



Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights

**Floating bodies and drifting souls:  
The absurdity of burial and the state of contempt**  
(The tragedy of the "Zarzis peninsula")



November 2022

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November 2022

# Summary

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## Introduction

The image of a woman sitting on an old refrigerator by the sea of Zarzis, as if embodying the stagnation of the feelings of a cruel society towards its citizens, is that of a mother waiting to fall into the arms of her son, who will never come back. It is an image of love and adoration for her son, her beloved from the moment of conception to the moment of their eternal separation. In those moments, she becomes obsessed with a long waiting, wondering about his fate: had he managed to reach the Italian borders, was he fighting against the waves...or maybe she loses hope of seeing him return alive...



Source: Social media: Facebook

The "Zarzis Peninsula" has been living through tragic days and nights, characterized by struggle and local community solidarity. It has been living the impact of painful events in the absence of Tunisian State actors. From societal and cognitive standpoints, we tried, as much as possible, in the current context, to dig into the scenes of this tragedy in the "Zarzis Peninsula" and analyze its causes. We tried to research the stakes of the local protest movements and to ascertain the extent of the presence of the Tunisian State and the roles of local actors, which are embodied mainly in the activists of the "Al-Bahar Association"<sup>1</sup>. But we must not forget that the real revolutionaries aren't only the ones who are always visible on the streets. There are also those fighting for their rights who remain active behind the scenes in this highly complex drama, such as students in schools, employees in their offices<sup>2</sup>, etc. Therefore, it must be said that the Trade Union Movement, Human Rights defenders, the Union of Farmers, the Union of Employers, the fishermen and the ordinary citizens of Zarzis played a crucial role in the solidarity march and the dynamism of the mobilization, but their only fault is

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<sup>1</sup>Association "Le Pêcheur (fisherman) for Development and Environment " in Zarzis.

<sup>2</sup>Bayyat (Asef), "Political Life, How Simple People Change the Middle East", translated by Ahmed Zayed, The National Center for Translation, Cairo, 2014, p. 334.

that they are "silent fighters", in the words of historian Hédi AL-TIMOUMI.

In this preliminary explanatory paper, we relied on two qualitative research techniques: the technique of semi-directed conversation with actors of the "Al-Bahar Association", members of the Trade Union Movement, and with some local elected officials; as well as the technique of participatory observation. We spent five days in the "Zarzis Peninsula", from October 14 until October 19, 2022, during which we attended public and open meetings held in the fishing port, at the headquarters of the Local Labor Union of Zarzis and at the headquarters of the "Al-Bahar Association". We also participated in demonstrations and social movements as well as in the general strike, and we moved between the regional hospital of Zarzis and the "Jardin d'Afrique" cemetery, in the streets of Zarzis and in some houses of the families of disappeared young people. We also participated in the search mission of fishing boats on October 17, 2022, participating in this attempt to comb the sea in search of the bodies of the disappeared young people, without neglecting the conversations that took place in the spheres of popular cafes in Zarzis between inhabitants and young people. The task at hand was challenging, as it involved addressing an interesting sociological issue as it continues to unfold.

## I. The autumn of strangers and the days of pain

On the "Zarzis Peninsula", the forgotten young people embarked on the night of September 21, 2022 for a dream boat trip to the northern shore of the Mediterranean. But this plastic boat dedicated to recreational fishing, whose total area does not exceed five meters, did not withstand the weather storm or the marine sentinel<sup>3</sup>. This was the tragic story of fourteen young men, two young women and an infant...All of the people on board this makeshift boat have become victims of injunctive migration policies that have turned the Mediterranean into a "maritime cemetery".

The oppressed of the earth, in the words of Franz Fanon, choose the way of the sea, and made it a companion and a love story, but the marine world rejected them as their territory. The sea expelled many bodies that could not be found...these bodies turned out to be sleeping in tombs...But in which tombs? They sleep in the cemetery of "foreigners" called "the garden of

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<sup>3</sup> Through our interviews, and through the dialogues conducted in the streets of Zarzis or on social media, two narratives become clear: there are those who talk about climate violence on the night of September 21, 2022, and there are those who argue that the boat crashed into a naval patrol that belonged to the Tunisian or Italian authorities. Considering the absence of many bodies to date, and given that there is no trace of the boat that the migrants boarded, we cannot be certain of the causes of this tragedy, especially since this crisis is not yet over.

Africa", and so they lived as foreigners and were buried as foreigners in the autumn of foreigners, and the city of Zarzis thus became a space for foreigners, as if it were a scene that brings us back to the image of Abu Dhar Al-Ghafari and the prophetic hadith that predicted his end: "May God have mercy on Abu Dhar, he walks alone, dies alone and rises alone". This sense of alienation is rooted in the majority of the local community, and is also evident in the banners that were raised on the day of the general strike, and in what citizens wrote on their banners.



Source: Photo by Felice ROSA.





Source: Radio Lela Meryam FM Sawt Al Janoob (official Facebook page).

