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“Partir Pour Rester?”

To Leave in Order to Stay? The Role of Absence and  
Institutions in Accumulation by Pastoralists in  
Southern Tunisia

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PHD IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

**“PARTIR POUR RESTER?” - TO LEAVE IN ORDER TO STAY?**

**THE ROLE OF ABSENCE AND INSTITUTIONS IN ACCUMULATION BY PASTORALISTS IN SOUTHERN TUNISIA**

SUMMARY

Pastoral economies are often portrayed as operating in isolated and marginal spaces, where absence, as a result of emigration, is said to threaten pastoral production with implications on agrarian change. By using absence as a lens, this research unravels the political-economic implications of dynamics of accumulation for pastoralists in southern Tunisia’s drylands. This research asks: How do different forms of absence explain processes of capital accumulation within pastoral communities?

“Partir pour Rester”? (to leave in order to stay?), focuses on the relational dimensions of who leaves, who stays, and why. By describing how different pastoralists manage (im)mobilities to sustain multilocal capital accumulation strategies, and by using pastoral institutions as an entry point to analyse how livestock, land and labour relations of production are organized within the pastoral community, this research highlights the more flexible qualities of accumulation and differentiation.

Through a qualitative study, visual methods and digital ethnography in Douiret, a mountainous community in southern Tunisia that identifies as being Amazigh or Arabized Berbers, this research finds that different forms of absence-presence facilitate differential patterns of accumulation. A key aspect that emerged from fieldwork is how different forms of absence-presence are mediated by informal institutions that operate through a series of commoning practices. For example, the *khlat* emerges as a pastoral institution that enables flexible accumulation by pooling herds, sharing herding labour costs, providing alternative herding labour arrangements, and legitimizing access to a mosaic of pastureland.

In conclusion, peoples’ mobilities and adaptive/autonomous informal institutions shape and are shaped by livestock’s liquid logic, a trait of livestock (as a form of capital) that tracks variability. These intersecting features explain how reliability is being generated over the long term, and across demographic lifecycles in Douiret. I argue therefore, that more dynamic theorizations of pastoral production are needed to highlight how pastoralism persists in drylands and as such this thesis challenges overly deterministic accounts of agrarian change.

*To all the “fatalistes optimistes”*



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## Glossary

*Acheba* – contracts of exchange or renting of land for grazing (as a form of gleaning)

*Al-Baraka* – blessing

*Arch* – clan

*Balgha* – herder's walking shoes

*Barzakh* – a place between hell and heaven, where the soul resides after death. In Islamic eschatology, al-Barzakh is generally viewed as the barrier between the physical and spiritual worlds

*Çaheb* – the shepherd is his master's çaheb. This word, which in other contexts means "companion" or "friend", must be understood here as a kind of euphemism hiding the idea of "client"

*Cheulh* – Amazigh dialect from Morocco

*Chotts* – salt lakes

*Derja* – Tunisian Arabic dialect

*El Fassa* – Alfalfa

*El houl* – annual herding labour remuneration

*Erlaya* – in-kind payments

*Gasr* – also *ghorfa*, family or collective granaries

*Gdel* – resting sites of pastureland

*Hojja* – clientelist contracts

*Jbeili* – from the mountains

*Jessour* – hydro-agricultural systems in drylands

*Jezz* – sheep shearing season

*Keri* – literally tenant

*Khammes* – a sharecropper who retains a fifth of the produce

*Khlata* – literally mixing

*Ksours* – literally castle though the term generally refers to a Berber fortified village

*Marghoum* – a large patterned carpet woven by women and inherited through marriage

*Mogharsa* – a contract between the landowner and the one that plants the olives and takes care of the planting and maintenance until the trees are productive when the produce is then split

*Sareh* – herder

*Shirka* – partnership

*Tabia* – dyke or barrage

*Twiza* – collective labouring system

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Pastoral economies are often characterized as operating in isolated and marginal spaces, where absence, as a result of emigration, is a prominent feature of rural economies. Absences, it is argued, threaten pastoral production with implications on agrarian change. This research seeks to unravel the political economic implications of absence by asking: **How do different forms of absence explain processes of capital accumulation within pastoral communities?**

“Partir pour Rester?”<sup>1</sup>, to “leave in order to stay”, is an enquiry into the paradox of leaving and staying. It captures the relational aspects of absence. One may leave in order to stay, or leave in order for others to stay, or leave in order to stay later. Implicit in the dialectic of leaving, as a form of absence, in relation to staying or returning, as a form of presence, is the process of migrating. The centrality of absence in explaining change depends of course on context, but also more generally on the implicit assumptions we hold about the way people function in relation to others and place or space. This thesis is also about unravelling the assumptions we hold onto about absence and re-imagining the political economic consequences of doing so.

This dissertation focusses on Douiret, a community in southern Tunisia that is largely defined by absence. With a total population of around ninety thousand, only between seven hundred and one thousand live more permanently in Douiret. Its long migration history, some say, is due to its difficult arid terrains.

The way in which absence transforms relations of production in Douiret is at the core of this thesis. My interest in the non-material aspects of absence relates to how physical non-presence is mediated, and how it influences pastoral production in contexts of environmental variability. Livestock require a daily presence and is labour intensive posing a practical challenge for households that also depend on the herd for their livelihoods. How does the absence of one, or several members of the family influence the way the herd is managed? This is related to the question of how livestock owners position themselves in highly dynamic pastoral settings with ever-changing dynamics of resource-scarcity today. Mobility, social institutions, and agrarian production therefore remain central themes to grasping urban and agrarian change in the face of diverse and changing uncertainties.

This research is inspired by prior explorations on absenteeism with pastoralists in other parts of the world, and my longstanding connection to Tunisia since 2013. I depart from an understanding that pastoral livelihoods are often constructed between different spaces, and as a result, the political economic aspects of who leaves, who stays, and why, are important to explain how different people manage mobilities to sustain

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase was mentioned as a passing comment by one of the respondents (A1), that stuck with me throughout the research. I have added a question mark, to account for the fact that it is not a statement, a state, but rather a way of enquiring. This is also the title of research conducted by others who have in similar ways enquired on multilocal dynamics (see Cortes, 2000; Fréguin-Gresh et al., 2015)

capital accumulation strategies in southern Tunisia's drylands. The way spatially stretched relations influence livestock accumulation is particularly relevant as it brings to light agrarian themes of accumulation and differentiation, typically covered in "peasant studies", from a pastoral perspective and therefore opens up some important new avenues of enquiry.

### 1.1. Overview of the Argument

After introducing the research questions in this chapter, in chapter two I elaborate how these questions have emerged from my own reading of debates that look at the political economic aspects of migration/mobility, institutions, and dynamic theorizations of agrarian change. In chapter three, I draw on empirical material to present Douiret and define key moments in its history to contextualize transformations in pastoral production in Douiret, within southern Tunisia's political economic context. Here I explore how geographies of identity, early migration through schooling and the evolution of patron-client relations emerge as important features of agrarian change in Douiret. In chapter four, I situate the study more broadly through my own personal research journey, and describe the methodological approaches I used, hinting at the contribution of this thesis and my interest in it. This first part lays the ground for the following three core empirical chapters that form the building blocks to the thesis argument.

In chapter five, I answer the questions: **Who is absent? Who is present? How are different forms of absence relevant to accumulating capital in the pastoral community? How does absence influence class, gender and wealth differentials in the course of daily practice?**

The short answer to these questions is that who is absent is in relation to who is present, and this has different implications for the ways livestock is accumulated and maintained. Through various cases, I focus on the intermittent, returning and asynchronous forms of absence. In turn, I use the absence-presence<sup>2</sup> lens to highlight the ways these mobility practices, include different ways of being present, and explain multilocal accumulation. As families are both disaggregated and connected across multiple spaces, the gender, class, age and kin dimensions also acquire multiscalar analytical dimensions. This raises further questions on how accumulation strategies are dislocated across time and space. For example, how does pluri-activity (and off-farm income), entering and exiting pastoral production, splitting, mixing, or pooling herds, and sharing common grazing land influence herd growth?

In understanding different accumulation strategies, absence remains a key theme in peoples' mobilities. Douiret's migration history reveals how absence is sustained by extensive social networks and processes of aggregation in specific loci. But beyond the family network, how are absences mediated to allow for accumulation? What forms of organized social networks are relevant to livestock accumulation? These

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term absence-presence to emphasize the relationality of the two intersecting, but apparently oppositional, terms

questions are addressed in chapter six where I ask: **How do livestock management institutions help to maintain or multiply herds, and accumulate capital “back home”?**

For pastoralists in Douiret, the *khlata*, literally mixing in Arabic, emerged as an entry point to analyse livestock, land and labour relations of production in the Dahar mountain ranges. The *khlata* is an institution that operates through the pooling (or mixing) of livestock of different livestock owners, the sharing of herding labour costs, and the pooling of other endowments, such as pastureland. By understanding how the *khlata* is embedded in changing economic, environmental and social contexts, and by seeing the *khlata* as an autonomous and adaptive assemblage of relations, opportunities for relationship and resilience become visible. The *khlata* is autonomous in the sense that it not only helps maintain or multiply herds, but it does so outside of kin relations, and outside of state-control. Most importantly it allows for a heterogeneous group of individuals to flexibly accumulate livestock. This would suggest that in drylands, or contexts of high variability, pastoral institutions that operate through redistributive commoning processes, may have slower livestock accumulation rates and may not be considered to be as profitable as individualized herding arrangements, yet they are more inclusive of diverse rationalities and can better track various forms of variability.

In sum these two empirical chapters on migration and institutions, explain how livestock accumulation includes multilocal aspects, where I argue that peoples’ mobility is key, and show how various forms of absences and livestock accumulation objectives are mediated by pastoral institutions. Through these chapters it becomes increasingly clear that livestock accumulation patterns in Douiret are non-linear, multi-local, and contingent on other accumulation dynamics. These, I argue, are the characteristics of flexible accumulation inherent to managing livestock in Douiret’s drylands.

In chapter seven, I explore the implications of this for agrarian change. I ask: **How are livestock, as a form of capital, linked to different households’ strategies of accumulation?** The herd can drastically and responsively expand, contract or split as people move in and out of livestock keeping, as fodder or meat prices increase/decrease, as land tenure patterns change, or as aspirations change along a continuum of seeing livestock as subsistence and/or commodity. In this sense, livestock capital follows a liquid logic that enables multiple balances of (re)production between the herd and the household. This explains flexible dynamics of accumulation in the trajectory of building herds. Through an understanding of livestock’s liquid logic; people’s mobilities and adaptive informal institutions reveal how options are created and reliability is generated in drylands.

Overall, this thesis argues that multi-local, non-linear and contingent characteristics of accumulation typical of pastoral systems in drylands differ from accounts of accumulation and differentiation in agrarian studies, particularly those modelled solely on crops and fields. The pastoral perspective offers dynamic theorizations

of agrarian change and challenges the idea that pastoralism is an isolated, rural enterprise that it is destined to disappear and shows how in fact it remains at the centre of much wider, and complex relationships that are established over years, and indeed across space and generations. Ultimately, the absence-presence lens shifts the analytical focus from what is apparent to the more invisible with implications on the way we understand how people relate to place, and in this thesis, livestock. In chapter eight I bring these elements together, by focusing on the theoretical contributions of understanding pastoral production in context of extreme variability. Absence through mobility, institutions, and flexible accumulation are all aspects that explain how pastoralists in Douiret generate reliability, helping to conceive the persistence of livestock-keeping in such “marginal” spaces. As I conclude in chapter nine, this has practical implications for understanding pastoralism. Here I focus on the policy implications for migration and rangeland governance in Tunisia, given the political-economic changes and context since the so-called revolution in 2011.

## Chapter 2. Locating Absence, Pastoral Institutions and Accumulation in the Literature

### 2.1. Introduction

In answering the overall thesis question I draw inspiration from several strands of literature, some of which intersect. I begin with the migration literature, in particular transnational framings that have opened up ways of thinking about space. By exploring the evolution of theorizations on return migration, I extend these to explore the evolving notion of absence. Here I bring to light the analytical utility of the absence-presence framing by exploring diverging views on absenteeism in pastoral settings. The respatialization of absence-presences, through mobility, result in the reorganization of relations within and outside of the household. In section 2.3. I turn to the institutional aspects in understanding how relations are organized and mediated and how this influences rural transformations and pastoral development. Institutional theorizations relevant to understanding the political economy of pastoral production. Here the role of informal institutions, as mediating absence and facilitating accumulation is largely left out of contemporary agrarian analysis in pastoral contexts, specifically in the Maghreb. This is a significant gap, because when understood as assemblages of relations and spaces of negotiation, pastoral institutions hold analytical value in parsing livestock, land and labour relations which are key for critical approaches to agrarian analysis. In section 2.4 I explore how absence-presence is linked to multilocal accumulation dynamics. I turn to the literature that articulates the organization of production and capital accumulation across multilocal scales. Here I adopt more flexible framings of accumulation, as they are more inclusive of the non-binary, fluid and multiscale conceptualizations of absence. Here I show why this approach is important for understanding contemporary agrarian contexts of southern Tunisia, especially given particular migration dynamics that characterize



mountainous communities like Douiret. By including the intersecting role of absence-presence and institutional processes, this research explores the persistence of the peasantry within capitalist dynamics.

## 2.2. Theorizing Absence

In the same way as theorising connections between places has evolved into relational and multi-scalar conceptualisations (Glick Schiller, 2018), I argue, that the notion of absence also has to be read with this key (see Callon & Law, 2004; Cortes & Pesche, 2013). In this thesis, I use the notion of “Partir pour Rester” to capture the relational aspect of the act of leaving and the act of staying or returning, and the interaction between these acts. It speaks of both being here and there at the same time, and how the here is embedded in the there. Implicit in this dialectic is the process of migrating, the creation, of a “third space” with political economic implications on production, reproduction, social transformation, and the way pastoralists perceive, live and conceive space (Karplus & Meir, 2013). Since the early 1990s migration studies have begun to challenge the assumptions of migration as being uni-directional, permanent and caused by push-pull factors. These debates have sought to bridge migration theory binaries such as sending–receiving, origin–destination, modern–traditional, Global North–South or core–periphery (see Bastia & Skeldon, 2020, p. 44). The bridging of binary thinking has helped to account for the growing diversity of migratory categories (ranging from economic migrants to refugees and asylum seekers) and has challenged the “methodological nationalism” for example, that comes with the intellectual orientation that assumes that nation-states can be equated with the boundaries of society and therefore serve as the primary unit in historical, economic, political and cultural analysis (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). The term “nexus” was introduced into the migration-development studies vocabulary to signal the two-way relationship between both transnational connections between migrants’ multiple locations of settlement and their homelands, and the implications on development (Glick Schiller, 2020). The relational understandings of mobility and production find solid ground in these literatures, where international migration theories advance the idea of “the return” as a conceptual approach to assess how resources are mobilised back home (King et al., 1983). Considered as a subprocess of international migration, return migration has been subject to various approaches that offer contrasting sets of propositions stemming from the different assumptions in for example neoclassical economics, the new economics of labour migration (NELM), structuralism, transnationalism and social network theory (Mendola, 2006). As summarized in Table 1, and further discussed in this section, the evolving theorizations on space, migration, and “the return” are useful in locating the evolving notion of absence.

| <b>Theoretical Lens</b>     | <b>Neoclassical</b>  | <b>Migration-Development Nexus / New Economics of Labour Migration</b>  | <b>Transnational</b>   |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Logic</b>                | Binary   | Relational  | Transformative   |
| <b>Theorizing on Space</b>  | Separate<br>HERE OR THERE  | Related<br>HERE AND THERE   | Co-constituted<br>HERE EMBEDDED IN THERE   |
| <b>Theorizing Migration</b> | Migration as permanent objective, through “push and pull” factors and individual rationalities     | Migration as project, through mutual relationalities where remittances for example connect to place of origin | Migration as co-constructed through social networks where mobility and immobility are co-constituted |
| <b>Theorizing Return</b>    | Return as failure  | Return always possible  | Return as periodical and a process that transforms   |
| <b>Theorizing Absence</b>   | Absence is a structural separation from place of origin where non-presence is bridged by returning | Absence is temporary where non-presence is part of the strategy   | Absence is a form of connection through multiple, everyday enactments of presence                    |

*Table 1: Locating the evolving notion of absence*

The neoclassical approach to return migration argues that return occurs as a consequence of migrants’ failed experiences abroad. This stems from the assumption that migrants as individuals act to maximise their earnings and the duration of their stay abroad to achieve permanent settlement and family reunification, and therefore return cannot but be motivated by a failed migration experience, in terms of expected earnings, employment and duration (Cassarino, 2004). This approach interprets migration as being marked by push and pull forces, where the difference between “here” and “there” explain factors for migration. Wage differentials, better-worse economic opportunities, safer-dangerous environments and so on, explain migration as a more permanent objective. In this way, people are either “here” or “there”, and absence is conceived as a feature of the migration project that separates the migrant from place of origin by virtue of the physicality of permanence, where non-presence can only be bridged by returning.

The new economics of labour migration theorizations (NELM), view return migration as the outcome of rational and intended strategies, where the family or the household units emerge as being significant to understanding migrant choices and aspirations. The NELM view shifts the focus of migration theory from individual rationalities to mutual relationalities (see Cassarino, 2004, p.3), where remittances are seen as the channel through which migrants are connected to their place of origin. In terms of development theory, remittances are part and parcel of a strategy aimed at diversifying the resources of the household to

compensate for the various social, economic and political risks in home countries. This approach interprets migration more fluidly and sees the absence of migrants and being more temporary since the continuous flow of financial capital marks an attachment to the family back home, and thus an eventual return is always foreseeable. This approach considers migrants as potential agents of change through remittances (De Haan & Rogaly, 2002), absence is therefore a necessary strategic feat to support livelihoods back home. In this framing people can be both here and there, where remittances, are seen as a nexus.

Both these frameworks are however primarily concerned with how the migrants' or families' decisions are tied to economic rationales of production and tend to isolate these decisions from their social and political contexts at home. More advanced NELM theorizations for example argue that assessing how remittances influence the propensity for families to invest in rural areas needs to include an understanding of access, quality and distribution to land (Taylor, 1999). By overlooking the factors that are at the origin of structural inequalities, suggesting that migrants have a choice to be absent, and that this is based on rationalized economic incentives is limiting. Empirical findings and theoretical insights produced by anthropologists, sociologists and social geographers have contributed greatly to challenging such assumptions of strategies and incentives (McDowell & De Haan, 1997) and how to think about space (Massey, 2005; Reeves, 2011a). One argument, for example, is that the right to be mobile is increasingly class-specific and selective, where incentives and strategies are therefore tied to processes of social differentiation and politics (Castles, 2010). The transnational securitization of border controls and international cooperation on migration control means that most people are increasingly restricted and have neither the economic resources nor the civil status to move. This suggests that how "the return" is experienced today, and how local power relations, traditions and values influence the returnees' capacity to appear as actors of change, are constantly shifting (Cassarino, 2004, p.31). The continued engagement with class, gender and kin differentiations, as embedded in particular political economies, are therefore important elements in explaining who moves and why, and who is absent and why. However, these need to include the importance of family ties and social networks. This is the effort that transnationalists have engaged with, in part, in order to question the more pessimistic views held by core/periphery dichotomies that shift the blame on the national and international dimensions of development which are based on assumptions of path-dependency. In part also to overcome limitations from an economic and (challenging) remittance-based understanding of migration and development.

Transnationalists began to theorize on place connections, by viewing attachments as enactments that migrants form to multiple places, emphasizing how periodical and regular visits to home countries serve the purpose of maintaining and developing linkages (Basch et al., 2020). Relationships are viewed as being continuously adapted and co-constructed, where transnational perspectives emphasise on the agency of migrants who maintain these relations across space. This offers a way to describe socio-spatial dynamics and processes of simultaneity and identity formation that transcend boundaries, at scales other than that of the

nation-state, a concept further emphasised through the term translocalism, or translocality (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). This is relevant when understanding dynamics of accumulation across multiple localities, where identity and mobility become important faces of the relational aspects imbued in social capital (see Raghuram, 2020). From a geographical conceptualization of space and human relations, this gives rise to notions of double identities, third spaces, deterritorialization of citizenship, and bordering practices. These conceptualizations provide another way of “thinking about the middle” both literally by considering the geographical middle, the in-between places and, transit zones in the migration trajectory, and more figuratively by theorizing migration through processes of simultaneity and transformation. For example, by recognising the multiplicity of boundaries and looking at the enactment of everyday bordering practices, the border is no longer seen as a physical entity, but as socially constructed through processes that simultaneously include and exclude (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019); or as Braidotti (2011) states, “deterritorialization process results in the relocation of what used to be called difference and of the dialectical relationship between self and others” (p.15). These views for example, offer another way of thinking about how borders define development policy design (Collyer, 2020), and biopolitics (Braidotti, 2011), and open up discussions on the politics of mobility where Cresswell (2010) for example, suggest how the movement of some depends upon the immobility of others.

It is in this light, that transnational views emphasize how the here is embedded in the there (and vice versa) and how these produce a third space where being absent is also about the multiple ways in which presence can be enacted. This can be appreciated, when absence is seen not as a separation but a connection through diverse practices of negotiated mobility. Therefore, in the same way that Mezzadra and Neilson (2008) posit border as an epistemic framework, and method to reassess concepts such as citizenship and sovereignty, I propose to use absence-presence as a lens to reassess how mobility practices are articulated into productive strategies of accumulation.

As this brief excursion shows, the evolution of theoretical framings in migration studies advance a variety of ways of looking at and framing absence and social transformation. What are the implications of these framings for understanding absenteeism in pastoral settings?

#### 2.1.1 Absentees and Absenteeism in Pastoral Settings

The literature that explores whether absence is good/bad for crop cultivation or livelihoods differs in its conclusions from region to region, (see for example (Wikan, 1982). In the pastoral literature, as I will show, the idea that absentees are absent, distant and part of an elite, obscures other types of absentees that are differently present, next door and can be of any “class”. A brief review on the literature on absenteeism, brings to light the analytical utility of the absence-presence framing I propose for understanding contemporary pastoral production.

The first strand of the pastoral literature, mostly based on research in African pastoral societies, has advanced the view that absentee livestock owners control significant amounts of livestock wealth, employing herding labour and controlling land and resources (Little, 1985; Shanmugaratnam et al., 1992). It is argued that contract herding arrangements often foster resource management practices that accelerate rangeland degradation (for example (Galaty, 1992) on Kenya; (Turner & Hiernaux, 2008) on Niger; (Bassett, 1994) on Côte d'Ivoire). The focus is on how absentee owners use their economic and political power to gain (exclusive) access to common pool grazing resources and, in the process, undermine institutions that regulate use of, and access to these resources. This is contributing, to unequal redistribution of capital (livestock), the mismanagement and further fragmentation of common pool grazing resources (Little), inequality (Bassett), redistribution of resources and livestock ownership structures (Bonfiglioli, 1985), and exploitative labour practices (Thompson & Homewood, 2002; Turner, 1999). These narratives of dispossession, speculation and destruction are certainly important, though they do not address the everyday forms of dispossession that occur in the everyday management of livestock through less visible forms of absenteeism. On the other hand, these dominant narratives of dispossession obscure how absentees may in fact support, rather than erode, rangeland governance.

From this perspective, understanding what is meant by absenteeism and absentees in the literature and the development discourse and what absenteeism represents locally becomes important. Korf et al. (2015) highlight that capitalists in pastoral systems can look quite different from the usual suspects of the land-grab literature: “not foreign and corporate, but indigenous and pastoral” (p. 898). They argue that indigenous commodification that has been incentivized by the adoption of more sedentary lifestyles by pastoral “elites”, have in turn contributed to the “unmaking” of the pastoral commons (Beyene & Korf, 2012 as cited in Korf et al., 2015, p.885). By following stereotyped assumptions of who absentees are, underlying and often hidden dynamics of reinforcing processes of commodification, accumulation, dispossession, sedentarization, and social differentiation, remain in the shadow.

The second strand, represented in more recent literature, obliquely challenges negative assumptions of absenteeism and the impact on rangeland governance and livestock management, by showing that absentees sustain pastoral production (Fernández-Giménez, 2002; Moritz et al., 2011, 2015). This literature showcases that absentees and herders may have complementary relations (Fernández-Giménez, 1999), and that absentee owners are far from being disengaged even if absent (Moritz et al., 2015, p. 150), and often remain bound by social contracts (Moritz et al., 2011). In Mongolia, for example, Fernández-Giménez (1999) finds that absentee-herder relations are complementary relationships, meeting new form of subsistence, in which the ownership-herding labour relation is based on ethnic family ties. In Cameroon, Moritz et al. (2015) examine the impact of herding contracts on pastoral mobility and management of common-pool grazing resources. The study finds that most of the owners are pastoralists, or retired, ex-pastoralists who entrust

their livestock to be kept in village herds and share the same ethos regarding common pool resources as other pastoralists. For example, absentees acted in ways beneficial to the pastoral communities, using their economic and political capital to advocate for the protection of transhumance corridors or ensure vaccination for the village herd. This is not surprising since absentees share the same problems of diseases, insecurity, and agricultural encroachment on pastoral infrastructure as do other non-absentee livestock owners. As such this second strand of literature is critical of absentee practices, though it also sustains that absentees “act as critical nodes or bridges between ‘mobile pastoralists in the bush’ and the ‘government officials in the city’ as they understand the practical logic of mobile pastoralism as well as that of the state” (p.150). This literature therefore recognizes that absenteeism is very much contextual, changes through time, and could in fact represent positive relationships between absentees, hired herders and non-absentees as they organize socially in mutually beneficial ways. It is in this light that this research seeks to unpack fixed notions of absence, in what are often referred to as absentees, in the pastoral contexts of southern Tunisia. The spatialization of absence-presences, through mobility, result in the reorganization of relations within and outside of the household, through assemblages of relations. The institutional aspects, as I will turn to next, are key in understanding rural transformations.

### 2.3. Institutions as Mediating Relations

Institutions are theorized in different ways, depending on the purpose of such theorizations. In political science, for example, statist framings rely on macro theorizations of context to explain state formation, expansion and evolution with path-dependent conclusions (i.e., colonial institutional inheritances). While more micro theorizations, as proposed by rational-choice approaches (North, 2018) have turned to behavioural and cultural analysis to theorize on ideational variables such as values, norms, trust but also costs-benefit analysis in explaining the reconfiguration and distribution of resources. Critical institutionalists frame institutions as inherently social, relational, and historically contingent (Cleaver & De Koning, 2015), this includes the view that institutions evolve as norms and economic relations evolve, and account for the differentiated abilities of people to benefit from resources under environmental variability (Mehta et al., 1999). Both the views of institutions as rules, dictated by rationalist decisions, and the more normative and agentic views of institutions as social, that explain how institutions adapt, between scales of organisations and sets of values (Cleaver & De Koning, 2015) are key in understanding how assemblages of relations organize to manage resources in drylands. The relative plural use of the term has led to different conclusions on how institutions facilitate or hinder social interaction, through cooperation or restriction, resulting in concentrating or redistributive processes. For theorizations on agrarian change, both macro and micro sociological approaches on state formation in agrarian societies suggest two lines of inquiry, one focused on communal structure and the other focused on class relations (see Boone, 2003). Institutions are not mere traditions but are adaptive responses. For Evans-Pritchard (1940), blood-feuds were political institutions, and



an approved and regulated mode of behaviour between communities within a tribe. For Berry (1989), rural institutions often operate as arenas of negotiation and struggle, rather than as closed corporate units of accumulation and resource management. Although the possibilities of accumulating capital are dependent on internal and individual processes of accumulating material wealth and/or benefiting from market transactions, participation in a variety of social institutions also serve as channels of collective access to productive resources (Mehta et al., 1999). Institutions can therefore be both, closed sites of accumulation, and more embedded, and porous arenas of negotiation. More broadly, institutions are assemblages of reciprocal arrangements, and therefore the flexible features of institutions depend on the flexible nature of contracts. For example, sharecropping can be framed as an institutional adaptation that resolves the disparity between the distribution of human resources (labour) and physical resources (land and capital) (Stiglitz, 1991, p. 24). This requires an analysis of the costs and benefits of operating through sharecropping versus other agrarian labour relations, but also how these are transforming as social dimensions like trust, norms, culture, negotiation and power change.

For agrarian studies, these wide-ranging theorizations on institutional aspects, that include for example endogenous, unintentional changes driven by dynamic disequilibrium (see Ho, 2016) have the advantage of explaining both larger processes of deagrarianization or repeasantization. The utility of engaging with a wider framing of institutions, which includes rationalist and critical agrarian dimensions, is that it sheds light on the link between property, institutions, and resource management. I see institutions as arenas where pastoralists (re)organize resource distributions by negotiating the interplay of livestock, land and labour, as embedded in particular ecologies, and political economies, including relations of production outside of the herd, household and markets. Therefore, although I focus on the purposive aspect of how institutions are crafted to perform livestock-relevant resource management functions, I also include the transformative aspects of how institutions mediate mobility and legitimize access to land for example. These aspects are particularly crucial for understanding collective action and common property theory in pastoral settings.

Often, rangeland policy, community-based resource/rangeland management or conservation approaches have the tendency to establish clear boundaries around both the resource and the social group owning/managing the resource. These are largely borne from a version of common property theory that treats rangeland management as a collective action problem resolved by clearly defined practices of exclusion (see Turner, 2011). Instead, the socio-ecological reality of pastoralists in drylands requires both flexible and exclusionary rules of access. This is related to the “pastoral paradox of land tenure”, where potentially conflicting needs for secure resource tenure and socially and spatially flexible patterns of resource-use poses problems for the application of common property theory to the management of pastoral commons (Fernández-Giménez, 2002). The response of pastoral research and development projects has been largely to focus on livestock mobility and connectivity (see for example Galvin, 2008; Reid et al., 2014), often failing

however to include the fact that livestock mobility also depends on peoples' mobility and accumulation strategies outside of the herd. This is a fundamental contribution that this research seeks to make by including the link between absence and accumulation, as mediated through institutions.

The role of informal pastoral institutions, like the *khilata*, are marginally discussed in the Tunisian literature and in the administrative alleys. The fact that the *khilata* is typically left out entirely from the Tunisian pastoral literature as an analytical space, while it emerged as being a key during fieldwork, is in itself telling. One explanation for this is that in pastoral societies, institutions are often not recognised by the modern state as organized assemblages, but are merely seen as habitual ways through which society manages day-to-day affairs (WISP, 2008).

The *khilata* means mixing in Arabic, and it describes a habitual practice of pooling herds. The only significant mention of this community-based herding systems is Boubakri's earlier work where he argues that the *khilata* cuts across social 'classes' and is increasingly used by migrants (according to him membership increased from 2% to 21% between 1986 and 1995 (Boubakri, 2005, p. 23). This suggests that the *khilata* supports the need to diversify income away from the herd, but still allows people to maintain territorial visibility through livestock, even when away. It is in this light that the institutional aspects of the *khilata* began to interest me.

I define the *khilata* through an institutional lens for two reasons. First because as it emerged during fieldwork, it clearly operates in a space, through assemblages of relations, where the aspect of negotiation is key; therefore this practice has explanatory power on rural social structure, and its political effects. Second, it contributes to research on common property institutions.

This has political-economic implications, since it draws attention to questions such as who accesses these social institutions and who does not, and how are capital accumulation possibilities differentiated in the organisational patterns of accessing land, labour and livestock for those who are physically present versus those who are absent. These aspects will be explored more throughout the thesis, while now I turn to the relevance of institutions in understanding rural transformations in the Maghreb.

### 2.3.1 Rural Transformations and Pastoral Development in the Maghreb

Given institutions are embedded within context this section explores key rural transformations and pastoral development discourses in southern Tunisia.

Inspired by "Pastoralists at the Periphery: Herders in a Capitalist World" (Chang & Koster, 1994), and by the thrust of (the few) Marxist anthropologists that began exploring heterogeneity through class analysis in pastoral societies undergoing the transition to capitalism, I began to explore the "economic sociology" (Bernstein, 2010) of pastoralism in the Maghreb. What pastoral literature has tackled the question of how

pastoralists re-invent themselves economically and socially within increasingly bureaucratic, neoliberal and capitalist systems of production? How is this relevant to the Maghreb?

While earlier political economic analysis in the region, including the Middle and Near East, subscribed heavily to materialist understandings of pastoral production (see for example Beck, 1980; Bradburd, 1984; Rigby, 1988; Sutter, 1987), anthropologists have for long considered livestock as having intersecting qualities of material, embodied and relational wealth (Borgerhoff Mulder et al., 2010), as explored in various ways in other parts of the world. In the Middle East and Near East, there has been a strong focus on detribalization, the shaping of modern political configurations in the region, processes of nation-state building, equality and hierarchy in Bedouin politics, all of which have been central to the economic history of the region given the significant entanglement of oil and gas development and pastoral identity and production (Eickelman, 1981; Ginat & Khazanov, 1998; Salzman, 2018). Anthropologists have for example focused on the relevance of the tribal unit in understanding socio-political configurations of nomadic pastoralists (Marx, 1977), relationships of power between “the state”, and various tribal configurations in Iran (Beck, 2014; Tapper, 2009), the role of diverse ecological landscapes in analysing socio-economic organization of pastoralist in Libya (Behnke, 1980), transformations as a result of displacement and dispossession in Jordan and Palestine (Abu-Rabia, 2001), including the impacts of the oil industry in shifting the organization of livelihoods from “camel to truck” in Oman (Chatty, 2013). In the Maghreb, the Moroccan context offers most food for thought<sup>3</sup> in the region as it includes institutional and non-material aspects to pastoral production, and contemporary political economic transformations through migration (Rachik, 2016), by including the transnational and pluri-active aspects of pastoral livelihoods (see Breuer & Gertel, 2007; Mahdi, 2007, 2014; Mahdi et al., n.d.). The Tunisian literature on pastoralism instead has largely focused on transition narratives, from mobile and ‘traditional’ pastoralism and ‘tribal’ societies to more sedentary forms of ‘modern’ peasantry, or from “sheep to olives” (Lahmar, 1994). Rural emigration has been treated largely as an exogenous phenomena, a shock to the system, resulting in people either being locked in a pastoral “mode of production”, or shifting towards less extensive forms of livestock-keeping, or abandoning livestock-keeping altogether (Abaab et al., 1995; Bourbouze, 2000). It is argued, that sedentarization, the appropriation of land through irrigation and investments, but also drought, have contributed to shifts in livestock ownership structures, herd

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<sup>3</sup> an extremely fertile literature in rural sociology and anthropology in the Maghreb (Dresch, Pascon, Berque, Crawford, Bonte) stemmed from research in Berber communities in the Atlas regions of Morocco and Kabyle in Algeria. This has resulted in the development of a range of foundational sociological theories (see Masqueray, Durkheim, Gellner, Geertz, Bourdieu) and debates on social change (segmentary theory, mechanic/organic solidarity). I do not cover these here but I wish to signal that some of these readings have influenced my own understanding of kin relations, power and autonomy, and institutions in Douiret.

compositions, and rangeland management practices over the past 40 years, with fewer livestock owners owning more livestock<sup>4</sup> (Elloumi & Ben Saad, 2018; Nasr et al., 2000; Saad & Bourbouze, 2010).

This relatively pessimistic take in pastoral research in Tunisia, mirrors the pessimism found in peasant studies in the Maghreb (see Ajl, 2020), with a dominant analytical slant on the legacies of failed agrarian reforms and state intervention. Aside from a few (to me accessible) older studies (Bennoune, 1979; Timoumi, 1973), most of the recent work on agrarian change in Tunisia focuses on the colonial-capitalism continuation, colonial developmentalism and under-development, the national liberation movement and post-colonial rural planning particularly in relation to land re-distribution<sup>5</sup>. Overall, these narratives have maintained the geographical aspect of core-periphery, marginal-central and in Tunisia's case the southern-interior versus north-the coast to explain processes of capital accumulation, dispossession with the neoliberal bias around food security in relation to family-farming (Ayebe, 2011; Ayebe & Saad, 2013; Bush, 2004, 2016; Fautras, 2017).

The focus of these contemporary studies has been on how agrarian reforms have created opportunities for speculative investments, where failed collectivization during Ben Salah's attempt to respond to a socialist regime in the late 1960s, and the subsequent privatization of land, the changing configurations of land ownership and land governance (Murphy, 1999; Simmons, 1971), explain extreme social differentiation and economic polarization that characterizes dualist development paths between coastal urban regions and rural internal regions (Ayebe, 2011; Sethom, 1985). The focus is on the legacy of clientelist relations, and how this continues to influence the politics of resource appropriation, as the important case of the struggle around the Jerid oasis (Battesti, 2015), usually by capturing public networks and resources through political affiliations and connections with the state, reflected in the challenging period Tunisia is coming into (post-2011). These aspects come at a time when Tunisia's new constitution commits the country to decentralization, with paternalistic visions for neoliberal agrarian reforms in the five-year development plan (2016-2020) (Fautras, 2017).

It is therefore important to bear in mind the challenging political-economic agrarian context in which pastoralists are operating in, post-2011, where Tunisia's rural regions have undergone further transformations, characterized by eroding real wages and increasing food prices (Elloumi & Ben Saad, 2018). These have created the conditions of what Bernstein calls the "reproductive squeeze", through the increasing costs of production and decreasing returns to labour, which have incentivized migration and further fragmented labour markets (David & Marouani, 2015). Labour shortages in rural areas, compounded with the need to diversify income have resulted in a characteristically fluid, precarious and temporal rural labour market (Bessaoud et al., 2017). Furthermore, the fragmentation of labour, and the creation of the "hoe and

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<sup>4</sup> See for example relevant documentary by Alain Bourbouze on different classes of pastoralists in Morocco <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqsicrKeQrM&t=333s>

<sup>5</sup> see (Ajl, 2018) for a comprehensive bibliography of Agriculture Planning and Rural Development in Tunisia

wage” economy (Cordell et al., 1996 as cited in Oya & Pontara, 2015, p. 59), is particularly crucial to understanding intra- and inter-household social differentiation.

It is at this historical conjunction of precarious labour markets and the reconfiguration of core-periphery distributions of power with influences on land (re)distribution that I allocate my analysis of the role of migration/mobility on pastoral development; institutions as the social, political, and cultural basis through which flexible accumulation happens; and livestock as a means to sustain livelihoods, given uncertainties. These reflections have remained largely marginal to dominant discussions, aside from Boubakri’s committed interest on migration and pastoralism (for example Boubakri, 2004, 2005; Boubakri & Nouri, 2009). The more persistent aspects, therefore, of how pastoralists negotiate encounters between themselves and the ‘state’ and neoliberal policies, through diverse practices of negotiated mobility (in the wider sense of the term, to include money, people, ideas), and that incorporate networks, operating through informal institutions is largely omitted. These aspects, I argue, are often overshadowed by the more pessimistic accounts of how migration influences the survival of pastoralism and contributes to “the crisis of nomadism” (Breuer & Kreuer, 2011; Mahdi, 2014). Such “agro-pessimism”, with a focus on crisis obscure the dialectic tensions between accelerated processes of differentiation and forms of resistance that ensure the continuation and survival of livestock keeping (Oya, 2010). For example, in Tunisia, the more pessimistic body of literature is predominantly cited by technical studies that are limited to envisioning pastoralism as “systems of production”, and therefore focus on the analysis of production through shifting land tenure regimes, desertification and degradation, the reorganisation of agrarian systems and rangeland governance (Saad et al., 2010; Zanzana, 2018). The resulting technical solutions are often paternalistic focusing on changing pastoral practices and rationalities, through subsidies for feed, spurring the *gdel* (resting sites) practices for rangeland productivity, incentives through payments for ecosystem services, and infrastructural development through borehole drilling (Abaab et al., 1995; Abaad & Guillaume, 2004; Bonte et al., 2009). Although these solutions may be seen as important for pastoralists, they obscure the existing relational, mutable and negotiable dimensions of pastoral systems, which make use of their own institutions, with implications for understanding patterns of accumulation.

#### 2.4. Theorizing Accumulation

Accumulation processes have largely been explored through political economic theorizations. At the heart of Marxist theories on the political economy of capitalism is the question of production, where “capitalist modes of production” are explained by capital accumulation, in which surplus production is invested back into the production process and land, labour or capital are transformed (Bernstein, 2010). Social differentiation occurs when individuals or groups accumulate wealth (profit, status) relative to others resulting in the polarization or fragmentation of a previously (relatively) homogeneous society (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2012b). For Marxist political economists, therefore, social differentiation is a direct result of capitalist infiltration in

agrarian systems, whereby the commodification of land, labour and capital, through various processes of accumulation, lead to the disintegration of monolithic class structures, such as the “peasantry”, into multiple classifications of class differentiation (Byres, 1995). Thus, at the heart of classical political economy lies the preoccupation with capital accumulation and its determinants, described as “the constant creation of new means of production” (Dobb, 1967 as cited in Byres, 1995 p.564). However, several developed concepts of accumulation have been advanced to explain different transformations hinged on different, historical materialist, conceptions of what capital is and how it behaves (see Bernstein, 2010; Hall, 2012).

Marx’s primitive accumulation for example, highlights the origins of the historical processes of divorcing the producer from the means of production through enclosure (of the commons), forcible usurpation, extirpation and enslavement (Glassman, 2006). Rosa Luxemburg furthered this idea to explain why there is the permanent necessity of primitive accumulation for capitalist stability, which she saw as the constant conquest of non-capitalist territories for the expropriation of raw materials and the reinvestment of surplus in capitalist territories (Luxemburg, 2015). Hence, ideas of the ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ began to be used as synonyms to the capitalist/non-capitalist distinctions to explain processes of global accumulation and imperialism (Amin, 1978). Within this vein, primitive accumulation is a process that restores a “dynamic - equilibrium” (p. 85) and a process that forms the basic condition for capitalist production.

As the forms of accumulation began to morph with the changing nature of capitalism, so did the analytical angles used to understand processes of capital accumulation. Harvey’s (2003) idea of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ for example emphasizes expanded production but also points to the dominant role of global neoliberalism as the means to establish processes of privatization, in a myriad of forms, within the global ‘core’. Harvey’s focus remains on capitalism’s need for “something outside of itself”, which it can “either make use of some pre-existing outside ... or it can actively manufacture it” (p. 141). The inside-outside dialectic explored in core-periphery theorizations espouse similar logics to the above-below accumulation conceptualization to describe historical capitalist paths (Byres, 1997). Those who are able to engage in expanded reproduction by extracting surplus from hired labour-power such as “landlord capitalism”, as “capitalism from above” (Byres, 1997) contrasts with “peasant capitalism” as “capitalism from below”, “democracy from below” (Neocosmos, 1993), or “enclosures from below”, that coincide with “enclosure from above” (Li, 2012). Mamdani perhaps best elucidates further on the distinction between processes of accumulation from above and below, which he argues serves to reveal “the octopus-like movement of individual capitals into the countryside” (Mamdani, 1987, p. 207) and the ambiguity and contradictory nature of rural capitalism.

Although I agree these are relevant to understanding the wider background and structural context; in this research, I move away from the classic Marxist discussion of accumulation within capitalism, and focus on



the everyday processes of accumulation, conceptualized in multiscale ways through the idea of flexible accumulation. This is similar to the approaches adopted by others who also suggest that ambiguities can be unearthed by focusing on the contradictory, soft and silent, forms and scales of rural accumulation (Berry, 1993; Cousins, 2013; Li, 2014a; O’Laughlin, n.d.; Oya, 2010). This relates to how translocal practices transform the particular localities they connect (see Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013), where, “each historic restructuring of modes and spaces of accumulation creates new and dynamic relationships between mobility and immobility” (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 190); but where I also argue, the mutual constitutions of mobility, place and subjectivity (Massey, 2005) influences everyday accumulation practices through livestock. This idea of flexible accumulation used in this thesis is similar to Harvey’s (1989) use of the term, to express the changing patterns of accumulation. However, rather than focusing on the negative consequences of corporate decentralization involving an assembly of components sourced from geographically dispersed suppliers, integrated by new financial instruments and markets, through the consolidation of the production of commodities in low-waged economies abroad; I focus on the everyday aspects and flexible accumulation through the household and herd. This includes for example, how the means of human reproduction influence the means of material production, within current capitalist contexts (see Katz, 2001; Meillassoux, 1972).

How does theorizing multilocal and flexible accumulation dynamics, help elucidate on the political economic aspects of migration and agrarian change?

Whether migrants are located as part of larger processes of “capitalist penetration” (the political economy of international labour migration) or itself, a source of capital through their own mobility (the political economy of migrant relations of production), these aspects are best interpreted through transnational processes of accumulation and conceptualizations of capital across space (similar to Harvey), to include “flexible citizenship” defined as “the cultural logics of capital accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political economic conditions” (Ong, 1999, p. 7). These are the faces of “transnational social positioning” (Nowicka, 2013) where capital accumulation becomes a central tenant, as each epoch of capitalism produces specific arrangements of capital accumulation from migration processes (Canterbury, 2012). This is fundamental for understanding how patterns of absence-presence are co-constituted with patterns and processes of accumulation across space.

I draw particular inspiration in my framing of multi local and flexible accumulation from the renewed interest in the last two decades in social reproduction amongst feminist theorists, who broaden earlier Marxist and feminist understandings of the term, by engaging with transnational frameworks (Katz, 2001; Kofman, 2012). These frameworks, were strongly influenced by the explorations in the 1980s of capital restructuring and the growth of flexible forms of accumulation (Bastia & Skeldon, 2020). In this vein, recent feminist theorisations

have worked on transnational family research and the link between social reproduction and production to make domestic labour and the gender dimension visible in the process of global capitalist accumulation (see Bhattacharya, 2017). This intersectional scholarship has focused on social reproduction in multilocal spaces by looking inside of the household in its relationship to a changing world economic and political order. Others have also looked at how articulations of social reproduction influence agrarian change at a new historical conjuncture<sup>6</sup>, with a particular focus on the role of the global household (see Douglass, 2006; Tsikata, 2015). Feminists argue that these characterizations of the domestic mode of production as a theoretical construct through which to view production for use, accounting for household labour and capital in ways different to the limitless logics of capital accumulation. This lays the theoretical groundwork for “decentering political economic theory from capitalism, producing a discourse of economic difference in which the heterogeneity of economic activity is foregrounded rather than obscured (Safri & Graham, 2010 p.103). An understanding of agrarian ruralities in a postcapitalist economic landscape, recognizes this heterogeneity, where actors inhabit multiple spaces and occupations (De Haan & Rogaly, 2002), and heterogeneous non-capitalist economic activities coexist with capitalist ones in a diverse economic landscape (Gibson-Graham, 2006). From a feminist economic perspective, the global household is therefore a site where remittances are also investments in non-capitalist, non-market-oriented production. In this sense capital accumulation is not definable in such bounded terms but is instead a process that helps understand the transferral and transformative aspects of capital. This is key to imagining a post-capitalist alternative.

By adopting the idea that capital accumulation occurs in multilocal spaces, and that “paths of accumulation” occur simultaneously and in different locations contemporaneously, this thesis therefore expands on the contemporary, albeit limited, literature linking agrarian change and migration which supports flexible understandings of capital accumulation. Similar to the myth of the “amorphous peasantry” debunked by Hill (1968) and the focus on heterogeneity of rural accumulation which Oya (2007) and Cheater (1984) describe through “idioms of accumulation” as embedded in culture, I use the absence-presence lens to conceptualize accumulation dynamics, beyond overly-bounded conceptions of “communities”, “capital” and the household.

