all those artist projects that make stories and memories visible and listen to them. The act of listening, the act of questioning is really very essential, I think. And also underestimating what that does. That's also the story in Tighmert.

**MM:**

Have you experienced that in practice?

**HV:**

Yes, I think so. There is a lot of passive waiting in a society like Morocco. I think also Lebanon, for sure. Because bureaucracy or society just doesn't, as a visitor it's all wonderful, but when you actually live there and you want to get something done. You want to organise something, you need permission, permissions. That's a hell. For sure, you get nothing done.

You only get something done if you have property, so if you're in a house, you can do what you want. Organising something in public or communal space is incredibly complicated. And if you keep running into those invisible walls and losing all your energy on it, that has quite an effect on how you view life, how you relate to each other. It also fosters that kind of not giving much to each other factor, which is also very present in Morocco. Jealousy and corruption, and everything goes through the people you know, if you don't have access to that, yes, then you have a problem, it's very tough. It's the same in Lebanon, but Lebanon has a larger, richer upper layer, I don't know if that's still the case, but there are many bubbles in Lebanon, that was my impression when I was there.

**MM:**

Certainly, yes, yes. Clientelism is even stronger, yes, and is even more fundamental, up to notions of security as in Hezbollah being armed and guaranteeing the security of large communities and at the same time holding the rest of the country in a stranglehold. And thus controlling even more. And thus pitting people against each other. And yes, in that sense, the king is generally very popular in Morocco among most of the population. Although I must say, I have been little in the countryside.

**HV:**

That's the same. Yes, I think it's the same everywhere.

**MM:**

While, precisely in the sense that you see the difference between rich and poor in Lebanon on the street level. If you see an SUV passing by while someone else is rummaging in a trash can, for example. Whereas, from what I understand of Morocco, it's mostly the contrast between cities, population, and countryside. That's where the major divide is, and that people in the countryside feel neglected, marginalised.

**HV:**

But it's also true that many people from the countryside have moved to the cities in various waves. Yes. For example, in Fez, in the Medina, you have that poverty in the city because there were vacant houses. Because wealthy families eventually moved to Casablanca and Marrakech, so there was a lot of vacancy. And then those poor people actually moved into those houses, beautiful houses, in a sort of... not around the city, but in the city, so that's why the Medina is also seen as one big... by other Moroccans who no longer want to live in the Medina. If you are born in the Medina, you want to get out as quickly as possible. Then you

have a better life. That's how the Medina is viewed. That's almost the same in every Medina in Morocco. But indeed, the countryside, and there is also a large difference between the Rif and the south. But indeed, the king in the south has less prestige. That's really different, yes. What I find very special about Qanat or all those places that are dedicated to creating free space outside the general dogma of society and liberalism, is that within that space, room for hospitality and exchange. And camaraderie can actually arise. And at the same time, it also questions how you should do that, so there is a kind of potential. We see a space of potential that is intangible, but it is maintained by the people who relate to it and contribute, put in more energy, and that is a kind of virtual space that is super precious. That's what it's about, that's what it's about as far as Qanat is concerned, and. Yes. And especially all those alternative places.

Yes, Caravan Tighmert is really a different story.

**MM:**

Yes? Well, that was something I was curious about beforehand. I don't have a full grasp of it. How do you see Tighmert, ultimately? Is it partially connected, or does it come from the same infrastructure? No.

**HV:**

No, as you've probably heard, it was set up by the artist. What's his name again, who grew up there? The guy, about my age, a smaller artist. He started it. He initially invited Carlos to come and see Tighmert. It would be great if we could do something for the residents of Tighmert. They had just had that flood. And because Carlos has a kind of love for the desert, for Morocco, and enjoys driving his Volvo out there, he also knows some people in the cultural world. So he, together with Ahmed, who facilitated locally, would go there every year to see if they could invite people.

**MM:**

I mean, is it intertwined in the sense that the same people pass through? For example, the people who go on residency in Tighmert often also come through LE18 or eventually return to LE18. Is there a sector or scene connection?

**HV:**

Yes, that's quite possible, and that's because there's just not much in Morocco. And since Carlos knows LE18 well, it's easy for connections to be made. So if you've been to Tighmert,

you can easily show your work at LE18. That link is quite evident. And there aren't that many artists in Morocco who work in that way.

**MM:**

That's why it feels like a small scene, which is part of the same network.

**HV:**

Yes, that's true. And then you have LE18, L'Observatoire, Le Cube, Appartement 22, which are somewhat different. And in Tangier, they have good connections too. So it's a very small group of people. Very manageable.

**MM:**

And yet, there are quite a few people involved over time.

**HV:**

Yes, indeed.

**MM:**

I'll keep an eye on the time. I don't know if you need to go. We've been talking for almost exactly an hour.

**HV:**

That's fine. Do you have more specific questions?

**MM:**

Yes, there's one more thing. You touched on it earlier, but I was curious how you view it yourself. In your own film, you mentioned in an interview about your film being a cartography of memories. Or I can bring up the specific quote.

