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A garden without a place

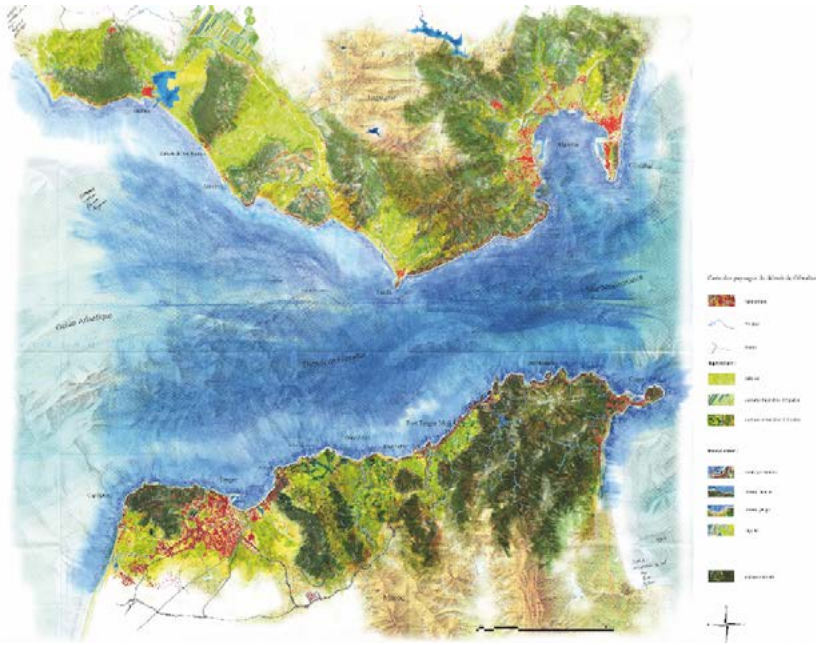
MAPPING THE TRAJECTORY OF A VERNACULAR GARDEN FORM IN THE LANDSCAPE OF THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR

FOR ALTERNATIVE MAPPING

I wish to sketch a trajectory of thought, an alternative cartography of informal spaces, through the evocation of a vernacular garden type found in the Moroccan coastal city of Tangier, along the Strait of Gibraltar. Such gardens are without a clear purpose, but are nevertheless destined to be part of the emerging city. Gardening is one of several practices that live on in these undefined places like a kind of utopia. The occupants hold no rights to be there but nevertheless act as important markers of boundaries and spaces of another order. The gardens are more than merely the land on which to grow herbs and vegetables, and gardeners take part in the arrangement of the plots, transforming them over the years into bearers of good fortune for people starting their new lives in a neighbourhood.

AN ORDINARY GARDEN IN THE URBAN INTERSTICES

In speaking of utopia, I am not referring to a place that does not exist (More 1516), a fantastic, unattainable world, but of a living space, embodied in the world. This space is distinct and recognizable for the qualities it contains, its refined organization, its layout. A garden in the family of ordinary gardens (Brinckerhoff Jackson 1984), what makes it utopian is that it is a site without a place of its own. In the West, historically, gardens were designed as a representation of power, a Debordian (1996) spectacle — “a separate pseudo-world that can only be looked at.” A space without place. The vernacular gardens of Tangier likewise lack a sense of pattern and definition of space. They are un-drawn, undefined. However, they are also properly spaces of opportunity, cultural



Strait of Gibraltar landscape map, 2020. Map: Eugénie Denarnaud.

and bodily transmission, not simply existing to be seen. When one garden is covered by a new construction, the gardener relocates to another place to continue gardening.

I first spotted gardening on the margins of an informal settlement in Tangier. It was a place for growing food and everything else, where the notion of pleasure was linked as much to what grows there as to the act of cultivating, indulging, or simply doing nothing. For its qualities of informality, ephemerality, gratuitousness, non-possession of land, I used piracy as a heuristic metaphor (Bey 1997). The adjective is used to understand and describe a way to “hack” space in a dynamic, adaptative, free and opportunistic way. These qualities have been used to describe communities of freed slaves and sailors who formed pirate communities, based on the sharing of loot, gender equality, and self-organization - a form of counter-power (Rediker 2008). My own engagement grew from a photographic series I exhibited in 2014 on *Pirate gardens* at the symposium of Cerisy-la-Salle “Nourritures jardinière dans les sociétés urbanisées.”

A CITY IN FULL TRANSFORMATION, METROPOLITAN TANGIER ON THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR

Northern Morocco has been undergoing a massive urban transformation in recent years that has dramatically reinvented the landscape along the Strait of Gibraltar. Tangier, its location in the region lends itself to the particularity and preponderance of goods and people moving by boat. In the upheaval that the city has been experiencing, pirate gardens

create important links that ground people to a shared sense of place (Berque 2008). What is fostered in these gardens? A knowledge of plants including their nutritional virtues; smells (particularity of certain taxon e.g. mint *gnaouiya* and leaf cabbage); cultivation techniques, such as sowing, tillage, and the use of tools; the breeding of domestic animals (chickens, sheep) – all are strong markers of one’s connection to the land and to gardening practices even when they take place outside the site of the garden itself.



Gobeur, Série. Photo: Eugénie Denarnaud.