#### 2.4.1 Multilocal and Flexible Accumulation in Southern Tunisia

Having established how absence-presence is linked to accumulation, I now turn to discussions on how mobility practices articulate the organization of (re)production in southern Tunisia, given wider migration dynamics in the Maghreb. North Africa has evolved into one of the world’s leading “labour frontiers” (see Skeldon, 1997) with Europe, contributing to a long, and rich migration history in the Maghreb (De Haas, 2007). The more contemporary Maghrebine-French literature has analysed such migration dynamics by

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<sup>6</sup> The term ‘historical conjuncture’ is a succinct way of describing changing conditions as a result of transforming intersections of multi-scalar, institutional, corporate, political and personal networks (Glick Schiller, 2018).

portraying migrants as “a bridge in-between two shores” (Charef, 2003, p. 9). This accounts for the multiple returns, multiple identities and multiple attachments migrants have to heterogeneous space (Raulin, 2004), as well as the implications on political mobilisations (Geisser, 2012) and social mobility (Dumont, 2011). These themes have also been explored in the extensive, but particular, literature on diasporas, which focuses primarily on identarian consciousness<sup>7</sup>, and gravitates around the organization of a political, economic or cultural community, embedded through various forms of relations with territory of origin (Cesari, 1997). Although diasporas are a distinct category of transnational ties, where the perception of extra-territoriality is at the heart of the diasporic question, this literature has been fundamental to characterizing the types of relations between Europe and the Maghreb as a continuum (Cesari, 1997, p. 86), where the historical dimension of translocal relations become important. These literatures have, for example, contributed to the representation of the multifarious ways in which Tunisians, Moroccans and Algerians are linked to common ethnic origins and in-group solidarity (Pouessel, 2012; Valensi, 2000), where human and financial resources are embedded in ethnically defined frameworks of interaction. An excellent example is offered by Boubakri (1985) who argues that in the 1980s the social organisations of resource management in south-east Tunisia were perpetuated by the form of translocal organisation of enterprises between communities in Tunisia and France. He explains the ways in which different communities, such as the Djerbians (with Jewish origins) and the Ghoumrassins, as *jbeili* (mountainous populations) in the south of Tunisia, accumulate capital elsewhere through associations and mobility of reinvestments. For example, the Ghoumrassins shape enterprise associations in Paris following similar social rules to land use/access in the south-east of Tunisia within the same clan, where work and earnings are collective (p. 53). He further argues that the strength, preservation and proliferation of these enterprises is linked to the way social capital is constructed in the Tunisian commercial apparatus in Paris. The development of transnational enterprises, which for the Tunisian Sahelian networks are particularly vested in restoration (bakeries and patisseries) and the textile industry in France have followed a continuum through family ties, at least until the late 1990s. The objective of these transnational relations of production was not to accumulate capital for financial wealth, but to ensure a continuum of networks of ethnically-tied wage-earning employment opportunities in France (p. 56). These strategies also work in reverse, the way capital is organized and accumulated abroad also influence the way it is invested, structured and accumulated in the home country.

I mention these aspects as they are particularly crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of mobility strategies that follow established corridors through kin-relations in dryland regions of the Maghreb, such as

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<sup>7</sup> For example the term *Ould el Franca*, literally the children of France (in Tunisian dialect) refers to a doubt in the Tunisian-ness of the second generation of those who have migrated. While *Chibanis*, is a colloquial terms applied to a category of people from former French colonies (mainly from the Maghreb) who emigrated to France during the Trente Glorieuses (1945-1975) without succeeding in establishing a stable situation in France, and who reached retirement age in precarious conditions (see Abbassi, 2003). See also documentary : *Perdu entre deux rives, les chibanis oubliés* (Lost in between two shores, the forgotten chibanis) by Rachid Oujidi (<https://youtu.be/-vydzlckx2c>)

in the south of Tunisia. These are characterized by an extremely differentiated and “pluriactive” socio-economic landscape (Bessaoud et al., 2017), where non-farm work and informal markets (Malik & Gallien, 2020), migration and remittances are central to rural transformations, and where the household is an economic institution straddling multiple localities (Boubakri, 2005). The paradoxical strategy of “partir pour rester” therefore encapsulates the seemingly contradictory role of mobility in assuring the social and economic reproduction of agrarian economies, and as I show in this research, in particular ways for agro-pastoral settings of Tunisia’s drylands. This strategy requires social relations to be organized in ways that mediate practices of leaving and staying when managing the herd.

## 2.5. Conclusion

In responding to the overall thesis question, **How do different forms of absence explain processes of capital accumulation within pastoral communities?** I begin by exploring how we can theorize about absence showing that it is not necessarily a structural separation but a connection through diverse practices of negotiated presence and mobility. This lens poses new questions about how accumulation is practiced in absence. One avenue looks at how relations are mediated, which I address through the institutional lens in pastoral contexts. Institutions are understood as sites or arenas of interplay of livestock, land and labour relations of production, embedded in particular political economies. I find both the agentive and rationalist stances useful in explaining how institutions adapt and I therefore adapt both approaches in analysing institutions. The institutional dimension of how relations of production are organized is particularly key in Tunisia. For example, the question of how pastoralists negotiate encounters between themselves, the state and neoliberal policies through diverse practices of negotiated mobility and networks as mediated by pastoral institutions is largely omitted by dominant narratives. This is where the utility of the *khlata*, as a pooling mechanism, for example, emerges in explaining rural transformation in Douiret, and informing pastoral development more generally in southern Tunisia. Having established that absence and institutions are key given the context of Douiret, in southern Tunisia, I explore how these are relevant to the political economy of pastoral production and agrarian change. In theorizing about accumulation, I find that flexible conceptualizations of accumulation highlight for example how translocal practices transform the particular localities they connect. This is useful when understanding how mobility, place and subjectivity influences everyday accumulation practices through livestock. Flexible accumulation better incorporates the mobility strategies that characterize the *jbeili*, and multilocal processes of accumulation that are in line with pluriactive livelihoods in pastoral systems and southern Tunisia.

The core thesis question therefore incorporates the themes of migration/mobility, institutions, and agrarian change, which I explore further through these sub questions:

**Who is absent? Who is present? How are different forms of absence relevant to accumulating capital in the pastoral community? How does absence influence class, gender and wealth differentials in the course of daily practice?**

**How do livestock management institutions help to maintain or multiply herds, and accumulate capital “back home”?**

**How are livestock, as a form of capital, linked to different households’ strategies of accumulation?**

Each of these sub questions form the basis for the three core empirical chapters on migration (chapter five), institutions (chapter six) and agrarian change (chapter seven). These follow on from the next chapter, where I contextualise the agrarian setting of Douiret in southern Tunisia, and chapter four where I introduce my methodology.

## Chapter 3. The Agrarian Context of Douiret

### 3.1. Introduction

Douiret is located in the south of Tunisia (Appendix 1), in the mountainous dorsal of the Dahar, a plateau of 80 km that rises gently towards the east, beyond the basin of the large Algerian-Tunisian *chotts*, salt lakes, on the edge of the Djeffara plains (Appendix 2). Due to a series of topographic formations, the Dahar is better watered and looks like an island of alfalfa in the middle of an ocean of desert steppes (see Camps, 1994).

The Sahara begins to the west of the Dahar. Carved reliefs, aligned from north to south by wadis, are marked by south-west facing valleys of the *jessours*, a series of water and soil catchment barrages built with earth and stone barrages called *tabias* (Image 1 and 2).



*Image 1: The constructed tabias allow for water and soil to accumulate in low-lying plots so olives, figs and cereal can be grown*





*Image 2: A series of connecting jessours in the valleys provide better pasture during the spring/summer months*

These ingenious structures preserved by farmers, increase soil moisture for crops, ensure groundwater recharge through the infiltration in the terraces and protect downstream infrastructure by flood control. In the *jessours*, better pastures, olive tree plantations, and partially cultivated cereals sustain dryland livelihoods, and are used as part of reciprocal grazing-for-services arrangements. The *jessours* are therefore a key component in the mosaic of options that pastoralists use to match patchy rainfall distribution. By relying on a spectrum of relations and land tenure regimes from open systems, to more private (but accessible) land like those in the *jessours* belonging to specific families of different *arch* (clans).

The *jbeili* (or *Djebalia*, *jbaliya*) (mountainous populations), identify with being Amazigh, or Arabised Berbers, and typically identify with living in *ksours*, fortified villages in the mountainous dorsal of the Dahar. Hundreds of villages such as Douiret, Chennini, Ras el Oued, Ghomrassen and GuerMESSa populate this area of south-east Tunisia, with the plains to the east and the Sahara to the west (Appendix 3). The migration patterns of the *jbeili* to the north, to Tunis, is a longstanding, and rhythmmed affair, different from the more recent, “less networked” migration patterns of the “nomads” from the plains (see Prost, 1955). The *jbeili* are known to

have specific businesses and types of manual labour they engage with and are integrated in a well-defined and established economic space they have created outside of the village.

Two aspects are worth highlighting. First, the extended family forms the basis of the social architecture of the *jbeili*, where typically the average family size is of about 8-11 persons and almost one third of the families consist of two or more households (Nasr, 2004). Second, in terms of migration, studies in the early 1990s in these communities found that between 14% to 48% heads of households are active outside of the region and that 93% of the working population in Chennini for example, works outside the area (72% in Tunis and 20% in France) (Nasr, 2004, p.253). Similar figures are found in other mountain communities, including Douiret, though these figures shift in time.

This chapter introduces key moments in the history of Douiret that locate migration as part of its changing agrarian conditions. Context and history, of course, influence the relationship between production and reproduction, the herd and the household, and so how absence-presence intersects with processes of accumulation. This chapter therefore identifies geographies of identity, early migration through schooling, the evolution of patron-client relations and the question of land sovereignty and territorial visibility as key to explaining livestock, land and labour relations of production in Douiret.

### 3.2. Us and Them: Geographies of Identity

Douiret is one of the most visited villages along the “*ksour* tourist trail” explaining its uniqueness within the dryland tourism industry (Ouessar & Belhedi, 1999). The particularity of Douiret as a *ksour*, *aghrem* in Berber, a fortified village or castle has in part been depicted through the state’s re-purposing of the south of Tunisia. Since the 1960s Douiret has represented resilience, with its billboard imagery of the exotic desert and the troglodytic abodes. In part, Douiret has acquired its fame as astronomers, anthropologists, agronomists, architects, geologists, and dryland enthusiasts passing through Douiret, have all produced a variety of discipline-specific knowledge. In fact, several theses have been written on this “strange Berber town” (Louis, 1964) which draw on Douiret’s peculiarity. For example, *cheulh* (Berber dialect) (Gabsi, 2013), the symbolism of the *Marghoum* (carpet) (Pardo, 2003), reciprocal social practices like the *Twiza* (Louis, 1973), consanguinity, endogamy and anthropological work on demography and genetics (Ben Halim et al., 2016)<sup>8</sup>, vernacular architecture (Znidi, 2018), or rainfed agricultural farming systems in the *jessours* (Laffat et al., 1997). Douiret therefore continues to fascinate and is a source of inspiration for both those who have passed through it and those who originate from there.

The pride constructed around Douiret’s “unique traits” was particularly evident to me through the everyday practice of othering. The dialectical process of constructing an us-them opposition, *les autochthones versus*

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<sup>8</sup> I met Nizar Ben Halim, geneticist from Douiret who returned twenty years after leaving to conduct a study on how patterns of migration in Douiret are linked to demography, by tracking genetic traces in Douiret, Paris, and Tunis.



*les allogènes*, further reinforces a sense of being Douiri, as several Facebook groups and pages showcase<sup>9</sup>. The myth of the village contributes to arousing strong emotions regarding home, the motherland, ancestral heritage, and generating artefacts, customs, traditions and therefore particular senses of attachment to identity, that for some is defined by being Amazigh, for others *jbeili*, for others “descendants of the prophet”, for others “people of the olive tree”. What does the process of identity construction in Douiret reveal about the translocal character of social relations? How are these aspects relevant to processes of boundary-making along an us-them fissure? How is this all key to understanding the experience of the “return”, of attachment and belonging, of ways in which Douiris maintain territorial visibility through both presence and absence?

Douiret’s dryland economy is continuously shaped by its geologic surroundings. The way social, political and economic relationships are established, shaped by geographic frontiers and barriers, emerged during fieldwork by the (sometimes not so) subtle opposition of the people of the mountains, the *jbeili*, with those of the plains (Image 3), which include “Arab” tribes.



*Image 3: The el Ouara plains*

The plains versus mountain reading found in French colonial historiography (Service des Affaires Indigènes, 1931) in Tunisia and generally in the Maghreb (see also Maurer, 1996), while critiqued as being limiting, rigid and reductionist (Albergoni & Pouillon, 1976; Laroussi, 2008) is still very much present in everyday representations and interactions both explicit and implicit. An understanding of the recurrent but contested

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<sup>9</sup> See for example: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/16825530846>

equation Berber=sedentary=agriculture=mountains and Arab=nomad=pastoralism=plains, does not preclude the plurality of intersecting production systems, but it does reflect popular representations that stem from political and statutory processes (Guillaume & Nouri, 2006). These processes influence the organization of institutions that represent or negotiate with “the state”, with consequences on the socio-economic organization of Douiret through social relations, across clans, and through frontier dynamics (see Pardo, 2017). Such processes of territorialisation establish and re-order property systems, political jurisdictions, rights, and institutional arrangements (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018a), as will be explored more fully in chapter seven.

The historical construction of the *jbeili* hinges on the idea that the autochthonous Berbers, which once occupied the plains, were obliged by the invading Arabs to find refuge in the mountains. The narrative is that Berbers barricaded themselves in the mountains, and so achieved independence from “the state”, colonial authorities, invaders, and outsiders (Service des Affaires Indigènes, 1931). As a result, two agrarian arrangements, around which institutions and social relations have been built, epitomize the “Berber specificity” in the mountains. The fortified collective granaries (*ghorfa* or *gasr*) and the *jessours* (Laroussi, 2008). Both of these characterize dryland strategies contributing to the *jbeili*’s characteristically fierce and proud independence. This independence is not absolute however, as these agglomerations cannot do without the ploughing land offered by the plains nor can they live without exchanges from the plains. Douiris, therefore have had to accept an economic association, often coupled with a certain vassalage towards the nomadic protector (Louis, 1972, p.122). Depending on who you speak to, who is the invader, the protector, who is the patron and who is the client, gets muddled in personal versions of history. So while the *jbeili* are often portrayed as depending on the Arabs, with specific clientelist contracts (*hojja*), and relations of servitude and complementarity, the *jbeili*, are part of a network of reciprocal arrangements, meaning that relations of dependence go both ways. Certainly, equating the plains with Arabness, exchange, commerce, roads, networks, and vastness, while the mountains with Berber ingenuity and insularity presents an abstract picture, which may have been useful in representing the poles of a regional system in the past. However, the reality today is increasingly messy and ambiguous, though I have still found this caricature useful in dialogue and in exploring the historical dimensions of patterns of differentiation, solidarity, resource-use and distribution.

Alongside these constructed stereotypes rests another differentiating aspect of being Douiri, which stems from its political centrality in the southern region between the 1880-1950s. This also explains the type of relations that Douiris have built with the sovereign powers and wealthy families in the capital, and in relation to the Ottoman dynasty, (Abderrahman, 2003). Historically, most Berberophone regions correspond to regions with contrasting relations with the central powers that typically have a strong colonial or Arabophone urban tradition (Chaker, 1989, p. 837). For Douiris, building allegiances with the “Arab public administration

in the plains<sup>10</sup>” or “identifying the *cheulh* -speaking sellers at the market in Tataouine, in order to be recognized as *jbeili* and to get discounted prices from fellow *jbeili* sellers”<sup>11</sup>, are strategic features of how Douiris access resources outside of Douiret. These strategies have a historical context.

In the 1880s, at the tail end of the Ottoman and beginning of the French protectorate, Douiret’s economic centrality in the region pushed the French protectorate to establish Douiret as the administrative centre for the southern region of Tunisia, which was under a military and not civil administration unlike the rest of Tunisia (Service des Affaires Indigènes, 1931). With the establishment of the Bureaux des Affaires Indigènes<sup>12</sup> in 1888, as a decentralized administrative body, Douiret became a military post for the French in the south of Tunisia. The idea was to exploit Douiret’s position as an important trading relay along the caravan trail from Gabès to Ghadamès, linking Libya with the south of Tunisia, the Sahelian region (Sphax, Sousse, Djerba), and the north; therefore linking the south to the Mediterranean and beyond (Louis, 1996).

Although short-lived, as the administrative centre of the south, a class of Douiri notables, interlocutors and administrative allies developed. Strong ties began to forge with the capital through links with influential families linked to the Beylic regime, through for example housekeeping for wealthy families in the medina<sup>13</sup>. The continuing development and opening of Douiret’s economy to the Mediterranean and to a monetary-based economy is said to have been interrupted by the decision to reallocate the weekly market and the administrative centre for the south, from Douiret to Tataouine in the 1890s. As Tataouine in the plains became the new economic centre of the region, this also meant a shift in power relations where the administrative headquarters changed from a Berberophone to Arab polity. This is often said to have marked the beginning of Douiret’s decline, however another reading is that this initiated Douiret’s extension, outside of Douiret, through pre-established networks. In Douiret’s case, migration corridors spurred subsequent waves of emigration, specifically as porters, bakers and newsagents, contributing to creating cohesive colonies of decentralized communities, “islands” of Douiret in the Medina of Tunis in neighbourhoods such as in Nej Bacha, Hafsia, Bab Mnara, and Bab Alouia, as I explain further in chapter six. These patterns of mobility are linked to geography and identity, where the propensity to emigrate, and notorious capacity to build relations outside of Douiret, feeds visions-of-the self as “habitant branché”<sup>14</sup> (connected resident).

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<sup>10</sup> HH3

<sup>11</sup> HH3

<sup>12</sup> The Office of Indigenous Affairs was presided by French officers, and Tunisian intermediaries between the French and the “indigenous”. The duties of this administrative structure included overseeing tax collection and law enforcement, informing residents and suggesting reforms.

<sup>13</sup> Douiris were said to be preferred over the Arabs as trusted housekeepers for the homes of wealthy families in the Medina. When these families eventually moved to their summer homes outside of Tunis, they preferred to sell their homes in the Medina to trusted Douiris even at derisory prices. This is one of the reasons why there are neighbourhoods in the Medina, such as Hafsia, with known and established community of Douiris (B2)

<sup>14</sup> HH3

As I have briefly explained, the mountain-plains expression of the Arab-Amazigh dichotomy and Douiret's political history, reveals that it would be erroneous to conceive Douiret as a peripheral and insular community. As migration continues to be a common feature of its collective identity, the way absence-presence is embodied and the way social relations of production unfold relate to identity and citizenship.

### 3.3. "Children on the move": Schooling and Early Migration

Schooling is often linked to early migration, resulting in the mobilization of other family members, and the reconfiguring of family constellations and accumulation possibilities to enable access to institutionalized forms of education (Bastia & Skeldon, 2020). The intersecting mobilities and aspirations of different members of the household overlaps with questions around gender, age and ethnicity, but also the value of family labour versus waged labour with implications for agrarian change. This section focuses on translocal householding in Douiret which begins often with "children on the move" (Thorsen, 2020).

For Douiret, the arrival of institutionalized, state-provided education has been a key driver of agrarian change and migration. The memorable establishment of the French primary school in 1939 is regarded as a defining moment in Douiret's transformation (Image 4).



*Image 4: Facebook post commemorating Douiret's school (2012 left and 2020 right)*

The school also marked the impetus for the transition from the old troglodytic village, to the new village further in the valley in the 1960s, with the government endorsed re-installation of Douiret with new cement housing, electricity and water (Image 5).





*Image 5: "Old Douiret" is left of the image, while "new Douiret" is along the tarmac road further in the valley to the right of the image*

This "modernization from above"<sup>15</sup>, constructed on ideals of moving away from tradition and towards modernity has influenced the way assemblages of relations in Douiret are organized, through the reshuffling of neighbourhood dynamics and kin relations, as I discuss further in relation to the *khlat* in chapter six.

Along with this physical displacement from "old" to "new", new ways of living and organizing are accompanied by shifts in the meaning attached to education, from being seen as "anti-economic" to a form of emancipation, particularly for men. As the family continues to mobilize itself to allow for the education-migration project of children to be carried out in the urban centres, under the tutelage of aunts, uncles, grandparents, and extended relatives, the reconfiguration of the spatialization of households is met by an evolution in the values accompanying these journeys. The absence-presence of various family members, continuously re-writes the constructed imaginary one has with place of origin. The early mobility of

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<sup>15</sup> M1

individuals such as A.S, has influenced the way Douiret's imagery is scripted through the virtual and visual, in multiple, distant and reticular spaces.

"Once we leave the village even if we are far, we live in a family community of close or distant relatives. Its like islands, little island that are created. These islands create a virtual way of being 'chez-soi'. We are not in the village, we re-create the village so we are not far from the village [...]. even if there is a physical rupture, we continue to live the village in an imaginary fashion, in a virtual fashion, we continue to keep the images of our childhood vivid. The caves, school, the olives, the dromedaries. This presence continues through the imaginary, and it is this imaginary that maintains a presence and avoids the definitive rupture with the village."<sup>16</sup>

Although this is not a particular feature of Douiret but common to most rural transformations in Tunisia, the cohesive nature of family networks and distribution of these networks for Douiret is unique. For many families, the education of children have been primary motives for dislocating accumulation possibilities and households, while maintaining Douiret as a fixed locality. Early migration, first through education and then work, has therefore driven most families to be translocal in nature, while remaining enmeshed in their place of origin. This remains an important component of translocal householding, also called translocal family reproduction or split labour reproduction (Gidwani & Ramamurthy, 2018). The feminist scholarship covered in chapter two, focus on global care chains and transnational surrogacy that are particularly relevant to understanding processes of social reproduction in Douiret. This shifts the attention from focusing on labour's relations to capital, to understanding how labour is redistributed across gender and age within households to sustain herds. Again, various absences result in the redistribution of family, farming and herding labour as I explore further in the next section.

### 3.4. The Evolution of Agrarian Labour Relations

Outside of kin relations, how have labour relations developed in Douiret? The relevance of patron-client relations in the past, for describing the present social structure of Douiret became clear to me when mapping the *arch* (clans) and families in Douiret (as also explained in chapter four). Some families and clans were categorized to me as "coming from outside"<sup>17</sup>. These "outsiders", mostly of Arab origin, have established relations with Douiret as *khammes*. The word *khammes* comes from *khoms*, in Arabic, meaning one-fifth to outline the annual compensation of a *khammes* for his labour as a fifth of the harvest while the landlord, who furnished the other means of production, land, draft animals and seed, keeps the remaining four-fifths of yields.

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<sup>16</sup> M1

<sup>17</sup> A5

While some Douiris describe the *khammes* purely in terms of agricultural labour relations, others describe the *khammes* as a household-helper, that is “like family”<sup>18</sup>. As I was told, the *khammes*, were usually children of poorer individuals who would be taken care of by surrogate families in Douiret in exchange for household chores, which could include herding livestock. The *khammes* thus represents a particular labouring class, as well as a form of “free” labour, that supplemented family labour. Several individuals in Douiret commemorated the centrality of the *khammes*. Statements like “without the *khammes* we would not have been able to build all this”<sup>19</sup>, signal the centrality of such relations for the upkeep of the barrages (*tabias*) of the *jessours* or the building of abodes. Yet the *khammes* also evoke emotional bonds, and extended like-family type of ties, that are commemorated to this day. The portrayal of the *khammes* as being purely exploitative would be misleading, though it does illustrate the variegated ways in which labouring relations, also called “non-capitalist relations of production” in North Africa, have been central to agricultural productivity and rural transformations (see Hamzaoui, 1979). With the formalization of education, I am told, “the *khammes* seized to exist”, as families would prefer to send their children to school rather than work as *khammes*. Yet it is those families in Douiret who could mobilize “non-capitalist” labouring relations, similar to the *khammes*, as agricultural labour, who could also then afford to send their children (previously “free” family labour) to school earlier. Thus access to schooling for some households happened earlier than for others, as for a period of time, the *khammes*, and non-waged based agricultural labouring relations, substituted for absent family labour, allowing for the development of different accumulation possibilities off-farm. In this sense, the development of labouring relations must be understood as constructed around absence-presence, within and across households, so affecting the development of off-farm forms of accumulation.

The link between non-capitalist labouring relations, various forms of absence-presence, the articulation of accumulation, have also resulted in shifting pastoral labour relations. For livestock-keeping, labour relations are distinct to the *khammes* as the labour force of the herder was specifically tied to the family’s herd, and tied to family-relations in different ways (Timoumi, 1973). Herders were in fact referred to as *çohba*, which means “companion” or “friend”<sup>20</sup>, although generally like the *khammes*, they were not simple workers but

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<sup>18</sup> A6

<sup>19</sup> HH3

<sup>20</sup> Although again, like for the *khammes*, some warn that this word should be understood as a kind of euphemism hiding the idea of client (Rachik, 2009). For most herders I interviewed, these relations have somewhat disintegrated as they have shifted towards waged labour. The most obvious observable change is how herders are referred to. As M.D mentioned to me: “Today as a herder the last thing owners care about is your wellbeing, even when your own family members are involved. Previously they would call you *çaheb* /brother, now you are called *sareh* (herder)” (F2), this goes even further as Y.B.M remarked “they now call him *keri* and not a herder” (HH9), *keri* literally means tenant in *derja* (Tunisian dialect).

inextricably tied to family-relations as well. These types of relations draw its strength from social structure, and they reinforce that structure as well (Hamzaoui, 1979, p.449).

Again, understanding which families in Douiret had a *çaheb*, of Arab origins, indicates which families could continue to free up their own family labour more easily from the herd. Families who relied on such patron-client relations to manage their rural assets, have also been the first to send their children to school, or the first to migrate to Tunis. Essentially, those who had access to patron-client relations also had the faculty to manage their property/wealth within Douiret beyond the use of family labour, and thus had first-mover advantages in their migration journey, and in social mobility, to access education and professions elsewhere first.

The other aspect of labour relations is the clan differentiation in herder-owner relations. For example, hired herders in Douiret are almost exclusively “Arabs”, from outside of Douiret, as they are considered to be specialized in the practice of livestock rearing. The Rbaya for example are known for their skill in tending camels, and it is mostly them that work for Douiris who own camels (Image 6). While specific families from Dhiba and Chided (further south towards the Libyan border), for example, settled in Douiret as *çaheb* of families in Douiret.



*Image 6: Rbaya herder standing working as camel herder for a Douiri family (sister in the background and brother lying)*

A key point is that Douiris generally do not work as herders, especially not in waged format, and not for others. This is important to highlight as it defines differential patterns of accumulation in the Dahar, between



Douiris and those from outside of Douiret, who settled in Douiret through historic labour relations. Changing patron-client types of labour relations, and geographically distinct labour specializations relate to migration. Both the in-migration of “outsiders”, as well as the out-migration of Douiris, have shaped identities and social relations of production in Douiret, influencing the ways in which livelihoods evolve.

### 3.5. The Question of Land Sovereignty and Territorial Visibility

Given migration and absence is a defining aspect of agrarian change in the drylands of southern Tunisia, the political question of negotiating access and use of land in the Dahar is linked to questions of who is visible and who is not in the Dahar. I include the discussion of territorial visibility throughout the thesis as it emerged as a key factor explaining the nexus between absenteeism, the power of negotiation, the future of the commons and discussions on pastoral rangeland sovereignty, understood as maintaining an autonomy from state-influence in land governance. The question of land in the region of Tataouine is particularly complex, and distinct for two reasons.

First the positioning of Tataouine, bordering Algeria and Libya, intensify land contestations where frontier dynamics, cross-border trade and extractive industries’ interests intersects with the fact that land tenure arrangements in this region, unlike other regions, are still largely dominated by a collective but tribally arranged tenure-system, particularly in the mountainous regions of the Dahar. The *arch*, remains a central sociological feature upon which resources such as water and rangelands are accessed and managed collectively. Second, Douiret’s commons in the Dahar occupy over one quarter of the region of Tataouine, which is the region with the largest extent of grazing lands in Tunisia. Given that much of the remaining common land in the region, in the plains, has given way to private and formalized arrangements resulting in rangeland fragmentation, the regional and national significance of the Dahar as an important alternative source of unfragmented pastureland is key. Although the socio-ecological significance of Douiret’s commons remain an under-appreciated and under-emphasized aspect, it is at the crossfire between various conflicts of interests. The state, absentees, and present individuals that are part of clan dynamics are resisting or colluding in ways that predominantly risk prioritizing private, over collective interests. These visions are influenced by processes of sedentarization, land-use intensification, and economies of anticipation around oil and gas exploration. As such, the question of how and who maintains territorial presences to maintain grazing access rights, notwithstanding absences, remains interesting. It is important to remember also that these practices are occurring in a context where the rhetoric around the politics of access and ownership in the Dahar, *vis a vis* the state, is predominantly (though carefully) leaning towards the idea that the Dahar is not sovereign, but governable, and under the responsibility of centralized authorities. This is particularly true in frontier areas labelled as “buffer zones” guarded by the national military, or near “open-access” land. The general sentiment around land sovereignty and the legal apparatus that supports such visions is summarized well in this conversation I had with Hedi towards the end of fieldwork:

“The problem is that the consensus when it comes to the topic of common land is that there is a percentage that has to be for grazing - this is stated in a law- so that this grazing area can be managed by the Forest Administration, which is part of the Ministry of Agriculture. For example [...] if you give me, let’s say 12 hectares, in-between 12 and 20% of that plot of land is for grazing. These include grazing areas, underground resources, building materials [...] (common land) is considered the private property of a certain clan. So the investors and companies, like oil and gas companies and whatnot, know they can’t invest without the permission of that tribe. But when the land ownership is disputed, or under the management of the forest administration, the government still allows companies to invest and tells them to figure out how and whether compensations should be made [...] the problem is that the rulings made by courts are then postponed [...] so, when you’re about to solve your problems with, let’s say, with Elmrazig you get in trouble with Wled Slim or Wled Dabbeb. Even if you solve some issues you’ll always have problems, you’ll never completely resolve the question of land. The companies keep extracting resources while everyone takes you to court over these compensations. The grazing area, for example, is for residents of Douiret on the surface but then there’s foul play between Douiret and Wled Slim. Wled Slim are to the south of Douiret, south of the road we took earlier, [...] they don’t consider that Dahar anymore, they consider it Jeffara. So they give away that Dahar, the common one, when it comes to grazing. That’s the problem of this land.”<sup>21</sup>

Such reflections highlight the intersecting threats to tribally managed commons, and the risk of permanently eroding access rights for pastoralists. I further contextualize this in chapter eight and nine where I speak of how pastoral visions of common property systems or a “sovereign pastoral commons” (see Behnke, 2018) are at odds with state-centric visions of land tenure. The ability for people to exercise claims to land remains closely linked to membership in social networks and participation in both formal and informal political processes. As such, as I show throughout empirical chapters five and six, the day-to-day aspects of access-rights are continuously negotiated through territorial presence. Given that for Douiret absences remain a central feature of its agrarian context, the question of territorial visibility is central to the political economic question of pastoral production. For example, both olive tree plantations, and livestock as used as tools to claim and maintain land access and usage rights. For those who are absent, maintaining territorial visibility also means maintaining a sort of presence, and power of negotiation. This means that although rights of access to grazing land are acquired (or inherited) depending on the *arch* an individual belongs to, these are alienable as individuals lose their territorial presence, visibility and power of negotiation. This detail is significant because it shows how those who stay, in very material ways, mark their territorial presences continuously and synchronously, while those who leave, have to also negotiate with their own absence. In

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<sup>21</sup> A7

chapter six for example I highlight how collective herding arrangements are used by absentees to maintain and legitimize access to land in ways that subvert customary rules and expectations.

### 3.6. Conclusion

This chapter explains key features of agrarian change in Douiret in the last fifty years. The evolution of pastoral labour relations and the question of land sovereignty in Douiret is distinct, and related to geographies of identity, schooling and early migration, and territorial visibilities. These aspects have a history that help contextualize the changing nature of labour, livestock and land relations of production and highlight the political economic context in which capital accumulation occurs in Douiret.. The multilocal aspects explain the particular distribution of relations of production between different clans, in different geographical spaces, where the mountain-plain relation remains foundational for understanding contemporary patterns of production. Various forms of mobilities influence patterns of production and reproduction within the family.

Whether it is shifting neighbourhood dynamics as people move from “old” Douiret to “new” Douiret; or the establishment of specific migration corridors where “children on the move” have contributed to redistributing and rearranging family constellations; or shifting patterns of out-migration as Douiret re-establishes relations to shifting centres and power polities; or changing agrarian labour relations with “outsiders” who are then integrated into Douiret, we begin to see how absence, expressed through peoples’ mobility, has multiple faces and is a central political economic question. Who is absent is in relation to age, gender, clan, and kin, but absence (or different ways of being present) also contributes to shifting subjectivities, ideals of the self, accumulation of knowledge, social capital, the types of networks accessed, the everyday, and the relationship between the herd and the household. This is key in explaining how production and social reproduction dislocate thus helping us understand how absence and accumulation are linked.

## Chapter 4. Crafting Methods Through Absence-Presence

### 4.1. Introduction

“By recognizing the other, as a mixture of presence and absence, the relation between ‘the same and the other’ as identity in difference and difference in identity, consciousness becomes the means of acceding to totality, i.e. to Spirit, which ‘reunites and concentrates the diversity spread out through space’ (Trebitsch as cited in Lefebvre, 1991, p. 22)

This reflection, in the preface to Lefebvre’s “Critique of Everyday Life” mirrors my personal journey throughout this doctoral research. “By recognizing the other, as a mixture of presence and absence”, I have come to terms with the powerful epistemic implications of using “absence” as an analytical lens to understand processes of adaptation, and what responding to uncertainty, and tracking variability may mean

for pastoralists. Formally, this research is based on a total of approximately 43 interviews with individuals, where full translations and transcripts of interviews are available for 24 interviews (see Appendix 4 for list of interviews and codes). However, as will become clearer in this chapter this research is based on much more.

Following my interest in understanding and representing the plurality of absence through the eyes of pastoralists<sup>22</sup>, in this chapter I focus on the methodological infrastructure understood as the “basic operational elements of method” (Krätli, 2015, p. 8), used to capture everyday dynamics. By acknowledging that these operational elements of method reproduce the social organisation of knowing, in this chapter I animate, and hope to bring to life, explanations for why I have written what I have written. This research has not been separate to my other spheres of life; indeed, “research is enhanced by acknowledgement that the social world, the academic world, and the personal world of the researcher are intermingled and co-created through the ongoing process of social life” (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 521). As such, I touch upon some of the most salient aspects of these different “worlds” in my methodological journey and fieldwork experiences, to include my personal views in ways of representing information and ontological shifts, the texts I have been engaging with, and the analytical perspectives, I bring these together to define some aspects of the knowledge-production space that has contributed to crafting the methodological infrastructure for this research.

This chapter is divided in two parts. In section 4.2 I frame the knowledge-production space by explaining why I decided to explore the complex relationship between presence and absence, what it means to do research, the way I did, in Douiret, and how the political economy of pastoral production helps to see pastoralism. In section 4.3 I describe my methodological journey chronologically. From arriving to Douiret, through to the moments where I had to reassess how I would continue to trace relations given the development of the pandemic, to reflections on engaging remotely and virtually through digital ethnography, to the choice using the camera (and pastoral poetry) as a tool and method during the second round of fieldwork. All along I reflect on the challenges, limitations and biases that I am aware of.

#### 4.2. Seeing Pastoralism

Haraway’s (2020) call for an “epistemic turn” in social research that conceptualizes knowledge as situated and plural has, as a matter of fact, been revealed in practice only relatively recently in my research career. My background in economics and my professional engagement in participatory monitoring and evaluation, and research design for large-scale impact-evaluation, has largely biased by framing of research as being survey-based (framed around production, consumption and exchange or inputs-output models of household economies), and structured, with an implicitly appendaged attitude towards qualitative aspects. Throughout this journey, I have had an opportunity to self-reflect on questions of representation and the implications of

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<sup>22</sup> See <https://seeingpastoralism.org/Tunisia>

methodological approaches in drylands and for pastoralists, culminating in co-editing a special issue on “Methodological Mess: Doing Research in Contexts of High Variability”, published with the journal of *Nomadic Peoples* (Pappagallo & Semplici, 2020). This has been a fundamental experience, confirming the relevance of “seeing pastoralism” by accounting for lived contexts as messy, characterised by incomplete, ambiguous and transient dynamics, and where social, political, economic and environmental variability, particularly in drylands are fundamental features of pastoral production. I mention these aspects to highlight that my research style, and methodological approaches, have continuously shifted how I see pastoralism, and how I have performed research throughout this doctoral experience. Indeed, as Jeanne Chiche, a Tunisian geographer/cartographer who has worked extensively on pastoralism in the Maghreb said to me at the beginning of fieldwork: “research is a permanent dramaturgy”<sup>23</sup>, reflecting on the performative aspect of research (see also Law, 2004).

#### 4.2.1 Why Absence?

This research builds on my personal experience with absence, my encounter with absence (and absenteeism) with pastoralists in Namibia, Iran and Oman prior to the doctoral research, as well as becoming an absent researcher due to the pandemic.

My curiosity around plural forms of absence-presence, has risen out of my own mobility and experiences of absence. Having lived in the Middle East and North Africa for a greater part of my childhood, moving frequently between different countries, in-between different world views, without a firm attachment to any particular identity, but a plural one. This has certainly influenced the way I perceive absence-presence, which has nevertheless shifted through this research.

Initially, like for most of us, absence represented simply a void, and non-presence. The topic of absence began to unravel for me when “absenteeism” almost always emerged spontaneously as a topic of discussion with pastoralists in different places. For a greater part, these absentees were portrayed as the urban elites, town-based merchants, who invest speculatively in land, appropriate themselves of access to grazing lands in conservation areas, build second homes (palaces) on precious grazing land and privatize water wells. However, this describes a very particular class of absentees, leaving out other types of absentees. These other absentees are not necessarily distant, absent and removed from place, but in fact very much linked to the “community”. Through more in-depth interactions, the everyday aspects of absence began to emerge inciting a very basic curiosity around what absences may mean for pastoralists, given that animal husbandry requires daily presence. As I framed my research questions and began fieldwork, I started to recognize how monolithic representations of absence, as non-presence, are problematic in accessing the more anonymous aspects of who is absent, how and in relation to whom-else. The idea that absentees are distant and invisible

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<sup>23</sup> B4

but powerful agents in rural contexts, often involving large-scale land grabs, further feeds the idea that absentees are politically problematic and difficult to counter. Instead, a wider understanding of absence-presence helps include the taken for granted forms of absences that are closer to us, just next door. For me, this seemed to be particularly relevant to Tunisia, where throughout my experience of living in Tunisia for five years between 2013 and 2018, I also began to recognize more centrally the socio-political implications of absence.

The political question of mobility (as an act, practice and process) and migration (as a politically constructed “issue”) in Tunisia, overshadow the more complex social aspects that include for example the gendered dimensions of absence and how it is connected to social reproduction (as covered by feminist critiques) or the psychological and emotional (“non-material”) aspects of absence, that still remains largely marginal to mainstream discussions. Yet, as I experienced through my closest friendships in Tunisia, choices on how, or whether to be absent, from where, from whom, for what purpose, for how long, and why includes different ideals of mobility, social relations, sovereignty, citizenship, aspirations, autonomy. In rural areas, absence has implications for food security, access to land and agrarian change. Practically, given the sensitivity of the topic, approaching these discussions from the perspective of absence, rather than migrating, proved to be all-inclusive and less invasive. As I applied these approaches during fieldwork by talking about absence instead of migration, I noticed how it helped avert the prejudices and resistances around the topic of migration, and has opened possibilities to include, for example, the symbolic or temporal dimensions of absence-presence. This approach revealed, for example, different insights on the ruptured and desynchronised aspects of processes of accumulation as I explore in chapter five.

Slowly but surely, and quite naturally, the topic of absence, would almost always segue into the political economic aspects of material accumulation. Eventually I began to see how absence-presence could be used as a lens that contributes to theorisations of the “invisible” with implications for researching the empirically unknown (Bernstein, 2021). The gendered aspects of absence (see for example Ahearn, 2018) lead me to important avenues tackled by human geographers, such as the affective conception of absence-presence in relation to dynamic space. It also led me to feminist critiques of the construction of households as patriarchal, leaving aside how female-headed households (of which I was part of one) are produced (O’Laughlin, 1998, 1999). These differing conceptualizations seek to bring through what is usually overshadowed, this aspect became even more important to explore, when I myself became an “absent” researcher in February 2020, when I left my field site for what turned out to be a year-long absence. The process of finding my presence in Douiret through this time was both challenging and revealing, as will become clearer throughout this chapter.

#### 4.2.2 Where and Who?

I chose to work in Douiret as my fascination with the vernacular architecture of Douiret brought me to establish personal connections there in 2015. This thesis therefore is borne out of a historical connection to Douiret, but most importantly through the subsequent interactions I had in Douiret, including with individuals who helped me throughout this research.

Nabila has been part of this journey from the beginning. As the interpreter, a woman of my age, from Douiret and one of the daughters of the Talbi family, whom have been my everyday anchoring-point in Douiret, her honest advice has been fundamental to the accomplishment of this research. She often mediated the particular challenges that come with being a non-Tunisian, non-Arabic native speaker, and doing research during the pandemic while being absent from Douiret. Nabila's perspectives and approaches have been different to those of Hedi, who helped connecting with pastoralists in the second round of fieldwork. Hedi helped with strategically organizing meetings with the hard-to-get-to livestock owners. This differed from the experience I had in the first round of fieldwork, primarily because Nabila was not inserted – or inserted differently - in the pastoral community and pastoral ways. Hedi instead provided a different way into the pastoral reality of Douiret. As a man from Bir- 30 (a sub-section of Douiret), with a strong attachment to his Amazigh identity, he often instigated interesting and heated side-debates with pastoralists about land, livestock, the state, identity and so on. This has been key as I benefited overhearing countless conversations that informed my understanding of the socio-political territory that I found myself in, without having to ask direct and politically sensitive questions. Hiba, my translator and transcript writer, is a brilliant young psychology student from Tunis; she is a close friend of mine, fascinated by research, people and the south. She came to the south to experience first-hand some fieldwork before transcribing and translating 24 long interviews. We would often deliberate on the translated text, her interpretation and my understanding. This process and her view as a young urban female immersed in the sociological and political context of her own country, brought some focus to the psychological, emotional, and the “non-material” aspects of mobility, urban-rural relations and human-animal relations of (re)production. Finally, Hamdi, is also a very close friend of mine; he is the eldest of seven brothers and a pastoralist himself from Kasserine. He emigrated to Tunis when he was young and began working as a cameraman, while continuing to maintain strong attachments to his land and extended family that remain involved in farming. His invaluable familiarity with rural values and peasant struggles, and his capacity to relate with people through his interest in agrarian politics, progressive techniques and ideals of how farming can be done differently in Tunisia, has been key to reaching to the core of key agrarian questions effectively. The second period of fieldwork was effective largely thanks to Hamdi's persona as he was not seen as a northerner, as a foreigner, or as an urbanite and in fact most commented on his “tête de berbère” (literally Berber head), and his affinity to being a *jbeili*. This facilitated,

and influenced, the decision to use the camera as a method, where we filmed all our interviews, as I will discuss further later.

Doing research in Douiret has therefore included Nabila, Hedi, Hiba and Hamdi, each with their respective backgrounds, genders, roles and perspectives. These interactions have enabled me to deepen my understanding of the multiple dimensions of this research. Indeed, research cannot be envisioned as a solitary endeavour, as is often imagined of ethnographic studies, but it is shaped by interactions with “third parties” too, which however often remain invisible in the text.

#### 4.2.3 How?

Through my journalistic work in Tunisia and previous work with ILRI (International Livestock Research Institute) on designing payments for ecosystem services in Tunisia, I have engaged with narratives around environmental disruption, extractive industries, struggles around food sovereignty and state intervention in drylands. This brought to light the urgency of understanding how pastoralists are incorporated or resist interpretations of neoliberal policies in the Maghreb. If livestock rearing in the region is increasingly relying on GMO feed imported from the USA, in a context where the state maintains meat-import dependence, at the expense of food sovereignty, how are relations of production, and the way livestock production is imagined and (re)organized, explaining the persistence of pastoralism today?

I have drawn much of my methodological inspiration from theorizations on sociospatial relations (Jessop et al., 2008), now common to transnational studies and human geography (Massey 2005), but less common to critical agrarian studies (although see Greiner, 2011). Typically, critical agrarian analysis offer methodological and analytical avenues to assess pastoral transformations, although they would have to be adapted to include livestock, as a means of production, and applied to contexts of high variability.

Given that the *khilata* emerged as a key pastoral space (see chapter six), I began to think about how I could move from the more disjointed exploration of households, families and individuals to “collectives” or “pastoral units”, and use *khilatas* to guide analysis and discussions on pastoral production. I used the *khilata* as an analytical space to organise the analysis of livestock, land and labour relations of production. This approach is different to those found in classical agrarian research, that divide farms into size categories (in terms of land holdings) to establish preliminary distinctions between different forms of production (Oya, 2004). Furthermore, I do not rely on quantitative measurements of production, consumption and exchange patterns at the “household”, family or farm level for various reasons (including the invasiveness of such research methods that require time to build trusting relations, which I did not have, especially given the pandemic). Though such input-output styles of data gathering remain useful in supporting qualitative understandings of accumulation and differentiation, deficiencies, and confusions arise when too much attention is placed on aggregate statistics for *leading* the analysis of accumulation and differentiation



(Cousins et al., 1992; Oya, 2004). For example, studies that present statistics on land concentration and landlessness as if they were adequate indicators of class differentiation overshadow how differentiation is a dynamic process. As Ben White suggests, in his critique of empirical studies of agrarian change:

“It is not about whether some peasants become richer than others, but about the changing kinds of relations between them [...] in the context of the development of commodity relations in rural economy. The changes involved in differentiation processes are thus essentially qualitative rather than quantitative; although of course they can be quantitatively measurable, they involve changes in the form or at least in the function of production relations” (White, 1989, p.20)

In this research I therefore engage in a qualitative approach to describe patterns of accumulation to include empirical approaches that capture everyday aspects of production and labour regimes, social divisions of labour, labour migration, rural-urban divisions and connections.

### 4.3. Methodological Journey

#### 4.3.1 Arriving: First Impressions, Moorings and Gossip (October 2019 - February 2020)

When I arrived in Tunisia, I established two bases, one in Tunis and one in Douiret. This was important to trace the multi-sited reality typical of most families in Douiret, who live between Tunis and Douiret, as it provided me with the flexibility of exploring both. My objective was to dedicate the first months developing relations in Douiret and then gradually trace and follow relations outwards through the family. After finding a place in Tunis, I arrived in Tataouine in mid-October. The first weeks were dedicated to various formalities of meeting regional governors and administrative representatives related to pastoral policy-making. The formal letters of support from the geography department at the University of Sousse, and the in-country supervision of Hassen Boubakri (Migration scholar in Tunisia), have been foundational for the various authorizations for this research. This process, has also helped me get into close contact with the Office of Livestock and Rangelands (OEP) at the Ministry of Agriculture in Tunis, as well as maintaining a relationship with the OEP in Tataouine. The director of the OEP in Tataouine, for example, strategically introduced me to various governmental authorities in the south, avoiding any diplomatic *faux pas*. This process allowed me also to interact with different narratives regarding pastoralism held in the administrative alleys of the south.

As I introduced my research project and interest in Douiret to the various administrative figures, the initial reaction of some was of surprise. Some were suggesting I conduct my research in Beni Mhira where, I was told, I would find the “real pastoralists”, understood as “when you live off-of livestock only”. Beni Mhira is a community in the plains, on a crossroads in the Ouara rangelands (known for being an important, yet militarized, grazing expanse), clans are mostly of Arab origin, with significant camel herds and wealthy livestock owners characterized by peri-urban pastoralism with important transhumance activity, with a long history of livestock trading, particularly camels. The belief was that it would make more sense for me to do

my research there, perpetuating the common misconception that pastoralists are “real” only if they exclusively live off livestock or herds are large. Though I entertained the idea of including Beni Mhira as a multi-sited comparative study, to contrast it with Douiret, characterized as Amazigh, and a relatively smaller mountain community dominated by ownership of small ruminants, after some deliberation, I soon abandoned the idea in favour of focusing on a single-sited study. This choice, I soon realized, was significant. In part there are political reasons explaining why I was incentivized by central authorities to work in Beni Mhira rather than Douiret, and in part there are still stereotyped imageries of Douiret, where it is not considered to have a significant pastoral community.