**HV:**

My God, in general terms, it was this: "This research unfolded a cartography of spaces and practices linked through the stories and memories of the people I met in Fez about the disappearing gardens of the city." Yes, I found that particularly interesting because it relates to themes I've seen frequently within Qanat, such as cartographies and memories. I was curious about what you meant by that, or how you understand it, or what you interpret as a cartography, especially linked to the stories and memories of people.

**HV:**

It grew organically, but it comes from, if your perspective is spatial, how the cultural, social,

and spiritual spaces in a city interact, and how the garden, so to speak, represents all those lines coming together as a heterotopia. The garden reflects the surrounding culture in a microcosm within the garden itself, in the sense of the memories of the garden's inhabitants, how it was used in the past, what function it had, what meaning it held, and how people grew up in the city. What the relationship with those gardens was. But also, the garden as a metaphor or representation of something else. For instance, there's a whole genre of Malhoun poetry. Are you familiar with Malhoun?

**MM:**

Malhoun?

**HV:**

It's a traditional form of poetry and singing in Morocco, quite old-fashioned to younger generations but rich in language and imagination. Nature and gardens are often used as a forum to discuss other topics like politics, local politics, love stories, or the relationship with the divine. Then you have Malhoun, and another genre called Andalus, which is more associated with the aristocracy. Andalus comes from Andalusia and garden architecture there. Fez is partially influenced by this. There's an older part of Fez, the Medina, and a later part built by immigrants from Spain. So the garden architecture relates more to how it was built in places like Alhambra. But that's a bit too extensive.

So my research method was to approach people I met on the street, but also to knock on doors and ask, "Hello, I'm looking for gardens." Remarkably, this worked quite well. I also connected through friends of friends, and eventually, I built relationships with several people in the city and gathered their perspectives on the gardens, their way of life, and tried to capture those dimensions and meanings.

As the stories and memories grew, I developed a fairly rich and varied archive. I made a selection and included that in the film. In the film, it's not just about letting people speak and tell their stories. Their viewpoint and the story they provide are integrated into the narrative of the city. The main thread in the film is water, as it represents the spiritual aspect of the city but is removed or cut off from the city itself. The Medina is like a large narrative; for example, a house is geometrically perfect inside, beautifully arranged and decorated. The public space is organic. The rivers became the main streets because economic activity took place along them. They then started building houses, which are entirely arranged, while the

rest remains an organic whole, like in the Medina of Marrakech. Fez is even more concentrated due to its valley location. Have you been to Fez?

**MM:**

No, unfortunately not.

**HV:**

So, there's a contrast between the organic and the geometric, and how water is fundamental to it. Through interviews and conversations, that contrast took shape and was filled in. The film explores the interaction between what you don't see and what you do see. What you don't see are memories and spiritual dimensions, such as people communicating with spirits or the spirits of water. The garden as a metaphor also represents something else. These are all those virtual layers touched by the garden.

**MM:**

Yes, yes, yes. I understand what you mean.

**HV:**

No, and in that sense it's a cartography of spaces, stories, and memories. Because, yes, it grew and it grew where there was still life, bringing everything back. But I don't have it. I keep trying to unpack and showcase another piece when I have a presentation or an exhibition.

**MM:**

Yes, these are also concepts that reappear in Garden Collectives.

**HV:**

Yes, Garden Collectives, because it mainly took place in Nieuw-West, Amsterdam Nieuw-West, focuses on the context of the garden city. And the specific history of Nieuw-West as a modernist city, a garden city designed in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s by the architect Van Eesteren, as an expansion of Amsterdam. Everything is designed according to modernist principles, with an idealism of a lot of greenery, open space, and affordable housing for people. In the meantime, there is a large Moroccan and Turkish community living there, and with gentrification, people from the city centre are moving there because there are still houses for sale. At the same time, there are refugee projects, hotels, and very luxurious apartments, so it has become an eclectic mix of different cultures and lifestyles within the framework of the garden city. From the perspective of modernism, because you can still see that in the street pattern and the parks, but what happens inside has many modifications.

**MM:**

So it's actually the complete opposite of Fez?

**HV:**

Yes, a bit, yes. But there, with Garden Collectives, I was looking for how we could converse with each other despite the differences. Through projects by artists who stimulate imagination, creating new spaces by sharing stories and memories, thereby adding a new layer to the city itself. If you do a performance somewhere in the park, and I walk by again in three weeks, that park will also have changed. So yes, you experience the park differently and you always carry that with you. That's part of what I did with Garden Collectives.

And now I'm still exploring how I can take that further because it's very much tied to the place. What I'm doing in Tighmert is still a bit in development because I'm trying to figure out how to contribute to the community. Not just because in Fez there was also an urgency due to the past not being seen or documented, but it wasn't as urgent as in Tighmert. So that's also complex because what are you actually imposing as an outsider in a crisis, working with people who are in a very dire situation? So, in the past six months, we tried to realise the water pump together with Ahmed. With subsidy applications, it didn't work out, so now we need to look further.

**MM:**

Yes, but a water pump is just a temporary fix in the end.

**HV:**

Yes, but it is essential, isn't it?