Take, for example, the practice of inshore angling, where fishermen know perfectly the imperceptible traces in the landscape to reach the water’s edge. These same figures also know which plants will cauterize bleeding should they cut themselves while mounting their lines. One of the most locally renowned is the viscous inula (*Dittrichia viscosa* (L.) Greuter). It is enough to crumple the freshly-collected plant and spread its juice on a wound to obtain an immediate effect. Fishermen know which plants can be used as a timely first aid kit to pick on site. Another practice, used for cooking, is the picking of leafy vegetables such as the large-flowered lavatera (*Lavatera trimestris* (L.), or *bqûl* in the Tangier dialect, to make a special dish of leafy tajine, also called *bqûl*. Similarly, at the end of every winter, green leaves appear in the meadows and are collected to make a different kind of tajine using garlic, crushed olives, and the triad of herbs used in basic cuisine in Tangier: parsley, coriander and wild celery. The result is the so-called “lean dish” that is used to regain fresh vitamins and fibres at the end of the rainy winter season (Lieutaghi 1998). Harvests of berries (blackberries, myrtle), honey from wild apiaries, and milk thistle cardings (*Silybum marianum* (L.) Gaertn.) are still very common near



Infrastructures, Tangier, 2019. Photo: Eugénie Denarnaud.

highways, traffic lights or road interchanges that spread over the countryside, and whose management is based on old and updated vernacular practices that have yet been affected by the green revolution in agriculture.

REINVENTING ULTRA-LOCAL PRACTICES IN A METROPOLITAN CONTEXT: LANDSCAPE AS RELATIONAL PRACTICE

Pirate gardens are part of the invention of everyday life (De Certeau 1990). They are places for the maintenance and transmission of living practices in a globalizing city whose arable lands are rapidly disappearing under the pressure of large-scale urbanization in the region. The small gardens often cultivated in the natural terrain, in plots of land between new buildings, are a link between the habits of the newly-arrived inhabitants from the countryside and those of their increasingly globally-connected urban neighbours. There is a strong dialectical relationship between the biodiversity present in these gardens, the richness of the local ecosystem (free of agricultural development planning), and the inherited ways of doing things that are intrinsically linked to the landscape (Ponsich 1970).

Pirate gardens are places of relations between humans and non-humans, spaces of "diplomacy" (Morizot 2016) – what I like to call "landscape carriers," to use Bernard Lassus's expression (De La Soudière 2019). In this sense, they encompass and transmit the skills, habits and modes of care associated with the people and sites where vernacular gardening is found. They constitute spaces of openness to the wider landscape. These

sites not only maintain the beauty of a place, they are crucial to the welcoming of new arrivals to Tangier as well as those relocating from other parts of the city (El Hafa, Merkala, Dradeb, Sidi Bouqnadel, Jbel Kbir, Fom del Oued Lihoud, Achaaba...) where similar gardening practises were used.



Buildings, Tangier, 2017. Photo: Eugénie Denarnaud.

As urbanization expands throughout the region, many residents living in informal neighbourhoods are being displaced by state and local authorities with the ambition to put these precarious lands to “better use”. Without adequate proof of ownership or tenure rights many people who have been living in these informal districts for generations have been compelled to move elsewhere, to places totally unknown to them. In this context, vernacular gardens are a first step towards re-appropriating the areas to which they have been displaced. They ground themselves through their gardening practises and actions. For rural migrants coming from further afield, many decide to leave the countryside of northern Morocco and its southern regions, to work in Tangier’s new factories. They too continue to cultivate plots of earth as a way to have a positive influence on their new urban lives. A form of *baraka*, or luck in dialectal Arabic, informal gardening is associated with this type of relationship, charging and transcribing the area with a divine spiritual force, religious or otherwise, for the neighbourhood to come. For such resident-gardeners excluded from the city’s building programs, I see gardening practices as a way for people to get involved in their communities and the metropolis through a kind of direct democracy. Gardening, as a utopian practice, helps support the city’s capacity to build itself through the forging of community relations (Zask 2016).



Gibraltar, Hypsométries. Map: Eugénie Denarnaud.

CONCLUSION

Anchoring myself in contemporary anthropology, gardening is a poetic expression of the Earth, insofar as it links us to places and experiences. Garden is a visceral, organic link in a globalized society now fragmented, where urban development has become a priority above all else, and where humans focus on that which is above-ground, leading us to search for a more “rooted” common sense in the land.

In this context, I am seeking to integrate a sensitivity for the Other through the development of an alternative form of cartography using the medium of photography. Ethnobotanical observation, herbarium practices, annotated sketches, discussions with actors in the respective sites are all elements of the field investigations that make it possible to decipher the experiences and relationships connecting Tangier and its landscape. Doing so, “it is to be hoped that subsequent research, and first of all new surveys of the last witnesses of the old society, can, in a broader comparatism, promote a better definition of what belongs to the territory in question” (Descola 2005). More than a science, landscape studies offer a socially-grounded way to highlight the relational fabric that we are a part of. Once we have encountered the germination of a plant, the condition of a fungus, or the temporality of a rock, we integrate this experience into our lives. They are considered.

In a world segmented between humans and everything else, everything is built in the immanent risk of encounter and interrelation. Complex ecosystems, like those found in informal and vernacular gardens, make up the spaces that allow us to live, to exist. From the multiplicity of these exchanges, landscapes are born.



Informal Garden, Tangier, 2019. Photo: Eugénie Denarnaud.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

The photograph on page 87 is a detail from the photo on page 93, by Eugénie Denarnaud.