As I finally arrived in Douiret, a different narrative began to unfold. Although Douiris consider themselves as “people of the olives” (see chapter seven), livestock ownership has always been a central activity. Proverbs, riddles, poetry and local stories, as I explore briefly later on in this chapter, clearly reveal the historical centrality of livestock rearing for reciprocal relationships, patron-client relations, for social cohesion, exchange and for the household or family more generally. Douiret’s contemporary “pastoral transition” is marked by a younger generation that is now encouraged and supported to begin livestock projects, although with a more commercial, commodified, outlook. For example, several argued how migrating is no longer convenient, and began to question the use of their own remittances to pay for expensive herder salaries instead of “employing” family members to manage their own herd. As a result, some young individuals, who are also enduring psychological and economic strife from unhealthy lifestyles and inflating costs in the cities, are returning to Douiret to invest in livestock with the support of the extended family.

This was expressed for example in the photo-essays of two pastoralists from Douiret to whom I gave disposable cameras to and asked to simply take pictures of their day-to-day life as young returnees engaging in livestock production<sup>24</sup>. The contrasting narratives revealed to me that although changes are happening “in the periphery”, in Douiret, that are not yet recognized centrally in the administrative offices of the south, in Tataouine, let alone in the north in Tunis. This dissociation from rural realities, constantly portrayed as difficult and harmful for the development of individual aspirations, also portrays the city as a place of opportunities and individual growth. Instead, this photovoice exercise and several interviews with young livestock owners revealed the various challenges young individuals are facing in the city, with rising costs and mental health difficulties, and how they are in part resolved thanks to the herd in “marginal” spaces. This led me to value the more affective aspects of production relations in my understanding of accumulation. Wellbeing for example emerged as being relevant to expanding materialist understandings of pastoral production

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<sup>24</sup> See <https://seeingpastoralism.org/tunisia-photovoice-1> and <https://seeingpastoralism.org/tunisia-photovoice-2>

The first round of fieldwork between October 2019 and February 2020 was dedicated to finding an interpreter to work with, finding a place to stay in Douiret, and beginning to talk to as many people as I could about livestock. In this first period I met all sorts of people, and each had something to say about pastoralism. During this period, I also continued to maintain a link to the capital, where the processes of travelling to and from Tataouine or Tunis, also became an important aspect of this research where I gleaned pastoral perspectives, on the road. In these bus journeys, I would meet the “shuttlers”, lorry drivers who worked transporting hay and livestock feed from the north to the south; I met university students who were visiting parents in Douiret; I met grandparents who would go to Tunis to join family and access better health services and women who would translocate for months to Tunis to support their sisters who had just given birth and needed help in the city. I too would build my own “mobility network” or relations that would help me with my own mobility, as I too had to find ways of getting to Tataouine or Tunis cheaply and conveniently. Not being motorized during the initial months was challenging, but essential in meeting people and remaining visible. The aspect of remaining visible was also important for this research, more than I had perhaps considered. I for example found that my early morning runs in the canyons helped with building respect and my own identity within the community. In the morning runs I would often meet pastoralists who set off to tend to their herd, and when I would meet them later on during fieldwork, I was already known as “the runner”. These initial sightings greatly facilitated relations down the line, as confirmation of my physical strength, as a woman, helped enormously with building trust and mutual respect in a largely male dominated pastoral scene.

During the first months of work, Nabila and I visited most households during the day, as most men were out to work. My interaction with women early-on in the research, in particular through the Talbi family, which Nabila was a member of, forged my initial impressions on the fluidity of gender subjectivities. It is in these moments that I witnessed shifting subjectivities as male figures are absent, or as returns change internal family dynamics. The Talbi family consists of six sisters and two brothers, five of the sisters (aged between 32 and 48) are not married and have decided to remain in Douiret, while the two brothers and a married sister, left and now live and work in Tunis and in France. Through the various mobilities, the Talbi family therefore transformed to be a largely-female dominated household. As I spent most lunch times with the Talbi family, it is in this space that I observed how the division of labour within the family along patriarchal schemes breaks down, even if temporarily, through absence. Shifting subjectivities, the adoption of specific roles, and even mannerisms, within family constellation need not follow subscribed ideas and expectations of female vs male division of labour, roles and responsibilities. Indeed, social reproduction can look very different once we gaze through the lens of absence, as I for example explain in chapter five.

Mooring to the Talbi constellation meant I was able to discuss more systematically the social structuring of Douiret. With them I benefitted from continuous conversations on internal community dynamics and the life

histories of specific families, through for example a collective exercise of listing all the families and *arch* (clan) divisions that structure Douiret. The objective of this exercise was to form an initial bird's eye view of Douiret, an overview of changing livestock ownership structures, as well as who left Douiret and why, and mapping out the "poor", "medium" or "rich" families, and how these changed over time and why. This exercise revealed, for example, what constitutes conceptions of the poor, medium or rich and how these change over time. It also helped me grasp the history of migration in Douiret, the reasons behind why different families constituted and dissolved herds, the rise and fall of wealth of different families, who settled in Douiret from outside and why. Eventually we used this template, throughout the research, where for each family we mapped the different herding arrangements categorized as self-herding (family labour), hired herding, or the *khlata* divided into the three models as explained in chapter six (Annex 5).

The Talbis (five women and two elders), are particularly well inserted in Douiret's social fabric and have an impressive grasp of the intricacies of most of the family's histories. I therefore had access to this type of information, also thanks to begin a young woman, where I was able to integrate into the gossipy feminine environs within the community. Though often disregarded as part of method, the "inferential functioning of gossip, and the epistemic structures it supports" (Bertolotti & Magnani, 2014, p.403) suggests that gossip, as a cognitive activity deeply rooted in one's social ecology, is essential in forming the knowledge-base that a group shares. Much of this "background" information has not been recorded nor written down, though it has provided me with the social text, and background to, understanding better (though never fully) community politics. This proved particularly useful in assessing virtual interactions and contextualizing conversations amongst Douiris on Facebook for example.

#### 4.3.2 Readapting: Tracing Relations (February 2020 - February 2021)

By the end of January 2020, Nabila and I felt ready to trace relations. We had planned to begin from the home, marked by the absence of male figures and the presence of women, elders and children, and trace relations outwards to livestock owners and their herds, who were marked by mobility. Nabila and I were incessantly chasing livestock owners who moved from pasture, to town, to the market, to the capital - shuttling between various commitments. Tracking down livestock owners was not an easy feat, especially given I did not have a vehicle. In this first period we interviewed livestock owners who would graze near Douiret, or who would end their working day at a café in the old part of Douiret. Eighteen informants were formally interviewed in this three-week period, and this included livestock owners, herders, and a few governmental officials. By this point we had established closer relationships with some livestock owners and would therefore have the liberty (and privilege) of engaging in open-ended, continuous conversations, while with others we (semi) structured the interviews and aimed at gathering an overall impression of the livestock, labour and land relations of production. In general however interviews focused on the livestock accumulation journey, the organization of herding labour, the family history and involvement with livestock, the

importance of external resources and financial support, access to pasture and subsidies for feed, the motivations behind owning livestock and future visions. It is through these conversations that the *khlatas* and the aggregate aspects of migration patterns for Douiris emerged.

At this point, Nabila and I had decided to focus on mapping the *khlatas* constellations as this would help us contact other livestock owners. By mapping the web of relations, it became clearer for example that compared to the past, *khlatas* today were increasingly formed by different and distant members that were not from Douiret; and so we would have to include livestock owners from outside of Douiret. Unfortunately, just as I had decided to rent a car in February 2020, to facilitate the process of tracing relations out of Douiret, and therefore to include livestock owners in other parts of the Dahar, the plains, and beyond, the pandemic reached Tunisia. After two weeks of stand-still, I decided to leave Douiret as I was not able to talk with individuals and continue the research in the way I had envisioned. Little did we know that this period would last longer than expected. I had left many of my personal items there, and it was only one year later in March 2021, that I was able to return to Douiret for a second round of intensive fieldwork that would last one month.

The original plan therefore of tracing social networks through the *khlatas* within and outside of Douiret, and later on, to trace extended family relations to Tunis and elsewhere, as well as interviewing returning migrants to understand how remittances and/or experiences of absence help to maintain or accumulate herds 'back home', had to be reassessed. Having left Douiret, and not knowing how long the pandemic would last, between March 2020 and July 2020 I analysed the data that I had collected and continued to maintain relationships as best as I could with the view of returning to the field in September 2020. This however was not possible given the global, and Tunisian, covid-related conditions. I therefore readapted the research design, by continuing the research remotely through phone interviews with French-speaking Douiris who had left Douiret. This was challenging as many of these connections had to be built from scratch, Nabila was understandably reticent in engaging with those we had met to ask for connections elsewhere as this was a sensitive period and furthermore only very few Douiris, who were available, spoke French. To build an ongoing engagement remotely and virtually requires a considerable trust-building process, where the initial face to face and in-person engagement is foundational. Although I attempted to use contacts and social media to build relationships, several individuals were reticent, and many of those who were available initially, eventually tapered away. From September 2020 to March 2021, I spoke to four male respondents, three of these respondents I spoke to repeatedly throughout the months. However, a turning point for me was engaging with social media and realizing the importance of the virtual medium in shaping discourses around pastoralism, people and place, and observing how relationships across the diaspora, and ideas around absence-presence, in Douiret were maintained and developed.

#### 4.3.3 Going Virtual: Digital Explorations of Absence-Presence (March 2020 - March 2022)

The unplanned adaptation of remote fieldwork did result in some anxieties. The “ethnographic fear of missing out”, and “the anthropological aversion to thin descriptions” (Hjorth, 2017, p. 93) has been in part influenced by my own prejudice that good research means presence in the field. It took me some time to rethink the notion and utility of the virtual in social studies and the act of “participating”, or better observing, online. This was a particular challenge for me as I have been off social media for several years, and still do not engage online with any social platform. What then was my digital space now? Was I prepared to redefine my relationship to the virtual space in the name of research? These are very personal questions, that (I believe) a researcher must engage with before and during digital ethnography. Mine could be described as a soft and silent approach.

I have been engaging with Douiret, as a networked, web of relations, for over four years, embedded in a Tunisia that I have been absent presently engaging with for ten years. Having been on Facebook before, during the period I was living in Tunisia, I am aware of how Facebook is used differently by different age groups and backgrounds and in different parts of Tunisia. Being familiar with the different online etiquettes, I decided to maintain a low-key strategy. My profile name does not reveal my full name and surname, while my profile picture depicts a romanticized ideal of the Amazigh mountain woman, my friends are few and all from Douiret (Image 7).



Image 7: My Facebook profile

I decided not to use Facebook to contact people out of the blue, as I find this intrusive and forceful; instead I just acted as I would normally. I posted only a couple of times on topics related to my own interests. My “participation” has been primarily to like and comment (very few times) on other people’s posts. Slowly, through this mediated form of ethnography, I began to construct a field site that extended online and included Douiret’s diaspora. Although I was aware of the drawbacks and limitations of doing research online (what is often termed as “the digital divide”, such as the bias of who uses Facebook, has access to internet, to a smartphone), and the irreplaceable ethnographic sense of “the real”, the process of archiving by collecting artefacts, fragments of experiences, thoughts, opinions, through different mediums has been a way to organize information and visualise what was repeated, emphasized and deemed to be important to the community (through number of likes/shares/comments). Therefore, this process of archiving has allowed me to mentally map various aspects that are important to Douiret.

Interactions online do not follow the same conventions as offline, where age, gender and class distinctions in defining social protocol matter more. Online, likes and comments are used more freely to express emotions that may not be expressed at all offline, profiles are often kept public, many only use messenger to communicate with others (not Whatsapp) and remain reachable and visible with the green bubble signalling their online presence. Thanks to the automatic translating function I could now follow conversations, and opinions, unaltered by my own presence, by the lag of transcribing, translating or interpretation. Soon I realized that remote fieldwork was more than a remedial measure or a "second best" choice. It helped me observe familiar people from a different perspective, opening me to new "impressions", thereby creating another layer of engagement with Douiret as mediated through physical and virtual absence-presences. Who is online all the time? Who remains invisible? What symbolisms do different people hold to? How would they formulate their opinions? What memories were being remembered? How would this link to their family history?

I too, like others, had an online and offline relationship with Douiris, and as I began archiving artefacts (text, images, audio or video files), Facebook presented a different visual-scape of Douiret to me (Annex 6 for examples).

Digital systems can also be understood as:

“an open system of disseminating meanings that are labile, ambivalent, dynamic, and transformative, allowing researchers to encounter the continual layering of different interpretations from multiple collaborators, this system enables the way to robust, ever-"thicker" ethnographic knowledge." (Hjorth, 2017, p. 45)

The hypermedia narrative, as it were, is not linear. It is interactive and multi-layered and incorporates different multimedia that helps add analytical texture. By simply observing the contradictions between online and offline behaviours for example, the ambiguity around normative values and the question of identity came to the fore. Although the Amazigh identity was often portrayed to me (offline) as also holding different values from “Arabness”, online many ascribed to a Wahhabi aesthetic, an interpretation of Islam originating from the Gulf states. The contrasts and contradictions in the projected images of oneself, with contradictory attachments to different values and imageries reminded me of how the “virtual and artificial” is, as A.S noted, “more about being in a societal game and not necessarily about an individual/personal responsibility”<sup>25</sup>. Indeed, online presences hold different normative values to offline presences.

#### 4.3.4 The Camera as Method (March 2021 - April 2021)

Postmodern approaches to subjectivity, knowledge creation, and representation critique the singularity of ethnographic texts as constructed narratives, and argue for the use of visual images and interdisciplinary approaches in experimental fieldwork to add multiple layers to research (Bloustien, 2003). It is with this in mind that I approached the use of the camera as tool and method, to achieve a sort of “ethnography by proxy” (Bloustien, 2003, p.5).

The quote by Dorothea Lange, often referred to as America's greatest documentary photographer best known for her photographic chronicles of the Great Depression and migratory farm workers “The camera teaches us how to see without a camera”, is how I began to see the camera as a tool for relating with the “outside”. Since my early childhood years, this has been one of my primary ways of engaging with people and places, and has become a familiar means for me to mediate with reality. For those whose training is literary rather than visual, the camera as method may not mean much. In fact, handling a camera may be seen as unnatural, awkward, embarrassing, intrusive, as a means to objectify, as a voyeuristic tool, raising important questions around how observations are distorted, and narratives biased in visual anthropology.

My original intention of using the camera as a research tool in Douiret was simply to document. With Hamdi, this intention shifted, as together we realized that the use of the camera in interviews was helping maintain a focus. We decided to record all interviews with livestock owners on camera and then film their relationships to the herd and interactions within their immediate environment. The purposeful timing of this second round of fieldwork with the *jezz*, sheep shearing, festival was useful as it meant that other livestock owners, and hard to get to herders would also be present. Over a little less than a month, between March 2021 and April 2021, Hamdi and I conducted 24 interviews, of which 8 interviews were follow-up interviews from the previous year, and 2 interviews were follow ups from the remote interviews I carried out previously.

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<sup>25</sup> M1



The camera became our way of interacting with various personalities. Both Hamdi and I were comfortable with this modality having had a history with its use, and Hamdi specifically with film-making in Tunisia. For both of us the camera not only extends our perceptions – learning to see with visual accuracy complex details in non-verbal communication, but also as an ice-breaker. The task of documenting gave us a role. It was our means to get busy and gave respondents a sense of ease, as they did not feel the pressures of needing to entertain. The camera created a sort of distraction, as we weaved in and out of conversations and situations, sometimes with the camera, other times not, other times as the video camera was rolling focusing on something else. Meanwhile, respondents could perform their day to day without expectations on what they had to say verbally. It was the camera that was doing the watching, and not a person, a researcher. Interestingly most people, if not all those we interviewed, felt at ease with the camera. This is in part explained by the fact that since the revolution, it has become increasingly common for people to vocalize their opinions in front of a camera, publishing the video on social media with the intention for it to go viral. The collective imagery around self-expression and the public image, has therefore changed since the revolution, even in rural areas, and particularly in the south in Tataouine, which has been one of the most vociferous hotspots in Tunisia.

Another interesting aspect of using the camera as method, is that interviewees were surprisingly at ease with handling what could be said and not said on camera. Some of the most politically sensitive questions around land for example were shared once the camera stopped filming, but this safer “off the record” space was constructed thanks to the presence of the camera. Without the camera, I found discussions to meander and dissolve into other avenues, that I would not interrupt given my own research approach/style. With the camera instead, moments of separation were created between efficient interviewing on-camera and off-camera secrecy, freedom and deliberation. The clear delineation of these spaces was helpful and made the second round of research necessarily effective.

#### 4.3.5 Poetry as Method

A final method I would like to mention is the use of poetry. In the south of Tunisia, oral poetry is an important skill, still cherished as a means to transmit popular emotions, to describe leaving, staying, returning, places, relationships, conflict, and rural living. Pastoralists’ use of oral poetry, maxims and riddles to describe territory, frontiers, mobility the desert-scape, the urban space offer a medium to understand the affective, and practical aspects of absence-presence, and relations between the mountains and the plains. My idea was to collect these forms of oral stories, from the *Rbaya*<sup>26</sup> in the plains, and contrast these with the *jbeili* poetry. I was particularly interested in the poetry that describes the emotional-affective, and practical aspects of absence-presence. I was put in touch with a man called Houcine Mseddek, a history professor, from

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<sup>26</sup> Nomadic tribe specialized in camel herding

Ghomrassen, like Douiret, a *jbeili* community, who had emigrated to Strasburg. Houcine and I had several exchanges and decided to embark together on this exploration of pastoral poetries, with the idea of publishing a translated pamphlet in Tunisia. In our collaboration, Houcine was extremely engaged and passionate. In the month that followed, we traced pastoralists whom had posted videos of themselves on Facebook reciting poetry and concluded that if we wanted to explore relations between Ghomrassen and the plains, we would have to contact the Sekrafi, who have historically looked after the herds of their *jbeili* counterparts. Houcine tapped into his networks from the alumni society of his high school in Medenine, in the south of Tunisia. At a distance, we were able to track pastoralists, who were often in the desert. This revealed an important and active support network that was mobilized at a distance by Houcine, notwithstanding the fact that he had left Ghomrassen, relatively young, and pursued his path of education and academia out of Tunisia. The strong relationship he continued to maintain with Ghomrassen, and his commitment to preserving the oral history of his hometown was yet another confirmation to me that often one never really leaves. Through his high-school network, our objective was to coordinate and contact pastoralists, translate the poetry and compile them in a way that would include the voice of the poets. Thus our poetry-collecting endeavour and exchanges began. On the summer of 2021, I received the sad and shocking news that Houcine had just passed away unexpectedly. This influenced me greatly and as I remained briefly in touch with his daughter and wife, the desire matured in me to complete this project for Houcine eventually.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

This research journey, with its different phases and different forms of interactions, has been a continuous interweaving of different personalities and methods. I use the lens of absence to craft a methodological infrastructure that helps uncover different dimensions of absence-presence, and as best as possible, unfold an understanding of how multilocal relations are implicated in pastoral production. By recognizing the *khlata* as a pastoral space, a more systematic exploration of pastoral production and how relations of production are built through the organization of networks around livestock has been possible. Notwithstanding the various and unexpected challenges of the pandemic, which have bought me to experience being an absent researcher, the process of readapting the research has allowed me to explore alternative mediums, such as the virtual medium. Through digital ethnographic methods I crafted my own presence in Douiret, and through Facebook, I have collected a series of online/digital artefacts, which have allowed me to explore livestock, land, people and place in ways I would not have done through more traditional ethnographic formats. Although virtual and long-distance methods expose multi-scalar conceptualizations, they have their limitations, and a much warranted second round of fieldwork was welcomed. A one-month window of opportunity presented itself, leading me to explore the use of the camera as a tool to focus interviews and give a different sense and meaning to my research so that engagements were more effective given the short

time frame available. Most importantly, the collaboration with Nabila, Hedi, Hiba and Hamdi, and the mentorship/supervision with Hassen Boubakri, Houcine Mseddek and Jeanne Chiche, have brought to light multiple aspects of my research. These include the gendered dimension of absence, the political aspects of land and identity, and the relevance of the mountain-plain division.

The empirical experiences outlined here, and the methodological approaches adopted, coupled with the agrarian context of Douiret outlined in chapter three have highlighted the often-underemphasized centrality of absence-presence in analysing the spatial-temporal distribution, transformation and expression of accumulation. Three central themes have emerged as being key for understanding pastoral production in the dryland context of the Dahar: mobility, institutions, and flexible framings of accumulation. The following core empirical chapters, explore each of the three themes. Chapter five delves deeply into absence-presence through different forms of mobility by asking: How are different forms of “absence” relevant to accumulating capital in the pastoral community? How does “absence” influence class, gender and wealth differentials in the course of daily practice? Chapter six explores the organization of livestock, land and labour relations through the *khlat*, and asks How do livestock management institutions help to maintain or multiply herds, and accumulate capital “back home”? Finally, chapter seven focuses on the dynamic aspects of patterns of accumulation in pastoral systems by asking How are livestock, as forms of capital, linked to the to different households’ strategies of accumulation? In each chapter I maintain the focus on household and herd dynamics, how they relate, how they transform one another and thus explore how aspects of (re)production are relevant to understanding agrarian change in Douiret.

## Chapter 5. Migration: The Role of Absence-Presence for Multilocal Accumulation

### 5.1. Introduction

Douiret is at the end of a windy road, at the very edge of the Dahar mountainous range, nestled between the dry dusty canyons of southern Tunisia. As I arrived, elders, children and women dominated the scene when walking through town or when taking the bus that connects Douiret to its closest market, Tataouine, twenty kilometres away. As I began to sink into Douiret’s rhythms, the initial impressions of this demographic skew gave way to a different image: the expansion and contraction, the ebb and flow of Douiret’s demographic tide, marked by seasons and cycles. At times the town swells with children returning to Douiret during school holidays, other times it hollows as young men return to Tunis after tending their olives during the picking season. During *Aïd El Kebir* or Ramadan, Douiret bustles with close and distant relatives coming from near and very far. When these religious festivities combine with wedding season in the summer months, then

Douiret is filled with absentees and other visitors. Who is present and who is absent? Who leaves and who stays? Who returns and who does not? Why are answers to these questions important?

Today Douiret has a total population of around ninety thousand, but only between seven hundred and one thousand live more permanently in Douiret. The rest are scattered between France, Canada, Libya, and other Tunisian cities such as Tunis, Tataouine and Sousse (Image 8).



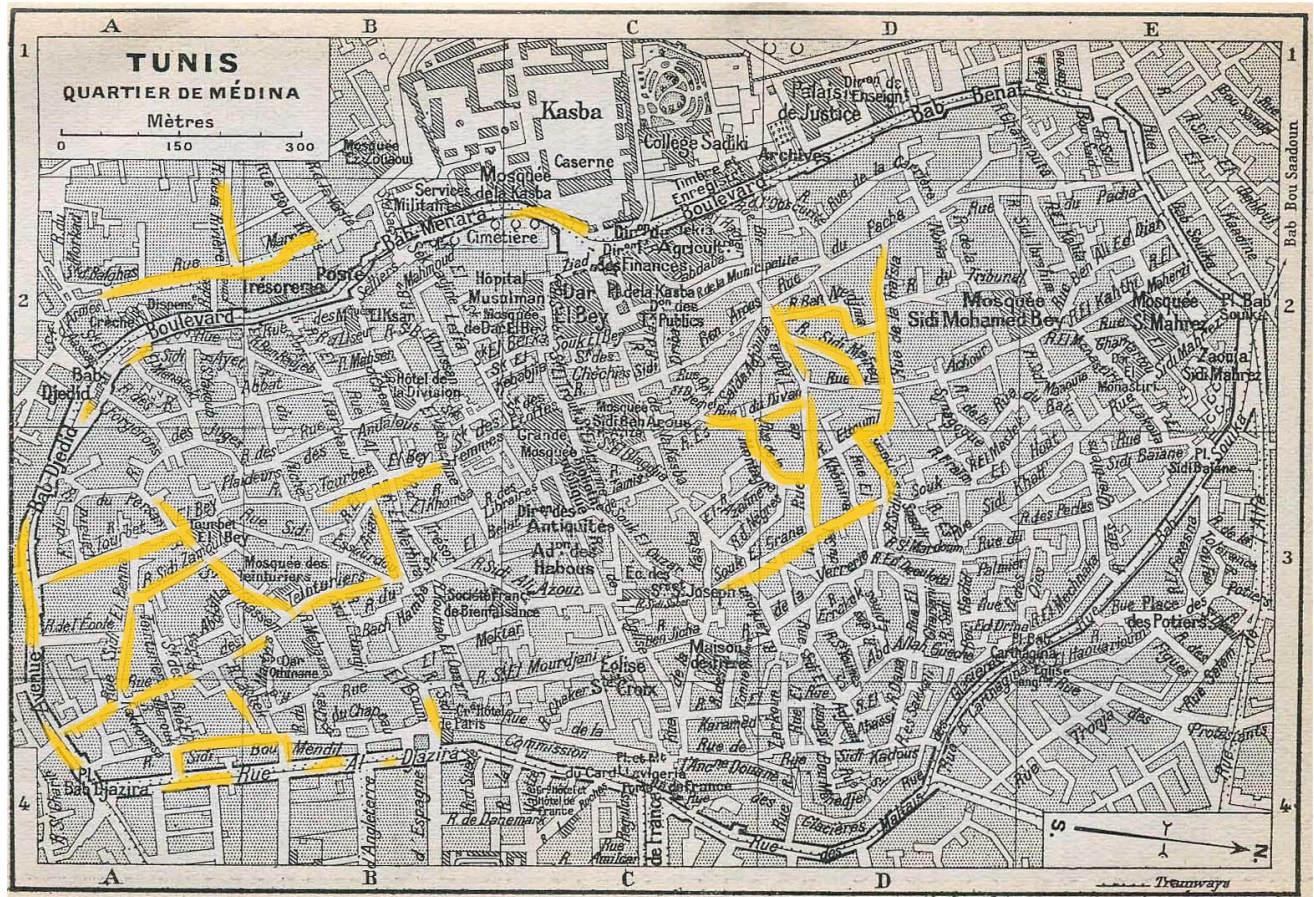
*Image 8: Spatially stretched relations, representing Douiret in different localities*

The majority, twenty thousand, are in Tunis, specifically in the *Medina*, where “little islands”<sup>27</sup> of Douiret have been notoriously created through processes of “aggregation” and spatially-stretched social relations in neighbourhoods such as Hafsia, Baba Jezira and Bab Jedid (Image 9).

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<sup>27</sup> M1





*Image 9: Douiri neighbourhoods in the Medina*

As A.S, who grew up in Tunis remembers, “We are not in the village, we re-create the village so we are not far from the village”<sup>28</sup> and this is a specific trait that marks the historic relationship between Douiret in the south and Douiret in the north, that is, in Tunis .

Spatially stretched, but territorially defined, aggregation pathways, through networks of kin, pave the way for labour specializations, employment opportunities, and marriage opportunities<sup>29</sup>. And, while the membranes of Douiret are porous, elastic, stretched out in space to new places, where individuals belong to

28 M1

<sup>29</sup> Nizar Ben Halim is a geneticist from Douiret who recounted his own personal relationship to Douiret to me, and his return to Douiret through research. Interestingly his research is somewhat similar to my own but from a genetic perspective. This is his story for example:

"I was born in Tunis and my father too, my grandfather came at a young age (10 years old) in the 1930s/40s. From my mother's side she also left young at 2/3 years old. The first time I visited Douiret was in 1984 when I was 22 years old. I am a fourth generation Douiri. I visited Douiret when I worked on my doctoral thesis. I am a geneticist. I did my thesis on the genetic diversity of Douiret. I chose Douiret as an isolated village, we call this the "Genetic isolate". At first it was a demographic research, I was interested in why people chose the ancestral model of endogamy and co-sanguinity. Why do Douiris not marry with people outside of their community even if they have left the community since a long time? Why do people remain anchored to such marriage habits? Why is the percentage of endogamy and co-sanguinity still high for those who left and who are in Tunis and Paris?" (M2)

more than one community; the *jessours*, *ksours*, pastures, and olives are solid emblems of a carefully nurtured village identity. As already mentioned in chapter two, the specificity of the “*jbeili* system” in terms of labour relations and mobility, is fundamental to understanding the political economy of Douiret (see for example Seklani, 1974).

The fact that eighty percent of Douiris are in fact scattered, not in Douiret or “absent” from Douiret, influences how social networks operate, how identities and subjectivities are formed, processes of “capitalist penetration”, accumulation and social relations of production. Within this extended sense of space, “community” can no longer be defined by its geographical boundaries, nor by the demography of those who are present, nor can households be understood as being either here or there. Absence therefore becomes a defining feature of Douiret’s political economy.

This chapter focuses on the multiple faces of absence. As introduced in chapter two, absence is not necessarily a separation, a rupture, or non-presence but it includes various forms of connection, of presences. One may be absent in order to be differently present now or later. One may be absently present, and presently absent. Absence-presence as “productive of both effect and affect” (Maddrell, 2013, p. 503), therefore reflects the centrality of absence in the productive relations and becomes a lens and framework of analysis (see discussion in chapter four).

Chapter two highlighted the importance of relational and multi-scalar conceptualisations offered by transnational studies and how these are relevant to understanding processes of agrarian change in Douiret. Transnationalists theorize on place connection through translocal understandings by considering how migrants form attachments to multiple places and negotiate relationships between places. Similarly, I argue, that absence also has to be read with this spatially disaggregated and temporally stretched key. This is important for a political economic understanding of rural livelihoods in Douiret because various forms of absence in the web of relations influence the way resources are mobilized or the way livestock, land and labour are redistributed and accumulated within the household and community. Most discussions in Douiret revealed the link between how family members accumulate capital “outside” so that people “inside” can maintain or accumulate livestock. By using absence as a dialectical lens, discussions reveal how absence explains how departures shape multiple identity formations and influence visions of capital accumulation. This is similar to Reeves exploration of diverse experiences of “staying put”, where she uses a relational view of mobility to examine the ways “in which the mobility of one person or group can constrain or shape the mobility of others: how the temporary absence of a husband, for instance, alters the way in which female mobility within and beyond the home is morally evaluated” (Reeves, 2011b, p. 557). The way in which absence is gendered for example, reveals aspects of social reproduction and power relations that are invisible or taken-for granted (Ahearn, 2018, p. 402). With the splitting of households and with departures, there are

shifts in social responsibilities for those who stay. Gender is written into the codes of conduct, division of labour, and changing subjectivities that shift the organization of households as they change through mobility. The fact that those who leave households tend to be male and married women necessarily influences social reproduction, relationships to territory and decisions on whether and how much livestock to keep.

This chapter therefore focuses on peoples' mobilities by using absence as a lens to dissect the material and non-material processes of accumulation in multilocal spaces. Here I answer the question:

**How are different forms of “absence” relevant to accumulating capital in the pastoral community? How does “absence” influence class, gender and wealth differentials in the course of daily practice?**

By including the multilocal framing across migration networks, I show how the different forms of absence, as a result of different forms of mobility, result in different patterns of accumulation. One example I discuss for example is the symbiosis between one accumulation node in the central market of Tunis, Bir El Kassaâ, and the herd in Douiret. These analytical stances challenge stereotyped views of accumulation as a linear “path of accumulation”, as a cumulative process in one locality, or through one person, and instead enjoins the work of scholars that highlight the dynamic and multilocal aspects of accumulation (Berry, 1985; Naumann & Greiner, 2017; Oya, 2007). However, I do so from a particular angle whereby I also include how accumulation strategies are materialized through ongoing transformations of absence-presence, at the individual and family level. The political economic relevance from this angle is interesting as it highlights less rationalized and material understandings of accumulation and differentiation, as will become clearer throughout the thesis. In this chapter I focus on how accumulation is spatialized, and include several dimensions such as gender, generation, class, material strategies and non-material routines, visible and invisible relations developed online and offline. I also bring in the lifecycle element into the analytical picture, to capture the beats and pulses of various intersecting aspirations and emotional needs, from youth to adulthood to retirement, met by leaving and returning in different ways and engaging and disengaging with livestock. The ebbs and flows of accumulation of knowledge and experiences, through transferral and exchange with the place of origin, are transformative aspects that influence visions and opportunities of having herds.

## 5.2. “Partir pour Rester”?

The title of this thesis “to leave in order to stay”, is inspired by a passing statement early during fieldwork. I use this oxymoron as a way to enquire about the significance of physical separation for relations of production and reproduction. The question of whether people leave, in order to leave, as suggested by the rebuttal paper “Partir pour Quitter” (Kagermeier, 1997), or leave in order to stay, or both is less interesting to me than what leaving and staying implicates, how this changes, and what the lens of leaving in order to



stay can teach us. To leave in order to stay, means different things for different people. When I asked Zoglem what leaving meant for him his reply was the following:

“Leaving could mean emigration, like those who left for France and never came back, they left once and for all, and they no longer remember Douiret. Then there are those who came back and yet they don’t want to remember or recognize Douiret as their home. They would leave and in the course of two or three generations their children, who were born abroad, no longer know Douiret and even if they visit, they come as tourists or they might visit to study its history. The ones who no longer remember Douiret have intended to never come back since they left. Then there are those who have emigrated to find bread (a source of living) elsewhere, while their families remain here. So they come home once a year during their vacation. They might leave their wives and kids here and they spend their one-month vacation with them in Douiret and spend the remaining eleven months working abroad. They would live this way until they retire and that might take ten to fifteen, twenty years or more, depending on how young they were when they left.”<sup>30</sup>

This basic description covers various forms of absence that include spatial-temporal dimensions (generational, length of absence, frequency of presence), attitudes to leaving (never intending to come back, don’t want to remember), attachment to place of origin (visit as tourists, remaining family), age (kids left behind, age of departure), and gender (wives left behind). “Partir pour Rester”, embraces this dialectical approach where the act of leaving, *as a form of* absence, is in relation to staying *as a form of* presence. While human geographers have focused on “sense of places”, the affective aspects of place making, the ties between place, memory, ruins and the meaning of “home” for those on the move, for family left behind (Degnen, 2013; Maddrell, 2013; Reeves, 2011b), migration scholars have used spatialized conceptualizations to for example challenge the spatialised politics of borders and social transformation (Castles, 2010). I also include the productive transformations that occur across multilocal accumulation loci, moving beyond cultural geographers’ treatment of absence in affective terms, as felt, noticed to include the act of leaving as also a physical, and materially productive type of separation<sup>31</sup> in similar ways to those explored in the transnational fields (see for example Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

As Zoglem eludes to, emigration cannot be equated to just leaving as a form of absence. In many cases, absence is enacted along with presence, it is constituted with it, and helps to constitute it (Law, 2004). One may leave in order to stay, or leave in order for others to stay, or leave in order to stay later. These different variations of what leaving entails suggest that absence is just another form of presence and can be seen as

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<sup>30</sup> HH3

<sup>31</sup> I would like to thank Ariell Ahearn for this observation.

the necessary Other to presence. These aspects are relevant to the thesis question as different forms of absences influence not only accumulation possibilities and how accumulation is spatialized, but also as we will see in chapter seven, the characteristics of accumulation dynamics.

I begin by outlining three different forms of absence in Douiret: intermittent, returning and the asynchronous. Through different cases I explore how these give rise to different forms of socio-spatial reproduction. When we see absence in terms of attachment to place (with different temporalities, through different mediums, in different spaces etc..), and migrating people as inscribing their presences in different ways in Douiret, this gives rise to different forms of socio-spatial reproduction, and fundamentally I argue, different production relations.

For example, as I will show presences are enacted by A.A through the ritual of bringing his children regularly “to the village” so that they can integrate in the social fabric of place of origin and form memories and attachments to livestock and Douiret. This influences intergenerational aspects of accumulation. As I discussed in chapter four, I observed how the absence of men in the Talbi family changes subjectivities of those who are present in the family, including reshuffling roles and responsibilities for women. For the O.Sisters the permanent absence (death) of their father cemented a permanent presence with their father’s herd, while liberating them from their duties as women, conceived in a particular way, towards society. These are anecdotal examples of the gendered aspects of absence. For M.B.M (father) and Y.B.M (son), longer-term departures give rise to multiple identities where one identity (the self-outside of Douiret) influences choices made through the other identity (the self-inside of Douiret); while for several Facebook users from Douiret, less visible forms of presences are maintained through engagement in the virtual space. All of these processes influence the way social and human capital is accumulated and integrated across multiple spaces. For pastoralists, as I explore in more detail in chapter six, absences result in the re-spatialization of trusting relations for livestock production that are mediated by social institutions through alternative arrangements of herding labour, and negotiations of access to pastureland. This chapter will focus solely on how absence-presence shape logics and strategies of accumulation. I include imaginaries, identities and belonging as these emerged as key aspects that shape discourses around pastoralism, people and Douiret, as forms of absences change throughout the lifecycle of individuals within extended family networks, and where the mobility of people, morph subjectivities, and labour and capital constraints shift and relations of production are re-organized.

### 5.3. Intermittent Absences: Persistent Relations

Intermittent forms of absence constitute intermittent forms of presence. There is a continuity nevertheless, whereby intermittent absentees maintain an involvement in various family projects, influencing decisions, taking part in festivities, funerals or various rituals that maintain and engagement and foster relationships in Douiret. Typically, these individuals leave Douiret for work but continue to have their spouses and children

and/or parents, siblings and the extended family in Douiret. Often this includes the case where family units split across localities, typically to ensure better access to education for children. The intermittent absentee is therefore split between different financial and practical responsibilities, alternating between the city, his/her job, and Douiret on a weekly or monthly basis, while maintaining an involvement with territorial capital (olives, abodes, livestock and land). The rhythm of return is usually marked by the agricultural calendar (olive picking and the *jezz* (sheep shearing)) and festivities (funerals, Ramadan, New Year, school holidays) but also external factors such as travel restrictions and travel costs. Herders or agricultural workers for example return home once every three months, while those that work in the oil sector in the south return every two weeks, others that have public or teaching posts are bound to public holidays, and return on average every four months, while those living abroad return less frequently, usually up to twice a year. The intermittent absentee maintains a careful attachment to place of origin, with various social responsibilities towards different family units and members, often across different localities. This is especially true for elder brothers who, particularly in the south of Tunisia, are still expected to take over the aging father in providing for support to the rest of the family.

In Douiret, the intermittent coming and going of individuals in the family is extremely common. For livestock owners, uncles and siblings often remain involved with constituting a family herd in Douiret. Typically, this is done by providing kin relations financial support in the initial years of the livestock project, or until the project becomes self-sustaining. Having members of the family with stable and formal jobs elsewhere becomes an asset for the family, as this not only ensures there is access to external cash flows, but also access to loans from banks. Having kin members as contracted labourers outside of Douiret, can therefore be seen as a form of social capital that helps overcome capital constraints and manage variable cash flows in drylands and in the agricultural sector, where, for example, high interest rates and the lack of collateral assets recognized by the state, means that it is extremely challenging to access (formalized) financial capital otherwise.

This is the case of the ABD family for example, where household-wide behaviours and intermittent forms of absences have helped constitute a herd. A.A is an employee in the Tunisian company of electricity and gas (STEG), he works in Borma, in the desert 120 km away from Tataouine. He works fifteen days in the desert and gets fifteen days of rest.

“In these days off, I mostly spend one week in Douiret and the other week in Tunis with my family (wife and kids). I spend few days here (Douiret) and I can bring the family and spend the holidays here, I spend at maximum 21 days far from Douiret.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> HH4

As he fulfils his responsibilities as a father, alternating between Tunis, Douiret and Borma in the desert, he also fulfils his other role as the elder brother. In Douiret, his goal has been to create a stable and reliable source of income for his brothers, who are unemployed. This is the story of how A.A harnessed his own stability as a waged employee, to create capital accumulation possibilities for his brother.

“Initiating a livestock project requires an important capital, forty to fifty thousand dinars<sup>33</sup>. This isn’t possible even for most employees in Tunisia with limited salaries. Knowing that, when I started working in STEG, I got a loan and started the project [...] In the beginning, since I was going to buy the livestock along with ongoing expenses, I got a loan of sixty thousand dinars, payable over twenty years. I don’t remember the exact amount of interest but I think you pay back around ninety thousand dinars as the total debt. Paying back the loan isn’t a risk for me, the biggest risk was related to the fact that I don’t know who would truly take care of the project, that was scaring me more than anything else. The credit is on my own salary, it will be all paid from my monthly salary not from the livestock project’s income. So even if complications occurred or we faced some hurdles with project, the bank is already being paid from my salary. My biggest fear was whether my family will support me given that the project will not show its profits from day one. Like any other project, especially during the first year, it will be hard. We know it from our grandfathers. They say if you initiate a project, you are the one who gives/endows the project for the first year. For the second year, if you are on the right path, you will gain balance. You will be able to produce from the project’s revenue starting from the third year [...] We started our first step in this project around 2010 and my brother was responsible for it. However, conditions weren’t favourable and we needed money so we sold all of them. In 2017 we invested again, in the same project, and from that project we succeeded to provide employment for my other brother, M.A. took care of it and hopefully we will try to make out of it a stable job and source of income for him. I am already reaching the specific goal that I aimed. The starting capital remains untouched and I gained a remarkable profit. The revenue I made has exceeded the amount of money I started my project with. One of my siblings has a stable work, and thankfully, now the project is auto financed. I do not have to spend money from my own pocket on forage or herding labour, as was the case for the first year of this project.”

A.A is not absent, although on average he spends two thirds of his time away from Douiret. His salary from working in an oil field has been a sort of collateral to the livestock project, and has provided employment and a source of revenue for his brothers. A.A’s brother, M.A, was already accumulating livestock, but slowly.

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“I started with six head and reached thirty-five heads, which is not easy in two years. In four years, you find yourself owning 150-250 head when you start with 35 head. I could do it, I was selling young sheep and buying old ones. My brother saw how persevering I was and how passionate I am about this field, so he started supporting me by buying heads for me until we reached an interesting number of livestock.”<sup>34</sup>

The difference between the two strategies is the speed of accumulation. A.A’S capital injection jump starts the process of accumulation so that a sufficiently large flock that can financially support the household, is achieved in minimal time. M.A’s accumulation strategy is limited by the starting capital, as he explains:

“Without a loan it could be possible, but it will take longer time to achieve a productive project that would allow you to sustain yourself and provide for you and your family. You have to own above 100 goats/sheep. If one doesn’t get a loan, they will have to buy 1, 2, 3 goats/sheep each time to achieve 100 in order to have a stable work. It will take several years, around 4-5 years for the project to be productive. If you get a loan it will be sort of a shortcut towards success. If you want to start with 100, with a loan, you will have 200 -250 and start working on this project from the first day. It’s like industrial projects. In order to start you can either begin with one chain of production, as in the case of an auto-financed project or, you can get a loan and construct the whole factory.”<sup>35</sup>

Access to credit for A.A is the result of his own mobilities, between the desert and multiple locales. Another source of credit, particular and central to Douiret, is through the inheritance or “buying and selling”<sup>36</sup> of shares in a cooperative of porters (COPMAG) in the biggest central gross market of Tunisia, Bir El Kassaâ in Tunis.

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<sup>34</sup> HH7

<sup>35</sup> HH7

<sup>36</sup> I mention buying and selling in inverted commas because this is a contentious practice. In reality the buying and selling of shares is not allowed. The contract between buyers and sellers is understood as a transfer of ownership, where the ‘selling’ value is not mentioned.

Since the 1940s, the central market marks a historical space for Douiret's political economic relations with Tunis. Porter-work in Bir El Kassaâ is central to the unfolding labour relations and accumulation dynamics that links Douiret with Tunis (Image 10).



من الذاكرة...  
بطحاء رمضان باي:  
صخرة وملقى هام في المدينة يتلاقا فيها سبعة أنهج هي الباشا وبيير الاحجار وسيدى بن عروس والسيدة عجولة والأغنه وسيدى مفرج وبن نعمة. هالبطحاء هي ملقى اهنا من الدويرات ايام كان حرقتهم الجمالة بالجل والبعض منهم حمالة قفة.  
حمالة الجبل ينقلو الاثاث والخزانات والصناديق بمختلف احجامها. وحبل الجمالة يتكون من صرعين من حبل القربب قطر الجبل يتراوح بين 15 و 20 مم وطول الصرع ثلاثة امتار يتم تعديل الصرعين بحزبه ميت يجب يقول بعد الخزة وما يشاركش في اللحمل، والتعديل على مقاس الاثاث، ويكون مركز الثقل المتوسط على منتصف الفقرات الظهرية والصرعين في اسفل الحمل، اما ضفيرة الجبل يكون موقعها على الجبهة مسندة على كبوس قديم او كلاج مئتي باش يمتص ضغط الضفيرة.  
ما كانتش عيشتهم ناعمة اما كسبوها بالجهد والعرق ليهم السلام والرحمة.

From the memory...  
In Ramadan bye bye:

Surah and important meetings in the city where seven approaches meet: Al-Basha, Beer Al-Hajjar, Sidi Bin Arous, Mrs. Ajoula, Agha, Sidi Mafraj and Ben Najma. This Bathaa is the source of our people from the courses when their craft was rope holder and some of them were stand carriers.  
The rope carrier transports furniture, cabinets and towers of different sizes. And the bra rope consists of two laces of the cauliflower rope, the diameter of the rope is between 15 and 20 mm, and the length of the sprain is three meters, the sprains are adjusted by a dead part, he likes to say after the girdle and what does not participate in the pregnancy, adjusted to the size of furniture, and the average center of gravity is on the middle of the spinal vertebrae and the sprain Y bottom lamb, as for a rope braid its location on the front is leaning on an old nightmare or a claw that absorbs the pressure of the braid.  
Their lives were not smooth when they earned it with hard work and sweat. Peace and mercy be upon them.

[Hide Translation](#) [Rate this translation](#)



Image 10: A Facebook post by a Douiri that remembers and discusses the challenges of porter-work, the original link to working in Tunis

In the 1960s, when trade unions acquired political influence in Tunisia's post-colonial agenda (see Beinini, 2001), COPMAG was set up by Douiris, mainly from the Sabri clan, to protect porters' welfare during Ben Salah's socialist regime. COPMAG members could own a "fiche" (share/title) that they could pass on (but legally not sell) to family members. In 1981 a fiche was valued at 300 TD<sup>37</sup>. By 1984 the fiche already reached a value of 2,500 TD, and today the current value of a fiche is of 55,000 TD<sup>38</sup>. This is just about the viable amount of capital needed to initiate a livestock project. For several, if not most, Douiris I met, the initial connection to Tunis began with their forefathers emigrating to Tunis to work as porters in Bir El Kassaâ, and continues to this day with waged relations through COPMAG. Several mentioned how their herds have been constituted thanks to the earnings from accumulated wealth through increasing share values and in almost

<sup>37</sup> This is the equivalent of 1,704 TD in 2020

<sup>38</sup> A7 WhatsApp communication. The equivalent of 16,000 Euros

all interviews, working as a porter was mentioned at some point, as being part of the family's labouring history. The central market thus marks a key space of alternating presences, between employment/shareholding as porters in Tunis and investments in the south, through the accumulation of share values.

These are also forms of intermittent absences that speak of how links to territory are forged, by working through networks of kin either simultaneously outside and inside of Douiret, or temporally between the north and the south. In A.A's case, he simultaneously accumulates financial capital outside and livestock inside. This strategy is typically supported by siblings and rendered possible by maintaining multiple responsibilities in multiple localities. The degree and type of involvement can vary of course, but typically, employed siblings "outside" sponsor unemployed siblings "inside" of Douiret. This contrasts with a more sequential strategy, where financial capital is first accumulated in the north (usually Tunis) by tapping into aggregated networks of kin to access professional opportunities (either in the textile industry, or as porters in the central market), to then accumulate livestock later in the south.

The frequency of such sequential strategies can at times be very high, as is the case of another young livestock owner, K.O.Y. His story illustrates how in order to deal with personal health issues, increasing forage prices, living expenses and drought he is forced to alternate between jobs and places, subscribing to a fast buying and selling regime where the herd is dissolved and reconstituted on a yearly basis, with very low accumulation rates.