**MM:**

It is indeed difficult.

**HV:**

When it comes to water, there's almost nothing more essential than water.

**MM:**

No, certainly, certainly.

**HV:**

But I still find it complicated, so I'm working on it. And I need to write it up much better on the website. It's actually more urgent, and I'm not yet very good at elaborating on it like Francesca can with Qanat. I need to do that too. It will be much stronger.

**MM:**

Well, I got the impression.

**HV:**

You have an impression.

**MM:**

I did a thorough search on your website. There's a lot to find. Thank you for your time. Is there anything I might have missed?

**HV:**

I have no idea; I'll read it again. When does it need to be finished?

**MM:**

By the end of August

**HV:**

Oh right. So, enjoy writing over the summer. Yes, exactly. And how many interviews do you have? Oh, that's manageable. It seems quite manageable.

**MM:**

Ultimately seven. Yes, I had hoped to speak to more people, but it's really challenging, sometimes due to language, sometimes due to busy schedules. Everyone is now spread out across the world. But yes, it's enough, definitely enough to work with. I would have liked more different perspectives, but this is what I could manage within this timeframe.

**HV:**

What is your main question again?

**MM:**

To be honest, I'm not clear on it. I started with the question of how Qanat puts the notions of the commons into practice. But I've discovered that the concept of the commons is often mentioned in their public discourse but scarcely appears in conversations. So, in that sense, I'm not sure how relevant the main question still is. So yes, it's a matter of the sub-questions, like what it means to organise as a collective. And then some, well, the method, mapping out the methods they use in knowledge production, and how concepts like cartography and memory come into play, and what significance that has in the Moroccan context. But I'm still grappling with that, and in broader terms, it's a struggle to determine how appropriate it is to

talk about water, as it becomes increasingly politically sensitive. Certain political discussions that happen internally, I'm not sure if it's a good idea to document that.

**HV:**

Will your research be published or will it?

**MM:**

That's, perhaps it's better that, at least for now, it ends up in a thesis archive. I can't make it accessible, and the management, if I want to publish it elsewhere, can share it there. So, I think that's how it will be. There's no risk in any way. Although, yes, the chance is small that a master's thesis will be spotted, but still, you never know.

**HV:**

Maybe you could also write an article based on your thesis.

**MM:**

Exactly, I'd like to do that indeed

**HV:**

Because then you already have a rich foundation to draw from. That's quite interesting.

**MM:**

There's a vast amount to draw from, yes. That's interesting, just need to explore which platforms to use.

**HV:**

At the moment, you're actually mapping things out for yourself. What is the framework you're tackling? What is the logic behind it? That's essentially the job, to uncover that.

**MM:**

Yes. Yes, yes, and yes.

**HV:**

Have you also spoken with Jeanne van Heeswijk?

**MM:**

I also emailed her, but unfortunately didn't get a response.

**HV:**

But try writing again, maybe persist a bit, or just visit Gemaal op Zuid, and see if you can talk to people there and work your way in.

**MM:**

Indeed, what I'm doing now. Formally, I'm delivering something by the end of August, but also what comes after that. Well, my interest will certainly continue. Good, now it's a relatively short time that I'm here in the Netherlands.

**HV:**

What's interesting about Jeanne is that she works in structures. So, if she can implement those structures in groups, you don't need to be constantly overseeing it. And that's how she can manage projects in various places around the world, it's remarkable how she achieves that. But it's because she works within structures. For Francesca, it's been a long quest to figure out how to lead Qanat. She didn't want to position herself as the director, but you can't just leave it to the group, otherwise nothing happens.

**MM:**

Yes, I would have loved to speak with Jeanne.

**HV:**

She does it truly as an artist. It's really her practice. Very special, a lot of admiration for her.

**MM:**

And, have you worked with her before?

**HV:**

Yes, well, not directly worked with her, but have spoken with her. I also investigate how she does that and read her texts, trying to understand how she manages it. But yes, Francesca knows the most about it among us. She's there.

**MM:**

Yes, that's been, well, crucial moments, that period at BAK in Utrecht and also in Marrakech itself.

**HV:**

But Francesca is still there, so that's very good. We're always afraid she might do something else.

**MM:**

Yes, well, absolutely. In the last four months, she took on a task to organise an academic conference.

**HV:**

Yes. That has already happened, right? Were you there? I was thinking of going as well.

**MM:**

Yes, yes, yes, definitely. It was a very interesting, very beautiful conference, and I think, from what I heard from participants, quite unique, with a lot of additional programming, and intertwined with Dar Bellarj, LE18, where there was also programming, not just at the university. It was very rich and beautiful, with many Indigenous people from around the world, so not just academics. It was really in line with Francesca's interests. But yes, it was for, not as an autonomous curator, but commissioned by the Global Diversity Foundation, so a different route than usual. Speaking of doing something different.

**HV:**

Yes, yes, yes, but that could indeed lead to new things emerging from it.

**MM:**

Yes, certainly. It's a remarkable person. A very inspiring person.

**MM:**

Okay. Thank you.

**HV:**

Have you got enough?

**MM:**

Certainly.