"I had some money so I bought some heads, step by step. I started with 1 ewe and reached over 30 and 40 heads, and I continued to buy until I reached 70-80. I kept ewes, that is how the number grew. Then I got bored and tired, so I sold them and went to Tunis. I worked 4 or 5 years in the central market as a porter, like a donkey, carrying a chariot, it was more tiring than shepherding. I got diabetes in Tunis and I didn't go to the doctor until I got so tired that I couldn't work anymore. I couldn't handle carrying anything heavy anymore, I sold my "fiche" and went back to my livestock. I had bought the fiche for 25 thousand dinars then sold it for 45 thousand dinars and with that money I bought new heads and started from scratch, and thank God, that is life. Because of the pandemic and the increase in forage prices and herders' expenses, (I changed strategy), instead of going for one year to the capital, I now only go for 5 months and come back and save money that way. [...] the 5 or 6 remaining months of the year I buy ewes, look after them, and when autumn comes I feed them, sell them and rest. You just keep buying and selling now, you do not actually own anymore"<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> K1



Both ABD's family and K.O.Y rely on intermittent absences, extreme mobility, and networks of kin to accumulate capital in multiple localities, simultaneously and sequentially. The different strategies denote different rates of livestock accumulation: slow and organic (M.A), fast with high initial input investments (A.A), or sustained/very low by radical constitution and dissolution of the herd (K.O.Y).

For the intermittent absentee, networks of kin are fundamental. The responsibility towards maintaining connections is reflected in the way, for example, future generations are encouraged to maintain, even if only symbolically, their presence in Douiret. This territorial visibility is important, to maintain access rights for example, but more generally for pastoral production as I explain throughout the thesis. For A.A although his decision to live in Tunis "is for my kids' future", ensuring his children build their own relationship to Douiret remains important:

"What I am working on is to plant the seeds of Douiret's love in them. I don't want them to be totally absent from this place, I want them to come here. I bring them here during holidays and make them want to visit Douiret and love this place, now they study there (Tunis) and they can't wait for the holidays to come here to Douiret, that's how it should be."<sup>40</sup>

The ritual of returning and building imaginaries and identities through childhood memories, like herding during school holidays or coming back to the village for olive picking for example ensure relationships to territory are built over time.

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<sup>40</sup> HH4



*Image 11: At the end of a day of olive-picking with young women, elders (in the car), and young children returning from school*

The archetype of “Douiret is like a mother”<sup>41</sup>, where “its nature brings you back, the climate, the peace of mind, the lifestyle, a nostalgic den calls you back”<sup>42</sup>, where “you can’t live with an organ missing in your body, this village is like an organ in one’s body”<sup>43</sup>, exemplifies how forming and maintaining attachments to place of origin, is essential to Douiret’s social cosmology. In fact, for many these are values instilled from a young age. But identities are not only built by returning to the village. For Douiris in Tunis, the coming and going of visitors is just as important as visiting Douiret. As A.S remembers:

“There is the phenomenon of the couriers coming, or people coming from the village either temporarily or definitively. Like my uncle who came to Tunis to work in the central market and ended up living with us. This coming and going created a sort of continuity for me, for my mother and my

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<sup>41</sup> HH8

<sup>42</sup> K2

<sup>43</sup> HH7

younger sister. This continuity manifested itself every time someone came, when we received letters, when someone would say that it rained in Douiret. The rain is something extraordinary, we are always in the time of rain, 'has it rained in this place, has it rained in Douiret, in Ras el Oued?' This rain didn't bring me personally anything, nor to my dad, but it was the good news. So this relationship with the village is virtual, not real, and manifests itself with people that come, with couriers, with good and bad news. This permanent presence with the village has made it so there have not been ruptures as such."<sup>44</sup>

These aspects are fundamental because they form the foundations for present and future attitudes and strategies to territory, including livestock and herd accumulation. As I explain in the next section, returns reappear generations down the line, these atavic returns<sup>45</sup> show that returning does not necessarily require continuous engagements with place. This is typical in many parts of the world, yet in a discussion with Hedi on this topic, he explained to me why this is the case for Douris in particular:

"Let me give you an example, when the irrigation project started in Bir Amir, a Douiri man who was born, raised and lived his life in Tunis, and who was very rich, acquired a farm in Elmhaahir. They asked him why he was wasting his time and money and he said *my kids were born in Tunis, I want to bring them here and tell them 'this is your land, the land of your ancestors, this is your palm tree'. I will not plant it for dates, I am planting roots for my son who was born in Tunis*. This is the principle of the Douiri. By saying 'I will plant olive trees', he is practicing what the Qur'anic verse says '(a goodly tree), its root set firm, its branches reaching into heaven'. So one's roots are here, and wherever you go they will remain here."<sup>46</sup>

One reading of this, is that it epitomizes the extent of the symbolic significance of tending the olive, palm and fig trees for Douiris. It is in-between absence-presence, that the tree "roots" Douiris to their ancestral lands. For Douris, land represents a "memorial space", or a "Third Emotional Space, for embodied-emotional and performative remembrance, mediating between absence and presence and other related dichotomies" (Maddrell, 2013, p. 504). Returning is an important act therefore, also for second and fourth generations of Douiris born outside of Douiret.

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<sup>44</sup> M1

<sup>45</sup> to borrow terminology in biology: atavic describes the genetic reappearance of a characteristic in an organism after several generations of absence

<sup>46</sup> A7

#### 5.4. Returning Absences: Multiple Identities in the Making

In contrast to intermittent forms of absence, the returning absentees have a longer timeframe of absence. Upon return, the accumulated social and financial capital is reintegrated in one way or another in the socio-economic territory of origin. Yet the types of accumulation trajectories depend on the type of return; whether it is premature, forced, voluntary, protracted etc. There are different ways of returning that do not necessarily, and straightforwardly, result in reintegration. Much of the migration literature tends to portray leaving as a commitment to achieve specific goals such as employment, training and professional development, education or savings, where returnees are depicted as ‘agents of development’ and sources of new human, social and financial capital (Faist, 2009). The idea that returning is desirable, also suffers from the sedentist-bias (see chapter eight and nine) that is at the heart of reflections and practices of development, which sees mobility as symptomatic of dysfunction, implicitly suggesting that integration and returning is an objective (of development) (Bakewell, 2002). Instead, increasingly, the literature on place attachments and migration critique approaches that assigns moral privilege to fixity while neglecting the varied and complex ways in which people leave, stay and return (Di Masso et al., 2019). This means shifting away from the view that the return is a directional event, where the migrant’s departure is seen primarily as a rupture with place of origin, where leaving is equated to “brain drain” or reintegration as a happening, to one where return is understood as part of global mobility practices (Jeffery & Murison, 2011).

While the idea return migration has been one of the angles that international migration theories have used to build relational interpretations of how resources are mobilised back home, as I explained in chapter two, these conceptualizations risk focusing on sequential ideas of “the return” as happening only once different forms of capital have been accumulated elsewhere. Transnationalist views instead adopt the idea that migrants keep a translocal identity in preparation for the eventual return where migrants operate along transnational social fields, where translocal networks are both structured by the actions of the people involved and at the same time provide a structure for these actions (see also Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). These views elevate how transnational family relationships are enduring and reserve a place for return migrants at home, offsetting their global vulnerability. Practices such as regularly visiting, maintaining continuous communication with family back home, sending remittances, and keeping up to date with the political and social changes occurring in the place of origin, or getting involved with diasporic organizations abroad; are all rituals that maintain attachments to place and define ongoing integration as paths to accumulation unfold, as a dynamic view of “place-making” would highlight (Reeves, 2011). This way of theorizing sociospatial relations (Jessop et al., 2008) helps to redefine absence, from a rupture towards an understanding of absence as a different form of presence, where multiple identities are in the making.

On several occasions conversations around experiences of migration engaged with liminal terminologies, and stories, the 'here and there' or 'neither here nor there' aspects of multiple identities, sustained in a third space. I have found that understanding liminality helps understand these aspects of ongoing integration, unfolding accumulation paths and multiple identities in the making. The following detour I make around *barzakh*, liminality, helps acknowledge how the everyday fabrication and experience of multiple identities, in absence, for many defines the constantly mutating projections of imagining returning.

"To recognize the significance of the Arabic word *barzakh*, a liminal fissure, is to perceive the importance of a space of memory, an imaginary realm of possibilities. It is a place where the Franco-Maghrebi finds her/himself and it is important to understand since it touches almost every aspect of his or her life. It is [...] an Arabic word fluidly slipped into a French phrase (or vice versa), a parent or child who seems foreign and distant, yet familiar and same, or a beer spilled over a prayer rug. It is being here and there, or elsewhere and nowhere." (Sharpe, 2005, p. 398)

As I was often told, the distance and absence from territory, allows for "the visions of a stranger", through the "capacity to double oneself" and "look at the collective objectively"<sup>47</sup>. As I will show, through the story of the Ben.M family, the pastoral identity of the father, was in the making in France long before he constituted his flock in Douiret, while for his son, who is now a professor in Dubai, his identity as a present pastoralist in Douiret is reinstated every time he returns. Identities are not mutually exclusive, and in fact they influence intergenerational ideas around drought, drylands, livestock management, intensive farming, and tradition versus modernization.

At eighteen years of age, M.B.M left Douiret and after working for in the industrial chain for Chrystler for seventeen years in France.

"I came back in 1987. I was born in 1952. When I came back here, I came back with a longing for my country. I remember back when I was in France my friends used to go out partying on New Year's Eve and I would pull the covers over my head and sleep, because ever since I left all I kept thinking about is my home and my olive trees. [...] I left in the hope of gaining money as all the young people at of that time who didn't want to work in the countryside. I wanted to go to the city, I wanted new clothes, I was not in the same mindset as those older than me. When I worked in France I was very attached to my home, Douiret. There are other young people who left for France as I did but they were not attached to their homes as I was. As for my wife, I prepared her passport so I could bring her along but afterwards I decided to leave her here because I wanted her to stay here. I have worked

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<sup>47</sup> HH4

in many companies in France but I ended up staying at Chrysler for 8 years. Afterwards in 1980s the French economic crisis broke out, as it did in Italy and other places. In 1976 there used to be 35,000 workers in Chrysler, and in 1984 the factory had kept only 20,000 workers as factories have replaced workers with machines. It was then when I started thinking about going back to my country and staying definitively. I came back willingly I wasn't fired from my job or anything."<sup>48</sup>

M.B.M's return is a voluntary and premature return that was then followed by successive paths of accumulation over thirty years in Douiret. This began with renting out tractors, labouring other people's land, paying off debts, accumulating olive trees, land and then eventually livestock:

"When I came back from France I had a few livestock that I sold as I had debts to pay off for a tractor I bought, so I was left with 9 goats and 3 ewes. I bought a tractor to work myself and I also worked for the neighbours to gain a living. I started having livestock and olive trees little by little. I also bought land that I have acquired through the *mogharsa*<sup>49</sup>. As for livestock, this winter I had 500 productive heads but in total I have about 800 if you count the offspring. I always have a herder, it started off with one herder since 1992, this winter I had 3 and now I have 4."<sup>50</sup>

The material accumulation trajectory of M.B.M has unfolded over several years. The first five years were dedicated to labouring on other people's land and renting out his tractor and paying off debts, while livestock accumulation began thereafter and continues to this day, as land is also accumulated. As a relatively young returnee, M.B.M has had a longer-term vision, opening up for the possibility of ensuing successive paths of accumulation over the course of several years. His is not a simple story of investing the savings accumulated in France upon return, but it is a successive managing of unfolding of livestock, land and labour relations of production that has been influenced by the accumulation of knowledge in France.

If mobility is understood more widely as an "accumulation of life chances" (Moret, 2017), the ebbs and flows of accumulation of knowledge, experiences, cash and wisdom, through transferral and exchange with the place of origin, are transformative aspects that influence visions and opportunities of having herds, in relation to households. Mobility has strongly shaped M.B.M's outlook on agriculture and education. Most of our conversation evolved around detailed numerical comparisons between different countries' competitive advantages, milk production, livestock keeping techniques, livestock-population ratios, production capacity,

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<sup>48</sup> HH6

<sup>49</sup> The *mogharsa* is a contract between the landowner and the one that plants the olives or "mogharsi". The latter takes care of the planting and maintenance until the trees are productive (10 to 15 years for olive trees). Once the trees have become productive, the contracting parties share the planted land equally and the "mogharsi" becomes the owner of his land.

<sup>50</sup> HH6

fodder and meat import-substitution policies. All of these facts and figures were informed by attending agricultural fairs in France and reading newspapers such as *le Figaro* and *le Monde*, which have given M.B.M a “progressivist” perspective on the state of his own territory. This influenced his approach to accumulating livestock but also how he envisioned and influenced the future of his own children’s education, and indeed their own attachment through territory. M.B.M has five boys and two girls whom have all graduated high school and went to study in Tunis. M.B.M instead did not finish school beyond 6th grade, but as a self-taught man, he clearly delivered to his children the importance of formal and territorial education. One of his sons, Y.B.M for example is currently an Arabic professor in Dubai, and a doctorate researcher in the field of Amazigh culture and the history of the Maghreb in the Middle Ages. The following transcripts, the first from M.B.M and the second from Y.B.M are suggestive of how the absence of one member of the family influences intergenerational visions of accumulation. The absence of M.B.M, has allowed him to accumulate specific knowledge around production and progress, influenced by western ideals of a specific generation, pre-Schengen when migrating to Europe was different to migrating today. Y.B.M’s father values education and “progress”, and has clearly transmitted a sense of this to Y.B.M. But Y.B.M’s pursuit of academia does not preclude his, and his brothers’, view that livestock represents a livelihood back home. According to them accumulating knowledge and wealth in the Emirates are strategies for the survival of the herd back home. What was missing in M.B.M’s idealized accumulation journey, is fulfilled by Y.B.M in some capacity. The following quotes contrast visions between father and son around livestock-keeping and education/careers, and exemplify generational transfers in values and norms around livestock-keeping.

**M.B.M:**

“I read Tawfiq al-Hakim’s books, and Ehsan Abdelkodous, and Benhaddouga. Also Al-Ma'arri and philosophy ever since 6th grade. I also read Tayeb Salih and el Messadi. My qualifications are not beyond the 6th grade. But I still read philosophy books. There’s one book that I didn’t read which is Tahāfut al-Falāsifa (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), I read it but didn’t get it. I also read Jahili poetry (pre-islamic poetry). I know more than what my formal education would suggest. I understand history, geography, I understand them well and Y.B.M’s case is different as he went to university and got his master degree. But I did not, yet there are things that I know better than him.

Anyways when my children were pursuing their master degrees at university, they studied as anyone else but I gave them a different kind of knowledge. I taught them the culture of the clan and how to live within a society.



For instance when they were at university and would come home for *Aïd* for three days, they would herd. As they are in the *louage*<sup>51</sup> on their way back home, I would call to ask their whereabouts and if they would say that they had reached Tataouine, I would tell them to bring their *balgha* along. You know that *balgha* is the shoe that herders wear. This meant that they knew that the herder had gone home and that they had to fill in for him. As soon as they would arrive they would spend all of their time herding sheep until they packed their bags to leave.”<sup>52</sup>



Image 12: *Balgha*

**Y.B.M:**

“I was born in 1985, as a child I have opened my eyes (in the 90s) to find my father raising and owning sheep, so growing up, we used to go herding on Friday and Saturday afternoons and on Sundays. Even during school days, we would go herding around the village after we finished school at 15h. By the end of the 90s early 2000s, my dad had finally succeeded in gathering a respectful number of livestock in his flock, so from then on we started herding outside the village, in El-Batouma or in Megessa or in the desert areas.

So, I grew up to be really familiar with sheep and goats, I know what they eat and how they eat, when and how they mate and how to herd them. I have accumulated a certain amount of knowledge about this field, it is what my family has been doing for thirty years or so. Our relationship with herding and livestock is a bit paradoxical, in a way we did suffer a lot doing this job because it is hard work and a tough lifestyle but in a different way it did also motivate us to pursue an education and learn and obtain higher degrees to improve our economic and social conditions. So this kind of life pulls you down but it does also push you forwards, I mean one feels conflicted because in way you love raising

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<sup>51</sup> Bus system in Tunisia

<sup>52</sup> HH6

livestock because it's your way of living but it is also very tough and bitter lifestyle. But either way we are thankful, we graduated from university and had the chance to work in Tunis and even then, due to the tough economic and social conditions, one finds himself in a constant search for new horizons career wise, so a lot of people have immigrated to Canada, Europe while others went to the Gulf.

Yes, and you discover that it (emigrating) is necessary in years where there is drought like this year and last year. If it was not for our emigration to the Emirates, this year would have been very tough for our father [...] the herd consumes barley all year long, in addition to the fodder expenses, there are the herders' wages. He (the father) doesn't have a cash capital to make ends meet, so he resorts to selling some heads outside of selling season, and selling out of season could lead to great losses, such as losing half of the profits. So, the fact that my brother and I work abroad has contributed to the sustainability of the herd."<sup>53</sup>

As we continued, the conversation naturally unfolded to include the multiple perspectives and multiple identities of Y.B.M, illustrating how one can be both, "here and there", both a professor and pastoralist.

"I am progressive, I like moving forwards so I would choose living in the city because my children have better chances in the city in terms of education and a civilized upbringing. This is a part of my identity, I am very realistic, I wouldn't give up civilization for the sake of tradition, I'm progressive for me life is about moving forward, the future is of the most importance, not the past.

At the same time a lot of people and civilizations have withered and there is no way for them to turn back time but I'm fighting this, I'm doing what I can to preserve these traditions, I write about them in my anthropological researches, I write articles about them and Facebook posts as well. I am trying to be reconciled with my identity. When I can give lectures about economy, ideology or even politics, I can give lectures about grazing and livestock as well, it is not a problem. I do not separate between my identity as a professor and my identity as a herder, there is no conflict between both identities. I am proud of them both, I am not in a conflict with who I am. [...] Pursuing a higher education and observing the economic conditions in Tunisia, as well as my engagement in politics and student unions during my university experience and even after that in my professional experience have allowed me to understand the economic conditions in Tunisia and gain a particular knowledge about agriculture because I come from a family of farmers and most of my interests are related to agriculture.

I believe that Tunisia's economic future depends on modernizing and restructuring the Tunisian agricultural industry, including livestock sector, in order to have an independent national economy

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<sup>53</sup> HH9

[...] So, I try to find solutions and contemplate upon the issues of this sector. I think of ways to improve the herd while preserving our identity. Preserving identity is fundamentally based on preserving the types of economic activities that one was born into.

As a southern Tunisian I am not going to change in a matter of day and night and suddenly start producing cars and try to compete with big brands like Toyota. I was brought up in a family of farmers and in tribes that raise livestock so the future of our regional economy will always depend on agriculture. The future of agriculture could be promising on the condition that it improves and progresses so it could compete with others. That's why I think we need to preserve agriculture, but we should also modernize it."<sup>54</sup>

A key reading for me is how mobility practices result in the straddling of multiple identities, for both father and son. This has created complementary, at times paradoxical, visions between progress and tradition, between professional development and the idea that "preserving identity is fundamentally based on preserving the types of economic activities that one was born into"<sup>55</sup>, between modernization and "Al-baraka", all of which influence visions around livestock production. "Al-baraka" in Islam, is not a state, it is a flow of blessings and grace. In relation to livestock accumulation, this influences ideas around risk, wealth and uncertainty. As K.O.Y reproached:

"We should stop using the lexicon of guarantee, assurance, loss, risk, chance; livestock rearing is God's work [...] it is all by grace of God – being rich is not an assurance to productive livestock herding".<sup>56</sup>

So while mobility practices emerge as responses to new constraints, risks and uncertainties faced by livestock owners, as well as access to aspirations, opportunities, services and comforts available elsewhere, these are also non-materially defined and influence subjectivities.

Absences, explain how departures and arrivals of different members of the family, for example redefine notions of femininity and masculinity, the division of labour and the organization of split households. The gendered and age- aspects of absence are therefore important. One reading is that behind a man that "leaves in order to stay", there are (several) women that stay in order for a man to leave. "Elles restent pour qu'ils partent" – they (feminine) stay so that he (plural/singular) can leave. Sisters, wives, mothers and female relatives stay in Douiret to support social reproduction, to allow for dislocated accumulation possibilities but also to continue to sustain agricultural production (either directly or through the management of people that do), as Zoglem, who worked a lifetime in Bir El Kassaâ in Tunis, affirms;

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<sup>54</sup> HH9

<sup>55</sup> HH9

<sup>56</sup> K1

“If it wasn’t for women, we wouldn’t be able to do anything, women are everything. When I was in Tunis I had a lot of livestock here and I relied on my wife. She ran the business, she bought hay for the sheep and herded the flock and spent from her own money to keep things going. If I were to do it alone I couldn’t have achieved that. My daughters helped her as well, without the help of my daughters and my wife I couldn’t have raised livestock.”<sup>57</sup>

However it is important to note that Zoglem is of a particular generation, where women were more involved in pastoral labour, while today this is mainly limited to olive picking. Aspirations related to ideas of modernity, and a modern woman, means there is a certain stigma attached to women being herders. The feminisation of agricultural labour as a result of emigration that is highlighted by several researchers in the Maghreb (De Haas, 2007) does not apply significantly in Douiret for livestock rearing. My observations have been less around than the feminisation of pastoral labour, but more around the reshuffling of subjectivities, power dynamics and roles created through the absence, vacuum, of male figures in households. For example, women take on more masculine aptitudes, roles, responsibilities and opportunities, outside of traditional household care-responsibilities.

The story of the O.Sisters was often brought to me as a sort of romanticized and exceptional example of the persistence of the herd through the direct involvement of female heirs. The anecdotal story of these two sisters, who decided to step in and continue to care for their father’s herd, is seen as admirable particularly because of their decision to live in the desert far from Douiret. As I was told by A.S:

“The father who was a porter in the central market, returned to the village in the 1970’s, installed himself and looked after his herd. He became one of the most important goat herder in the valley called Meggasa, who is of the Ourak family. When he died, they could not find someone to look after the herd in his family, so it was the girls that decided to look after the herd – they were seen and treated as *garçon manqué*.<sup>58</sup>”<sup>59</sup>

When I later met the O.Sisters, I learnt that their personal decision to take over the management of their father’s herd and move to the desert far from the community, in troglodytic caves, was in part led by the affective relationships they had built to the herd as their father would always involve the two daughters in herding chores, but in part this decision was led by their refusal to engage with standardized social expectations such as marriage and tending to household chores. As their story unfolded, it became clearer to me how these two women had formed their subversive and unconventional household in the desert

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<sup>57</sup> HH3

<sup>58</sup> *Garçon manqué*, translates literally to failed, near, wannabe, or missed boys (in English tomboys), and it encapsulates the prejudiced connotation that comes when women adopt more masculine attitudes and roles.

<sup>59</sup> M1

thanks to the permanent absence (death) of their father. This observation is very much in line with Maddrell's (2013) wonderful analysis on "Living with the deceased: absence, presence and absence-presence":

"We all experience the absence of the deceased and negotiate living with that absence in different ways, in and through a variety of place-temporalities." (p 503)

Although the selling/buying decisions of their livestock is negotiated with their elder brother, and various dependencies to the brother remain (the brother visits them in the desert on a weekly/biweekly basis), the relative absence of authoritative male figures has resulted in the redistribution of care (household) and livestock rearing labour (herd) divisions between them. For the two sisters, work is still performed in reference to expectations around gender, following current masculine/feminine divides. While one clearly adopted the more 'masculine' role of engaging with the exterior (receiving and dialoguing with guests such as me) and being responsible for the goats in the morning, the other sister adopted more "feminine" roles (preparing food and tending to more household-related chores). The key point I want to make is around the fluidity of gender roles, that are circumstantial, but also influenced by "modernity". As I was reminded by A.S, a distant family member of the sisters:

"It is a romance story. They stood up to the needs. These are not representative anecdotes but revelatory ones of a situation which is complex, and not as orthodox as before. Before the passage from one generation to the next was smooth, but now facing 'modernity', which began for some at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and others at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, means that this passage becomes more difficult."<sup>60</sup>

The difficulties around "the passage" that A.S alludes to are the intergenerational and gender-specific frictions and negotiations that redefine the cosmology of ideas around the masculine and feminine. Mobility continuously transforms the meaning of absence and how absence influences expectations around marriage, gender roles, division of labour and pastoral labour. As these vacillate or shift, social reproduction and production change. In some ways, absences accelerate change, alleviate the household of prescriptive ideas of fixed gender roles/performances, and give space for transformations. In "Winters without women: social change, split households and gendered labour in rural Mongolia"; Ariel Ahearn argues that "male experiences of absence may give rise to new ways of performing gender and making a living from mobile livestock husbandry in rural Mongolia" (2018, p.3). I argue the same, where gender, is also a space where flexibility and adaptation is crafted through absence.

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<sup>60</sup> M1

While returning absences explain the more medium to longer-term transformations that occur within households throughout the lifecycle, where absences influence subjectivities, identities, ideas and ideals and these explain changing inter-generational and gendered divisions of labour; intermittent absences reveal some of the more immediate and generative qualities of multilocal accumulation dynamics of how kin-relations support the herd back home. The next section focuses on asynchronous absences to explain how distances and detachments, especially when they involve international emigration or leaving to pursue an educational path or career, may result in ruptures or the loss of territorial visibility. Here there are class dimensions that shape visions around territory, where the role of diasporic networks becomes important, including knowledge production and the formation of discourses around pastoralism, people and place.

## 5.5. Asynchronous Absences: Contested Visibilities

### 5.5.1 Territorial Visibilities

“El ghayeb houjjetou maâh” literally translates to “Those who are absent keep their argument to themselves” or, as the 17th century version of this proverb says, “he who is absent is always in the wrong”. It is always easier to blame someone who is not present, when arguing for innocence. A.S, signaled this proverb as we spoke of the loss of power of negotiation through absence, for those who are not visible, or somehow not enduringly present.

Asynchronicity is illustrative of the arrhythmic quality of the unfolding lives of those who leave, in relation to those who stay. For example, when the migratory calendar and the agricultural calendar are no longer in sync, this reflects the fact that individuals “outside” and “inside” no longer follow the same rhythms. This increase in complexity may refer to a diversification of migratory projects at the level of the social group; for example, each individual may develop their own project without necessarily referring to the concerns of the rural family unit, or to an increase in the autonomy of migrants vis a vis the kinship group (Boesen & Marfaing, 2007).

Asynchronous absences therefore refer to what happens as a result of longer-term departures, where individuals are not able, nor willing to maintain the kinds of social ties that, for example would allow them to invest in territory. These types of absences range from individuals who have categorically separated themselves from Douiret to those who have contributed to the development of Douiret but have eventually eclipsed away due to disappointments in governance practices and changes in local political orientations<sup>61</sup>, to those that are not born in Douiret but are proud to have Douiri blood and are symbolically attached to

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<sup>61</sup> This political aspect is important to mention particularly since 2011, with the rise of extremist Islamic political parties such as Ennhada affecting the political choices and governance strategies of this region. Several of those who left Douiret reflected on the asynchronies of political views where, they say, Douiret has drifted from having a socialist and reformist outlook to being based on conservative and religious-based belief systems.

Douiret's heritage even if they recognize that they are not "one of them" and would not be able to invest in agricultural activities there, to those atavic returns where second or third generation Douiris born elsewhere return to Douiret to reconnect with their family networks, relearn their mother tongue, and get involved in local political or social questions.

These types of absences, are important to mention because they highlight those ambiguous and conflicting relationships to place of origin, where even if people may be symbolically attached to their place of origin or extremely active and present within the community, at a distance, practically, symbolically, or virtually, not everyone decides to return, and for many of those who return, they do not succeed in investing in territory of origin. As A.S recounts:

"Generally those that left and went to Tunis, end up forgotten since they are not present to defend their part or what is due to them, so they end up finding agreements already done. It happens like this a little bit everywhere, those who leave the terrain of game, of fighting and division lose their advantage and their position of negotiation. It is a story of negotiation. I know my father, decided to turn his back. He was the eldest of his brothers, his brothers that worked in Tunis would come to our home and eat with us, their clothes were washed by my mother and when the moment came to divide the inheritance my father, who considered himself at ease, left and said "I am not going to set foot back to the village", and this is what happened. So that person who is in the place is always the winner. It is not a story of force, but of presence on the terrain. It is about visibility. There is solidarity amongst people who have a certain kind of visibility. Those who do not have this visibility, lose their part, and this is something that no one is going to explain to you. As I told you I am an exterior person, even if I am implicated.

In my view, there is a very strong attachment to the village. But the idea of embarking in a (livestock) project, necessitates a preparation a strong predisposition to be able to obtain the objectives. It is not an escapade, a walk [...] it's like when you are in the sea, you need to have a stable boat that can return to a situation of security. [...]

A friend of mine who worked for many years in the Danish seas, he married with a Danish they had children and he separated and so he wanted to return to Douiret to work on the olives and palm trees of his father. He held out for a couple of years but then abandoned. The enterprise, whether it is agricultural, or pastoral requires very strong attachments that ensures a return in security. But for someone who lived for a long time in Tunis, Canada to return, is an uncertain return.

I cannot affirm this as a sociological truth – but I think a rupture has been created between the village and those who have left [...] every time there is a return he is perceived with suspicion. There is not



in my view a welcoming solidarity. [...] You can come, you stay some days but if you start to think to establish yourself it is a sort of competition that isn't seen well.”<sup>62</sup>

A.S reveals that leaving *and* staying is therefore not simple; the conflicting enactments of attachments, indicate an unspoken struggle, in being both present and absent; the tensions between belonging and not belonging come to the fore in conversations around inheritance matters and reintegration. As A.S reveals; “it is not a story of force, but of presence on the terrain. It is about visibility”<sup>63</sup>. Territorial visibilities and ruptures, symbolize the directional experience of leaving and returning, and the awareness that presence not only requires time, but it requires a particular kind of time, a tempo, that the place of origin demands and is accustomed to:

“The most important thing around absence is losing the power of negotiation. Presence requires time. There is a problem of time. There is a problem of time in terms of duration, and time in the sense that everyone has their tempo. Tempo is the rhythm of time. [...] The tempo holds the clock of the time. Everyone has their own time. The one in the terrain has their notion of time, difficult to identify. The one who is not there has a limited time... the one who is there has all the time of the region. And the one who arrives has left his tempo in Tunis, in Paris. It is almost burlesque, comical.”<sup>64</sup>

This burlesque sensation (Image 13), illustrates the asynchronous aspects of temporalities that differ according to space. The local social, political, cultural, economic dimensions follow a particular tempo, to which one needs to be accustomed with. The diverging of tempos occur through longer term absences, often with considerable social implications (ruptures).

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<sup>62</sup> M1

<sup>63</sup> M1

<sup>64</sup> M1



*Image 13: Depicting asynchronous tempos: postcard of Douiret in the 1950s (note the palm tree), a particular tempo ...*



*Image 12: ... different from today (note the palm tree)*

Livestock rearing in Douiret, as in most pastoral settings requires, a sort of synchronicity, where managing herds requires specific territorial social capital. It is not enough to be part of a clan, to be related, and to – in principle - have rights of access and usage to pasture or land. Livestock accumulation requires a kind of territorial visibility that has to stand the test of time. This was highlighted by several livestock owners I met, who alluded to the fact that, although they no longer had the financial nor emotional capacity to keep

livestock, they would still decide to keep a symbolic number just so they could maintain their territorial visibility and not lose access to pasture. As S.A explains:

“Most livestock owners in Douiret own a piece of land where they have olive trees. Their aim is to acquire as much land as possible for pasture. [...] You have olive farmers that buy livestock and hire a herder who would look out for the olive trees and makes sure that no one else brings livestock to his territory. [...]. This guarantees that people won’t damage his property, and it ensures that no one will use his water resources. [...] on the other hand we have pastoralists who accumulate land by planting trees, in order to ensure a grazing area for their livestock. They plant a few trees here and there to make sure that his livestock has a space to move around and navigate.”<sup>65</sup>

Rather than framing this narrative as peasants using livestock to protect land or pastoralists using olive trees to accumulate grazing rights, in fact there is an overlap where peasants become/are pastoralists and pastoralists become/are peasants, where both olives and livestock are used as tools to maintain territorial visibility, a sort of presence, and power of negotiation. This detail is significant because it shows how those who stay, in very material ways, mark their territorial presences continuously and synchronously, while those who leave, have to also negotiate with their own absence. In order to maintain territorial visibilities, those who leave require people in Douiret, or institutions that can mediate for their absence. These are some of the ways in which absence is embodied and enacted, materially through everyday practices of presences, influencing possibilities of accumulation later. I will now turn to other forms of presence enacted through diasporic networks as institutionalized forms of producing knowledge, and maintaining presence.

### 5.5.2 Institutionalized Visibilities

In the 1980s an emerging class of migrant elite intellectuals from Douiret born between the 1930s and 1960s came together and instituted ASNAPED<sup>66</sup>, an association that set out to promote and preserve Douiret’s heritage. The 1940s-50s, marks the period when Douiris began to emigrate not only for work, but also for education: to access formal schooling, where the journey typically began in elementary schools in Tatouine, then high-school/university in Tunis, and for several university in France (at that time it was easier to leave Tunisia), and for a few, higher education elsewhere (Canada, Belgium). A.S is a sociologist, and one of the founding members of ASNAPED. Aged seven in the early 1950s, he remembers how he was one of the first children to leave Douiret for education; “they used to mock my dad saying ‘oh Ben.S instead of sending his

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<sup>65</sup> M3

<sup>66</sup> Association de la Sauvegarde de la Nature et de Protection de l’Environnement à Douiret. ASNAPED, is a community of local and international enthusiasts dedicated to valorising all things related to Douiret and its territory. ASNAPED has become Douiret’s focal point for all those interested and dedicated to the study and realization of projects on irrigation, vernacular architecture, desertification, astrology, religion, caravan routes/trade, biodiversity conservation, arts and crafts and the provision of accommodation in renovated troglodytic homes in the old part of the city. ASNAPED has been central not only to my own experience but that of many different people, with different backgrounds, that have contributed to enriching Douiret’s history and legacy (see Ouessar & Belhedi, 1999)



kid to herd, he has sent him to school””. At that time, he continues, “sending children to school was seen as anti-economic, a *manque à gagner*,<sup>67</sup> and a joke”<sup>68</sup>. Today, he acknowledges his father’s choice (Image 14).

A mes premiers instituteurs à Douiret toute ma reconnaissance et mon respect.

Lettre envoyée à mon père à Tunis, avec annotation de mon maître d'arabe.



Aghilas Hedi EL-Jeni and 190 others

23 comments

Image 14: "To my first teachers in Douiret, all my respect and recognition. Letter sent to my father in Tunis, with annotations from my Arabic teacher"

A.S.’s early departure is characteristic of an emerging class of elite intellectuals of that generation who, within a very short time-span, experienced the transition from a relatively isolated community largely practicing “primitive socialism”<sup>69</sup>, as I was told, to a different reality influenced by a particular form of schooling, in the rest of the world. Most of A.S.’s generation in Douiret are proud of being born in troglodytic caves, in a tent or under olive trees, side by side with livestock. For this generation, *cheulh*, the Amazigh dialect spoken in this region, the mother tongue, has been an important aspect of the *jbeili* consciousness and identity. When I asked Jalloul Ghaki, a *jbeili* with a strong engagement in Amazigh rights; “when did you discover the meaning of Amazigh?” he answered; “when I pronounced my first words”. For many, the Amazigh identity and language fossilizes a connection to their childhood past and roots as *jbeili* with a strong connection to the land. I mention these aspects because *cheulh* has been a tool of resistance to “the double colonization”<sup>70</sup>, from French and Arabs. On the one hand, the *cheulh* dialect allows for secrecy and unity of the *jbeili*, and on

<sup>67</sup> Literally meaning a revenue shortfall

<sup>68</sup> M1

<sup>69</sup> M1

<sup>70</sup> A7

the other it differentiates. Many remember a structural violence that began at school when they had to learn Arabic and were forced to forget their own language as Tunisian citizens. This reinforced the differentiation between being Arab and Amazigh that, in an intellectually and politically effervescent post-colonial context beginning with independence in 1956, marked a particular socialist trait of the *jbeilis* of that generation. It is important to remember the context in which this generation grew up in. As Jalloul remembers:

“The first injustice is that when I was six years I was forced to cut with my mother tongue in a time when I was developing, and this cut was an unforgettable shock for me. As I experienced violence in the classroom for my difficulty to learn Arabic, and the fact that until 2011 we could not speak our language on the streets, we could not carry out our festivals in public, nor call ourselves Amazigh or consider ourselves as an autochthonous populations.”<sup>71</sup>

I mention these aspects because they are crucial to understanding the particularity of *jbeili* diasporic dynamics, that have been driven by a politicized homeland elite, who are considered to be important for the community as they have elaborated, and continue to mobilise, a very specific form of attachment, identity and duty towards Douiret. As I was reminded, the elite have been foundational for the diasporic involvements in local dynamics. Many of those like A.S, have become key figures of political resistance, socialist politicians, musicians, historians, scientists, archivists, activists, singers, writers and professors; maintaining a different form of territorial visibility, and an influential, increasingly virtual, form of presence as I observed through Facebook.

ASNAPED, as an institution, epitomizes this diasporic, material, and visible presence, and it is has been a node around which, Douiret’s diasporic community has influenced and supported an ongoing conversation around its identity as portrayed to the exterior. As the influential members of ASNAPED change, so too does its role and influence. The way in which Douiret is reimagined as a socially constructed collective identity or “imagined community” (Anderson 1983), is dependant to some degree on the internal cohesion of those who are mobilised to come together to maintain connections with their real or imagined homeland(s). ASNAPED as a knowledge producing node, has become a sort of gatekeeper for Douiret, maintaining and developing a significant discursive influence on Douiret’s ideals of rural livelihoods, imaginaries of pastoralism, agriculture, crafts, poetry. In fact, it is by now included as an influential stakeholder in various community development projects, as well as being a physical space where farmers’ organizations meet, where researchers connect, and where artefacts and cultural celebration is preserved through events.

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<sup>71</sup> B3

### 5.5.3 Virtual Visibilities

Another knowledge-producing space, that is decidedly less conform to class, gender and kin divisions, is the virtual platform, particularly Facebook<sup>72</sup>. During the pandemic, virtual platforms increasingly began to showcase expressions of cultural celebrations, exchanges, and attachments to territory of origin. With over twenty extremely active Facebook groups or pages dedicated to Douiret, and thousands of individual profiles, I began to witness how the visual and virtual were becoming tools to display beliefs, discourses, and attachment to place of origin. As an open and increasingly accessible platform, social norms that separate and usually hide different belief systems between people of different genders, kin and ages across borders, largely break down. In this sense, the virtual has given rise to new exchanges and exposures, meaning new knowledge, imageries, and symbolisms. Through my collection of “artefacts” (see Annex 6 for some examples) the overall impression I have is that Douiret perpetuates an ideal of attachment to its roots, land and olives, yet in practice, this ideal remains folkloric and performative much of the time. The types of information shared on social media differs between those who live and are present in Douiret and those who are not. While the online community of Douiris are more sentimental, historical and nostalgic, often bringing in westernized perspectives with a demeanour of confidence, posting long-form posts on their walls, those who live in Douiret mainly contribute to discussions through short commentaries and “likes”. For example, a few of the more influential individuals that I followed, who were in Canada, and part of the diasporic community that maintained their attachment and engagement with Douiret, have become highly regarded, and referred to. These elder individuals (all male) consistently posted primary archival historiographic material, manuscripts, maps, landed titles, as well as information on innovative agricultural techniques, and opinionated contestations of the political situation in Tunisia and in the south more specifically. Those who instead were more present in Douiret typically posted pastoral poetry, or information on different livestock breeds, updates on herds, sheep shearing activities, issues related to access to land, governmental interventions and videos of meetings of farmer associations. All of these “artefacts” informed my perception on the recurring tensions between tradition/modernity and ideals of progressiveness in Douiret and how different people express their virtual presences differently depending on their experience of physical absence from Douiret.

To what extent can these virtual engagements be used to leverage rights or enable accumulation in Douiret? Does the sharing of colonial texts, archival footage and pictures, manuscripts, land titles, maps, obituaries, poetry, legal claims and cases, governmental decisions and real-time meetings, live Facebook videos of sheep

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<sup>72</sup> What I mean is that during the pandemic, Facebook emerged as a key meeting space for absent and present Douiris, where I was able to witness how knowledge is constructed, shared, and critiqued, and where I have observed how interactions between different classes, kin, age-sets and gender in this virtual space are not bounded by the same social etiquettes as in reality.

shearing, olive picking, and carpet weaving influence possibilities of accumulation, by showcasing (conspicuously) accumulation of social capital?

My impression is that these tropes are part of the projected idea one has of oneself, and the online persona, in some cases serves to signal wealth of knowledge, exhibit connections, and maintain a territorial presence through the digital realm. As the examples in Annex 6 show, each posting, along with commentaries and interactions, generate a wealth of information specific to Douiret, that have been critical in shaping knowledge and discourses around pastoralism, people and place. Pastoralism in Douiret can therefore be understood through the ties, visible and invisible, that bind; some quite distant, others cyclical, intermittent, synchronous, virtual and immaterial, all with different implications for dynamics accumulation. This challenges the idea that pastoralism is an isolated, rural enterprise that it is destined to disappear and shows how in fact that it remains at the centre of much wider, and complex relationships that are established over years, and indeed across space and generations.

## 5.6. Conclusion

This chapter shows how absence is not a structural separation but instead a connection negotiated through diverse practices of presence and mobility. By showing how absence is not a void, a separation from place of origin, the multi-scalar dynamics of accumulation, and how these are constructed in less fixed and circumscribed ways, come to the fore. Multilocal capital accumulation also reveals the invisible and dislocated ways in which extended households are connected to livestock. There are sequential and simultaneous accumulation patterns. Those who leave may do so in order to build enough capital to invest in a herd upon return, provide financial support or access to credit for other family members in parallel, who stay in Douiret to manage livestock. Others leave to transition away from agriculture. By dissolving agricultural assets, including herds, they lose territorial visibility and with that their power of negotiating presences. These asynchronous absences, which sometimes result in ruptures, are still often involved in shaping discourses and imaginaries on territorial development, pastoralism and people; through virtual platforms for example.

Livestock keeping in Douiret is largely seen as an investment and employment opportunity for the extended family network. It has acquired a commercial and commodified outlook bringing accumulation dynamics to the centre of agrarian questions in Tunisia's southern drylands. From a political economic perspective, as the forms of absence-presence change throughout households' demographic lifecycles, livestock owners adopt different strategies of accumulation. These will be explored more closely in the next chapters. In this chapter I have shown the different class, gender, generational and kin dynamics that are relevant to accumulation, and are revealed through a processual understanding of absences. For example, absences influence gender subjectivities and the division of labour within households influencing gender roles and identities that are remodelled to maintain social reproduction and, in some cases, the survival of the herd. Intergenerational



dimensions influence the livestock-keeping connection between grandparents, parents, and sons. Inheritance, intergenerational visions and possibilities of accumulation are continuously reshaped by the coming and going of different age-sets within the household, while kin relations carve possibilities of accumulation through historic professions and connections with places, such as the Sabri clan's involvement with the porter cooperative in the central market of Tunis. Finally, the diasporic community, often a particular class of intellectual elite, maintain attachments in different ways that shape imaginaries of communities. Despite, or thanks to, Douiret's long history of migration, the connections, whether material, emotional, online or offline, continue to define how people construct their relationship to territory through livestock, which remains an important, flexible means of production and site of accumulation.

Overall, this chapter contributes to the transnational or translocal approaches that theorize how places are connected, and how they transform one another, through mobility practices. I use the absence-presence framing to capture how material and non-material aspects transform subjectivities, roles and productivity more widely, in ways that remittance-based studies typically fail to account for. I therefore join the extensive migration scholarship that is increasingly challenging prejudiced framings of migration as an either here or there state, where households are seen as fixed, circumscribed units that are separate from those who leave. I do so from a pastoral production focused angle, by still including notions of wider circulation of care that constitute the workings of 'global households' (see for example Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

The notion of "Partir pour Rester", counters representations that reproduce an either/or mentality, where Y.B.M is seen as either a present pastoralist in Douiret or an absent professor in Dubai, for example, and instead emphasises how he can be both. The common assertion that young people are no longer interested in farming or that pastoralism is destined to disappear is short-sighted and emerges from assumptions that equate leaving with absence and staying with presence. The trouble with these binaries is that they give rise to analytical blind-spots, failing to spot how social life unfolds through processes where, for example, both fixity and motion are interrelated. This produces a third space, that accounts for how individual aspirations operate through processes of simultaneity, within social networks, and is a space that is relevant for language and identity formation but also for political economic analysis (Delgado Wise & Veltmeyer, 2016). I cover this, from a more production-oriented view, in the next chapter where I look at how these diverse relations of absence-presence are mediated and how this influences how livestock is managed, and how processes of accumulation unfold. As I will then show in chapter seven, this has analytical implications for the way agrarian change, including dynamics of accumulation, social differentiation and social reproduction within households are understood and represented.

## Chapter 6. Pastoral Institutions: Mediating Absences for Flexible Accumulation

### 6.1. Introduction

Douiret has been borne out of connectivity. The original town, “old-Douiret”, is a *ksour* perched on the sides of the Demmer mountains. Hundreds of caves and troglodytic homes are hidden along the characteristic amphitheatric S shape of the canyon. The Nakhla mosque (palm mosque) lies halfway along the main path that connects different neighbourhoods represented by the different *arch*. In front of the caves, adobe edifices three stories high protect what were once collective family granaries (*gasr*) (Image 15).



Image 15: Family granaries (*gasr*)

Given the harsh environmental context, the role of the collective granaries in exchange relations explain how Douiret has been defined by its connectivity and relations of interdependence with the plains and beyond (Laroussi, 2009).





*Image 16: Jessours lodged in the network of valleys connecting people and places*

The *jessours* lodged in the network of valleys (Image 16) become a series of connected oases, where thanks to the barrages (*tabia*) silted earth gathers when it rains, providing precious nutrients for cereal and fig cultivation. Several rocky paths connect Douiret to other neighbouring villages like Chennini. Some are capillaries that connect Douiret, with its various “daughter” *ksours* while other paths are like arteries that connect to the plains (like the Jeffara), Algeria, Libya, the Sahel into Morocco. Along these arteries interspersed religious foundations, the *zawiya*<sup>73</sup>, have developed as economic centres.

These nodes are a reminder of the strong association between agriculture, pastoralism, (slave) trade, and religion within a context of the Islamization and successive Arabization of the region. Institutions, such as *twiza*, a collective labouring system, has ensured the upkeep of trogloditic homes, *tabias* and the stone walls

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<sup>73</sup> A *zawiya* is a religious stronghold and pilgrimage site, mostly constructed around the tomb of a founding saint, and managed by his descendants or followers.

of the *jessours* (Louis, 1973), religious institutions have been linked to the development of trade (Scheele, 2010), and the organization of collective granaries have been linked to reciprocal relations between sedentary and nomadic pastoralists (Laroussi, 2008).

As assemblages of relations, institutions organize and regulate relations of interdependence, often based on principles of reciprocity, trust, and exchange. Institutions are defined by space (geography, architecture), and can be understood as mediating, or extending rules and relationships. As already discussed in chapter three, there are several angles and approaches to define institutions, including processual aspects (Cleaver & De Koning, 2015), regulatory aspects (North, 2018), and negotiation (Berry, 1989); where the dialectic between how individual relations characterize organization, and vice versa is also an analytical key, useful for understanding agrarian production. The dialectic between individual relations and assemblages of relations came together for me when Zoglem recited a saying in Douiret to explain how ways of relating change, as space changes:

“The *arch* are like goats; when they are far from each other they call out (bleat), when they are too close, they begin head butting (fighting).”<sup>74</sup>

This maxim explains changes in kin dynamics as spatialities shift in Douiret. As I mentioned in chapter three, by the late 1990s, Douiret moved further into the valley. As families descended to the new village, the reconstitution of neighbourhoods, re-organized social relations and influenced individual relations within and between *arch*, also resulting in a reshuffling of how people relate, productive relations and the way institutions are organized.

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<sup>74</sup> HH3

In “old Douiret”, each neighbourhood was discretely divided by *arch*, along a continuous single path that connects all neighbourhoods along the ridge of the mountain (Image 17)



*Image 17: Old Douiret, with homes following the side of the mountain connected by a single path*

This spatialization defined the division of productive relations for livestock, land, and free labour (*khammes*), and resulted in families relating to one another in a certain way – characterized by Zoglem as bleating (calling out) to each other- but essentially requiring a certain interdependence.

In “new Douiret” (Image 18), such endogamic organizations of productive relations gave way to new articulations of reciprocity, beginning mid to late 1950s until almost the whole community had moved further into the valley by the late 1990s. The new spatialization of Douiret, no longer segregated by *arch* but defined by other factors (warranting further research), have resulted in new ways of relating outside of kin relations, including the re-spatialization of trusting relations.





Image 18: New Douiret

Soon after Zoglem's comment and brief explanation, I was curious to know whether and how the *khata*, as an institution, included non-kin relations relevant to pastoral production. Institutions evolve to account for new forms of reciprocities, how does this affect dynamics of accumulation through different configurations of absence-presence? This was particularly interesting to me as I was engaging with literature on the production of space and its relevance for pastoral production (Karplus & Meir, 2013), encouraging me to relate spatiality with processes that involve claiming and legitimizing access to territory, through institutions, more widely defined (Peluso & Lund, 2011). This view includes how people's mobility practices, as established in the previous chapter, sustain multilocal accumulation. This chapter therefore focuses on how different forms of absence are *mediated* through institutions, increasing options for different accumulation strategies in drylands. This chapter answers the research question:

## **How do livestock management institutions help to maintain or multiply herds, and accumulate capital “back home”?**

As explained in chapter two, three and four, the *khlata* (literally mixing) in Arabic, or *assesri* in Tamazigh emerged as a key institutional space to explore the mediating aspects of relations for pastoral production and accumulation. The *khlata* is a pooling mechanism, where different livestock owners, or associates, mix their herd with others. As I will explain, the collective herd acquires a different rationale compared to individual herding arrangements. Analytically, as discussed in chapter two, the more agentic take of critical institutionalists shows how wider negotiations through organized social networks transform accumulation possibilities, while the more rationalist framings see institutions as managing optimality in terms of costs and benefits, and the utility-maximizing opportunities of such arrangements.

In thinking about how the *khlata* functions to mediate absence and legitimize land access for flexible accumulation, I take a cue from more rationalist framings to describe its practical aspects, and adopt critical framings to explain the more dynamic, adaptive, and (I argue) autonomous features of the *khlata*. For example the *khlata* increases an individual’s negotiating power by offering access to another set of relations outside of the family (and the state). In this sense, I see the *khlata* as a space that generates autonomy.

I begin by explaining the *khlata* as assemblages of relations structured around managing herding labour shortages, costs, needs and relations. I then carry out a simple cost-benefit analysis to explain the different rationales for each of the three different *khlata* models that emerged from fieldwork. This lays the grounds for understanding how the *khlata* functions. In section 6.4 I explore how these different models can be combined in different ways across the demographic lifecycle to mediate absence and dislocate accumulation strategies. Here I focus on two primary profiles that typically use the *khlata*: young entrepreneurs and/or financially constrained individuals at the initial stages of their livestock accumulation project and “absentees” (such as retirees, urban part-time pastoralists) who, for various reasons, do not want to be fully engaged with pastoral production now but do want to maintain livestock.

Given my focus on production processes and the political economic aspects of accumulation, the *khlata* is a unique and neat space to understand livestock, land and labour relations. In section 6.4 I explain how the *khlata* also helps extend rules, by legitimizing access to pasture for example. This is a key aspect that helps begin to explain how, given resource scarcity and patchiness, pooling mechanisms generate reliability. This argument is developed further in the last section of the chapter that focuses on the adaptive and autonomous aspects of the *khlata*, where although it is not considered as an “optimum” and efficient means of managing livestock, the *khlata* generates options for flexible accumulation while tracking variability across space and



time. As I further develop in the next chapter, this has implications for understanding agrarian change, dynamics of accumulation and social differentiation.

## 6.2. The *Khlata* as Assemblages of Relations

According to Boubakri (2005), since the early to mid 2000s there has been a revival of the *khlata*, in part due to returning migrants' decisions to (re)constitute herds after having accumulated sufficient capital elsewhere, and in part as workers in the city aspire to own livestock in rural milieux. For example, Boubakri finds that "Emigrants, the elderly and civil servants" are more likely to use the *khlata*, where the proportion of the *khlata* herds raised by migrants increased from 2.14% to 21% between 1986 and 1995, reaching 44% in the early 2000s (p. 23). Although I was not able to collect such data for Douiret, and the interviews I conducted did not confirm the prevalence of "migrant" livestock owners in *khlata*s, it is clear that absence and heterogeneous rationalities are key features of the *khlata*. Examining the *khlata*, as assemblages of herding labour relations, brings these two features to light.

From the period between the 1940s and 1980s the *khlata* typically consisted of 8-15 persons from Douiret, where the collective herd generally did not exceed 500 head and associates were kin-related or from the same *arch*. Today *khlata*s are composed of a smaller membership base with larger herds, some up to 700 head. As I will explain further in the next sections, my observation is that *khlata* associations today include an increasingly heterogeneous membership base. Networks adapt to manage resource scarcity, where I suggest that the inclusion of non-kin-related and distant relations in the *khlata* compensate for changes in resource distribution (understood more widely to include changing access rights to pasture). In terms of livestock owner-herder relations, both in the past, and today, herding is carried out by individuals that are most likely of Arab origins. As also noted for other pastoral contexts, standard treatments that conflate livestock ownership and management do not typically apply to Douiret (see Groves & Tjiseua, 2020; Moritz et al., 2011; Turner & Hiernaux, 2008). Livestock are owned by all social groups in Douiret, while herding remains a specialized occupation. It is important to reiterate here that herding labour, in its remunerated form, is typically not carried out by Douiris but by "outsiders". Remunerated herding arrangements have therefore always depended on external labour; either through "outsiders" that have had longstanding relations with Douiret and have evolved from past patron-client relations (see discussion on *khammes* and *caheb* in chapter three), or through "outsiders" that are contracted from other parts of the region. The insider-outsider division in understanding herding labour relations and contracts of association in Douiret is key. Maintaining the distinction between livestock owners/breeders (*éleveur*) and herders (*bergèr*) in Douiret is therefore analytically important, especially given distinctions are constructed around inherited herding skill sets and ethnic/clan divisions, further reflected in class relations. This creates a subtle insider/outsider, Douiri/non-Douiri, livestock owner/herder division based on the socio-political legacies of the mountain-plain division discussed in chapter four.

Moving the discussion forwards onto the changing nature of pastoral contracts and changing payments structures reveals how associations are crafted in ways that meet the needs of different rationalities. In the past, herding labour was remunerated, usually in-kind, on a yearly basis (*el houl*) from “jezz to jezz” or from sheep shearing season to the next. In-kind payments called *erlaya*, were negotiated to a degree, but were set to a standard payment of one ewe or female kid (for goats) per 25 heads herded. Herding labour payments evolved from standardized in-kind payments and negotiated reciprocal agreements calculated on a yearly-basis to today’s singular modality which is a monetized fixed price per head that currently ranges between 5-7 TND/head/month<sup>75</sup> or 50 TND/head/year<sup>76</sup>. This reflects processes of commodification of livestock (and labour and land), and accounts for production logics that increasingly subscribe to the logic of expanded production through capital investments. The herd is “not just a herd anymore, it is a herd that depends on capital, that consists of a tractor worth 30,000 TND<sup>77</sup> and a car worth 20,000 TND<sup>78</sup>. Cash flows to buy fodder, to keep things running, and the payment of herders, who are now paid wages”<sup>79</sup>. Then shifting payment structures with the *khlata* from annual to monthly payment structures, and from in-kind to waged labour, reflects the need to fractionalize time so that owners have the flexibility to engage and disengage with the pastoral production quickly, especially in contexts where livestock markets are defined by faster buying and selling regimes, and changes in livestock prices. Furthermore, monthly payments meet the needs of those associates who are less able to be present for the herd, or have less experience with livestock and/or do not have family members or friends who are skilled enough to care for livestock and help cover for their absences. The agreement in monthly payment structures (unlike annual) is that the herder is entirely responsible for the herd. Livestock is returned to owners once payments end, while in the annual contract, some responsibilities remain with livestock owners. For example, pregnant ewes, tired or injured livestock and calves are given back to livestock owners. This means that in annual payment structures livestock owners must either have the skills, or if absent, must be able to tap into other networks that can look after livestock in Douiret. This aspect is revealed in the gendered division of labour, where caring responsibilities for the pregnant, calving, and injured livestock are often delegated to wives, sisters, daughters, or female relatives who are able to be more consistently present (Image 19).

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<sup>75</sup> 1.54 – 2.15 EUR /head/month

<sup>76</sup> 15.4 EUR /head/year

<sup>77</sup> 9,200 EUR

<sup>78</sup> 6,143 EUR

<sup>79</sup> HH9



Image 19: Caring responsibilities are usually carried out by women

Absent livestock owners that cannot access such care-spheres are therefore more likely to prefer monthly payment arrangements. What this section aims to reflect upon is the link between herding labour payment structures and rationales (including class, kin, and gender dimensions) as these are central to understanding how individuals and herders choose to organize *khlatas*. As an assemblage of relations, the *khlatas* includes different payment structures to meet different production needs and logics, such as differential rates of cash flows, production preferences, or access to trusting social relations in Douiret that can cover for absences. Although here I have focused on herding labour arrangements, other aspects are also negotiated such as transportation, fodder and water, and access to tractors, boreholes, or markets. The main point is that the organizational framework of the *khlatas* is negotiated and depends on the mix of pooled endowments brought in by the different associates.

I will now focus on three prevailing *khlatas* models that emerged during fieldwork, and how these models produce different options for livestock management.

### 6.3. Cost-Benefit Analysis of Three Khlata Models

#### 6.3.1 Model One: Herder Coordinates the Khlata

This is the classic arrangement whereby a herder, usually of Arab origin, takes on the responsibility of forming and managing a *khlata*. The herder chooses who to include in the *khlata*, the size of the collective herd to manage and negotiates costs and payments methods with the various associates. The task of the *khlata* coordinator is complex; apart from herding, watering and the broader tending of animals, he may also be accountable for tracking costs and revenues, negotiating access to resources such as veterinary services, feed, land and water, and consulting with owners around decisions on the sale of livestock by following fertility rates, calving seasons and fluctuating market prices for meat. For a herder, the benefits of coordinating a *khlata* is that he earns considerably more than in an individual herding arrangements. Herding wages are currently valued at 1,000 TND a month (between 800-1,200 TND/month in 2020)<sup>80</sup>. With the *khlata* instead, at 5-7 TND/head/month (2020)<sup>81</sup> a 500 head collective herd would generate between 2,500 and 3,500 TND a month in labour remunerations<sup>82</sup>. The coordinator is then likely to hire a younger herder to help, paying him 700 TND<sup>83</sup> plus 300 TND<sup>84</sup> to cover food expenses. In the best-case scenario, therefore, a *khlata* coordinator could pocket up to 2,500 TND a month<sup>85</sup>, which is considerably more than individualized herding wages, with the added benefit of including his own livestock in the collective herd and avoiding forage, labour and water expenses. This reflection is important because, in this context, the *khlata* challenges the (contested) view that herding contracts necessarily “result in low, and sometime declining levels of herder remuneration – often at or below subsistence requirements”, leading to the conclusion that livestock (capital) accumulation occurs through the extraction of surplus generated by herding labour (see Turner, 2009, p. 749). Aside from the fact that, in Douiret, herding wages are considerably above subsistence level, and increasing, the *khlata* is an additional space where herders can negotiate the value of their herding labour, outside of the market, and accumulate wealth and/or livestock. This is not only through labour surpluses but by lowering (almost to zero) livestock expenses for their own herd. The *khlata* is, therefore, an opportunity for some herders to shift gears and accumulate livestock. This requires skills, entrepreneurship, embeddedness in territory and access to networks, which not everyone has, but coordinating a *khlata* also adds considerable responsibilities, which not everybody wants.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> 307 EUR a month (between 245-370 EUR/month in 2020)

<sup>81</sup> In the early 2000s a herder in the *khlata* was paid 20 TND/head/year (6 EUR/head/year) now the pay has increased to 45 TND/head/year (14 EUR/head/year)

<sup>82</sup> 768– 1,075 EUR

<sup>83</sup> 215 EUR

<sup>84</sup> 92 EUR

<sup>85</sup> 768 EUR (this is the equivalent of approximately five times the national minimum monthly wage set at around 400 TND, 123 EUR)

<sup>86</sup> I met several herders who stressed they preferred to earn fixed wages with a single livestock owner, as this released them from responsibilities. Again, the view that accumulation occurs through the extraction of surplus generated by herding labour, resulting in structural power imbalances overshadows the fact that there are different responsibilities



### 6.3.2 Model Two: Livestock Owner Coordinates the *Khata*

Another model is when a livestock owner coordinates a *khata*. As I mentioned previously, distinguishing between herders and livestock owners in Douiret is analytically important. The purposes and use of the *khata* is slightly different if livestock owners coordinate *khatas*, as typically they will not themselves herd the collective herd (unlike model one) but will hire a herder to do so. Comparing costs and revenues between a classic *khata* (model one) and one where the livestock owner manages the *khata* (model two) can give an idea of the benefits for a livestock owner to coordinate a *khata* himself. For example, in order to maintain 100 head, an associate would spend, at the average price of 6 TND/head/month, 600 TND a month<sup>87</sup>. This only covers herding labour expenses, of which fodder expenses need to be added. This is extremely variable throughout the season and year and can range between 40-100 TND a day<sup>88</sup> depending on pasture quality and rain. This is the equivalent of 1,200 to 3,000 TND/month<sup>89</sup> on fodder to maintain a herd of 100 in a *khata*, and excludes extra expenses for transportation, water etc. An associate who keeps 100 sheep in a *khata* will therefore spend in total (fodder+ *khata* charge) between 1,800 and 3,600 TND/month<sup>90</sup>. Now, if this individual instead decides to manage his own *khata*, he could gather a total of 500 sheep together with different associates and charge 6 TND/head/month, earning 3,000 TND from the *khata* charges, of which 1000 TND is spent on herding labour<sup>91</sup>. The rest, 2,000 TND<sup>92</sup> can be used to cover fodder expenses for his own herd of 100. The second model therefore creates options for a livestock owner, by minimizing variable expenditures on fodder.

The benefit for the livestock owner is therefore not necessarily to accumulate cash but to lower expenditures by ensuring that herding labour and fodder costs for his herd are covered by the *khata* fees paid by other associates. This is therefore a beneficial set up for young livestock owners who have the energy and networks to manage and coordinate larger herds but may not have the cash flow or capital required to cover the running costs of his growing herd.

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and reasons why one would prefer to be a labourer and not an owner. For some, the proletarianization of pastoral labour is redemptive, as confirmed by several herders that I spoke with, that stressed their preference in earning less as hired herders, even if they found that the *khata* is an opportunity to develop (materially and in terms of social capital through contacts).

<sup>87</sup> 184 EUR

<sup>88</sup> 12-31 EUR a day. Each sheep consumes 1 kg on average if there is available pasture. A herd of 100 consumes 2 bags of barley of 50 kg each. Each bag costs 22 TND (6.7 EUR), thus a herd of 100 consumes the equivalent of 44 TND (13.5 EUR) of barley a day. During drought a herd of 100 sheep can consume up to 5 bags of barley a day.

<sup>89</sup> 369- 922 EUR/month

<sup>90</sup> 552- 1,105 EUR/month. This means that the associate either needs to sell between 4-9 ewes/ month to recover costs (the price of an ewe ranges from 106 EUR – 260 EUR, in 2020)

<sup>91</sup> 922 EUR of which 307 EUR is spent on herding labour

<sup>92</sup> 615 EUR

### 6.3.3 Model Three: Partnership

A final model is the *shirka*, a partnership, where associates share herding labour costs but each is responsible for their own herd in terms of variable costs of feed, shearing, veterinary costs and selling/buying decisions. Effectively these are different management units where only one aspect, usually herding labour, is pooled. In this case associates (typically no more than three) are closely related and are also more involved and present in the management of their herd. Partnerships are forged with other likeminded livestock owners, where covering each other's back is important when substituting for absence. In the case of the partnership between B and M.A (in 2021), B states how one of the most important aspects of the *shirka* model is that, "[W]e each work on our own, however, as cousins and friends, we cooperate, whenever I am absent, if I go to Tunis for instance, he is present here, these flocks need to be checked on daily. And vice versa."<sup>93</sup> In this model, partnerships are typically forged with a strong incentive to accumulate livestock. Typically, partners are entrepreneurial and at the more advanced stages of their accumulation path and have more experience with livestock management and herding skills and see livestock as a profit-making investment.

To summarize, as a collective, pooled herding solution, the *khlata* offers alternative and additional arrangements to individual, private hired herding. First, it allows certain, usually skilled, senior and/or embedded herders, to earn higher wages and accumulate livestock. Second, it allows for cash-constrained, usually young, livestock entrepreneurs to enter the livestock production system with lower starting costs. Third, it mediates different forms of absence, ensuring that territorial visibility is maintained through livestock.

Nabila and I had set out to interview livestock owners for each of the different herding labour arrangements in Douiret (Annex 5). We had identified 3 self/family herding arrangements, 7 *khlata*s (model 1), 18 *khlata*s (model 2), 5 *khlata*s (model 3) and 10 hired herders. Although we could not carry forwards the tracing exercise, due to the various limitations caused by the pandemic, this data already shows that *khlata*s are a popular arrangement in Douiret. Having described the different models, I now briefly turn to how different people make use of these different models, in combination and over time.

### 6.4. Combining Models to Mediate Absence and Dislocate Accumulation

It is common for pastoralists in Douiret to shift between different forms of herding labour arrangements and *khlata* models throughout their demographic lifecycle. Livestock owners and herders enter and exit the *khlata* system in order to expand options, manage multi-local accumulation strategies, and meet different needs and accumulation objectives. I will focus on how two main profiles that emerged from fieldwork combine different models over time.

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<sup>93</sup> K2

The first profile is young and aspiring livestock owners. If the purpose of the herd is to provide enough returns to sustain herd expenses, as well as provide for consumption needs of households or individuals and replace the opportunity cost of earning wages elsewhere, the initial herd needs to either be large or grow fast. In this case, livestock rearing requires considerable upfront starting costs. As I was told by H.S, a young aspiring livestock owner:

“Here there is a financial problem, you know that in order to do such a project for 150 sheep you need 100,000 TND<sup>94</sup> to invest, you need a large capital otherwise the project doesn’t work [...] Those that start with 150 sheep, it takes them 2 years or so to have financial stability. If you start with 2 or 3 sheep it takes you several years, almost a lifetime.

The problem is financial capital because young people cannot borrow money because interest rates are too high. People don’t start projects because there is a problem of money/capital. In the last 4 years there is the example of a young person who had a *fiche* from Bir El Kassaâ. He sold it for 50,000 TND<sup>95</sup> and decided to invest in livestock in Douiret. It didn’t work well because that capital was too low to make money.”<sup>96</sup>

Individuals who do not have access to credit, remittances, savings or capital overcome high starting costs through the *khilata*. They generally begin with a few livestock and accumulate livestock at slower rates, until they are able to cover the costs of individualized hired labour (from 800-1,200 TND/month). The objective, it seems, is to graduate towards individualized herding arrangements because there is the popular belief that the herd is managed “more optimally” this way, in terms of health and productivity. Livestock in the *khilata* is said to be less healthy because of the increased chances of introducing diseases as different flocks are pooled together, the reduced control of genetic selection for productivity in response to what animals are valued more in the markets, and the reduced assurance of optimal allocation of feed. Another criticism is around bottlenecks in decision-making and trust. Those responsible for coordinating *khilatas* were often adamant to state that they were extremely careful whom they would choose to work with. Over and over again mutual trust was mentioned as a key factor in the success of the *khilata* and in many cases, the lack of trust was a reason for deciding to dissolve partnerships. Late payments of salaries or expenses creates stressful situations for those in charge of the *khilata*. For example, late payments to purchase feed means that stock needs to be sold in order to buy more fodder to feed the entire herd, but deciding on who’s stock to sell needs to be agreed with the livestock owners who are not always responsive in time of need. Not being able to sell stock, at the right time and price, to pay for fodder means that the entire herd suffers from suboptimal nutritional requirements. The problem of late payments is more common with associates who

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<sup>94</sup> 30,719 EUR

<sup>95</sup> 15,360 EUR

<sup>96</sup> A4



are not present, such as those who have migrated abroad. As a result, while some individuals categorically avoid working with absentees to ensure that “the quality of communication is maintained”, others rely on ties of kin and reputation when deciding who to mix their herds with. Given these various bottlenecks, an entrepreneur with an eye to accumulating livestock for profit will typically keep their herd in the *khilata* between 4 and 10 years, or until a significant number of livestock is reached (between 60-100). After which if he has the skills and time, he may himself decide to initiate a *khilata* or create an association (*shirka*) with a trusted individual.

A typical path for nascent livestock owners is therefore to begin by relying on family members for labour before graduating to the *khilata* or individual herding arrangements as the herd expands. Kin relations remain fundamental, as B recounts his experience building a herd:

“I was herding on my own. I cannot afford to pay a herder one thousand dinar while I sleep at home. I had to herd on my own for the first and second year and make some sacrifices, my brother helped me financially to be able to afford the herding costs later. I have siblings who work in Tunis, two work in Tunis, in the beginning you need to have someone who can help and support you financially, otherwise you cannot make it on your own due to the increasing costs and forage prices. Your family supports you little by little, and in 4-5 years of sacrifices you’ll be owning 300- 400 head as a capital. And that’s it. It is later on that I hired a herder and bought a car when the flock in could auto-finance itself, but in what concerns the start, it’s impossible to be able to hire a herder.”<sup>97</sup>

This path is typical amongst the livestock owners I came across because, even though there may be a long history of livestock ownership within the family, for one reason or another, either a few of the inherited livestock are kept, or a few livestock are inherited in the end (between 1 and 20 head). Often, the timing to manage larger inherited herds may not be right as the inheritors may have other jobs or aspirations elsewhere, or debts to pay, and as a result the inherited herd is either sold off and dissolved or divided amongst several kin members within the extended family. One inheritance dynamic is that elder siblings often emigrate first to the cities and therefore pursue different lifepaths, expectations and responsibilities, compared to younger siblings. Elder siblings inherit the kind of capital that allows them to earn salaries and maintain a connection to the city (for example, they may inherit the *fiche* to work in Bir El Kassaâ, as explained in chapter five) or assets such as land or homes that allows them to continue to be absent from rural areas. By contrast, as last-movers, younger siblings end up more tied to rural areas and are therefore more likely to inherit capital that ties them even more to rural areas, such as livestock (which requires presence). The result is that elder brothers in cities typically earn wages and are expected to support the endeavours of younger

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<sup>97</sup> K2

siblings in rural areas. This is why the *khlata* is fundamental for young livestock owners who find themselves, due to a series of circumstances, at the tail end of the household's lifecycle with a different set of productive assets in hand.

As the herd continues to grow, a young livestock owner with the view to establish himself through the herd will often decide to leave the *khlata* arrangement. Size does matter, and larger herds are not suitably managed through a *khlata*. As a young livestock owner, M.A stresses:

“It is not profitable to engage in *khlata* when you have a large number of livestock. For instance if I have 300 head and I mix it in the *khlata*, I would be spending the same amount as if I were to hire a herder, but in the *khlata* my livestock isn't eating that well since it's among a large number of other sheep. With a *khlata* of 700 and 800 head my herd will not be eating that much. They can't even enter some private lands, while when my flock is on its own it's always full (in terms of pasture) [...] I realized by then that I harmed my own livestock by mixing it [...] even the flock will not be at ease as they would be following each other. In herding they always say that the less the better. (kallel w dallel). *Khlata* is difficult, sometimes you can mix with a non-trustworthy person.”<sup>98</sup>

There are various cost and benefit calculations going on. For M.A, in order to achieve faster rates of accumulation, optimal nutrition is important to support higher calving rates, even during drought. Initially, maintaining low costs, building territorial knowledge, and experience through networks through the *khlata* can be beneficial. Once the herd reaches a significant number (between 300 and 400 head), the herd can finance itself more easily through the sale of stock. At this point the livestock owner will generally prefer to move to more individualized herding arrangements or a partnership model, such as the *shirka* (model 3), where there is less responsibility, more freedom to control costs and expenses with a trustworthy business partner, and a healthier herd.

A second common characteristic of profiles that use the *khlata* are those who want to maintain a territorial presence while being absent. By absentees I mean those who have professional engagements elsewhere, or those who live in Douiret and wish to maintain livestock as an investment/pension fund or as a type of insurance without having the skills, time or energy to manage their own flock. These individuals negotiate their presence in the pastoral system through the *khlata*, but generally have different livestock accumulation objectives to entrepreneurs. Interviews suggested that absentees often spend more than earning and can

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<sup>98</sup> HH7

afford to keep livestock “for fun”, for limited pocket-money and/or to ensure livestock for the Aïd celebrations. As such they tend to be older, urban-elites or retirees.

As a senior experienced *khilata* herder suggests, this is the difference between a young entrepreneur and an old and absent farmer: a young farmer will have to find ways of making ends meet through a mix of strategies, which include engaging in various responsibilities through different *khilata* models. A younger farmer may not find himself having enough capital (livestock) nor financial capital to sustain fluctuating conditions and support higher calving rates; as such he will sell and buy more often, while an absent and elder farmer has typically accumulated sufficient capital to cover revolving costs. He may not necessarily be in a better position to track variability, but the main point here is that different options to accumulation are possible when there are a variety of reciprocal arrangements that can be arranged, at any one time.

To summarize, decisions on how to use the *khilata* involve cost/benefit calculations that look at the various opportunity costs between size of herd, quality of herd, and the financial revolving capital needed to sustain the herd, where the choice in herding labour is key. This also includes different managerial capacities and responsibilities, meaning different capacities in negotiation and trust. A typical accumulation strategy is for younger livestock owners to graduate out of the *khilata* arrangement as soon as possible so that livestock can be accumulated more quickly and with more control over revenues and expenditures, through buying and selling regimes. It is important to remember that this path is not necessarily an “ascent” to private herding labour arrangements. Individuals may come back to the *khilata* again in the future as they decide to destock, work in Tunis and restock upon their return, for example. As pastoralists move in and out of livestock rearing, the *khilata* helps dislocate accumulation across space and time. Ex-livestock owners, part-time pastoralists, retired and returnee migrants use the *khilata* depending on the availability of family labour, personal financial and physical possibilities, and changing external factors such as market prices for livestock, fodder, transportation/fuel. From the organizational framework of different models of the *khilata*, to their combinations over time, I now turn to the specific aspect of pooled endowments and network dynamics.

### 6.5. Extending Rules: Legitimizing Access to Pasture

I have discussed thus far how the *khilata* mediates absence-presence, ensuring territorial visibility, and dislocates accumulation possibilities. I now explore how it also legitimizes access to land. These three aspects (mediating absence-presence, dislocating accumulation and legitimizing access to land) together reveal how pastoralists generate options for flexible accumulation.

The *khata* relies on a sort of commoning process of livestock and labour and all relevant endowments<sup>99</sup> such as water, tractors, transportation of fodder and manual labour during the shearing season, but also relationships and skills. One of the most significant (and least discussed) benefits of the *khata* is, I argue, the pooling of pasture. Through the *khata* the collective herd has the right to access pasture, “belonging” to each *arch* of each member including that of the herder. The pooling of different and dispersed land endowments means that livestock owners can use the *khata* to overcome individual requirements of negotiating resources and relationships that are important for the herd.

The Ouara are pastures in the plains, that B knows if he wants to access, he will have to build relationships and reciprocal arrangements through the *khata*:

“For instance, if I want to go herding in Ouara, they would kick my flock out, they wouldn’t allow me to herd there [...] If I want to get access to it, I will have to make a *khata* with someone there.”

What is interesting about the *khata* is that any livestock owner – regardless of kin or clan affiliation – could also potentially access variable distributions of pasture. This creates options to access a mosaic of pasture under different land tenure agreements, helping livestock owners to track patchy rainfall distribution better. As a heterogeneous assemblage of relations, the *khata* creates heterogeneous options for flexible accumulation.

The way in which the *khata* creates options, by mediating absence-presence, dislocating accumulation and legitimizing access, are its adaptable and, I argue, autonomous features, as I explore in the next section. Within or through the *khata*, pooling arrangements can also expand rights and subvert certain social expectations and rules about accessing land, that are found “outside” of the institutional space. For example, the *khata* alleviates the emotional weight for younger siblings (constrained by gerontocratic power relations) or landless herders (constrained by the legacy of patron-client relations) to negotiate access to land, given the current place they hold within a society. As an associate, you are still “measured” by your community depending on the kinds of endowments you bring. There are still tacit social pressures, norms and expectations (such as trustworthiness) that determine whether you are able to enter a *khata* and with whom, but these relationships are simplified by productive objectives and reciprocal interests. In this sense, the *khata* does not simply guarantee access to territories and identify rights-holders, but it multiplies and

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<sup>99</sup> I use the word endowments rather than assets, to capture the fact that endowments include capabilities (skills) rather than just resources, even though Bebbington's contention is that assets are not merely a *means* through which people make a living, but they also give *meaning* to livelihoods. In this sense assets, or what he calls capitals, are not simply *resources* that people use but they generate *capabilities* (Bebbington, 1999). Similarly I see endowments as resources but also capabilities and the meaning-making processes they engender.

extends the rules and practices beyond what is “customary”, thus helping individuals to maintain a degree of autonomy through collective pooling.

Although here I argue that the *khlata* can be a space where class, gender, age and kin differentials are implicitly challenged, and this is accepted and visible to the wider pastoral community, the *khlata* can also reinforce inequalities, especially if popularized (and if pooled herds continue to increase in average size). I have not explored this avenue fully due to limited time in the field, and it would be important to understand how and whether the *khlata* is implicated in contestations on access to pastureland. For now, I would like to propose that the *khlata* is a system of productive arrangements that has evolved to include a mixture of fixed payment structures as well as variable contract negotiations. These respond to land and labour constraints, overcome structural constraints such as class, gender, age, kin, as well as psychologies (trust, attachments to territory/herd, relationships with family), and support mobility (absence, multi-local accumulation). This resonates with findings and the more positive framings of sharecropping contracts, for example, that highlight how they enable temporal variations in social and economic relations (see Robertson, 1987).

In the next section I explore how these adaptive and autonomous aspects are embedded in political-economic contexts driven by for example changing patterns of migration, changing dynamics of contested land and resource distribution, and changes in skilled herding labour availability and costs.

#### 6.6. Adaptive and Autonomous Institutions for Flexible Accumulation

Returning to Boubakri’s (2005) observation that the *khlata* is increasingly composed of “emigrants, the elderly and civil servants” (p. 23), the question of who engages with the *khlata* depends on boom-and-bust livestock revenue patterns, but also the opportunity cost of earning money elsewhere versus investing in livestock in Douiret. As M.B.A.B.K a *khlata* herder from the plains remarks:

“There was a period where people got interested in owning livestock, the majority did, but then they found out that it requires a lot of expenses and a lot of work, so they abandoned the project. I think that now, livestock remains for those who grew and lived with it. [...] But people who are what we call intruders, those who work somewhere else and want to own livestock, they often find they are not making profit and eventually give up.”<sup>100</sup>

Who is a pastoralist and who is not, who is an outsider and/or insider, who is seen as an “intruder” or not and how these subjective framings intersect with class, gender, and age dimensions, help understand territorial processes of accumulation (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018b). As will become clear by the end of this chapter the *khlata* must also be understood as a space where individual emotions and subjectivities as well

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<sup>100</sup> K3(B)

as requirements of presence, experience, and cash-flows are mediated, subverted, and transformed. As mentioned in chapter four these aspects are related to meaning, identity, citizenship, and wellbeing, all of which are relevant to expanding materialist understandings of pastoral production. From this perspective, the *khlata* is an entry point to understand the wide-ranging adaptive and autonomous aspects that influence production as well.

Much of the research on contractual relations in agrarian contexts has either focused on inequity, subordination, dependence, stratification, and asymmetries in relations, or on the inefficiencies of reciprocal contractual forms of agrarian production that limit innovation (see Robertson, 1987, p. 3-9 for a discussion). These perspectives promote an idea of agrarian contracts as inherently exploitative and fixed, “primitive” or “pre-capitalist” forms of agrarian production. This is problematic as it leads systematically to define sharecropping, *mezzadria*, *metayage*, *mediera* and *khammes* in terms of conflicting social classes, as patron-client relations, and as backwards, resulting in some of these practices to be seen as taboo and illegal in some countries (such as Italy). Although there are important discussions to be had on the exploitative nature of agricultural labouring relations, this framing overshadows the variable aspects of different social contracts. Differences in the way social contracts are arranged and negotiated are not merely the result of differences in farming practices and contexts, nor are they random and inexplicable, but these variations are an essential operation of adaptive contractual relations. As Robertson contends:

“Each contract must be understood not just as a structure expressing cultural or statistical norms, but as a process extending through many months or years in the lives of people involved. The adaptability of sharecropping derives very largely from its complexity” (1987, p.7)

He continues;

“all this variability and ambiguity are not further evidence of disutility and redundancy of sharecropping, but are essential to its viability [...] most obviously, it is the key to explaining how share contracts change, both in the context of a single productive relationship within and between seasons, and as an institution evolving over many decades in a particular locality” (p. 9)

The *khlata* is different from sharecropping contracts in that it is structured around pooling mechanisms rather than bilateral exchanges of labour for land/crop. The adaptable features of the *khlata* derives from its relative complexity while at the same time being simple in its informal arrangement. The flexible principles (changing contracts, within and between seasons, over generations and localities) that Robertson describes are the same, though the *khlata* operates through commoning principles, where heterogeneous endowments of different members are pooled through association and reciprocal arrangements.

Given that commoning principles are shaped by context, what features of this institutional arrangement, makes it specific to Douiret? Understanding the evolution of the *khlat* is important as it contextualizes an understanding of its autonomous and adaptable features in relation to Douiret, nested in the Dahar, in Tataouine and in southern Tunisia.

It became increasingly clear to me that the *khlat* can be understood as a variability-tracking system of productive arrangements, when Jalloul confirmed towards the end of fieldwork that:

“The *khlat*, is a practice that is more common in the south because in the north there is more rain and vegetation, the office of cereals is accessible, and the availability of rangelands means that the expenses are less significant, than in the south”<sup>101</sup>

As Jalloul eludes, the *khlat* is most commonly used in the southern regions, because in the northern regions, the relative abundance and lower costs of fodder and access to services, privileges individualized rather than pooled herding labour arrangements. This suggests that in the south, the *khlat* compensates for resource scarcity through reciprocal arrangements. It is the relative abundance or scarcity of resources important for livestock production that determines how the *khlat* adapts. In terms of pastureland, as outlined in chapter three, the *jbeili* context in the *Dahar* has meant that Douiret has resisted the relative fragmentation and privatization of collective land that has been occurring in the plains<sup>102</sup>. This means that relative to the plains, the Dahar offers continuous pastures and is near open access areas. I suspect therefore that these rangelands will be increasingly sought after by pastoralists in the region, although this was not confirmed to be a trend yet. The *khlat* is one way in which these commons are accessed, and I argue, will increasingly be accessed through the *khlat*.

As already explained, formally, access to the commons in Douiret is determined by membership to an *arch* (clan). Inside the institutional space of the *khlat* instead, the herd has the right to access pasture, “belonging” to each of the different members, plus that of the herder. Essentially the *khlat* legitimizes, through the pooling of access rights, access to a wider variety of pasture quality and distribution. The heterogeneous qualities and patchy distributions of pasture in the Dahar (that change throughout the season) means that there are heterogeneous environmental, social and political layers to territory that the herder/livestock owner has to negotiate with. For example, when certain rangelands are depleted, especially during dry spells or droughts, access to other rangelands must be negotiated within the farming community as B highlights:

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<sup>101</sup> B3

<sup>102</sup> As explained the fragmentation of ownership, and the parcellation of land has been accelerated by an influx of land transactions supported by income from emigration (Abaab et al., 1995), and privatization soured by programs that favour olive tree plantations.



“Everyone is struggling in their own way in Tataouine and everyone knows each other. It’s a small state. For example we know each other you come to ask me if you could herd in a specific part of my land since drought hit yours and not mine, I would tell you go ahead and I hope the best for them. It’s only the farmer who would feel the struggle of another farmer [...] The farmers know each other and deal with each other that’s it.”<sup>103</sup>

The expertise and connections required to track pasture and rainfall is therefore considerably simplified when access to land is somewhat already contiguous. For those who need it, pooling access rights can therefore be a strategy to access more and better land. Furthermore, through the pooling of pasture, access to land is rendered even more contiguous, stretching the rainy season (Krätli, 2016) as it were, and helping to further increase options for matching access to land with patchy rainfall distribution. The *khlata* therefore increases options to track various forms of climatic and socio-political variabilities.

As changes in land tenures and distributions reconfigure patterns and pressures of access to pastureland, the importance of institutions like the *khlata* will become more visible. There are already signs of this, for example, as more “outsiders” enter *khlata* constellations in Douiret. While associates of the *khlata* in the past were typically from the same family (arch) or based around kin-ties within Douiret, *khlata*s today are composed of a more diverse group of individuals, including increasingly members that are from outside of Douiret that have ties to Douiret. The trend, I argue, of increasing heterogeneity in membership composition is a sign of institutional adaptability. The *khlata* increasingly includes “relatives, neighbours or strangers”<sup>104</sup>, people with different identities (non-Douiri) or kin (non-family member), but also comprises of broader dimensions such as class, different forms of absences, different rationales and strategies, temporal needs and different asset-endowments. This adaptive mechanism relies on the flexible bundling and unbundling of social relations as Jalloul explains:

“Eventually the *khlata* cannot group an entire village, because of the limited access and availability of good rangelands. That is why you find Douiris in other areas, there is a form of reciprocity in order to access more rangelands given rainfall shortages”<sup>105</sup>

He continues;

“The composition of members in the *khlata* has changed. Before the 1950s herds from Douiret could not mix with the herds from other villages. Each village had their herds and their rangelands. As the

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<sup>103</sup> K2

<sup>104</sup> H3(B)

<sup>105</sup> B3

rangelands became less productive and patchy, the membership to the *khata* began to evolve by including livestock owners in other communities. This was to enable more extensive access to rangelands, which included “poorer” as well as more fertile rangelands to better feed the herds. This has happened since the 1980s”<sup>106</sup>

Jalloul’s reflection suggests that the *khata* arrangement, as a more collective, sharing form of associateship, becomes more important for accumulation, as resources become more scarce or competitive, and as ties become more tenuous, beyond the narrow circle of the family or arch. This seems counterintuitive to the classical new institutional economic view that suggests that increasing resource scarcity results in a trend towards individualisation as the costs to exclude are less than the benefits of privatisation (see for example Baland & Platteau, 1998), or that collective action is most efficient with small, homogeneous groups (Baland & Platteau, 1995). The implications of such findings would align with evidence and discussions on the framing of collective action, and tenure regimes for pastoral systems in non-equilibrium ecosystems (see Behnke, 1994; Vedeld, 2000).

However, land-pooling as a central feature of the *khata*, did not emerge explicitly and unambiguously in my interviews. While some agreed that there is a strategic motive for using the *khata* to gain access to more and better land, others disputed this, while others focused more on the labour cost-sharing benefits. Contrasting opinions are expected of course, as the topic of land is sensitive. Access depends on the bundle of social relations and the power of negotiation that the individual has in the community, and therefore, explains the motivations behind using the *khata*. As I mentioned in chapter five, territorial visibility is important for pastoral production to maintain access rights to land for example. Those who are visible, involved in pastoral production for longer, or more embedded within the local context, are able to maintain their power of negotiation to access land. For these people, membership to a *khata*, in order to access land, may not be a central motivation, but this does not mean that using the *khata* to access land is not an important motive, even if in an eventuality, and particularly for herders who are typically landless. As R.O, a herder from the plains noted:

“Nowadays, shepherds and workers are looking for an employer who is well off, which means he has money, a tractor, a car and has a vast land where the shepherd could herd the flock. However, having a vast space for herding comes first, if a person owns a vast land with access to many hills then people would come to work for him. Shepherds would prefer to work for him because there is a lot of room to move around and herd the sheep properly”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> B3

<sup>107</sup> H4(B)

I would add, that in such bilateral private arrangements, the shepherd can also add their own herds in the mix and benefit for more and better land. The *khlata* is an additional option where “elders, migrants and civil servants” that Boubakri referred to and I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter may each have different rationales for using the *khlata*. Yet, through a sort of commoning process, and the expansion of the types of social arrangements in the association, the *khlata* facilitates entry to pastoral production, especially in contexts of resource scarcity or variability in inputs of production. So, while at first accessing grazing land was rarely declared as a major worry in Douiret, I argue that this may be true (currently) for those who have maintained their territorial presence in the farming community in the Dahar. But this is not always going to be the case, and it is certainly not currently the case for landless herders for example, or those who are considered to be “intruders” or those who have been absent for long and have not maintained their territorial presence or visibility, or nascent livestock owners that enter pastoral production, and perhaps even women (although I haven’t investigated this more). I suggest therefore that the *khlata* is a more central (and strategic) instrument for the invisible than was suggested in initial interviews.

When viewed as an inclusive system, the *khlata* has the potential of reducing inequalities generated by structural differences in age, gender, clan, and kinship by allowing livestock owners to tap into wider networks and relations beyond kin relations. The *khlata* is inclusive of those who may be less embedded in the territory or may not be endowed with access and usage rights to unfragmented land but may have other endowments to offer. For example, while some may simply be landless, such as Arab herders who historically have been - and in many subtle ways still are - itinerant labourers, others may have lost access right to high quality grazing land due to hostilities around inheritance or due to ruptured attachments to territory as I explained for the asynchronous absentees in chapter five.

Managing access to (contested) grazing land can be emotionally straining because it often involves family. The *khlata* thus provides a space, which increases an individual’s negotiating power by offering access to another set of relations outside of the family (and the state). In this sense, I see the *khlata* as being an autonomous space, or a space that generates autonomy. For example, through the pooling of more heterogeneous land access rights, landless individuals, such as Arab herders, are legitimized in their access to more and better grazing for their livestock in the Dahar, which are known to have better pasture than the plains (Ouara or Jeffara), but are usually accessible only to Douiris and neighbouring communities (Chennini)<sup>108</sup>. In exchange, or by association, the landless herder for example provides for his (remunerated) herding labour.

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<sup>108</sup> Neighbouring communities such as Chennini and Ras el Oued have access to the Dahar too, and are included in the wider farming community. Ras el Oued and Douiret are historically related as several examples of entire *arch* relocating

To conclude, the institutional adaptability of the *khilata* includes the mediating and legitimizing aspects, through a heterogeneous membership. This is particularly key in dryland settings, or settings of high variability as it offers the capacity to track various forms of variability, negotiating uncertainties in the pastoral drylands. The benefits of such institutional arrangements are not unambiguous, however. Critical political ecology highlights that the literature on the commons tends to romanticize and overlook inequality as well as power and politics, arguing how “commoning creates socionatural inclusions and exclusions, and any moment of coming together can be succeeded by new challenges and relations that un-common” (Nightingale, 2019, p. 30). While institutionalist approaches are concerned with the collective action problem/solution, the political ecology visions (that merge with some critical institutionalist views) focus on material interest and power (Turner, 2017).

I therefore include both of these aspects by framing the *khilata* as a variability-tracking system, highlighting that as an institution, the *khilata* mediates absence, creates options for inclusion in pastoral production for cash-restrained individuals, and allows for slow accumulation of livestock. Although the *khilata* is not efficient nor utility-maximizing in the strict economic sense of production maximizing, it does generate reliability. In terms of material interest and power, if seen in positive terms, the *khilata* can be a means to subvert, extend and refabricate “customary” social laws that instead would limit access to patchy distributions of land by formally linking access strictly to membership to arch. However, as well as the redistributive power of the *khilata*, it does also raise questions around exclusion and how it recreates new power dynamics on increasingly contested land. Further analysis would be needed to understand: Who does the *khilata* include? What kinds of “outsiders” have access to the Dahar through the *khilata*? What kinds of endowments will facilitate membership and reciprocity? How will these influence subjectivities (understood not as imposed from the outside but as emerging from an internalization process of power)?

## 6.7. Conclusion

This chapter brings together more rationalist and agentic/critical institutionalist approaches to analyse the *khilata* as a pastoral unit and space where livestock, land and herding labour relations of production can be parsed. I have shown how changes in herding labour relations, costs and benefit calculations for each *khilata* model, as well as social networks, negotiation, reciprocity, trust, and interdependence must be taken into consideration to understand the mechanics of the *khilata*. I have shown how by pooling endowments, the institutional arrangement of the *khilata* mediates absence-presence, facilitates accumulation, and legitimizes access to land.

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from Douiret to Ras el Oued show. Chennini, is also an Amazigh community, 20km away from Douiret with different genealogical roots, but similar socio-cultural history.

Livestock owners use different *khilata* models, in combination, or to substitute other herding labour arrangements or strategies, over time, to generate options. By focusing on its features, and how its different models are combined, I show how the *khilata* generates options to accumulate livestock flexibly over time and across the demographic lifecycle. At the individual level, the *khilata* allows livestock owners to widen their options thus supporting flexible accumulation, characterized as being non-linear, multi-local and contingent. At the collective level, different people with different needs and processes of accumulation can enter and exit pastoral production.

Finally, by tracing the evolution of the *khilata*, its adaptive and autonomous features emerge. Although, as I discuss briefly in chapter eight, there are benefits of the *khilata* in generating reliability for pastoralists, it is important to maintain a critical eye on the stratified ways in which this happens. Not everyone is able to access *khilata* arrangements, and differences in endowments, and herd sizes amongst associates can create hierarchies in decision-making processes. The next chapter examines the particular features of pastoral accumulation through agrarian dynamics and investigating livestock as a particular form of capital

## Chapter 7. Revisiting Agrarian Dynamics: Livestock Capital, Flexible Accumulation and Differential Differentiation

### 7.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the characteristics of livestock as a form of capital, and how it is linked to different households' strategies of accumulation. In combination with the findings in previous chapters, this helps to understand the implications of non-linear, multilocal, and contingent accumulation dynamics, on agrarian change, notwithstanding, or thanks to absence. Here, I answer the question:

**How are livestock, as forms of capital, linked to different households' strategies of accumulation?**

Shifts in livestock ownership structures, herd compositions, and rangeland management practices are said to be signs of 'pastoral transitions' in southern Tunisia (Elloumi et al., 2001; Nasr N. et al., 2000; Saad et al., 2010; Saad & Bourbouze, 2010). Key elements of change in the Maghreb generally include: a proletarianization of pastoral labour, a greater skew towards larger herds in the hands of fewer owners, a reduction in smaller herds, a shift to less rustic breeds thought to be more productive, a shift from goats to sheep, a division of livestock management practices where small and medium-sized herd owners focus on breeding, while others on fattening and trading, a fragmentation of pastureland, a reduction in the use of rangeland resting practices such as the *gdel*, an increasing reliance on (often subsidized) forage and boreholes, and challenges in finding herding labour due to rural emigration (Bonte et al., 2009). While these structural changes are occurring, it would be erroneous to define them as a pastoral 'transition', implying a directionality, and therefore inflexibility, in pastoral production. These static representations risk obscuring,

for example, how options are generated by adaptive pastoral institutions within commodified production systems. They understate the importance of people's mobilities for multilocal capital accumulation or the implications of different "waves" of migration in supporting the herd over the demographic lifecycle (as I argue in chapter five).

The main argument of this chapter is that the cyclical or indeterminate aspects of accumulation, suggest inconclusive impacts on differentiation, as livestock, labour and land relations of production continuously change. Further, framing accumulation, as a reliability-generating rather than solely as a wealth amassing process, helps better understand agrarian change. Accumulation is therefore understood through production processes, as it describes relations of production. In contrast to Marxist takes on accumulation as strictly referring to an extraction of surplus labour by capital, I adopt a wider understanding of capital and accumulation as a process that includes non-material aspects such as emotions, identity, symbolic values, aspirations as well as stochastic features of environmental, political and economic change (see chapter two).

Class-analytic perspectives of agrarian change frame features of agrarian transitions as the result of power and production differentials, and unequal access among producers to the modes of production, understood as the means of production (labour, tools, land, seeds) and the relations of production (the social organization of relations in the sphere of production). As discussed in chapter two, this framing focuses on production and productivity and the interaction of 'peasant units of production' with the wider economy (Deere & de Janvry, 1981). Often such economic and materialist analyses are supported by quantifications of landholdings, farm sizes and capital-labour relations, each assumed to be the main mechanisms for accumulation. As I position myself in the different approaches in chapter two, I move away from rigid Marxist/Leninist framings, as they portray an equally rigid idea of how the accumulation-differentiation dynamic occurs.

A complementary framework is Chayanov's vision of inequality over the lifecycle of "farm units" or the family (Chayanov, 1986). For Chayanov, inequalities of farm income and farm size (among the Russian peasantry) are not only determined exogenously, as an interpretation of Leninist paths to accumulation would suggest, but are also explained in terms of demography. As I will also show, this framing is particularly useful for a political economic analysis of pastoral economies where the more structural, and often static depictions of wealth differentials risk overshadowing the stochastic influences of herd accumulation in relation to the household's demographic cycle. For Chayanov, a set of internal balances, or ordering principles, "shape and reshape the way fields are worked, cattle are bred, irrigation works are constructed and how identities and mutual relations unfold and materialize," (van der Ploeg, 2013, p. 5). Essentially, changes in labour power availability, family organization (structure and size) and farm size are related and change across the life cycle of a family or individual. As White has argued, it is by including a synthesis of both - the more exogenous, sticky and structural aspects (Leninist/Marxist) and the more endogenous, dynamic and lifecycle aspects

(Chayanov) - that the persistence of the peasantry within capitalist dynamics, in differentiated rural communities, can be understood (White, 2018).

I use both framings together while reorienting them towards understanding the role of livestock as capital. A pastoral interpretation of accumulation dynamics differs from an analysis that is constructed solely around the “peasant” logic, restrictively understood, and built around conventionally-understood settled, agrarian contexts, which rely solely on crops and fields. This is not to say that there isn’t a peasant logic. As Shanin has described at great length, the *modus operandi* of the peasantry, as a process, as a way of living, as a political factor and distinctive social group, as an “Awkward Class”, can be archetypally conceived as fluid, heterogeneous and ambiguous by including the importance of off-farm connections, cyclical mobility and demographic differentiation (Shanin, 1966, 1971, 1973). It is in this vein that I seek to bring to light the particularity of “livestock’s liquid logic”, embedded in the peasant logic, whereby non-equilibrium ecologies and the basic biology of livestock influences production, consumption, exchange and accumulation possibilities (see Scoones, 2021) and explains particular dynamics of accumulation. I argue that this offers important rationalisations for the persistence of pastoralism in Douiret that differ from more pessimistic transitional accounts that, instead, theorise the dissolution of pastoralism.

The chapter is divided into three. In the first part I show how livestock as a form of capital is fluid, flexible and intersects with other means of production such as land. Livestock’s ‘liquid logic’, I argue, lays the ground for understanding why livestock accumulation is multi-local, non-linear and contingent, reflecting the wider biophysical, social, political, and economic uncertainties in drylands. By highlighting the flexible features of livestock accumulation in section 7.3, I show how pastoralist manage (re)production to generate reliability . In this way, livestock accumulation cannot be simply framed as unlimited growth, often implicitly imagined as a singular progressive path towards an equilibrium state of optimum herd sizes, with herd-maximizing imperatives. Instead, *flexible* accumulation, I argue, emphasizes the aspect of accumulation as a process that generates reliability over the demographic lifecycle. I expand on this by exploring how in Douiret, different livestock owners adopt different strategies internal to livestock production or ‘off-farm’ (off-herd) to manage costly fodder supplementation. The final section explores the implications of this for understanding differentiation, or more appropriately, differential differentiation

## 7.2. The Liquid Logic of Livestock Capital

It may seem strange to begin a section on livestock capital, by talking about olives but (as already explained) given that livestock as a form of capital must be understood in relation to other assets, it is important to talk about olive production in Douiret. The olive tree plays an important role in the economic history of Douiret



and is symbolic of social (re)production<sup>109</sup> and attachment to the land, where olive production has been one of the main means of generating reliability in the mountainous region of the Dahar. When discussing livestock in Douiret, one cannot forget about the olive production. As this conversation with S.A, an ex-livestock owner, illustrates:

“The profile of people who want to invest in olive trees and in plantations in general are the profile of young people who are relying on their own capital, freelancers. All people of this kind are thinking of planting olive trees because to them the economic conditions of the country seem unsettling. That’s why planting olive trees is the first thing they think of. So they go home to work in agriculture to guarantee some revenue during the ever changing conditions of the country. [...] It’s a way if escaping the instability of the economy. They want to ensure a financially secure future for themselves.

**Could the olive trees of Tataouine or Douiret compete with those in other regions where modern mechanization is used?**

Well here we are talking about two different sectors, the first one is traditional agriculture where you resort to the mountains and you depend on rainfall and for the other you rely on wells and irrigated agriculture. We have both. There are people who want to go to Bir Amir (in the plains) because there is electricity, and he could dig a well and practice agriculture in its modern form and then at the same time when he goes back home (to the mountains) he practices the traditional agriculture of his forefathers. After all planting olive trees in Douiret pays well, an olive tree here is worth 20 olive trees in the coast, or maybe even more.”<sup>110</sup>

What this conversation highlights is that although olive production is more common than livestock production in Douiret because it is less labour intensive, livestock is an essential option with different revenue traits, requiring different investment profiles.

Conceptualizations of transitions therefore, from “sheep to olives” (Lahmar, 1994) or “cattle to corn” (Greiner et al., 2013) point towards profound processes of restructuring, yet they do not necessarily help conceptualize the role that diverse sets of capital have, in combination, in a pluriactive household. The question therefore of how olives and/or livestock, the two pillars of agricultural production in Douiret, provide a way to “escape instability” and ensure “a financially secure future” within a climate of “unsettling”,

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<sup>109</sup> Several stories recount for example how change in a man's status, from single to married, depends on the production of olive oil. A young man, raised on the income from olive oil, will have to prove that he is capable of bringing home enough income “to feed the camel and thus, by extension, perpetuate the extraction of the oil”. Also, in the past, the father and paternal uncles of a young boy would gift him a date palm or an olive tree at the time of his circumcision, which would then be planted for him in his name (Pardo, 2003)

<sup>110</sup> M3

“ever-changing economic conditions” and uncertainty becomes important – even though in this thesis I focus on livestock production.

Throughout this research I have seen livestock as a particular form of capital, mediating relations of production in specific ways, in a given context. I am therefore suggesting that the herd relates to households in different ways - compared to olive production or other forms of settled farming, for example. Furthermore, because livestock is embedded in different *conditions* of reproduction (in terms of time/scale – and therefore flow) it produces different *processes* of reproduction, though the *principles* remain the same. I am therefore encouraging a different gaze on livestock as a form of capital, although I am not suggesting that pastoralism has a specific mode of production and deserves its own theoretical framework, as Asad (1978) warns us against. What I am implying is that understanding the specificity of pastoral production can contribute to understanding agrarian dynamics better and therefore can contribute to theorizations of agrarian studies that have been more heavily represented by crop-farmers rather than pastoralists (Scoones, 2021).

Capital, is derived from the Latin *caput*, which means head, or a single head of cattle. This may give the idea that livestock is a stock, a thing that stores value, and therefore, a form of currency or part of “patrimony” – in itself an essential component of “family capita” (van der Ploeg, 2013, pp. 34–35). There are many ways of seeing livestock capital (see Hart & Sperling, 1987). Livestock “is the bank of the poor”<sup>111</sup> for those who are not integrated in the mainstream banking system. For others, livestock offers a basis for claiming occupation rights and protecting assets from inflationary economy (Hecht, 1993, p.692). Livestock capital can also be understood as mediating various relations of production, as a means to generate more wealth, as having a use and exchange value that is interchangeable, as stocks representing future consumption and reproductive expansion (Bobrow-Strain, 2009). In a market-based economy, livestock is commodified and becomes a feature of capitalism. Overall, livestock includes relations of production and reproduction, expressed through livestock capital as living animals and economic objects. Livestock’s liquid logic describes the flexible qualities of relations of production and reproduction that enables livelihoods to be crafted through livestock. Livestock’s liquid logic is therefore not inherent but constructed and dependent on several factors including biophysical aspects and market context, where the mechanism of liquidity is the ease with which an asset can be turned into cash or, indirectly, another asset.

The most apparent feature of livestock’s liquid logic lies in its biology that differs between species, breeds, sex and age. Livestock, as a distinctive form of capital, is further influenced by the biophysical distinctions between different species of livestock such as sheep, goats and camels each requiring different labour engagements and arrangements (for example for shearing), types of fodder and amount of water, livestock mobility-patterns and disease control. In drylands, recent signs of returning to goat and camel production

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<sup>111</sup> A1

comes with the realization that the environmental conditions are no longer appropriate for sheep, which require increasingly more revolving capital and cash to support the herd during drought. In drylands, optimality is not necessarily only about yields but synchronizing and coordinating the multiple ways in which livestock husbandry can serve the socio-economic needs of a household, and the herd. The changing production logics for livestock, that increasingly depend on the monetarization and commodification of livestock, is further spurred by fodder substitution where "the sheep eats it's sister" to indicate the fact that livestock is sold for cash to support the herd rather than to provide subsistence cash for the household. The liquidity of livestock, the ease with which livestock can be turned into cash or another asset is therefore increasingly determined by markets and fodder substitution rather than environmental factors. These are in part articulated with off-farm work and changing patterns of return migration, especially as waged work substitutes for family labour. Therefore, livestock's liquid logic is influenced by biophysical traits but also shifting values, that are determined externally by markets, culture, geography and environmental conditions. Livestock as a particular form of capital is therefore influenced by inherent biophysical traits, the relative value of livestock as a commodity (i.e. value of wool, meat, milk, horns, and manure) in changing economic structures, and the relative value of off-farm work.

What this suggests is simply that while pastoralists optimize livestock production based on specific livestock's biophysical traits, the liquid logic of livestock highlights for example how a herd is harnessed to obtain specific herd growth objectives, meeting different production needs. Whether through spatial and scalar strategies such as herd splitting, dispersion, changing ratios of species composition, sex and age structures or different production logics in terms of degrees to which one relies on commodified livestock, labour and land relations of production. A side-note on the specificity of the livestock market conditions in Douiret, helps to understand better how livestock's biology is harnessed through markets. In Douiret, livestock owners are operating in a context where livestock markets are dynamic and thriving. Frontier trading with Libya is a key aspect of Tataouine's border economy, where "The fixity of these borders coexists with the fluidity with which informal economic exchange criss-crosses national boundaries" (Malik & Gallien, 2020, p.732). Douiris benefit from arbitrage in these interstitial spaces by stocking herds cheaply from Libya, when there is conflict in Libya, and selling to Libyans when things are better there, where "whether frontiers are closed or open matters very little as livestock are traded through alternative routes"<sup>112</sup>. Douiris may not engage directly in frontier trading, but the market of Tataouine twenty kilometres away is an important node for livestock trading with the Sahel. Furthermore, in general in Tunisia and in the south especially, there is a strong and sustained culture of meat consumption, boosted by Ramadan and Aïd El Kebir festivities, where the price of lamb doubles between Aïd and the spring and summer periods (Mekersi et al., 2005).

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<sup>112</sup> A7

The functional expression of livestock's liquid logic therefore is dependent on economic context, the inherent biophysical traits of livestock, and ecosystems. In Tataouine livestock's liquid logic is more evident because of the added opportunities from arbitrage in such frontier economies, where the quick buying and selling with limited bureaucratic frictions, and religious-propelled consumption patterns, create more options for pastoralists to engage with the market. In Douiret I would argue that livestock is a relatively more liquid form of capital than in other parts of the country because of the increased opportunities in selling and buying livestock through the market in Tataouine, with Libya. Livestock's liquidity is therefore one aspect that explains how a livestock owner in Douiret, given their social network, is able to generate reliability over different operating scales. Paradoxically, a Douiri is able to do this more easily or differently compared to a livestock owner that is further from a frontier in the north, even if he has better access to fodder for example.

The biological traits and the malleability of the herding unit in relation to frontier economics encapsulates Marx's presentation of capital as "movement, framing it as a relentless, dialectically expanding process of mobilizing commodified labor," (Bobrow-Strain, 2009, p. 778). Indeed, "Livestock, unlike land, constitutes fluid capital for peasant producers" (Fratkin & Roth, 1990, p. 1). My reading of this is not that livestock is fluid (or liquid) and land is fixed, nor that liquidity is desirable and fixity is not, but that different production logics and rationales are imbued in pastoral production systems, and these depend on changing external conditions that influence the relative liquidity of livestock. Biologically speaking, this ranges from fertility rates to milk production all of which depend on nutrition and external variability/seasonality. From a political economic perspective this depends on access to flexible and negotiable territorial claims, and markets, that are however increasingly premised on claims to fixed territory through neoliberal logics of titles, fences and cadastral maps. This means that as land becomes more bordered and fragmented, livestock is rendered less liquid through the tension between mobile circulation and fixed territory (Bobrow-Strain, 2009).

Livestock is relatively more mobile than land because land is materially fixed, it "is not like a mat: you cannot roll it up and take it away" (Li, 2014b, p. 1). However, this does not mean that livestock is inherently more liquid than land, especially when land is understood as "an assemblage of materialities, relations, technologies and discourses" (p.1). This echoes the political economic explanations of crop flexibility, termed as flex-crops, that outline how 'multiple-ness' and 'flexible-ness' specify the commodity features of different crops, with different political economic implications (Borras et al., 2016). Crops can be rendered more liquid through the "maximization of multiple and flexible uses of these crops, (where) diversification can be achieved within a single crop sector. When sugarcane prices are high, sell sugarcane. When ethanol prices are high, sell ethanol," (p. 93). Although these qualities are used aggressively in a commodified system to construct "flex narratives" that justify the drive for capital accumulation, what I want to point to is that whether it is real or constructed, the "multipleness" of certain crops, such as the palm tree that produces

fibres, syrups, beverages, fruits and construction material, is the feature that explains how options are generated to respond to variability, and therefore also the different accumulation strategies.

This is similar for livestock, where production logics include the emotional needs and shifting responsibilities of care within the family. In this research I have shown how livestock production logics are linked to everchanging roles and subjectivities through absences, that result in different strategies and imply different relations to the herd as I explained in chapter five. This includes how livestock, land and labour are mediated by institutions such as the *khilata* as I showed in chapter six. Livestock, as economic objects and living animals, are used to match seasonality, track variability and generates options. Although livestock owners buy and sell, stock and destock, in ways that minimize financial losses given stochastic and systemic factors, including the variability in market prices, fodder prices and personal household decisions (that include emotional ones), they do so by evaluating livestock as a form of capital in relation to land and labour, as shown in the following cases of two entrepreneurial livestock owners, A.B.A and B.

#### 7.2.1 Contrasting Visions of 'Liquidity': Two Cases

Decisions on how livestock is converted into other forms of capital depend on its value in relation to other assets. The two cases I present here show how different people, with different visions, link livestock production to variability in different ways and for different reasons. This reveals the specificity of livestock as a liquid capital for A.B.A and B.

A.B.A started managing livestock in 1999. He is known for breeding good quality sheep for Aïd and is considered an important livestock owner in Douiret. He mainly sells ewes during Aïd season, depending on drought, forage prices, as well as his mood. Throughout the last twenty years his herd has shrunk and grown drastically several times:

“Sometimes we buy sheep, sometimes we sell, we breed around 150-200 sheep for Aïd. We also sell some during periods of drought or when forage prices increase. In the past winter I sold 400 ewes for 600TD<sup>113</sup> each.

When there is drought during the whole year, one could feed their flock on forage, and it would still be profitable for him, especially ewes. A ewe is always profitable.

I started with 50 heads. I was working with someone else, then I started doing it by myself and reached 500 head. When I find interesting deals, I sell some heads and renew my flock.

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<sup>113</sup> 185 EUR

[...] So many times I sold almost all of the flock and decide to stop this tiring job. Sometimes, I swear to God I spend the night hallucinating about how I sold all my flock. People think that I become broke or have financial issues ... If you sell your flock other herders could come herding in my land or those of my uncles, it makes you feel jealous, so you go back to it.”<sup>114</sup>

A.B.A refuses to receive external support and has an affective motivation for maintaining livestock. He manages to calibrate forage expenses and needs either by selling stock, land or engaging in *acheba*, a formalized contract that allows livestock owners to rent land for grazing. A.B.A’s view is that:

“There are people who receive external support. If I ask my brothers to help me with 20,000-30,000 TND<sup>115</sup> they would definitely do it. Sometimes I don’t even have 10 TND<sup>116</sup>, but even if they ask me whether I need money I cannot do it. It’s true that we are one family but they are responsible for their own families, and I can’t stand asking them. I manage by selling a few head and get some forage until things get better. You have to find a way to manage the financial issues. You could also sell some land. I sometimes buy some land and keep it and then sell it.

I have land that I access through *acheba*. It costs me 2,000 TND<sup>117</sup>, I have been doing *acheba* for ten years, and it has only been my place. I could come and spend one or two months if I want my livestock to pasture in it. It is 100 hectares approximately – which is vast and the positive thing is that it belongs only to two people. Sometimes you may find someone owning 20 meters and another person 30 or two hectares, it is really common to find a piece of land that doesn’t belong to one person only. This fertile land that belongs only to two people and is more than 100 hectares is good as it gives different kinds of plants and there are no trees.”

A.B.A uses land flexibly. Owing to social contracts such as the *acheba*, he can rent land from farmers and glean left over crops, accessing more and different quality pasture, so that he has more space to manoeuvre, both literally and figuratively in terms of creating options for his production decisions. Livestock, is rendered more liquid in a way that matches his needs, given conditions. This is a form of utility maximization; yet, it does not necessarily subscribe to wealth, growth and surplus-based rationales as typically portrayed by classical economic assumptions of wealth maximization. Rather, A.B.A is also matching different needs with production possibilities. The process of matching maximizes the utility of livestock.

B used to work as a day labourer in Tunis until he decided to work in the car renting business in Douiret. Once he paid off his debts for the car, he sold the car and bought his flock after the revolution in 2011. For B the

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<sup>114</sup> HH1

<sup>115</sup> Approx. 6,000 – 9,200 EUR

<sup>116</sup> 3 EUR

<sup>117</sup> 600 EUR

liquid logic of livestock gives him more flexibility than working as a day labourer (that include for him: artisan in Medina, carpenter, coal miner, tractor driver) or depending on a car-rental business for his income. B makes use of the variable conditions to make (variable) gains. This is summarized in the following conversation:

**“What made you choose sheep?”**

If I own a flock it can get me a car, if I get a car without a flock, and I break it ,it will not bring me any income, what would I do with it?

**A car can be useful for other things than raising sheep though...**

No, not in this village what would you do with it? I was lucky to pay back all its price after five years.

The income of the car transportation got me some gains with which I bought sheep during the Libyan revolution period around 2013. At that time Libyans were freaking out and starting selling their sheep for low prices, some of them even ran away. It was a perfect opportunity not to miss to buy sheep, if I missed it I wouldn't be able to buy ewes, that today cost 550-700 TND<sup>118</sup>. I cannot afford that.

**For how much did you get the ewes at that time then?**

It was for 200 TND<sup>119</sup>, the quarter of what it's worth today. And from that I managed to raise a whole flock, the number increased, and I got a car.

**What if there is more drought to come, will you manage?**

It will be alright, it's true you do struggle, especially when you are not in a very favourable financial state. It has been ten years since I have been raising sheep, each year gives different gains, it depends on rain.

The number can grow depending on the year, if there is rain, you raise the ewes, and don't sell them, you only sell males. Or, during a year of drought you could figure out what is more convenient to do or not do. There are people who can afford forage and transportation expenses, while people with modest financial sources find themselves obliged to sell. If there is no drought you could keep your livestock and especially keep the ewes: from 100 ewes you will grow your flock from their offspring.

It always depends on the quality of the year as I told you, if it's a good year of rain ewes could give birth twice per year, you would sell the lambs and she would give birth again, you sell twice for one single ewe per year.

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<sup>118</sup> 170 – 215 EUR

<sup>119</sup> 61 EUR



If you fed her well, and fulfilled her needs, she would give birth twice, if you neglect her that won't be possible.

**But breeding sheep is still better than working as a daily labourer?**

It's better than working as an artisan in Tunis or anywhere else. It's your own treasure and you know how to manage it. Each year gives you different results and gains, it is true, but you get used to it and you learn patience."

These two cases operate over different timescales. While A.B.A has stocked and destocked his herd over his twenty-year livestock-rearing experience, as a young livestock owner B recently took the opportunity of the Libyan revolution to buy cheap stock and build his herd. Currently he is mainly buying and selling stock with the view of building the herd and covering costs depending on rainfall fluctuations and forage costs. The question of scales and stages is important in differentiating the accumulation rationales, yet the point is that for neither of them is livestock accumulation, in the sense of hoarding livestock or maximizing herd size, the singular overarching strategy.

For both, accumulation is important, but so is reliability, security and capacity to maintain resilience. This depends on how livestock, as a means of production, is used and viewed in relation to other means of production. For B, livestock represents a redemptive form of capital, as a way to free oneself from the different responsibilities of waged labour and/or of renting out an asset such as a car. For him, relying on a car for his income is risky as it can quickly become a cost that does not produce revenue if it breaks down, while livestock can always be readily sold, and thus provides cash-in hand when needed. Furthermore, livestock can be managed in a way that provides a lifestyle and independence that is not comparable to waged labour. For A.B.A, livestock represents a versatile form of capital. He focuses on the complementarity of livestock and land. Land is pasture and fodder, but also an asset with productive olive trees, that increases in value over time, that can be sold and transformed into livestock capital. On the other hand, if a convenient opportunity to buy land arises, livestock can be quickly sold and invested in land. For A.B.A, the mobility of livestock helps overcome natural obstacles to capital accumulation by expanding the territory through which capital can circulate and also by maintaining access claims to fixed territory or land, whether through the *acheba*, or by maintaining his territorial presence, by ensuring his presence, as it where, is not forgotten.

Both A.B.A and B are aware of the variability of incomes from one season to the next, and both are willing and able to respond to various forms of variability, in part thanks to livestock's liquid logic but also as production logics oscillate through time. This challenges the frequently propounded oppositional dyads that emphasize "livestock as commodities", and therefore expanded reproduction (accumulation) versus "livestock as sources of subsistence", and therefore simple reproduction (reproduction without

accumulation) for example. For A.B.A and B, who have different ages, and are part of different kin constellations, each enmeshed in different translocal patterns of migration, and involved in different (and perhaps overlapping) social networks, livestock allows for a plurality of rationalities - not only to accumulate wealth, or simply for subsistence, but also to generate reliability now and in the future. This may seem obvious, yet it requires a shift in the way livestock husbandry is framed and understood, with implications that I explore more fully in chapter eight and nine. Roe and colleagues, for example, have neatly argued that pastoralists need to be understood as reliability-seekers, rather than risk-aversers:

“the central concern of pastoralists is the creation of predictability from the unpredictable through establishing a ‘reliable’ flow of life-sustaining goods and services from erratic rangeland ecosystems that are an internal feature of pastoral production systems [...] through the use of a complex technology – livestock”. (Roe et al., 1998, p. 39)

Similarly, seeing the herd as including features of social reproduction within the household helps to see how the herd and household are mutually constitutive of one another (Dahl and Hjort, 1976). Livestock’s liquid logic therefore defines the use of livestock as a complex technology to transform one asset into another, where herds and households are related, and includes political, social, economic and psychological relations. In the next section I explore how these aspects are linked to characteristics of livestock accumulation.

### 7.3. Flexible Livestock Accumulation

Flexible accumulation is a characteristic of pastoral production in semi-extensive systems. It is multilocal, non-linear and contingent and has emerged as being specifically key to characterize accumulation processes in Douiret. This becomes evident when we look at fodder management decisions.

For A.B.A and B - and all the pastoralists I have interviewed - the question of forage is central to livestock production and, in one way or another, a source of struggle. The increasing substitution of pasture for forage for concentrates and grain-based feed, is the result of different rationales, that follow the desire to own sheep in an environment that is not ideally suited for sheep. For some, the shift to sheep production and recurring to pasture substitution is seen as an initial form of intensification, necessary, in order to meet meat demands, which Tunisia currently fails to meet and imports. For others, feed is an inevitable consequence of market-based economic expansion and the commodification of livestock, while for others it is the solution to counter climatic pressures and ensure food security. Whatever the rationales, currently during years of drought, fodder supplementation can account for 65% of the herd’s nutritional needs, and in rainy years 18% of the herd’s nutritional needs (Nefzaoui & El Harizi, 2006, p. 30). Although in the MENA, agricultural policies have been oriented towards increasing dependence on government controlled and subsidized fodder, dryland pastoralists know that remaining as much as possible autonomous from commodified feed is preferable. This autonomous imperative is often ideological and resonates with Chayanovian version of agrarian populism, in

which peasants negotiate their insertion in commodity relations to maintain as much as possible their autonomy and thereby resist full commodification of their conditions of existence (see van der Ploeg, 2013).

In Douiret, livestock owners are aware that they are increasingly inserted in a market whereby maintaining an autonomy from government subsidies and the commodified market that demands sheep is the challenge. In the south, the political dimensions of feed subsidies includes black markets whereby traders capitalize on buying cheap subsidized feed while reselling dearly to pastoralists in the hard to reach areas. This includes also being dependent on fodder production in the north. With this in mind, for livestock owners in Douiret negotiating autonomy can mean several things. It can mean building or preserving specialized knowledge of livestock health, pasture-tracking skills, territorial knowledge, and in general social capital, therefore building the capacity to delink livestock production from expensive feed. Autonomy from feed, can also mean depending on “off-farm” strategies. Therefore, one way in which pastoralists create predictability from unpredictability is by creating additional ways to respond to variability by using resources from a much broader ecosystem. This can be done by creating a portfolio of external sources (other sources of accumulation) outside of the herd. This framing echoes Chayanov’s dynamic understanding of the farming unit as managing multiple balances of (re)production, including the balance between internal resources (fostering autonomy) and external ones (fostering dependence) (van der Ploeg, 2013, pp. 6–10).

#### 7.3.1 Managing (Re)Production

In order to foster autonomy from rising fodder prices, either livestock owners produce their own fodder or accumulate pastureland. This is influenced by the broader political context and the relational dynamics of land appropriation, privatization and social networks that influence regular access to grazing lands (Bobrow-Strain, 2009). As I have argued in the previous chapter, institutions such as the *khlata* are central to increasing options to access pasture and support flexible accumulation. The *khlata* relies on commoning processes to legitimize access and usage rights. In other words, it overcomes the physical immobility of good pasture (land), but also the fixity of usage and access rights that are determined by kin, history and genealogy (territorial access is delineated by which family, blood line, and your gender). Both A.B.A and B started building herds, and generating reliability, through the *khlata*, and then graduated to individualized herding labour arrangements in order to buy and sell livestock more fluidly in line with household needs, and changing consumption patterns throughout the year.

In commodified rural contexts, stocking and destocking decisions in order to reduce expenses on feed/fodder, usually by selling when there is drought and buying when there is rain, is the most basic and common strategy pastoralists use to track variability. These decisions do not follow cycles, as may be more the case for intensive farming systems, but rather depend on several intersecting variables (climatic, price of Alfalfa, price of stock).

As well as Douiret's specific pastoral ecology, Douiret's positioning in a frontier space, with a particularly thriving livestock market in Tataouine, drives much of the livestock production tactics. As livestock owners in Douiret buy and sell livestock, invest and divest to meet changing conditions and needs, internal and external to the herd and household, multiple balances of (re)production are crafted. A.B.A for example prefers to operate outside of the *khlat* system because for him the *khlat* means less flexibility to decide when to buy and sell, or to keep track of feed versus pasture use. The *khlat* also brings in complications from having to negotiate a collective strategy with other associates. Generally, these challenges depend on the assemblage of relations meaning for example that some *khlat*s decidedly over-rely on fodder rather than pasture as a shortcut, while in other cases the *khlat* coordinator is skilled enough to decrease dependence on fodder and rely on access to patchy distributions of pastureland.

Outside of the *khlat* system, different strategies are used to accumulate pasture. For example, in the last ten years of his 23-year experience with livestock, A.B.A engages in the *acheba* to expand grazing possibilities. This is one amongst several strategies that A.B.A uses to track variability. When I interviewed him in 2019, he mentioned for example how he decided to sell livestock in order to buy land (he sold 700 head in 2018 to buy 40 hectares of land), with olives, which can then be invested in buying more livestock. This way, land and livestock are inextricably linked. One serves the other as he mentions:

“Owning land removes the headache of finding pasture – even though this is easy through family access rights. Also owning land means you can for example use two parcels of land with a special annual contract in association with another livestock owner, by paying 1,200 TND/year<sup>120</sup> with other herders (who are not necessarily from Douiret). And this means you can be assured good grazing”<sup>121</sup>

As a result, A.B.A minimizes his use of fodder through a series of social contracts and livestock-land exchanges. These land accumulation strategies are linked to livestock buying and selling strategies. The dynamic and accessible livestock market in Tataouine is particularly beneficial for Douiris where, as I explain in chapter nine, frontier trading with Libya allow for arbitrage in buying/selling, and religious festivities such as Aïd El Kebir expand opportunities for speculation. In general the idea is that “younger stock is sold to make money, females are sold only once they can no longer reproduce and males are kept for Aïd as they are a source of wealth”<sup>122</sup>. For A.B.A the best time to buy is during autumn and the best time to sell is in spring when ewes are pregnant and calving and when livestock traders are looking for lambs to fatten in time for Aïd. Every year A.B.A buys 150-200 sheep and prepares them for Aïd. The ratios of male/female depend on the purpose of the flock: “if it is for commercial purposes then having more males to sell for Aïd is better but if you want

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<sup>120</sup> 369 EUR/year

<sup>121</sup> HH1

<sup>122</sup> HH1

livestock for milk, more females is better”<sup>123</sup>. He alternates throughout the year between high growth strategies, and high selling strategies. So male/female ratios are constantly changing and for him generally, and the best times to sell males is when the calf is 4 months old or synching births so that 8-month-old calves can be sold for Aïd El Kebir. Once he sells them he buys females, resuming a higher growth strategy. He also splits his flock, so that each herd has different nutritional rationales, and different specialized herding and growth objectives.

What I have described here is similar to what Oya (2004) and Cheater (1984) call an “idiom of accumulation”, signalling a type of accumulation. However, what I also suggest, is that the uneven and non-linear form of accumulation is not only an idiom, but also a feature of production dynamics in non-equilibrium dynamics, and a means of generating reliability. Within the lifecycle of A.B.A livestock accumulation began slowly with the *khlata* and then continued as he began accumulating pasture in different ways. The possibility of the flock to be drastically reduced before it is reconstituted again is always there, either through engaging heavily with the market but also due to household needs and psychological factors:

“I grew up with my father owning sheep, sometimes I consider it as a virus and think about selling all of it and stop doing this job when one of the herders annoys me. Sometimes I do sell the herd, but then I find myself buying 30 head from one owner and 20 from another and I start it all over again...”<sup>124</sup>

Such emotional, psychological, or health-related factors often emerged in conversations as key reasons for drastically dissolving the herd or reconstituting the herd as is the case of K.O.Y:

“I sold them and went to Tunis. I worked 4 years 5 years in the gross market as a porter, like a donkey, carrying a rickshaw. It was more tiring than shepherding. I got diabetes in Tunis and I didn’t go to the doctor until I got so tired that I couldn’t work anymore. I couldn’t handle carrying anything heavy anymore. So I sold my *fiche* and went back to shepherding. I bought new heads and started from scratch.”<sup>125</sup>

Several livestock owners or herders I met, signalled to me that although the herd is a commodity, there is an emotional investment too that influences dynamics of accumulation. Livestock husbandry is a different sort of engagement to tending olives (that require very little attention aside from the picking season between November-February) or other crop engagements that follow different crop-cycles. The daily engagement required in animal husbandry suggests that reflections on wider human-animal notions, beyond commodified processes, are relevant to social reproduction. This is similar to propositions that embrace the more relational

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<sup>123</sup> HH1

<sup>124</sup> HH1

<sup>125</sup> K1

understanding of capital and interrogate how accumulation occurs through “non-commodified” processes (Bhattacharya, 2017). Such theorizations insist that our understanding of capitalism is incomplete when simply viewed as an economic system involving just workers and owners but should include wider relations of care. Similarly, capitalist relations in pastoral production cannot simply be viewed through an economic lens involving livestock, understood simply as wealth, labourers (herders) and owners. The non-material, non-commodified aspects of the herd, influence decisions around being absent-present, as I explained in chapter five, these also influence the organization of social relations outside of the family through institutions, such as the *khilata*, that mediate also for absences caused by ill-health and emergencies.

Moving the discussion forwards, while one strategy fosters autonomy by opportunistically buying and selling, stocking and destocking at the right time and the right place, or by accumulating access and usage rights to pasture and fodder to track patchy rainfall distribution; other accumulation dynamics foster dependence, by accessing the means of production and financial capital (remittances) ‘off-farm’ or outside of the herd. As I turn to next, some livestock owners are able to continue to purchase feed, without selling livestock, when there is a lack of rain, through a portfolio of external resources such as remittances or off-farm income, and relationships outside of Douiret. Dependence on fodder is maintained so long as relationships and resources external to the herd can cover such costs. The “financial support from outside is important to be able to resist and make profit”<sup>126</sup>, and the decision on how much to rely on external resources, either through the support of different members of the household who are absent accumulating capital elsewhere is often a very personal choice. As Y.B.M explained in this conversation:

“The important thing is that even say if one owns 700 ewes and he is a professor, he would never give up teaching, because just like everyone else, he could only rely on a stable source of income. It is impossible for a professor to quit teaching for something this unstable even if he owned 1000 ewes. What I mean to say is that no matter how big one’s herd could be he would never give up his main job because there are privileges such as CNSS (National social security fund) among other things and because of social status too, a professor’s social status is not the same as a livestock owner, that’s how it is in the collective mentality. Even though I personally think that a herder is better than a professor but that’s just my opinion but in the collective consciousness a professor has more credibility and respect than a herder, so everybody has two jobs. It is the same everywhere in Tunisia. As you know in Kasserine a professor, or any other employee could own half a hectare of an apple grove in Foussena or half a hectare of a wheat field in Beja or maybe he owns a store that he rents or fast food restaurant in the Medina. What I want to say is that it is impossible for a person to give up a stable source of income even if he has 700 ewes because he knows that he could lose it all in the course of 5 years. When you’re living under an unstable economy that depends on rain -especially in

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<sup>126</sup> F5

the south and climatic factors that you cannot control, in order to avoid any future crises you would never abandon your stable job.”

#### **Even if the salary is not much?**

Yes because it is guaranteed, they would never give it up, livestock is not such a profitable business that one would sacrifice a stable source of income for its sake. That’s the Tunisian mentality”<sup>127</sup>

Implicit in this rationality, is that a salary, prestige, social security, a guaranteed income, and an “accumulation of life-chances” through “mobile capital” further enables access to multilocal accumulation possibilities. Moret (2017) for example, uses the term mobile capital in the sense of productive labour, a source of acquired material and non-material endowments through mobility, or the capital that “allows some people to cross borders rather easily, to feel comfortable and carry out activities in different places, and to come back again”, she argues that this “is a neglected dimension of migrants’ strategies to negotiate multiple and contradictory social positions in a transnational social field” (p. 2). In this sense, mobility practices are instrumentalized to accumulate “life chances” (Beck, 2007), where one kind of accumulation (of life-chances) further allows for multi-local material accumulation.

By talking about balances of (re)production, I hope to capture both the production and reproduction aspects in the relationship between households and herds in generating reliability, through flexible accumulation processes. Through the examples of A.B.A, B and K.O.Y, I show how animals and households are relationally engaged in ways that explain non-linear, contingent and multi-local accumulation dynamics. The multiple and intersecting variability tracking strategies are interchangeable or used contemporaneously within families, across *arch*, and through time. It could be argued, therefore, that the appearance of herd growth volatility signals that reliability is being generated (as variability is better tracked) through processes ‘internal’ and ‘external’ to pastoral production. This analytical separation is useful in recognizing why there is no clear process of accumulation in livestock husbandry in Douiret, not at least, in the same way as exhibited in capitalist firms, or intensive farming systems.

Stochastic herd growth is nothing new *per se* and in fact it is the core of livestock production systems in drylands in most parts of the world whereby achieving a ‘steady state’ or equilibrium between stocking rate and forage production is not possible in most arid and semi-arid rangelands (Behnke et al., 1993). The particularity of livestock, understood through the lens of disequilibrium, is to appreciate that “the process of maintaining reliable production over different operating scales despite unexpected shifts takes priority,” (Roe et al., 1998, p. 41). The idea here is that livestock accumulation cannot be simply understood in the capitalist sense as limitless and relentless growth, or as accumulation for the sake of accumulation, or accumulation

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<sup>127</sup> HH9



for expanded reproduction. Instead, the everchanging conditions characterized by disequilibrium, I propose, means that the purpose of livestock accumulation is to manage the multiple balances of (re)production that Chayanov describes, over different operating scales. This can be captured through the idea of flexible livestock accumulation, which in the case of Douiret is mediated through institutions such as the *khata* and reflected in the different configurations and relations of absence-presence over time for different people. Flexible accumulation is thus a characteristic of pastoral production in semi-extensive systems such as in Douiret, which necessarily includes the intimate relationship between the herd and the household over time and across space.

### 7.3.2 Generating Reliability

I now turn to the question of generating reliability over different operating scales, indeed across generations and within a lifetime. I show how livestock accumulation may tend towards capitalist relations of livestock production, typically signalled by a graduation towards waged herding labour arrangements or larger herds owned by fewer individuals, or the commodification of livestock production logics. However, it would be erroneous to portray such shifts as unidirectional and singular. The livestock accumulation journey in drylands is not linear, leading to an equilibrium state of hired herding labour arrangements, stabilized herd sizes and rationalities.

The extreme seasonality and variability in herd growth in drylands, and semi-extensive systems, means that although livestock owners may follow “capitalist” patterns of accumulation, they also negotiate with other means of production. They may decide to downsize herding labour requirements and decapitalize, sometimes even drastically. Indeed, some may fall back on the *khata* to accumulate more slowly, or to begin a new cycle of herd accumulation without individualized hired herding arrangements, or to shift household labour, land or livestock distribution altogether. These are characteristic traits of flexible accumulation, that explain how reliability is being generated over different “operating scales” as the following descriptions of different accumulation trajectories illustrate.

#### M.B.A.B.K

“I dropped out of school in 1978. My father had 5 sheep and 20 goats. We did *khata* for around 40-50 head which I kept herding for around 10-12 years. My brother was with me and we made an interesting number of livestock, over 400 heads including goats and ewes, so we stopped the *khata* and hired a herder for 15 years. Then we divided the herd, sold some heads, and now I am mixing my livestock with another livestock owner in a smaller *khata*.”<sup>128</sup>

#### M.D

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<sup>128</sup> K3(B)

“Since Chibani (father) and my mum passed away. May *Allah* have mercy on them. We raised the flock little by little. I started with 15 heads of goats and ewes. Then the forage became more expensive, so did the barley. The important thing is that one can sell some of the livestock, little by little. We don’t have another source of income aside from livestock. Ewes didn’t work well for me. It’s just that ewes, when they reach 10 years of age, they become less fertile or die easily. It wasn’t profitable, so I sold them. I only kept goats. They reached around 300 heads. I use to have a lot of goats in the past but they became less numerous especially after marriage and construction costs. I currently have 150 goats, including their offspring.”<sup>129</sup>

#### **T.B.B.S**

“My grandfather owned an important number of livestock, he reached 300-400 head, especially goats, he used to care a lot for goats. He used to own camels and lived well through agriculture. When my grandfather passed away they divided the inheritance among his sons, there were few heads remaining. My father inherited 10-20 ewes but since he worked in Tunis, the number remained low. When we, took over and raised them the number increased. We reached 200-250–300 heads [...] My siblings work in Tataouine and come to help during special occasions. Some would contribute with forage and help in herding [...] There are times when I need a herder by my side, and I would pay him. For example, when the ewes are giving birth. But when it’s not necessary, we do it on our own. It’s better to be in control of your own livelihood. You work it out by yourself and look after your livestock on your own way. When I realized that I was not making profit by hiring a herder, I stopped, and decided to only rely on myself. But each has their own way. There are people who are able to make a profit by hiring a herder, weather there is no forage or whether there is good rain. Do you understand me?”<sup>130</sup>

#### **S.A**

“I work as a technician in an oil company and I am a previous livestock owner. I sold my livestock in 2020 and now I’m hoping to raise a new flock. I bought the sheep using my own funds. I bought 140 sheep in 2016 from Libya and in two years I reached 220 heads . I had a successful experience because I’m lucky. I have owned livestock for 4 years and these 4 years turned out to be rainy, but I don’t encourage anyone to follow this traditional method of raising livestock. I consider it as a very low source of income that is full of risks. The one who choses to work in this field has to heavily rely on rainfall, if the rain falls he will be in a good financial situation if it doesn’t he will spend all of his money on his livestock. I’m considering to begin a livestock project in the near future. However, I’m planning to do it in a modern way, meaning I’m going to rely on myself when it comes down to fodder and I

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<sup>129</sup> F2

<sup>130</sup> F5

wouldn't depend on the government. I would plant my own fodder. I'm thinking about digging a well, to plant *el fassa*<sup>131</sup> and raise goats so I can sell milk as well as the meat. I wouldn't depend on sheep because they might live or die since their chance to survive is 50% . The sheep might live or die and the rain might fall as it might not. So that's why one needs to have his own fodder and start a goat raising business for the purpose of producing cheese. [...] We have thousands of goats in Douiret, whose milk is practically going to waste. People drink as much as they can and throw the rest away.”<sup>132</sup>

What these examples show is that accumulation is not only about wealth accumulation, or utility maximization in the way classical economic models conceive, but also about generating reliability over the demographic lifecycle as a response to various relationships people have with uncertainties. M.B.A.B.K generates reliability by changing herd sizes and herding labour arrangements, and by moving in and out of *khlata* arrangements, over 43 years; M.D instead changed the livestock composition over 30 years and specializes in goat herding in order to rely less on expensive fodder; while T.B.B.S prefers to adapt his herding labour arrangements frequently and seasonally throughout the last 20 years. S.A instead, despite his “lucky” and positive experience with “traditional” livestock rearing has a different vision. He envisions a “modern” way which includes self-reliance on fodder and water, switching to goats, and accessing a niche market – goat milk to make cheese. These different approaches are different examples of “high reliability models for pastoralism”, where pastoralists reduce the probabilities associated with high-cost hazards over “different operating scales” As Roe et al. (1998) summarize:

“In the high reliability model for pastoralism, both the hazard and its probability are large, but the focus is more on probabilities than hazards. Accepting full well what the hazards are of living and working in an arid and semi-arid environment, pastoralists act in ways that increase the chances of their maintaining large herds in as highly reliable fashion as possible. In formal terms, pastoralists seek to ensure their capacity to produce and maintain very high, peak levels of livestock [...] This high reliability behaviour allows them to reduce the probabilities associated with high-cost hazards that arise through management mistakes.” (p. 47).

Maintaining herds in as highly reliable fashion requires flexible livestock accumulation, where the overlapping roles of livestock as living animals and economic objects explains flexible accumulation dynamics. Although these dynamics are often implicitly understood, rarely are they made explicit in a way that highlights for

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<sup>131</sup> Medicago, or Alfalfa

<sup>132</sup> M3

example, how extensive livestock management is about finding the right balances, or matching production processes with variability, and not necessarily about growing herd sizes (an exception is for example Manoli et al., 2014). As the experience of these pastoralists shows, people have different relationships to hazards, and adopt different rationales and behaviours to reduce “probabilities associated with high-cost hazards”. Yet, the objective is the same - generating reliability, and not necessarily maximizing herds. Those who are able to generate reliability better are also likely to be able to maximize herds, but this is consequential to generating reliability. From a political economic standpoint, this framing supports the distinction between variability in inputs and variability in processes, critical to understanding the logic of pastoral systems where:

“Understanding drylands variability as a structural difference rather than a structural limitation means accepting that cause and effect are often impossible to disentangle; that the highest returns come from managing risk, not avoiding it; and that multiple strategies of specialised integrated production exist in discontinuous, open-ended systems across vast scales throughout the drylands.”  
(Krätli, 2015, p. 81)

This is a subtle, but important way of understanding husbandry in drylands, suggesting that it would be misleading to assume static definitions of “class” but also wealth differentials and inequality. The last piece in the puzzle is discussing the implications of such framings for understanding social differentiation.

#### 7.4. Differential Differentiation

According to classic agrarian theorists, the patterns of surplus extraction are the most revealing indicators of the elements of class (Deere & de Janvry, 1979, p. 610). Yet, they say little about *processes* of differentiation. When class divisions focus solely on wealth differentials, expressed in terms of land or herd sizes for example, the implications for differentiation seem unambiguous. Differences in land holding or herd size, imply power differentials expressed through different concentrations in means of production. This view however leaves out how several intersecting factors, at different scales, such as lineage structures, gender relations, generational cycles, production logics, and affective aspects are key in explaining patterns of differentiation. This also has methodological implications. For example, Oya (2004) stresses that focusing on small versus large farming units has analytical value; however, it is a mid-point in the analysis to understanding such dynamics and not an end-point. He argues that maintaining a narrative of long-term processes is important, and that “when differences between farmers are only in degree and differentiation takes very specific and historically contingent forms, a limited number of criteria may be inappropriate,” (Oya, 2004, p.307). The number of contingent variables such as “technological dynamism/capital intensification (means of production index), scale of production (rather than farm size), patterns of land appropriation and use, farmers’ education, ratios of marketed output, wealth, and the ‘nature’ of marketed surplus, whether truly

commercial or 'distress' in character" (p.307), means that providing evidence for degrees of differentiation is complex.

Differentiation can be seen as both a process, and a state. Yet when we see it as a process, differentiation is more closely associated with processual understandings of access to capital, labour, liquidity or the mediating functions of institutional arrangements, than with assets, land or other natural resources *per se*. To capture this, I use the term "differential differentiation" (see van der Ploeg, 2018) so as to take into account the existence of several forms of differentiation, where different subprocesses produce contradictory process of differentiation.

As I have shown in the previous two chapters in Douiret, including the role of families in supporting the herd, in a context where absence is key, and institutions acting as mediators of various forms of absences, helps to acknowledge how livestock is a means of generating reliability thus influencing the differential dynamics of differentiation. This framing diverges from standard political economic analysis that treats pastoral wealth as if it were simply primitive accumulation, or that livestock accumulation occurs through the extraction of surplus generated by herding labour (see Turner, 2009). Instead, as is the case in Douiret, especially when we start to include wider processes into the analysis such as demographic changes, migratory processes, cultural forms of production, and transforming social institutions, we see a much more dynamic process of differentiation amongst pastoralists.

As summarized by Bradburd (1982), empirical evidence shows that herd volatility results either in economic differentiation, or the inhibition of "on-going economic inequality" or the maintenance of "homogeneity between family fortunes" (p. 86). Bradburd's own conclusion for southwestern Asian pastoralists is that long term economic differentiation was likely, and that economic differentiation may have less to do with the "nature" of pastoral production but more with the political economic processes (systemic factors) and random variation (stochastic factors) external to pastoral production. The shift of focus from structural conditions internal to pastoral production to political-economic processes external to pastoral production, and from changes in herd sizes to variability, is useful in understanding accumulation-differentiation dynamics; however it risks disregarding endogenous aspects to pastoral production, and how these explain wealth differentials, as has been highlighted by my work in Douiret.

This echoes Oya's (2007) qualitative work in rural Senegal. He argues that, notwithstanding the general logic of capitalist relations of production, "the variety of 'idioms of accumulation', [...] reflect transitions and synthesis between non-capitalist and capitalist forms" (p. 488). He argues that life histories reveal longer-term processes of agrarian change and accumulation that "show that there is a combination of 'accumulation from above' and 'accumulation from below' but no dominant pattern can be clearly discerned, at least in the space of one or two generations" (p. 488). In Douiret, I see livestock as acting as a synthesis between capitalist

and non-capitalist relations of production, motivating the framing of livestock as a technological solution with a liquid logic, as a means to generate reliability at different operational scales. The proposition of differential differentiation accounts for contradictory processes at different scales of analysis. As circumstances change and individuals' needs change, for people like A.B.A and B, the relative liquidity of livestock also changes. This depends for example on how much land can be accessed, and the skills and costs related to herding labour. Drastic changes in herd sizes indicate that reaching a steady-state equilibrium of the herd is not an option in the semi-extensive case of Tunisia's southern drylands, and so long as "fortunes rise and fall" (Fratkin & Roth, 1990), the long-term implications of accumulation on class and wealth differentials are difficult to unpick. What this suggests is that the stuttering, non-linear forms of accumulation in a dryland pastoral system are in fact less an idiom (embedded in a culture) but a feature of non-equilibrium systems, meaning that political economic analysis in drylands perhaps requires shifting our vantage-point entirely, as has been done in the domain of rangeland ecology (Behnke et al., 1993; Ellis & Swift, 1988), pastoral property rights/tenure (Moritz et al., 2018; Turner, 2011), and institutions (Behnke, 1994). These have implications on understanding conflict, collective action and more generally resource use, access and distribution (Cousins, 1996; Lane, 2014; Vedeld, 2000).

As others have proposed, variability must be understood as an "unfolding of lifestyles and livelihood practices that reflects becoming rather than being; flowing rather than stasis; and following/tracking rather than stability/settlement/constancy" (Sullivan & Homewood, 2017, p. 32). This approach has theoretical and methodologic implications for research (see Pappagallo & Semplici, 2020) and is relevant not only to an ecological-based analysis of pastoral production (Scoones, 1995) but also to the political economic or sociological analysis of production. This thesis further contends that by including the redistributive mechanisms of institutions such as the *khlata* in the analysis, and the role of flexible accumulation, the analytical focus of differentiation then incorporates aspects of how and who is able to generate reliability in drylands. In chapter eight and nine I explore the analytical and policy consequences of these propositions.

## 7.5. Conclusion

The uneven progression and the overlapping roles played by livestock as living animals and economic objects within a family's and community's ecology, as both patrimony and means of production, suggests that it would be misleading to ascribe only 'capitalist' social relations, as understood by classical agrarian theorists, in the trajectory of building herds in drylands. Discussions in this chapter align with the more non-linear, variegated characteristics of 'capital' and 'class', by appreciating livestock as a particular form of capital, always in relation to other forms of capital like land and labour, embedded in context. I explain this by exploring what I term livestock's liquid logic. In this case Douiret is operating in a particular frontier market economy, in a dryland ecosystem, where fodder supplementation influences the way livestock owners (following Chayanov) manage multiple balances of (re)production. This reveals the relationship between

households and herds, where herd volatility is signalling how reliability is being generated over different operating scales through strategies internal and external to pastoral production. Whether through the herd, or outside of the herd, in combination with land or in exchange with other types of assets, a variety of “idioms of accumulation” reveal that, even in commodified and market-oriented economies, strategies are not necessarily solely about maximizing herd sizes but are also about tracking variability. This supports the view that flexible accumulation includes various forms of absence-presence and is mediated through institutions such as the *khilata*. This has implications for understanding differentiation in dryland ecosystems, shifting the analytical framing towards differential differentiation. The key aspect here is understanding how pastoralists generate reliability through livestock. The theoretical implications of maintaining the dynamic aspects of production, reproduction, capital accumulation and differentiation visible, as proposed by Chayanovian framings, is that it does not preclude structural change generated by capitalist relations but includes other mechanisms and institutions. This has implications for understanding agrarian change in the drylands. It requires us to go beyond the more structural, linear interpretations of pastoral transition. Further, it pushes us to challenge narratives suggesting there is a dichotomous separation between “people of the olive trees” and “real pastoralists” (as I discussed in chapter four). This has methodological, analytical and practical implications as I will explore in the final chapters of the thesis.

## Chapter 8. Theoretical Contributions: Generating Reliability with Pastoral Production in Non-Equilibrium Systems

### 8.1. Introduction

In this research I set out to ask the question: **“How do different forms of absence explain processes of capital accumulation within pastoral communities?”**. Three main conclusions have been drawn from assessing the link between absence and accumulation. The first conclusion is that absence-presence is a lens that helps identify (im)mobility practices and multilocal accumulation strategies. Various forms of absence-presence explain how pastoralists generate options through extended social networks, explaining further how pastoralism continues notwithstanding (or thanks to) absence. This journey began with an exploration of different forms of absence-presence as mediated in families and then continued by exploring relationships outside of the household, through institutions. The *khilata* emerged as an autonomous and adaptable institution that mediates absences outside of kin-relations, legitimizes access to land and facilitates accumulation possibilities. The second conclusion is that collective arrangements, often borne out of conditions of resource-scarcity, such as the *khilata* have also become useful in mediating absenteeism in livestock management. The way various forms of absence-presence are mediated through time and negotiated over different operating scales include: pooling resource endowments, shifting herding-labour arrangements, and sharing costs. Essentially pastoral institutions explain how livestock, land and labour



relations are negotiated to generate options for flexible accumulation. This links to reflections on how livelihoods are crafted in drylands through livestock, as a particular type of capital, through space and time. Livestock husbandry requires different labour arrangements, visions of land/resources, and relationships to territory. These differences are inscribed in different production features and rationales that I explain through livestock's liquid logic. The focus on the mechanisms of liquidity helps to understand how livestock, as embedded in context, can track variability. This in turn explains how reliability is being generated through the interplay between households and herds, over the long term and across demographic lifecycles enabling multilocal, intermittent and contingent accumulation dynamics. This third conclusion therefore brings to light how non-equilibrium dimensions of pastoral production influence our reading of agrarian change. By including variability as an inherent feature of pastoral production in drylands, this thesis therefore questions overly deterministic framings of production, accumulation, and differentiation from a pastoral perspective. Effectively this thesis highlights dynamic theorizations, that explain how pastoralism can persist, and challenges overly deterministic accounts of agrarian change.

It is important to circumscribe the theoretical contributions of this research, that are borne out of the empirical exploration of how pastoralists in Douiret craft livelihoods, where the herd is in constant, mutual interaction with the household. These observations come from a particular context, where strong (albeit changing) spatially stretched social networks, with a strong ethos of reciprocity and negotiation, continue to explain the involvement of extended social networks in sustaining the herd (often seen as a family-project). The welfare of the herd therefore also depends on peoples' mobility and accumulation strategies outside of the herd. Fundamentally, it is by examining the link between absence and accumulation, as mediated through institutions, that this research has revealed how the organization of pastoral relations in Douiret explain the persistence of pastoralism in drylands.

This differs from theorizations of agrarian transitions that point to a path-dependent reorientation of socio-economic activities, "away from agrarian patterns" in the case of de-agrarianization (see Bryceson, 1996, p. 99). Re-peasantization for example, "is understood as 'the process through which agriculture is restructured as peasant agriculture'" (van der Ploeg, 2013, p. 135). Such formulations of linear trajectories of agrarian change typically focus on the proletarianization of rural labour, with various structural dynamics that contribute to peasants and/or pastoralists "moving out" of extensive pastoral production towards more commercially-oriented production, or leaving pastoralism all together in processes of de-pastoralization (Caravani, 2018; Catley & Aklilu, 2013; Delgado Wise & Veltmeyer, 2016). Under such conditions, structural political economic factors therefore make it hard for pastoralists to re-enter livestock production (Homewood et al., 2006). These narratives often portray increasing inequalities as structural and warn of the demise of pastoralism, particularly in contexts where pastoralists are seen as operating in marginalized, isolated and abandoned spaces. When coupled with rural emigration, that feed imaginaries of labour drains,

voids and absences, often simply understood as non-presence, these arguments project a negative storyline around pastoralism.

Contrasting narratives, as highlighted by this thesis, instead emphasise economic resilience through pluri-activity, entering and exiting pastoral production, facilitating accumulation possibilities across time and space. Such processes are located in demographic lifecycles, including the beats and pulses of various intersecting aspirations and emotional needs, from youth to adulthood to retirement, conditioned by absence and presence, leaving and returning in different ways and in turn engaging and disengaging with livestock. The ebbs and flows of accumulation of knowledge and experiences, through transferral and exchange with the place of origin are transformative aspects that influence visions and opportunities of having herds. While both narratives are preoccupied with differentiation, and often recognize that mobility, as a strategy inscribed in “off-herd” income or pluri-activity is important and common to pastoral production (Breuer & Gertel, 2007); transition-type theorizations fail to include, for example, the complementarity between fixity and mobility, for a more dynamic political economic understanding of pastoral production in agrarian studies. Two examples of dynamic political economic framings that challenge such transition-theorizations are Cousins et al (1992) study on social differentiation in communal land in Zimbabwe and Oya's (2007) study on rural accumulation trajectories among rural capitalists in Senegal. Similar to their work, what this research shows is that in Douiret's context, it is by including peoples' mobilities – their presences and absences over time and space - adaptive and autonomous informal institutions, and an appreciation of livestock's liquid logic, that it becomes clearer how pastoral production operates in the variable settings of the Dahar. Although Douiris are “people of the olive trees”, livestock has been, and continues to be, an important, albeit changing, feature of Douiret life. This is contrary to what various administrative authorities envision as I explained in chapter four, where the construction of who is a “real pastoralist” and who is not, undermines the *potential* value livestock has also for “non-pastoralists”. These tropes contribute to the general idea that “traditional” pastoralism is destined to disappear or is relevant to certain ethnic groups. The demise of “traditional” pastoralism is often misconstrued as an expected devolution, to be replaced by “modern” ideals of livestock-keeping as being more efficient and “resilient”, misconstrued as production strategies that generate stability and economic returns by controlling variability.

In fact, threats to pastoral resilience are in part due to the legacy of such misconceptions in pastoral production that result in misaligned policymaking within already problematic contexts (Krätli, 2018, 2016). Extensive efforts have been made to highlight how legacies that result in misconceptions and misrepresentations of pastoral systems play out through different assumptions around rangeland ecology and resource scarcity, particularly in drylands (see Vetter, 2004). Essentially, equilibrium-based ecological framings result in narratives that focus on variability as a departure from equilibrium, while non-equilibrium ecological framings see variability as a structural, inherent feature of dryland ecologies. Resilience-thinking,

which has become popularized in development, was born from non-equilibrium theoretical reflections, for example (see Konaka & Little, 2021), implying different socioecological causal connections, resulting in a “new pastoral paradigm” with new visions of livestock mobility, decentralization and common property resource management (Turner, 2011).

These remaining two chapters take this further by initiating a discussion on the political economic implications of appreciating variability as inherent to drylands. This chapter brings together findings from previous chapters to ground the analytical and conceptual implications of the main conclusions summarized. I focus on: recasting normative framings away from binary and static epistemics of mobility to highlight pastoralism notwithstanding (or thanks to) absence in section 8.2; the negotiation of livestock, land and labour relations of production through institutions in section 8.3; and framing persistence and accumulation in contexts where variability is the norm in section 8.4. This lays the ground for the final and concluding chapter nine, where I explore the implications of such framings for policy making.

## 8.2. Practicing (Im)mobilities: Pastoralism Notwithstanding Absence

“Partir pour Rester” seeks to recast normative framings of mobility that fall into binary ways of seeing leaving or staying. Indeed, this research suggests that one may leave in order to stay, or leave in order to stay later. This framing sympathises with mobility paradigms that highlight that choices of remaining immobile are a fundamental aspect of mobility *per se* (see for example Cresswell, 2010; Moret, 2018) and sees territory, place, scale, and networks as key spatial dimensions of social relations, salient to understanding contemporary political-economic restructuring (Jessop et al., 2008). By elevating the relational politics of mobility, Reeves (2011b) for example examines the gendered dynamics of mobility beyond a male/female dichotomy to one that pays attention to the way in which “socially situated and temporally variable ideals of masculinity and femininity shape migration processes” (p. 557). This challenges the scholarship that stresses “modernist overtones of a language of being ‘left behind’ (which accords agency only to those who move) highlighting instead how *not leaving* can be ‘part of an empowering strategy that offers women . . . a degree of economic autonomy and social well-being that they would not necessarily find elsewhere’” (Archambault, 2010, p. 920 as cited in Reeves, 2011b, p. 557). These reflections are important because they seek to “bring domestic and long-distance mobility into the same analytic frame” (p. 558), while elevating hidden practices that instead speak of emancipation, resilience, and autonomy; including experiences of simultaneity, where power and powerlessness are experienced simultaneously in different locations, and therefore do not presume either moving or staying as the norm but acknowledge that leaving and staying are “two sides of the same freedom-of-mobility coin” (De Haas, 2021, p. 21). Although often not discussed in these terms, managing both mobility and immobility generates reliability, where translocal networks are both structured by the actions of the people involved and at the same time provide a structure for these actions (see also Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Framing mobility in this way reveals the transformative aspects hidden in

mobility practices and provides tools for challenging insidious “political grammars of mobility” (Aradau, 2016), often found in European migration policy, that use the contraposition between mobility as vulnerability and security as immobility to advance migration policies that regularise movement from A to B (Zardo, 2020).

The implications of all this for pastoral development is further discussed in the next chapter, but here I would like to focus on the example of sedentist biases, to show how they are linked to assumptions and representations of peoples’ mobility and poverty, and implicitly absence, with implications for understanding accumulation and differentiation.

The “sedentist bias”, understood as “a set of assumptions, frameworks, and paradigms through which sedentary lifeways are implicitly associated with development objectives such as progress, growth, and peace” (ReDeMP, 2022), provides a way to understand misrepresentations of pastoral production systems, particularly in semi-extensive dryland settings. The sedentist bias is not explicitly opposed to mobility, though it implicitly pre-supposes logics that contrast with mobile praxis—such as the treatment of land as bounded, with a property’s notion of a bundle of rights, rather than a notion of access through bundled powers (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Sedentist bias therefore can influence the way mobility is understood, often resulting in driving immobilisation, social fission, livelihood disruption, and political marginalisation of mobile peoples through institutional and bureaucratic praxis. An example is the consequence of portraying livestock mobility, as undesirable, as a way to cope with hostile environments, and as a strategy that is consequential to “pastoral risk” (see for example Krätli, 2016, pp. 489–490). These are then politically instrumentalized to frame ethnic violence or farmer-herder conflicts as permanent, and the result of displacement and mobility (Moritz, 2006). The mechanisms are largely the same in portraying peoples’ mobility as undesirable, as I explore further in chapter nine in relation to migration. These logics bias the vantage point to one where variability is seen as a problem that must be controlled through sedentist logics, rules and regulations. For example, some climate-induced displacement narratives are adopting representations of variability as an anomaly, and peoples’ displacement as symptomatic of the struggles from various forms of variability, typically substantiated in quantitative terms adopting the view of “drought-as-scarcity-of-rains” (Krätli, 2017).

The political ecological implications of such drought-as-scarcity-of-rains framing remains problematic because although low precipitations trigger agricultural drought, they do not necessarily trigger pastoral drought. Krätli (2017) suggests that “pastoral drought” relates not to the amount of precipitation, but to accessibility of pasture and water, where: “While drought-as-scarcity-of-rains is a state of things outside human control (hence politically neutral), drought-as-inaccessibility-of pasture can be affected by management and context” (p. 144). The “drought-as-inaccessibility-of pasture” stance is powerful as it gives

analytical attention to the political factors that reduce the capacity for pastoralists to support what is also called “process variance” in pastoral production. The “loss of process variability” speaks to the loss in the operational processes of the pastoral system, meaning that livestock owners lose their capacity to match the variability in inputs in the system’s environment to produce an experience of stability “relative to the ‘here and now’ of the herd”, and correspondingly, the capacity to lower the variability in outputs (FAO, 2021, p. 23). The loss in process variance means that pastoral drought can become more frequent because of for example, reduced livestock mobility and in this thesis, I argue, also reduced peoples’ mobility.

In relation to this thesis, recognizing therefore how assumptions frame peoples’ mobility as reactionary and related to instability, is key in understanding the persistence of static conclusions around pastoral production. In several moments throughout fieldwork, I was presented with the idea that the difficult terrains and scarcity of water have pushed Douiris to emigrate, including herders and pastoralists who aspire to different lifestyles. This is reflected in recent studies on rural youth migration and its impact on food security and rural livelihoods in Tunisia, where authors suggest that “the high percentage of households with recent migrants whose main activity is livestock farming, which also coincides with the area of Medenine, might also lead to hypothesize that there are push factors connected to this specific sector in that specific area” (Zuccotti et al., 2018, p. 20). These “push factors” are based on two assumptions. The first is that poorer households are more vulnerable and depend solely on livestock production in dryland areas (Medenine). Livestock indicates vulnerability and poverty, and the “loss of process variability” is attributed to environmental factors. This leads to the second assumption: that pastoralists in drylands are more likely, through a series of “push-factors”, to migrate. This hypothesis subscribes to basic misconceptions in pastoral production. The idea that only poorer households in drylands own livestock, is shaped by a reliance on quantitative measurements that are highly questionable in the context of pastoralism, and do not capture the value of pastoral production and consumption (Randall, 2015; Randall & Coast, 2015), leading pastoralists to be often incorrectly assumed to be among the poorest sub-populations because they fare poorly vis-à-vis standard indicators like cash expenditures, education and market access (Devereux, 2007). However, this thesis argues something different. Pastoral production not only continues to remain central to drylands, but it remains central *notwithstanding* absences. In fact, this thesis suggests that peoples’ mobility and livestock accumulation are complementary to each other, and that this is particularly true in contexts where informal social institutions are autonomous and social networks are strong, such as is still the case in Douiret. This understanding is possible when mobility (or absence) is not just understood as being differentiated, but also relational. The way in which absence and presence are co-constituted, where the departure of one or more household member constrains (or impels) the mobility of another, or the way in which the out-migration of Douiris, or in-migration of non-Douiris and younger herders from different parts of the region influence patterns of

accumulation and differentiation has much to offer in the analysis of pastoralism and variability, including that of highlighting the more agentic aspects that lead transformation.

### 8.3. Negotiating Livestock, Land and Labour Through Institutions

As discussed in chapter six the *khlata* mediates access to labour and land allowing for flexible accumulation so that livestock owners are able to respond to dynamic systems. By sharing labour costs and splitting herds across different pastures, livestock owners (or skilled *khlata* coordinators) are able to ensure “process variability”. Although the *khlata* accounts for herding labour shortages, it is not a perfect system in terms of ensuring the nutritional needs for the collective herd or of ensuring optimum grazing. The impact of herding skills on animal nutrition is an essential aspect in livestock and rangeland productivity that includes how changing incentives, relations, and availability of labour influence people-environment relations and how rural producers utilize available resources (Turner, 1999). Often labour is a critical limiting factor in agropastoral production in dryland areas as the capacity to generate reliability is crucially dependent on herding skills and know-how. Responding to dynamic systems therefore has a qualitative aspect that must account for the economic and ecological implications of changing herding labour practices, also called the extensification of grazing management (see Turner & Hiernaux, 2008). The reduction in quantity and quality of herding labour available is one of the most recurrent and major challenges mentioned for livestock rearing in Douiret. So, while the *khlata* mediates absence and facilitates accumulation, it does not necessarily account for the quality of production. There is therefore room for improvement in research and policy on such institutional aspects, highlighting that understanding accumulation and differentiation dynamics must account for the qualitative aspect of herding practices

Another conclusion in chapter six is that both common access/usage rights to pasture and the more private and individualized forms of land tenure are key in explaining how options are generated.

The *khlata* helps individuals overcome land shortages and constraints by *legitimizing* the practice of rotating herds between a mosaic of land tenure arrangements, along a continuum of access-rights, from open access to the more common to the more private lands. Access to “the commons” is usually defined by a set of protocols, values and norms, which in the case of Douiret are defined by kin membership to the *arch*. The commons thus represent a space where self-organising social systems negotiate how resources are managed by a collective. In this sense, the commons are not simply a resource. They are a resource plus a set of continuously negotiated arrangements, and the *khlata* operationalizes negotiations by pooling endowments.<sup>133</sup> The *khlata* in part resolves the pastoral paradox where “pastoralists need both security and flexibility in resource tenure, and often require diversity as well” (Fernández-Giménez, 2002, p. 50). The

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<sup>133</sup> As membership to the various *khlatas* is dependent on the heterogeneous endowments that are brought by associates to the pooled arrangement, the aspect of negotiation remains key in generating reliability.

*khata* ensures security by facilitating access to a mosaic of resources (such as winter or dry-season pastures) while it also ensures flexibility through permeable and elastic spatial and social boundaries (informal, autonomous and adaptable features of the *khata*).

Formally, private property is borne from the idea that recognises land claims based on formal titling and bundled rights, dissected into discrete, stable and mappable units. Private property is defined by the right to exclude and regulate use and is held by an individual or corporation in contrast to common property, in which a group of users excludes others and regulates use among themselves.

In Douiret, it is the relatively more “private” patches of land often found in the *jessours*, or closer to Douiret, that also provide an important source of pasture especially during the summer months. These patches of land can be grazed on, though they often require more careful, individualized negotiation compared to the vast “common” grazing areas, yet negotiation still occurs on “private” land. What is considered as private in the Dahar, such as the unfenced *jessours* belonging to families (not clans), are still embedded within the “commons” and indeed always remain potentially accessible. Ultimately, it is those who are able to access *both* common and private property that are in a better position to generate reliability. Indeed, the *khata* multiplies the rules of access (therefore renders more elastic the spatial and social boundaries i.e. ensures flexibility) and reduces the exclusive nature of property rights (i.e. ensures security from a pastoral perspective). As suggested by Cousins et al. (1992), the more non-exclusive forms of tenure are most appropriate for so-called non-equilibrium ecosystems. Jalloul’s comment I discussed in chapter six, confirms this for example. The *khata* is a functioning institutional feature of drylands in the south and not the relatively more wet regions of the north, because it generates reliability in non-equilibrium ecosystems. To do this, however, the unfragmented (and unfenced) commons of the Dahar and institutions that increase connectivity through fragmented land remain key (Galvin, 2008).

Roe et al. (1998) also argue for the need of security and flexibility in pastoral tenure, by contending that when pastoralists are framed as risk averse, herders are seen as strategizing by reducing the magnitude of hazard, that is: by ‘spreading the risk’ through separating the herd across a large geographical space. In this case, herd mobility over a large common property is seen as being crucial (Roe et al., 1998, p. 47). However, if pastoral production is framed as a high-reliability system, where the goal is to maintain security and at the same time flexibility, livestock owners make use of a wide range of scale-dependent resources, whether public, private, or common property. A high-reliability pastoral system is one where access to all scale-dependent resources is possible through negotiation. In this way, pastoral policy-making should not focus on stability and security (i.e. more common property or more private property) to the exclusion of negotiation and change (enabling access to different land tenure arrangements over different scales and phases). As Roe et al. state:



“The policy implication of a high reliability perspective on pastoralism runs counter to the popular recommendation that what pastoralists require is common property tenure regimes, because such tenure arrangements facilitate herder mobility and movement. In high reliability terms, the relevant issue is instead the fact that the more experience high reliability institutions have with different operating scales, the more reliably these institutions can perform. For pastoralists, there is an access issue here, but it is one of ensuring access to scale-dependent resources. What is threatening about loss of grazing area is not that it restricts herder mobility but that it reduces the experience of herders with managing herds at different scales of operation.

One herder response to a reduction in operating scale has been to compensate for that loss by accessing other scale-dependent resources hitherto un(der)-used. For example, the response may be a shift to confined feeding of stock at selective times of the year, using improved grasses grown in plots near the herder compound or gardens. Grazing land may better remain common property; but one cannot argue in the same breath that a plot of improved grasses should as well remain common property. Different scale-dependent resources will have different access requirements, and therefore need different tenure regimes.” (p. 51)

This point is fundamental as herders around the world solve the pastoral paradox through negotiation, and through self-organized institutions that regulate open, common, quasi-private, and private ownership/use. For Moritz et al. (2013) “open property” regimes establish a fourth category of ownership rights, in addition to state, freehold (private) and commons. He argues that such open access regimes are not characterized by the absence of rules and do not necessarily lead to a tragedy. Unlike classical common property theory, there are no boundaries or bounded social groups collaborating to exclude others from open access areas. The additional optionality of open access grazing regimes are therefore key for pastoralists in situations characterized by disequilibrium systems, as they allow for additional forms of self-organization, essential to complex-adaptive systems (Moritz et al., 2018).

This research would suggest that currently pastoralists in Douiret resolve the pastoral paradox relatively more easily compared to pastoralists in the plains because they have access to a wider set of unfragmented, scale-dependent resources and land tenure regimes.

Such reliability-generating framings of pastoral production pose analytical challenges to theorizations of common property theories because they emphasize a high degree of negotiation and change rather than well-defined rules, boundaries, stability and security. As experiences from other pastoral societies suggest, rigid definitions of social and spatial boundaries are problematic in systems that rely on spatial and social mobility, where security for pastoralists is better understood as reliable mutual expectations about resource use, rather than inflexible boundaries (Fernández-Giménez, 2002). As Behnke (2018) also points to, pastoral

conceptualizations and uses of commons differs from those routinely characterized by theories of common property regimes, and do not conform to common property design principles, meaning that they “do not depict the institutional arrangements that characterize many of these (pastoral) systems” (p. 709). I also argue that as livestock is still often managed collectively in Douiret, allowing for the flexible reallocation of livestock, land and labour between herding units, property rights must be understood as constituting relationships between people, requiring a greater focus on spatial and temporal dynamics than standard approaches to agrarian systems would suggest (Scoones, 2021).

#### 8.4. Framing Persistence with Flexible Accumulation

So far I have argued that including qualitative and scale-dependant aspects of herding labour and land/property rights reveal the ways that reliability is generated in pastoral production. This helps account for flexible dynamics of accumulation, different from fixed ideals of the peasant archetype, that rely on bounded and fixed notions of capital tied to land. I will now highlight how applying a pastoral lens in agrarian studies helps include more dynamic theorizations of agrarian change.

I have shown in chapter seven that flexible accumulation stresses that optimality in pastoral production is defined by the capacity to track variability characterized by dynamic disequilibrium. This is represented by the capacity to manage (re)production, where the household and the herd are in a continuous interactive relation, over different operating scales. By framing accumulation as flexible, to include (agrarian) capital beyond the countryside, that is capital of non-agrarian, non-rural provenance (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2012a) and rural labour beyond the farm, capitalist processes, such as the proletarianization of pastoral labour, must be viewed through the lens of open and changing systems, where livestock, labour and land relations of production are remade, redistributed, reconceived, restructured, and respatialized. This emphasizes function over form, and how such functions change. This is reflected, for example, in changing negotiations around fixity, where one view is that “the uncertainty of shifting locus of rights from the state to the market means pastoralists must increasingly *justify their claims to resources by appealing to efficiency and more sedentary notions of land-use* [emphasis added] ” (Gardner, 2009, p. 782). The structural changes, in this case referred to as the shift from state to markets, underscore a normalizing process. I propose that such narratives are adopted by pastoralists *in response to* sedentist logics, methods and practices. Although pastoralists are part of these normalizing logics, non-market and non-state relations remain important in commodified agrarian contexts. The adaptable, autonomous and flexible functions of pastoral systems highlight the persistent functions of production, where persistence is the capacity for pastoralists to use livestock to track variability. The political question of size and scale remains important.

In this thesis I focus on processes of accumulation that are multilocal, non-linear and contingent to highlight the variable dimensions over different operating scales. Empirical discussions around the gendered division of household labour, the role of care as a form of unpaid labour, or global care chains delineate one aspect

of social reproduction and explain the transnational implications of capital accumulation and agrarian change. The dynamics of accumulating capital through physical absence in the rural household holds important sociological implications (Fréguin-Gresh et al., 2015). The most evident being, for example, the emigration of young and middle aged men from rural areas resulting in the feminisation of agricultural or herding labour, or how migration results in new forms of intra-family differentiation through changing gender and generational subjectivities within the family (Jacka, 2018), or how translocality influences patterns of stratification (Greiner, 2011; Naumann & Greiner, 2017). What all these literatures point to is that households straddle multiple capitalist realities which means that the spatiality and temporality of processes of capital accumulation, typical of any migrant's story, may not result in such fixed or linear rural transformations. This contrasts with a narrower or more superficial reading of capital accumulation from below or above.

The longstanding methodological problem of scale is concerned with the relations between processes operating at different scales (with different times scales), and the need to understand such multiple scales simultaneously. This translates to different sociological theorizations and "politics of scale" in rangelands (Sayre, 2017). For example, the lifecycle dimension includes social (demographic), animal (gestation periods, life expectancy of different breeds and livestock species) and plant life cycles (perennial and annual forage), that alter the perceptual scales of the observed variability (Levin, 1992). I propose that flexible accumulation raises questions around how livestock, land and labour relations are remade, and how pastoral production readapts, and how the locus of rights can be shifted towards flexible, and mobile notions of land-use rather than sedentary notions of land-use. I therefore propose that pastoralists can increasingly justify their claims to resources by appealing to high-reliability framings and less sedentary notions of, not only land-use, but also labour, outside of, but in conjunction with the market and the state. In other words, flexible livestock accumulation also has political implications. The ways in which livestock owners maintain their capacity to match variability in inputs to produce stability (the capacity to lower the variability in outputs) is a political question. The political question for example explores how the drivers of wealth inequality in pastoral systems are not necessarily only driven by the environment or snapshot pictures of herd sizes but by the incapacity to maintain "process variance". Once again, accounting for the persistence of pastoralism within capitalist trends, depends on subscribed assumptions around equilibrium and non-equilibrium. As Holling (1973) states:

"resilience and stability viewpoints of the behavior of ecological systems can yield very different approaches to the management of resources. The stability view emphasizes the equilibrium, the maintenance of a predictable world, and the harvesting of nature's excess production with as little fluctuation as possible. The resilience view emphasizes domains of attraction and the need for persistence." (p. 21)

The pastoral lens therefore suggests that instability is inherent to extensive pastoral systems in drylands, where the persistence of “small” or “large” herds transforms, as the idea/practice of what is “small” or “large” transforms. By focusing instead on the “domains of attraction”, the *relative* capacity to generate options and reliability is highlighted thereby shifting the analytical focus from states to processes. This is the pastoral contribution to agrarian debates on the persistence of the peasantry.

### 8.5. Conclusion

The idea of “Partir pour Rester” as the core approach to this thesis, unearths the flexible features of livestock accumulation in Douiret. These features emerge from an analysis that is mindful of different operational scales, longer-term dynamics and demographic-lifecycles. In this chapter I argue that including relational aspects of people’s mobility through migration practices helps highlight how (im)mobility practices generate options. This is particularly important in understanding the assumptions surrounding the mobility-variability-poverty link in drylands that shape our prejudiced understanding of pastoral systems as risk-averse. In terms of institutions and land governance, shifting from a risk-averse to a reliability-generating framing of pastoral systems expands the exploration of the adaptive and autonomous features of institutions that for example mediate absence, legitimize access to a mosaic of land tenure arrangements and facilitate accumulation possibilities. The pastoral lens on land tenure (and therefore institutions that legitimize access to land for example) emphasizes both flexibility and security, which in turn emphasises on negotiation and change rather than stability. The *khata* in part helps resolve the pastoral paradox, key in non-equilibrium ecosystems, that emerge through qualitative, scale-dependant and relational understanding of the livestock, land and labour triad.

Finally, mobility and institutions ground the analysis of accumulation and differentiation as including demographic aspects within households in relation to the herd. This helps hold together both the long-term and short-term views and brings into focus how accumulation influences the capacity to generate reliability, that is *relative* stability, and manage process variance.

What I wish to emphasize through my empirical findings is that the pastoral lens further calls for maintaining an analytical complementarity between fixity and mobility, the long-term and short-term. This influences our understanding of accumulation dynamics as flexible, and as generating reliability rather than maximising utility (wealth). In this sense, the multilocal, non-linear and contingent aspects of accumulation are a feature of a non-equilibrium systems. This has theoretical implications for understanding agrarian change, where in the same way that a non-equilibrium framing influences our understanding of socioecological causal connections, so does it influence the political-economic causal connections of accumulation dynamics. This also has political implications for understanding resilience and persistence. The persistence of pastoralism is threatened not by variability *per se* but by policies and processes that reduce cooperation, relationship-building and negotiation, for example, by controlling mobility and regulating informal institutions. As Galvin

notes, “Flexibility is embedded in pastoral management strategies and institutionalized in social capital” (Galvin, 2009, p. 193). As I will explain in the final concluding chapter, my findings join the voices of several other pastoral scholars who are critical of misrepresentations of pastoral production resulting in policies that produce inequalities.

## Chapter 9. Policy Implications

### 9.1. Introduction

In this concluding chapter I shift from the theoretical contributions of this research to how these findings can speak to pastoral development in Tunisia. I focus primarily on two aspects that are most relevant to the Tunisian context today; the first is migration policy that threatens multilocal accumulation practices, and the second is decentralization narratives (and practices) that risk over-regulating, co-opting, and politicizing informal institutions. I focus on these two aspects as a way to reflect on the main specificities of livestock management in Douiret. The first is the characteristics of migration patterns in Douiret that ensure social networks are strong and support (re)production that link the herd with households (and vice versa). Migration policy is important here as it is one factor that threatens such networks. The second is the characteristic of the *khlata* that is (for now) outside the ambit of state power. Although pastoral institutions are not necessarily apolitical, common-pooling mechanisms like the *khlata* are not regulated by the state. In exploring these two aspects, my take is that development and policy responses should not get trapped in a sedentist bias of managed migration. This is also relevant more generally for pastoral development, where the application of envisioned decentralization processes may in fact result in interventionist approaches that fossilize the autonomous and adaptable institutional aspects.

### 9.2. Controlling (Im)mobilities: Hindering Multi-local Accumulation Practices

As already explained extensively in chapter five, Douiret’s social networks have a long migration history where specific patterns of mobility of the *jbeili*, through aggregation have contributed to characteristically strong extended networks. This in turn explains why, notwithstanding absences, Douiris have been able to take advantage of accumulation possibilities and manage multiple balances of (re)production to support the herd. Mobility is however threatened by sedentist discourses that further control mobility.

Sedentist assumptions of mobility-as-vulnerability or variability-generated vulnerabilities, in the south of Tunisia is expressed in policies that favour sedentary lifestyles, promoted for example through subsidized irrigated olive plantations, borehole digging and fodder subsidies (especially to larger, registered cooperatives) (Saad & Bourbouze, 2010). While these are all envisioned as solutions, they are fundamentally at odds with the non-equilibrium dynamics of dryland ecologies (Vetter, 2004). Subsidized fodder supplementation, widespread in the Middle East and North Africa for example, means lower mortality and reduced offtake of livestock in drought seasons, thus influencing the variability-tracking relationship between

livestock and fodder/grazing. Such sedentist strategies are often at the expense of other policies that instead promote more fluidity, more transboundary exchange and mobility as being key to non-equilibrium economies (Scoones & Graham, 1994). All of these aspects are part of the “naturalizing sedentarist metaphysics” that are increasingly embedded in the “national” order of things, in law and order, in neoliberal processes of territorialization, in identity politics and bureaucratic modes of resource management that influence our understandings of dryland ecologies, politics, and social relations in dryland economies (Behnke, 1994; Greiner, 2016; Malkki, 2008)

The essence of this thesis, “Partir pour Rester”, shows that moving away from such binary logics, and the deficiencies in our understanding of pastoral development, is essential if we are to promote a strengthened vision of the role of spatially stretched relations. Recognizing policies that reduce access to (im)mobility<sup>134</sup> practices at different scales: between the rural and urban, mountains and plains, the family and individual, the Maghreb-EU, is central to a critical approach to activism and progress in agrarian change and pastoral development. One of the most obvious policy implications of this is in relation to how migration policies threaten multilocal accumulation in Tunisia. In the last fifty years migration policies that have become central to EU-Maghreb and international relations are evolving to be increasingly restrictive and “off-shored” with serious implications for countries in the southern shores of the Mediterranean (Limam, 2020; Limam & Del Sarto, 2015; Natter, 2015). In the Maghreb, the introduction of stricter visa requirements for Europe, starting in the 1990s, and the bureaucratization of entry transformed what was once pendular migration into one that has become less cyclical but more controlled (Cassarino, 2013). As Tunisians deployed new strategies to access mobility, through family (family-reunification schemes) and education (student migration schemes), new mobility channels produced by these changes in mobility regulations discriminate between those who have had first-mover advantages (and migrated pre 1990s), or those who have had access to education and social networks, and those who did/do not. By 2022, the legally accepted means to migrate has become inaccessible to many Tunisians<sup>135</sup>. Legal migration channels are highly selective, bureaucratized and

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<sup>134</sup> (im)mobility practices refer also to the right to remain immobile. Several EU-funded rural development interventions still promote sedentariness by for example promoting the reduction of rural to urban migration, or proposing policies that incentivize returns. These are based on the assumptions that “well-being” comes from being sedentary, without accounting for the fact that, sedentariness includes involuntary, and unhealthy forms of immobility and that mobility, is in itself a practice that generates further life chances (Moret, 2017, 2018a). A non-sedentary biased responses instead, would see development and well-being as associated with increasing access to aspirations (but not only, tools, knowledge, opportunities etc..), and therefore access to being mobile, which includes choices to remain voluntarily immobile. As such it would prioritize projects that accompany mobility, without using the urban-rural construct to differentiate and prioritize where people should stay and be.

<sup>135</sup> Some examples of requirements (taken from official Euro Visa website <https://europe-visa.com/schengen-visa-eligibility/schengen-visa-for-tunisian-citizens/>) include:

- 60 – 100 EUROS payment for the visa (the equivalent of, on average, one month rent for a single person in Tunis)
- evidence of travel insurance purchased showing a minimum coverage of 30,000 euros (in the bank)

inherently discriminatory, and this is further threatened by the transnationalisation of migration policing, bordering practices and surveillance, that pose new questions on class, gender, and wealth (Bastia & Skeldon, 2020). For example, today legal framings of European migration policy hide a dialectic of fixity and flow, where for example, the drive for “securitized temporariness” (Cassarino, 2013) links temporary *and* circular migration programmes. This results in migration policies that select and control seasonal labour forces to work in the EU. Such temporary migration programmes have become widespread as a way of replacing permanent and forms of migration deemed as unauthorized, with one that is controlled, for specific purposes. This reveals the normative values upon which profiles are selected. It is in this optic, that migration should be more correctly framed along the lines of *controlled* mobility, where the recruitment and conditions of work for contracted labour necessitates both fixity through confinement and flows through population movement.

In an era where supporting flexible livestock accumulation in the drylands and generating economic security increasingly means spreading family and individual opportunities across multiple spaces, controlled mobility threatens translocal relationships that support flexible accumulation. For pastoralists, but people in general, controlled mobility also threatens the capacity to support pluri-activity through the extended family that supports the private herd.

### 9.3. Decentralization: Threatening Autonomous Pastoral Institutions and Sovereign Land Tenure

The *khilata* operates entirely outside of state control. The utility and effectiveness of the *khilata* as an autonomous institution depends on two aspects. First the non-bureaucratized and informal nature of the *khilata* and second a degree of sovereignty in pastoral tenure systems that Douiret has continued to maintain, despite the changing role of the Tunisian state vis a vis land control in the south.

The constitutional configuration of Tunisia’s decentralization process that began in 2014 has resulted in the development of “new jurisdictional geographies” (Sassen, 2008, p.64). These new geographies are in part the result of a process that depicts decentralization as being key to filling voids of governance in the country, by arguing that there are marginal, isolated and forgotten spaces where people lack citizenship rights, public services and infrastructure<sup>136</sup>. The political expression of decentralization is therefore formulated through a governance restructuring that seeks to capture these peripheral, marginal, isolated, forgotten spaces –

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- business credentials and licenses for self-employed persons along with proof of financial means
  - for retirees, pension payment documents/evidence for past six months
  - for students, proof of enrolment and verification from school or college

<sup>136</sup> Prior to 2014, over 70% of Tunisia was “non-municipalized”, where it is argued that “Under-municipalization involves the rural and border areas of the country and affects roughly one third of the population [...] prevents them from exercising their citizenship fully” (Tarchouna, 2019, p.9).



therefore assuming that these spaces are devoid of governance - through an electoral process that emulates representation. In Tunisia, decentralization is therefore often rationalized by counterposing the idea of “the State”, as a unitary centralized authority, with “local governments”, as offering different kinds of citizenship rights to previous authoritarian rule during Ben Ali’s regime, and so more direct access to the state apparatus through democratic and participatory elections. Article 14 of the Constitution, however, makes it very clear that decentralization is not just a way to organize the administration but more than this it is “a way of being the State”<sup>137</sup>. Such “post national” conceptualizations however must be scrutinized as political processes. For example, municipal boundary reforms in Tunisia are guided by “a combination of security-based and clientelist logics” that impose centralized conceptions of space and, it is argued, “have failed to engage with territories as lived spaces” (Kherigi, 2021, p.1). Like in other realities, disagreements over administrative boundaries and access to valuable land-based resources have intensified ethnicized conflicts over land (Greiner, 2016). By failing to address the social, economic and spatial implications of boundary reforms, these forms of territorial restructuring risk producing a “‘despatialized decentralization process’ that ultimately has little meaning for residents and replicates many of the same logics and conceptions of space that have shaped territorial governance since the colonial era,” (Kherigi, 2021, p.1)

As I mentioned in chapter three, Douiret’s commons in the Dahar occupy over one quarter of the region of Tataouine, which is the region with the largest extent of grazing lands in Tunisia. As I suggest in chapter seven, this is one of the reasons why I expect pastoralists outside of the Dahar increasingly to join *khlata* constellations with Douiris in order to gain access to the relatively more contiguous grazing land in the Dahar. This is however under threat as, like in other parts of the world, the relatively unfragmented rangelands of the Dahar are contracting, increasingly contested, and progressively controlled.

Pastoralists that operate on frontier lands are always at risk of losing access rights through conflict. As ownership status shifts from open access to “buffer zones” under military control, to land “under custody” and managed by the Forestry Administration, or as grazing land, is equated to an “open access” regime, and seen as devoid of governance, and therefore governable. The issue of land control under frontier conditions that have been created is related to new territorialization processes, state formation and citizenship (Lund, 2016).

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<sup>137</sup> “Decentralization cannot challenge the unitary nature of the State and autonomy in local government does not mean being independent of the [central] State. This clarification is important given the distrust of regionalism which is part of [Tunisia’s] traditional political culture in which it is equated with primary and tribal allegiances. The assertion of the principle of the unity of the State is based on the State’s guardianship of local government” (Tarchouna, 2019, p.16)

As recalled by Behnke (2018), sovereign pastoral tenure systems are state-antagonistic and typically characterized by resources that are erratically productive. These are the fundamental features that support the institutional arrangements such as the *khlatas*, where its internal organization is characterized by fluid boundaries and shifting identities of “outsiders” vs “insiders”, wholly dependent on networks of social relations, and negotiated access. However, as Berry (1993) suggests, “the history of legal and political processes, social relations, and culturally constructed understandings which influence patterns of authority and obligation, the division of labor and output, and the meaning of exchange” (p. 3), are important considerations when studying changing conditions, and pastoral sovereignty. Given that the commons have historically been sites of contestation, and of primitive accumulation, the politicization of institutions that operate through the commons is not surprising. The connection between institutions, common property regimes, and state formation or power consolidation is key to understanding the politics of pastoral development in the south of Tunisia. To give an idea: as discussed in the special issue of dryland pastoral management in the south of Tunisia<sup>138</sup> (see Neffati et al., 2020), the overarching idea is that decentralization in Tunisia represents an opportunity to “the development of a “corpus” specific to rangelands and pastoralism” by extending state control legally and increase the decisional power of state-affiliated governance institutions on livestock and rangelands. A critical reading of this (verbose) document suggests a highly politicized, interventionist and judicially-laden vision of rangeland management, where it is difficult to tell whether such processes will really be participatory, and for whom, reflecting the wider sentiment and conundrum held by some scholars and policy makers on the decentralization process in Tunisia today.

Current framings of decentralization therefore incite the application of a pastoral code (see Werner et al., 2018), and pose new threats to sovereign pastoral tenure and the autonomous functioning of institutions such as the *khlatas* through competing, formalized institutions and the extension of state-controlled resource governance that risk politically co-opting practices that manage and access land. If pastoral policy-making focuses on stability and security to the exclusion of negotiation and change, or if as Berry (1993) suggests, power and culture are treated as exogenous or subordinate to economic forces, and ambiguity and negotiation as marginal aspects in explaining socio-economic resilience, then rules are seen as unambiguous and enduring – and therefore fossilizing. Such dominant narratives projected through decentralization initiatives in Tunisia, I argue, will continue to focus on crisis and pessimistic accounts of pastoralism to motivate regulation, while obscuring the agentive aspects of informal institutions. Decentralization includes

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<sup>138</sup> This is the current go-to document to understand the “new paradigm” and “revolutionary” vision of rangeland governance post the adoption of a new Constitution (2014) and a new Code of Local Authorities (2018) that emphasise decentralisation as an advanced form of territorial governance. This special issue, coordinated by the Institute of Arid Regions (IRA), includes the main technical actors involved in the pastoral sector and summarizes a four year long (2016-2020) consultation on the Tunisian experience in pastoral development and outlines the national strategic vision for pastoral development in Tunisia.

processes of devolution and deconcentration of central powers (Vedeld, 2003), key to establishing autonomy, however still very much questionable given the current political and economic environment in Tunisia. These processes can also erode flexibility and raise further questions on whether: informal pastoral institutions, such as the *khilata*, can maintain their functional characteristics, by remaining autonomous, and outside of politically-charged decentralized, even if local, governance and whether pastoralists in the Dahar can maintain a degree of tenure sovereignty through the association of enduring social groups to particular places.

Maintaining a degree of autonomy is key for the future. Autonomy though in itself, of course, is not enough to ensure institutions maintain their flexibility in accessing spatio-temporally variable resources, nor does it ensure that pastoral land tenure regimes especially in frontier spaces such as Douiret remain sovereign. However, autonomous responses would challenge received wisdoms, and misrepresentation from above, and by resisting contribute to transforming socio-cultural changes to mutual assistance, dependency on the state, and practices that give authorities uneven abilities to shape land use and access. Given that institutions that deal with natural resources and are linked to social conflict, power, and inequality, interventions should pay a lot more attention to the ways in which they disrupt systems that are already in place, like the *khilata*. The degree of openness maintained by the *khilata* enables pragmatic improvisation, where pre-existing resources are reconfigured and the do-it-yourself aspect is encouraged. Such visions of customary institutions would argue for example that *khilatas* do not simply guarantee territories and identify rights-holders but multiply the rules and practices of access (Nasr, 1993).

#### 9.4. Conclusion

In answering the original thesis question: **How do different forms of absence explain processes of capital accumulation within pastoral communities?**, two aspects - peoples' mobility and pastoral production - reveal the multifunctional ways in which households and herds, and processes of reproduction and production are linked. In Douiret, the *khilata* as an autonomous and adaptable feature of the pastoral production landscape in the south of Tunisia ensures different profiles and users can enter and exit pastoral production more easily. It mediates various types of absence, facilitates accumulation possibilities, and legitimizes access to heterogeneous pastureland. The interplay between households, herds and institutions on the ground offers a comprehensive framework for analysing livestock, land and labour relations of production through different mechanisms, with different loci, and encompassing different logics. The findings thus speak directly to wider theorizations of agrarian accumulation and differentiation.

In order to highlight these aspects, it is important to maintain an analytical complementarity between fixity and mobility, the long-term and short-term, where the question of scale is fundamental and influences our interpretation of accumulation dynamics. For example, I argue that accumulation can be flexible, multiple and generate reliability rather than solely "maximise utility" (understood as wealth). Therefore, I push for

acknowledging that conclusions on differentiation are hard to define in the short run, in drylands. In developing the argument, I adopt a critical approach to equilibrium-based methodologies, assumptions, analysis and narratives. In the same way that the pastoral scholarship has argued that non-equilibrium based framings help to understand institutions, tenure regimes, pastoral development, and social relations differently, I argue that non-equilibrium framings have political economic implications for understanding mobility and absence, accumulation, and differentiation. By appreciating variability as inherent to drylands I point to dynamic theorizations of agrarian change, and speak to agrarian studies from a pastoral perspective. For example, I contend that herd volatility also signals how pastoralists generate reliability through livestock, as a particular form of capital (expressed in the idea of livestock's liquid logic), rather than what is often portrayed as signalling distress in a risk-averse production system. This offers a more optimistic and dynamic view of pastoralism than is typically portrayed in literatures on de-peasantization or deagrarianization. Fundamentally, within capitalist dynamics, "Partir pour Rester" is one amongst a range of strategies that are enabled by, and enable, social networks and institutions.

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FAO.

Appendices

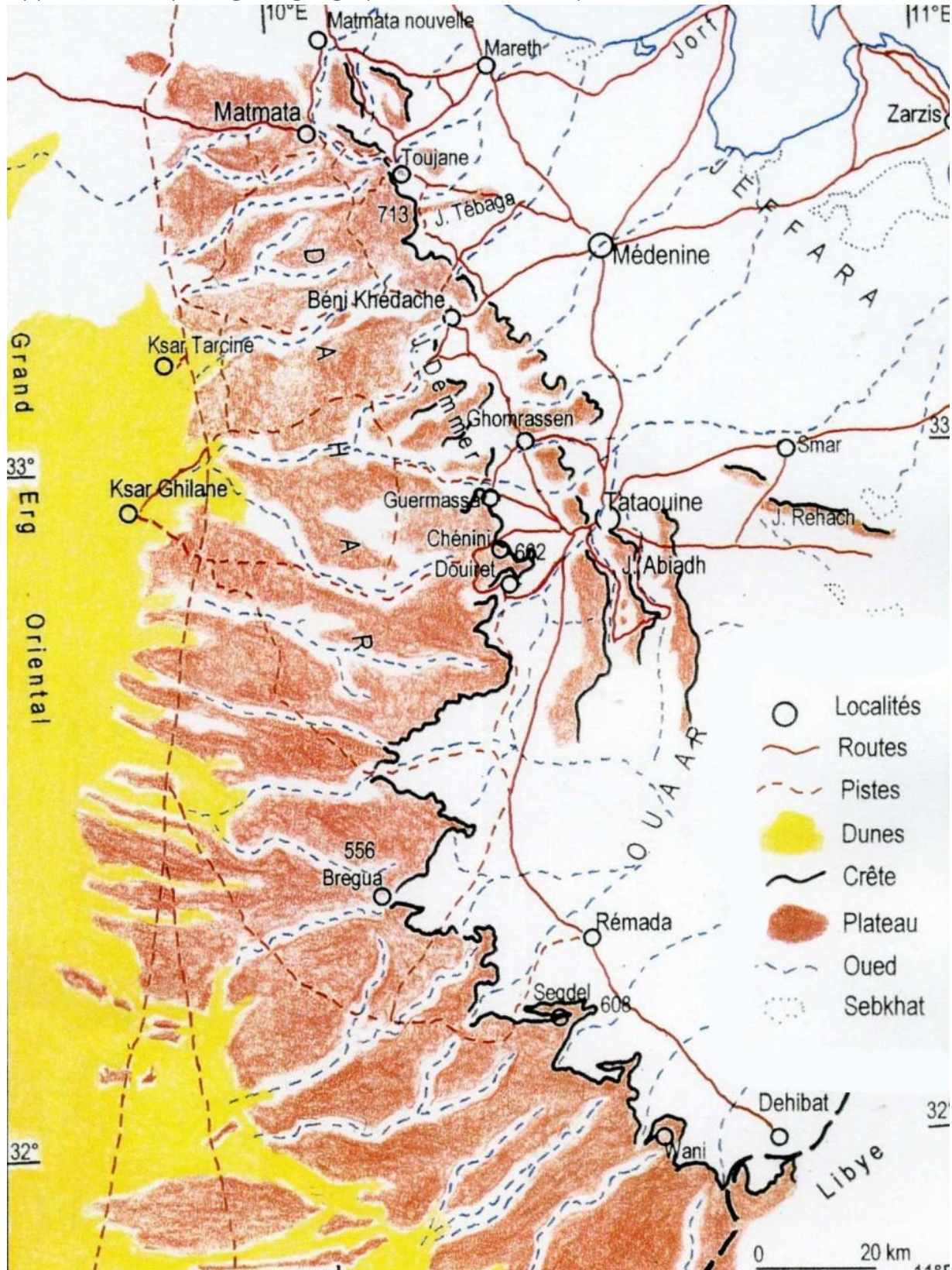
Appendix 1: Douiret in the south of Tunisia



Source: Google Maps

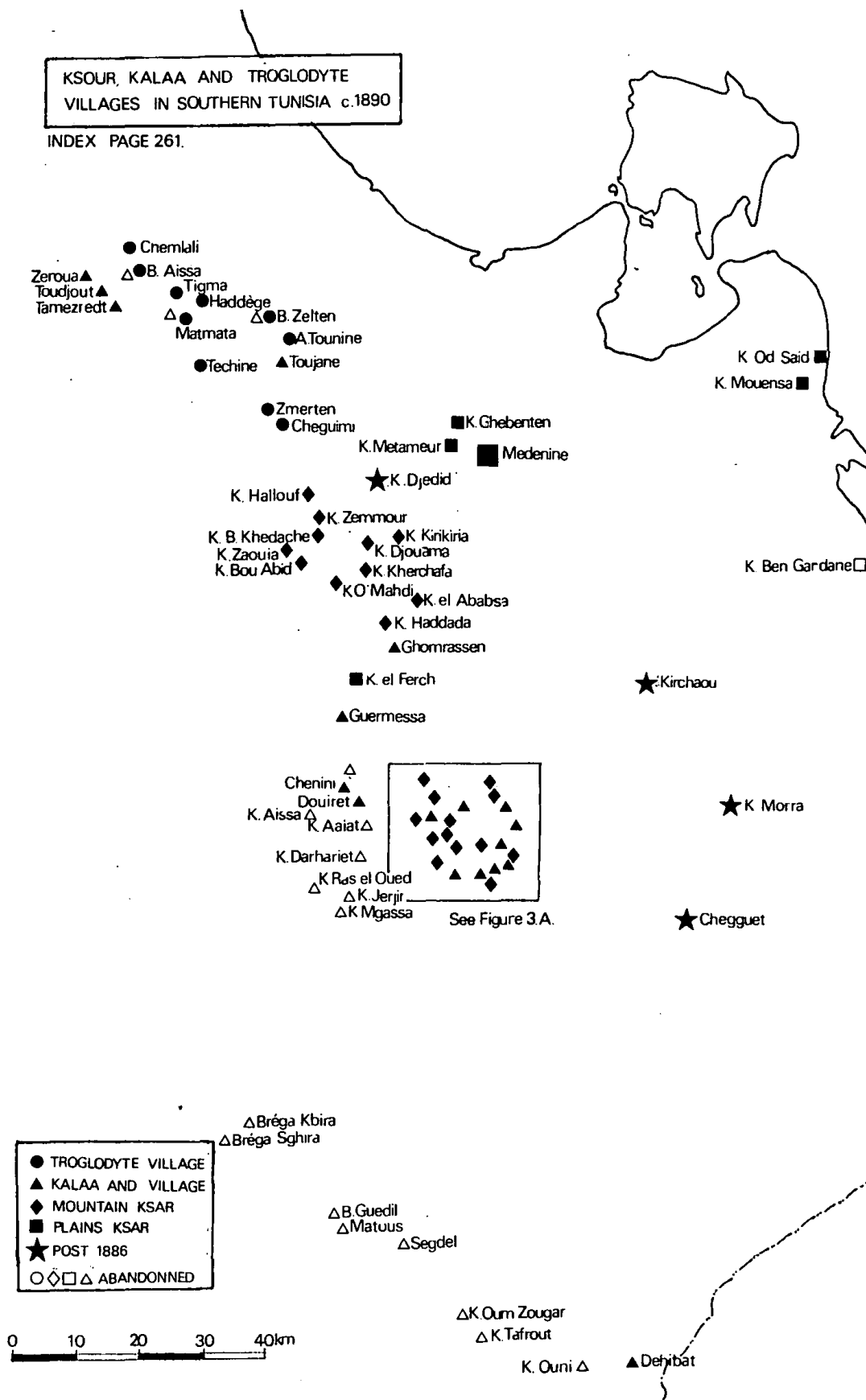


Appendix 2: Depicting the geographic distribution of plains, mountains, and desert



Jeffara and Ouara plains in the east with the Dahar separating the desert in the west with the plains/coast in the east. Douiret along with Chennini, Ghomrassen and other jbeili ksours are along the mountain crest of the Demmer. (Source: Martin, R., & Martin, A. (2017). *Histoires De Tunisie: L'Extrême Sud-Est*. Retrieved from <https://docplayer.fr/166132766-Parmi-les-nombreux-ghorfa-du-sud-est-de-tunisie.html>)

### Appendix 3: Map of ksours



Source: Fozzard, A. (1987). *Tribesmen and the colonial encounter: Southern Tunisia during the French protectorate 1882 to 1940.* [Doctoral Thesis]

#### Appendix 4: Anonymized list of recorded interviews and codes

| Anon. Name      | Sex | Age | Place          | Date Interview(a) | Date Interview(b) | Code           |
|-----------------|-----|-----|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| M               | F   | 30s | Tunis          | 12/04/2021        |                   | M5             |
| A.Affine        | M   | 30s | Tunis          | 12/04/2021        |                   | M4             |
| Y.B.M           | M   | 40s | Ras el Oued    | 09/04/2021        |                   | HH9            |
| T.B.B.S         | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 03/04/2021        |                   | F5             |
| S.S             | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 02/04/2021        |                   | HH8            |
| R.O             | M   | 30s | Ras el Oued    | 09/04/2021        |                   | H5 (B)         |
| M.A             | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 05/04/2021        |                   | HH7            |
| S.A             | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 04/04/2021        |                   | M3             |
| M.B.M           | M   | 60s | Ras el Oued    | 09/04/2021        |                   | HH6            |
| M.B.A.B.K       | M   | 60s | Bir Amir       | 06/04/2021        |                   | K3 (B)         |
| O.Sisters       | F   | 40s | Ras el Oued    | 04/04/2021        |                   | F4             |
| BLGC            | M   | 50s | Douiret        | 05/04/2021        |                   | H4 (B)         |
| Ham.S           | M   | 60s | Douiret        | 10/04/2021        |                   | HH5            |
| M.B.R           | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 10/04/2021        |                   | H3 (B)         |
| ABD.E.A         | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 10/04/2021        |                   | F3             |
| Nizar Ben Halim | M   | 40s | Remote/Tunis   | 01/03/2021        | 12/04/2021        | M2             |
| A.A             | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 05/04/2021        |                   | HH4            |
| H.S             | M   | 30s | Remote         | 03/01/2021        |                   | A4             |
| A.S             | M   | 80s | Remote         | 15/11/2020        |                   | M1             |
| Jalloul Ghaki   | M   | 50s | Remote/Douiret | 17/12/2020        | 15/04/2021        | B3             |
| X.D             | F   | 30s | Douiret        | 05/01/2020        | 13/04/2021        | F6             |
| M.D             | M   | 40s | Douiret        | 07/02/2020        | 15/04/2021        | F2             |
| A.K and H.L     | M   | 80s | Douiret        | 01/02/2020        |                   | A3             |
| Sabri Zoglem    | M   | 80s | Douiret        | 05/02/2020        | 08/04/2021        | HH3            |
| A.D             | M   | 50s | Douiret        | 05/01/2020        | 15/04/2021        | H1             |
| H.B             | M   | 50s | Douiret        | 03/01/2020        |                   | HH2            |
| F.T             | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 17/01/2020        |                   | A2             |
| B               | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 15/01/2020        | 13/04/2021        | K2             |
| A.B.A           | M   | 50s | Douiret        | 17/01/2020        | 11/04/2021        | HH1            |
| S               | M   | 40s | Douiret        | 03/01/2020        |                   | F1             |
| Ham.B           | M   | 50s | Tunis          | 01/12/2019        | 12/04/2021        | B2             |
| K.O.Y           | M   | 30s | Douiret        | 15/12/2019        | 10/04/2021        | K1             |
| A               | M   | 40s | Douiret        | 03/12/2019        |                   | A1             |
| E.B             | M   | 40s | Tataouine      | 10/10/2019        |                   | INST(OEP)      |
| ICARDA          | M   |     | Tunis          | 05/10/2019        |                   | INST(ICARDA)   |
| S.H             | M   | 40s | Tataouine      | 15/10/2019        |                   | H2             |
| S               | M   | 40s | Tataouine      | 05/12/2019        |                   | B1             |
| Nabila Talbi    | F   | 40s | Douiret        | ongoing           |                   | A5             |
| Latifa Talbi    | F   | 50s | Douiret        | ongoing           |                   | A6             |
| Jeanne Chiche   | F   | 60s | Tunis          | 05/10/2019        |                   | B4             |
| Hedi El Jeni    | M   | 40s | Douiret        | ongoing           |                   | A7             |
| Houcine Mseddek | M   | 50s | Remote         | ongoing           |                   | B5             |
| A.J             | M   | 50s | Tataouine      | 10/12/2019        | 23/03/2021        | INST(PRODESUD) |

Codes: K=Khata, HH=Hired Herder, F=Family labour, M=Migrant, H=Herder, B=not from Douiret, A=from Douiret, INST=institutions (name of institution)

## Appendix 5: Social structure of Douiret and herding labour arrangements

| Herding Arrangement | Self | Khlata Models |            |    | Hired Herder |
|---------------------|------|---------------|------------|----|--------------|
|                     |      | 2K            | 1K         | 3K |              |
| <b>TALBI</b>        |      |               |            |    |              |
| Tounsi              |      | X             |            | X  |              |
| Kahia               |      |               |            |    | X            |
| Louchem             |      |               |            |    |              |
| Talbi (W)           |      |               |            |    |              |
| Talbi (B)           |      | X             |            |    |              |
| Hadj Ali            |      | X             |            |    |              |
| Chlek               |      | XXX           |            |    |              |
| Hadj Mohammed       |      |               |            |    |              |
| Tanfouri            |      |               | X(OUTSIDE) |    | X            |
| Amor Ben Ali        |      |               |            |    |              |
| Bounagaza           |      |               |            |    |              |
| Bouchriha           |      | X             | X(OUTSIDE) |    |              |
| Krid El Oued        |      |               |            |    |              |
| Bouflija            |      | X             |            |    |              |
| Affine              |      |               |            | X  |              |
| El Mansouri         |      |               |            |    |              |
| El Aieb             |      |               |            |    |              |
| Ben Mchayekh        |      |               |            |    |              |
| <b>SABRI</b>        |      |               |            |    |              |
| El Habit            | X    |               | X(OUTSIDE) |    | X            |
| Hadj Brahim         |      |               |            |    | X            |
| Aouled Yahia        |      |               | X(OUTSIDE) |    |              |
| Zoglem              |      | X             |            |    |              |
| Aouled Slim         | X    |               |            |    |              |
| Lahmar              |      |               | X(OUTSIDE) |    |              |
| El Mchayek          |      |               |            |    | X            |
| El Barek            |      | X             |            |    |              |
| <b>HADJ JIMAA</b>   |      |               |            |    |              |
| Abidi               |      |               | X(OUTSIDE) |    |              |
| Ben Telouba         |      |               |            |    |              |
| Ben Hamza           |      |               |            |    |              |
| Laffet              | X    | X             |            |    |              |
| Ben Amina           |      |               |            |    | X            |
| Ar'our              |      |               |            |    |              |
| Esaket              |      |               |            |    |              |
| Hrizi               |      |               |            |    |              |

The arch (clans) are capitalized, while family names are not capitalized. Salmon colour from Douiret, Yellow/Orange from outside of Douiret

| Herding Arrangement     | Self | Khlata Models |            |    | Hired Herder |
|-------------------------|------|---------------|------------|----|--------------|
|                         |      | 2K            | 1K         | 3K |              |
| <b>HAMID</b>            |      |               |            |    |              |
| Zanzana                 |      |               |            |    |              |
| Bibas                   |      |               |            |    |              |
| Wadani                  |      |               |            |    |              |
| Boukhris                |      |               |            |    |              |
| Akrout                  |      |               |            |    |              |
| Bourguiba               |      |               |            | X  |              |
| <b>OULED ABDELKARIM</b> |      |               |            |    |              |
| Abdelkhalek             |      |               |            | X  |              |
| Krimi                   |      |               |            |    | X            |
| Wasser                  |      | XXX           |            |    |              |
| <b>BEN ZAGDAN</b>       |      |               |            |    |              |
| Ben Amara               |      | X             |            |    | X            |
| Ben Saleh               |      |               |            |    | X            |
| <b>DHIBET</b>           |      |               |            |    |              |
| Tlili                   |      | XXX           |            |    |              |
| Houwdi                  |      |               |            |    |              |
| Dhibi                   |      |               |            |    |              |
| <b>DGAGRA</b>           |      |               |            |    |              |
| Dagari                  |      |               | X(OUTSIDE) |    |              |
| <b>KARCHAOUI</b>        |      |               |            |    |              |
| Oubira                  |      |               |            |    |              |
| Karchaoui               |      |               |            |    |              |
| Tarous                  |      |               |            |    |              |
| Lahzem                  |      |               |            |    |              |
| <b>AOULED DEBBAB</b>    |      |               |            |    |              |
| Fnek                    |      |               |            |    |              |
| El Taief                |      |               |            |    |              |
| <b>HMIDET</b>           |      |               |            |    |              |
| Hmidi                   |      |               |            | X  |              |
| Hamouda                 |      |               |            |    |              |
| <b>NALOUT</b>           |      |               |            |    |              |
| Nalouti                 |      |               |            |    |              |
| <b>HWAYA</b>            |      |               |            |    |              |
| Hwiwi                   |      |               |            |    |              |
| Mahdawi                 |      |               |            |    |              |
| <b>CHHIDET</b>          |      |               |            |    |              |
| Gersan                  |      |               |            |    |              |
| Gouma                   |      |               |            |    |              |
| TOT (2019/2020)         | 3    | 18            | 7          | 5  | 10           |



Appendix 6: Sample of “artefacts” collected from Facebook posts depicting the virtual/visual-scape of Douiret.



Image 20: Posting pictures on Facebook of birthplaces



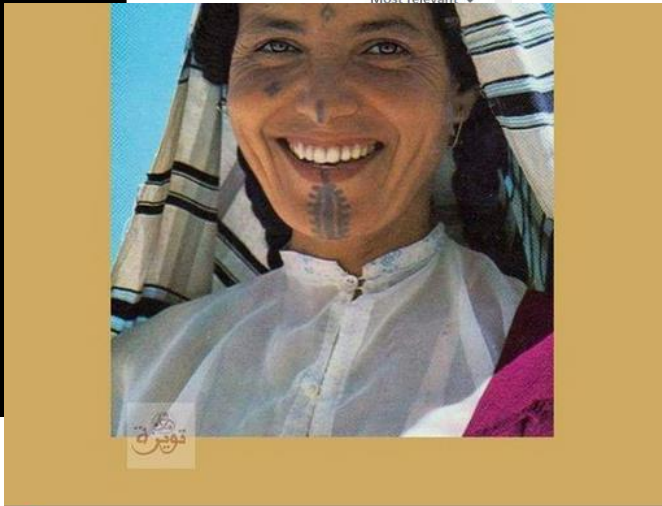
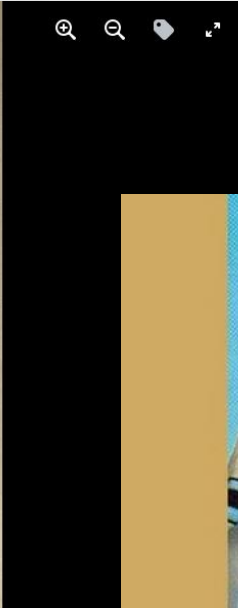
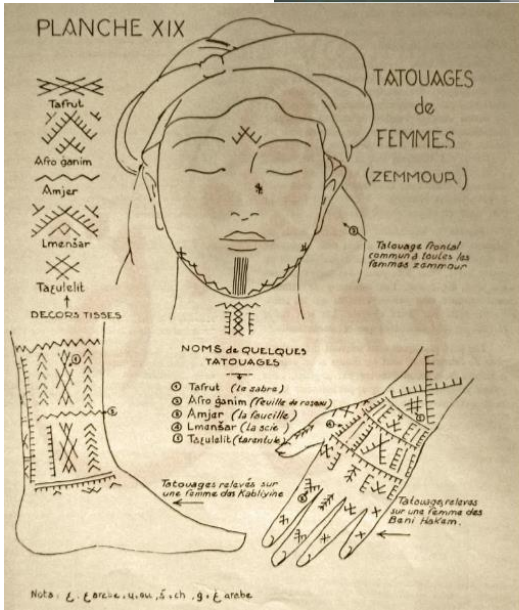
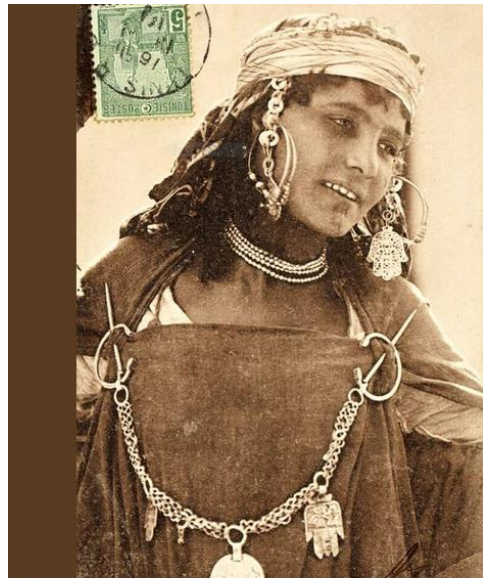


Image 201: A consistent theme, the symbolism of the Amazigh woman, adorned, with tattoos (now considered haram)



Image 212: A post from a Douiri showcasing his family's jessour from the sky



Image 223: Remembering places in the Medina of Tunis. Who lived where, what happened where. This is a constant theme that attracts engagement





Image 234: From wool to yarn

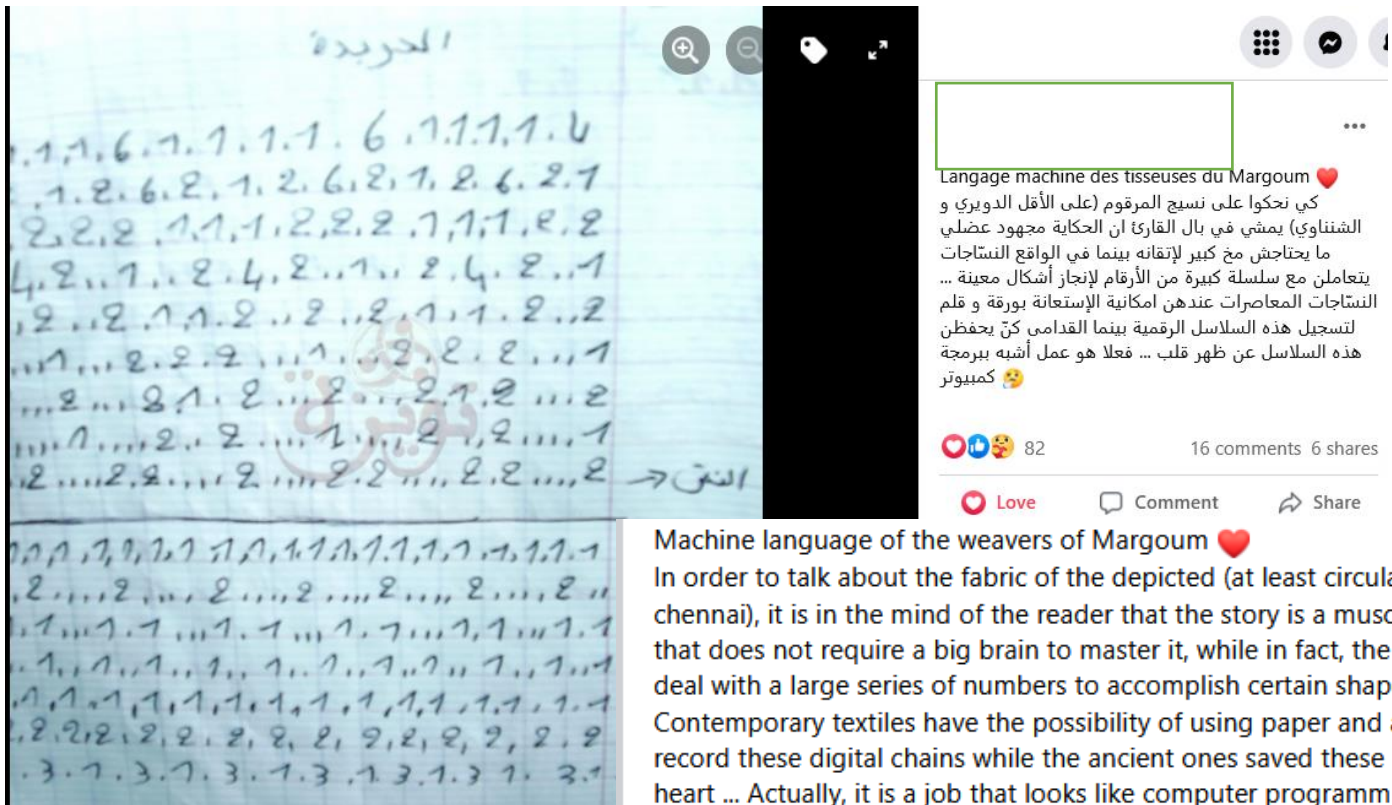
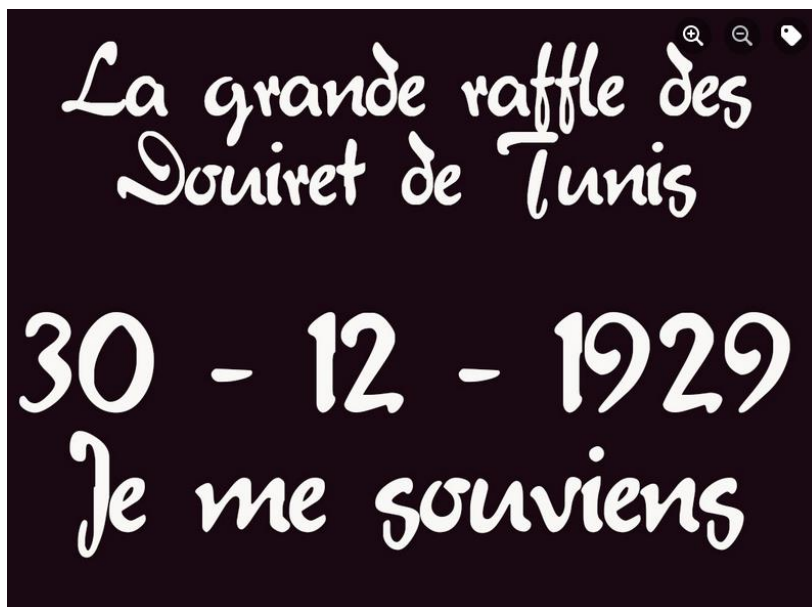


Image 25: The machine language of Marghoum weaving



Image 26: Annual commemoration of the famous 900-year-old Akarit olive tree, belonging to a clan in Douiret and considered to be the largest (but not oldest) olive tree in Tunisia. It still produces olive oil.





An expressive photo of a check-up of a circular girl in her traditional clothes at the Rabat Hospital ... During the extreme isolation of circuits in Tunisia in 1930.

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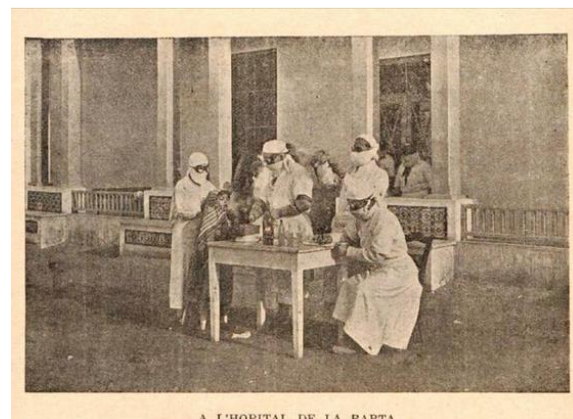


Image 257: Commemorating the raid and isolation of Douiris in the medina of Tunis due to a pulmonary epidemic said to have been spread by Douiris

Nostalgia... Nostalgia .. moaning 🥹

"Uncle, what are you giving birth to?" DIED AS WE THANK YOU? Are your balls dead ? "

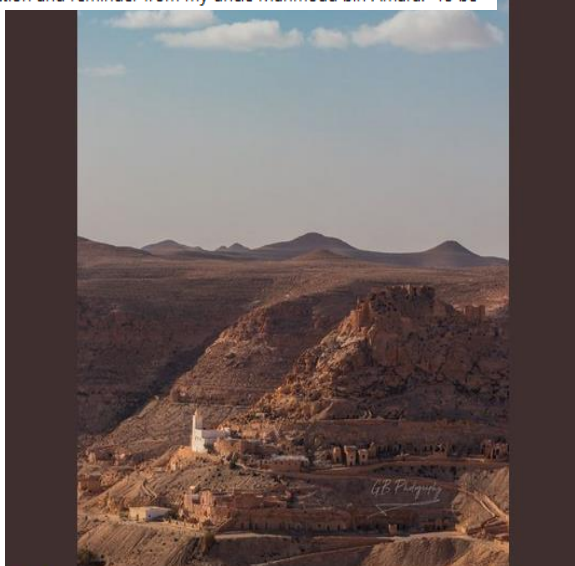
This introduction is for the weekly call to Tawfiq, my nephew, prior to a meeting in one of the Montreal cafes with Anwar, and sometimes with the ease of the courses community in Montreal.

Basically, I wasn't one of the people who talk in the circle. But here we speak in circular ways more than in Tunisia ... Perhaps it is a kind of search for the roots of "Nakarsh" in it so that French and English do not uproot me weeds and feathers, and maybe it is nostalgia for those mountains and those houses that every dark night they collide, even if it is a mountain far away from Mont Royal 🥹

-----  
The photo is of the eastern side of the Douirat, its palace and its great mosque. The Palm Mosque

Taken by my creative friend Belqasim Al-Qamari 🙌

\*\* Correction and reminder from my uncle Mahmoud bin Amara: "To be



[👍👍👍](#) Aghilas Hedi EL-Jeni, Abdelhak Sabri and 142 others

32 comments 3 shares

This blog is nothing but psychological preparation. Personally, I lived in the cold in Canada in all the nineties, and in the last three years, I was told that the cold in Canada was less than the cold of the nineties and hours we attribute this to the effect of old age and forgetfulness. It is certain that Canada's coldness is nothing compared to the cold of Taween (the city and the desert, while the others are another story that comes out on the spatial and time frame 😊) and the cold of Tunisia, the capital. I swear to God, there is a way in his creation 🥹😊

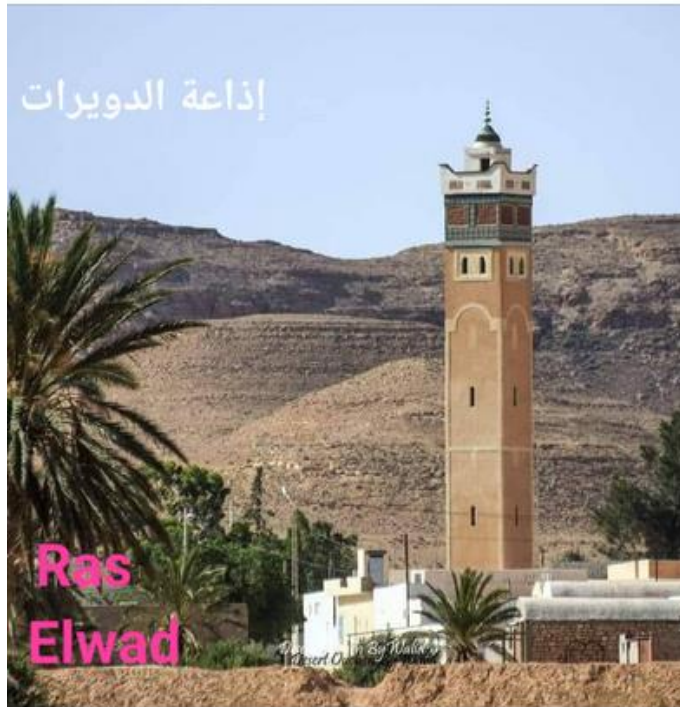
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Image 28: Nostalgic notes from Canada to Douiret

You stopped; because you saw something that touched your heart  
-homesick

[See original](#) · [Rate this translation](#)



127

1 comment 8 shares

Image 29: Nostalgic notes and poetry

خبيلى بوسه يا بلادى  
خبيلى بوسه يا بلادى  
بجيه وقت وين يخلص البوس  
خبيلى من سحر ذكري  
لذكرى في حبه هربت  
لنقاها من بعد سنين  
في اولادي والا في احفادي  
كي حبه زرعته لعيبة  
كي حبه عشق محبة  
كي وصية جدا على فرائس الموت  
كي كلمة بن شيفه ودمعة  
كي لمسة ورشفة كي همسة  
كي خرافة ولد السلطان  
كي عروبي نهاوند النيل  
كي عيون بالاكل شورها  
كي رحة كسرة من فريفا  
خبيلى بوسه يا بلادى  
وصية ليك بعد منامي  
امانة اصطيها لاولادي

Give me a kiss, my country  
Give me a kiss, my country  
There will be a time when the kiss will be sweet  
Hide me from your magic memory  
Remind me of a dream that I ran away  
We meet after many years  
In my children or in my grandchildren  
What a precious seed planted  
To be ashamed of a hidden love  
To be the will of Jeddah on his deathbed  
There is a word between a sigh and a tear  
Like a touch and a shiver like a whisper  
What a myth the son of Sultan  
Who is Arabian, howling at night  
Like eyes with eyebrows, encrypt it  
I smell like a broken team  
Leave me a kiss my country  
A will to you after my sleep  
A legacy I give to my children.



77

3 comments 5 shares



#### حائط بير ام علي • Limes Bir oun Ali

بين ثنايا جبال -خنفة ام علي- الوعرة في منطقة السقي من ولاية قبلي و على الطريق المتجهة نحو قفصة ينتصب حائط روماني ضارب في القدم حيث يعود تاريخه الى بداية القرن الثاني ميلادي

هو جدار حدودي بناه الجنود الرومان للفصل بين اراضي الامبراطورية الرومانية و اراضي القبائل الامازيغية ( اراضي النيجينين / نفزاوة) وبالإضافة الى كونه حد فاصل بين الشقين هو نظام حماية وبوابة مراقبة لحركة القبائل في المنطقة

يُسمى هذا النوع من الجدران الحدودية في دراسات الحضارة الرومانية بـ : الليماس (limes) او Clausura تسمية حديثة

وهو ليس حائط الليماس الوحيد في الجنوب التونسي او في العالم لكنه يعتبر من ضمن الافضل من ناحية التماسك و الصمود و كذلك التصميم فهو الى اليوم يحافظ على جزء كبير منه بشكله الفريد وينتصب شاهدا على التاريخ منذ ما يقارب 1800 سنة

اول من اكتشف هذا الجدار الازلي و اجرى عليه فحوصات و قياسات ميدانية هو ضابط فرنسي اسمه ( Paul Goetschy ) سنة 1894 كذلك تحدث عنه المؤرخ (Maurice Euzennat) سنة 1972 كما زاره و كتب عنه الاريكولوجي البريطاني (David J. Mattingly) سنة 2005 وهو مسجل ضمن القائمة الوطنية للمواقع و المعالم بتاريخ 2012-02-17 مرجع عدد5688

👉-انيس الشايب-

الحد الفاصل بين اراضي الامبراطورية الرومانية و اراضي نفزاوة بلاد البربر

The boundary between the Roman Empire and the lands of the Barbarians

Hide Translation · Rate this translation



#### Limes Bir oun Ali's wall

Between the turns of mountains - Khanveh Um Ali - Al-Wara in the Svi region of Qibli state and on the road heading towards Qafsa, a Roman wall is erected in the foot, which dates back to the beginning of the second century AD

It is a border wall built by the Roman soldiers to separate the lands of the Roman Empire and the lands of the Amazigh tribes (Lands of Nabjani/Nafzawa)

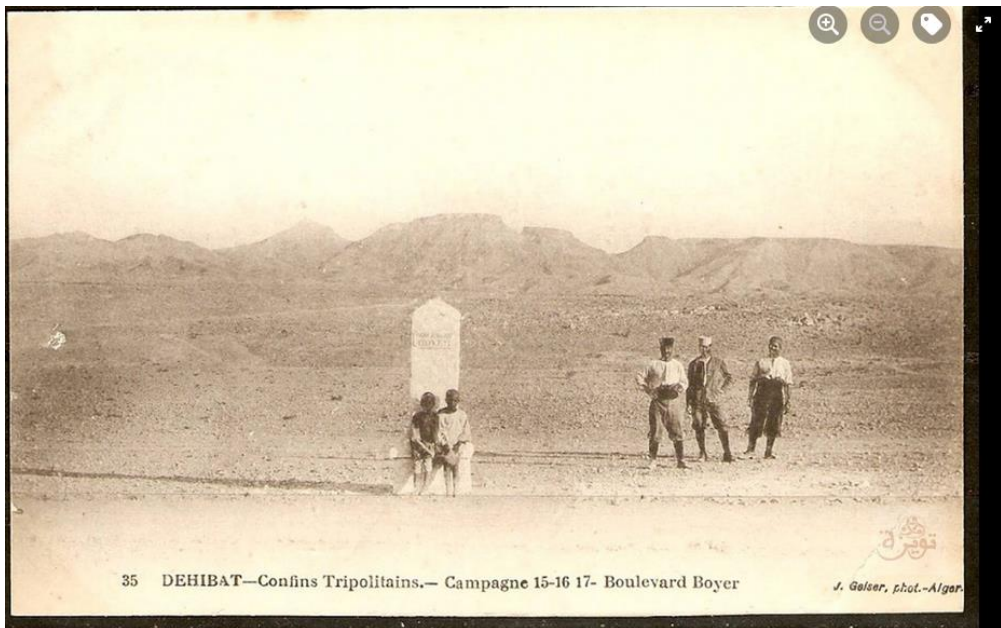


Image 30: Remembering borders, frontiers, and walls



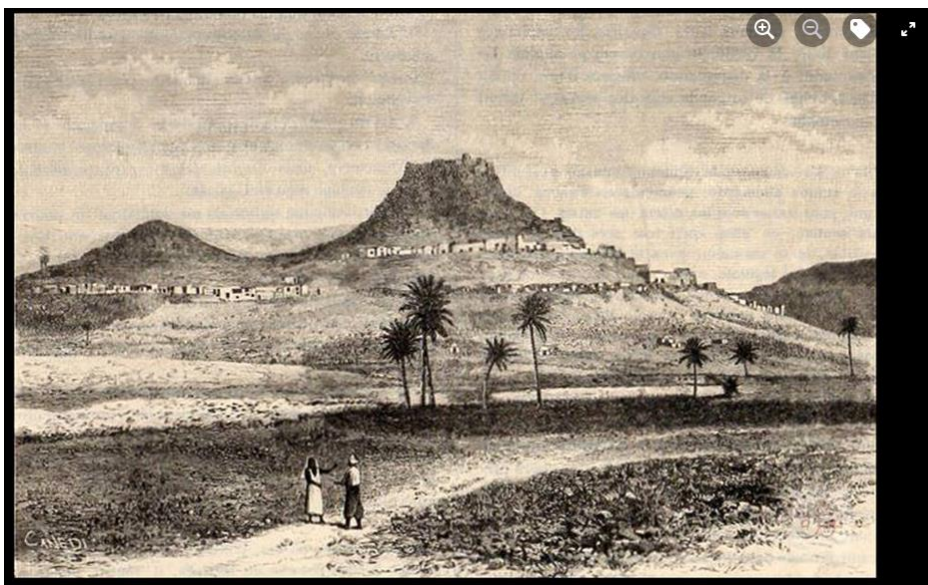
Bir Thlathine:  
Vestige des trente glorieuses ( de l'immigratoon)



Aghilas Hedi EL-Jeni and 20 others

6 comments

Image 261: The vestiges of the "Trente Glorieuses" (immigration)



Cette France qui "aimait" si bien les Douiret ...

-----  
Extraits du rapport trimestriel du Gouverneur de l'Arad, Joseph Luis Arnold Allegro (Alias Youssef Ben Ali Elligrou) au Ministre Résident Général de France en Tunisie.  
-----

3e trimestre 1892

....

Je renouvellerai mon vœu du rapport du 2e trimestre 1892 sur l'opportunité de plus en plus grande qu'il y a à tous points de vue à rouvrir les marchés de Douiret et de Chenini-Douiret fermés sans motif. Les indigènes se plaignent continuellement à moi de cette mesure qui leur porte un préjudice considérable dont ils cherchent en vain la cause n'ayant jamais rien fait qui puisse motiver cette injustice à leur égard. J'appelle de nouveau l'attention du Gouvernement à ce sujet : La réouverture de ces marchés sera un acte de haute justice et de bonne politique.

... See less

34

3 comments 17 shares



Like



Comment



Share



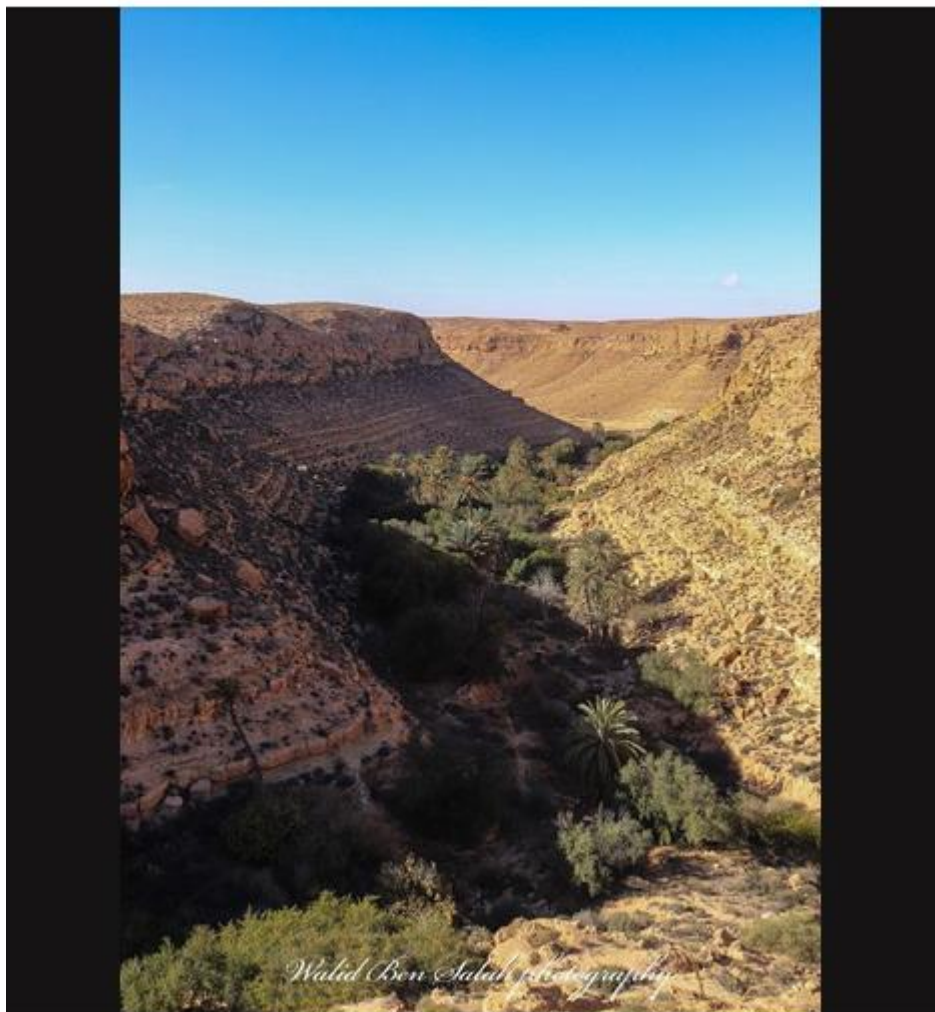
Write a comment...



Image 272: This France that "loved" the Douiris - extracts from reports asking to re-open the market in Douiret that was transferred to Tataouine in 1893



Taynast ellenej - Ain El Maaguel  
Un des sites mythiques de l'histoire de Douiret.



Aghilas Hedi EL-J eni, Abdelhak Sabri and 78 others

35 comments 5 shares

Image 283: A "mythical" site of Douiret - the connecting oasis

A visit to the desert of "Buzridah" from Motamadeh Benqardan from Medanine state, and a meeting with the shepherds of sheep and apple breeders, and a review of the highlights of the problems they face.

Hide Translation · Rate this translation



And the experiment says  
Selling you out at a loss  
And your money is dust in the sky, Emirate  
And what followed them was a little tidy

Hide Translation · Rate this translation



Image 294: Discussions between livestock breeders and apple farmers

## Approches pour l'histoire de la langue BERBÈRE:

Mise en perspective d'une langue à travers les âges

Séquence 2021



Organisé par l'Université de Tunis, Le Laboratoire du Monde Arabe Islamique Médiéval, la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris Nord et le Laboratoire Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale (CNRS, Paris).

En partenariat avec : (1) l'Agence de Mise en Valeur du Patrimoine et de Promotion Culturelle (AMVPPC), (2) la Bibliothèque nationale de Tunisie (BnT), (3) l'Institut National du Patrimoine (INP), (4) l'Académie des Sciences, des Lettres et des Arts Beil al-Hikma.

9 - 11 Décembre 2021



### Déroulement de la manifestation

- Jeudi 9 décembre 2021  
Salle du site archéologique d'Oudina (AMVPPC)  
09h30 - 17h30
- Vendredi 10 décembre 2021  
Salle de la BnT  
09h30 - 17h30
- Samedi 11 décembre 2021  
Salle de l'Académie Beil al-Hikma  
09h30 - 12h30

Pour toute demande de renseignements  
M. Hédi Ben Ammar  
hedi.benammar@univ-tunis1.tn  
hedi.benammar@univ-tunis1.tn

09:00 - 09:30 Science de l'homme

09:30 - 10:30 Des manuscrits et autres sources

- Abdallah AMENOU (Tunis, Maroc). The linguistic phenomenon known as the "al-Burgh" -  
- Roshan MOHAMMAD (Tunis, Maroc). The linguistic phenomenon known as the "al-Burgh" -  
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- Roshan MOHAMMAD (Tunis, Maroc). The linguistic phenomenon known as the "al-Burgh" -

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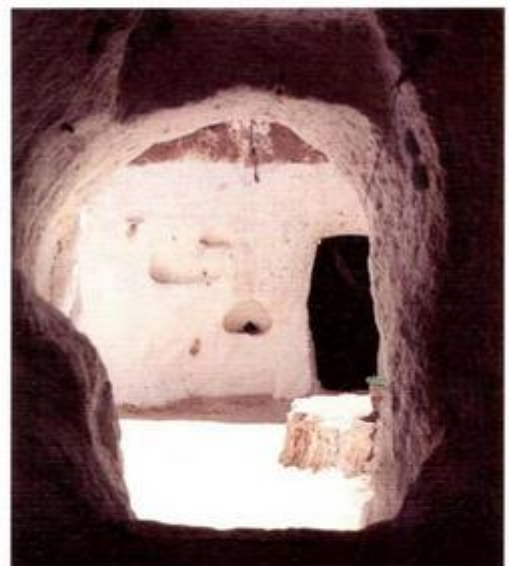
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## OPERA IPOGEA

Alla scoperta delle antiche opere sotterranee



2000  
2

**TUNISIA**  
**Architetture trogloditiche del Mediterraneo**  
**Il villaggio di Douiret, jbel tunisino-tripolitano**  
di Erica Besana e Mario Mainetti  
traduzioni di C. Porrenin

Ergo edizioni

Image 305: Examples of international events linked to Douiret published through ASNAPED