To die this way is nobody's dream, but this incident reveals to us the aesthetic of the "adventure of the irregular Mediterranean journey" and the aesthetic of the "farewell and parting" from the point of view of the aesthetics of the age of ugly art... "like the flowers of evil" by Charles Baudelaire or "the aesthetics of the ugly" by Theodor Adorno or "the marvelous and horrible manners" by Lyotard, Nancy, Laco Laparte and Negri...or the aesthetics of burning bodies that have rolled over the rest of Arab history since the self-immolation of

Bouazizi<sup>4</sup>. Their own death expresses their resistance to the state of congestion and anger, where the story of their farewell appears, like self-immolation, like a "special resurrection", as Fathi al-Maskini postulates. The victims have moved entire neighborhoods, where protest movements formed, and waves of anger have intensified. Migratory flows and movements are, in the end, a historical repertory of protest which characterized southeastern Tunisian societies as a statement of rebellion and disobedience since the authority of the Beys.

These forgotten youth dreamed of light, but their destiny has been to perish in the dungeon. The suffering did not stop there, as the mourning rites between families turned into a form of celebration. If the Spartan mother, when she heard the news of the death of her five sons in one of the battles of her homeland against the enemies, went out and prayed to thank the gods who granted her all this happiness<sup>5</sup>, the mothers of Zarzis, who lost the bodies of their loved ones and were still looking for them, congratulate those who succeeded

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<sup>4</sup> Al-Maskini, (Fathi), Benchikha Al-Maskini, (Umm Al-Zein), "The Arab Revolutions... A non-autobiographical biography", tables for publication, translation and distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 2013, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Ga' Billah, (Hammadi), "What is the Revolution?", The Movement of Tunisian Society in the Decade of the Revolution: Between "The Will of Life" and "The Response of Destiny", presented by: Mouldi Gassoumi, Dar Muhammad Ali Publishing, Sfax, Tunisia, 2020, p. 28.

in burying theirs. It is an "exhausting and painful paradox".

The families in particular, and the Zarzis community in general, have remained immersed in the past, the present and the future, or, as Proust said, they are "in a strange mixture in the crucible of retrospective memory and future vision. They are seen here and there and everywhere and nowhere, while they are in beds firm and solid, but their memories are conscious and awake".

They try to return to the past, trying to put brakes on the clock and turn back, to start an imaginary future trip that wouldn't stop until the usual morning, and then they make sure there's nothing again with the appearance of the sun of a new day. The journey to search for the bodies of their loved ones has become a daily, familiar and habitual exercise, eagerly awaiting the moment to bury them, but in vain. As if they were "waiting for Godot", as Irish writer Samuel Beckett struggled in one of his famous plays<sup>6</sup>. These dramatic days coincide with the absence of government authorities.

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<sup>6</sup>Beckett, (Samuel), "En attendant Godot", Les éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1952.

## II. The local crisis and the response of the Tunisian state

"I have nothing left except God and you". In these terms, one of the fathers of a young disappeared spoke to the "Al Bahar Association" president, Shams El Din Bourassin, on October 10, 2022. In the same context, one of the fathers belonging to the families of the disappeared said to president of "Al Bahar Association", at the headquarters of the Local Syndicate in Zarzis: "You are the president, Shams El Din... you are the president... you are the president." These words were filled with screams, pain and tears.

In their appearance, these expressions are tragic, expressing the pain of humanity, but their sociological meaning is none other than the profound expression of the absence and incapacity of the State. The citizens, men and women, did not demand the resurrection of the dead, but they simply demanded a "dignified burial" of their loved ones after a "DNA analysis" which would prove their belonging to their families. But what happened?

On the night of September 26, 2022, the fishermen found two bodies about 35 miles<sup>7</sup> from the shores of Zarzis, and they were buried the following evening in the "Garden of Africa" cemetery without submitting them to DNA analysis. They were identified on October 11 as being the victims of the September 21 shipwreck. This violation was accompanied by the absence of maritime guards and the Navy and the absence of the State in the search operations, especially during the first days following the tragic incident. In this regard, Shams El-Din Bourassin<sup>8</sup> says:

"What we have noticed is the absence of the State, politicians and security guards in the search and combing operations. We deplore this... The state did not support the searches carried out by the fishermen and did not even guide and coordinate with us."

In the context of the government's absence, male and female citizens protested and demanded the local authorities and the Navy to intervene by searching and combing, but the response was not immediate and

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<sup>7</sup> A direct interview conducted on October 18, 2022 at 14:00 in Zarzis, with Bashir, a member of the Al-Bahar Environmental Development Association.

<sup>8</sup> A direct interview conducted on October 15, 2022 at 13:00 in Zarzis, with Shams El-Din Bourassin, President of Al-Bahar Environmental Development Association.

serious, and the maritime security forces were also slow in the process of removing the bodies found by the sailors during the days of solidarity. This is highlighted by Majid's<sup>9</sup> testimony:

"The citizens asked for a plane for combing since the early days, but it came late on September 26, 2022... And the navy did not rise to their responsibilities and the size of the efforts made by the local citizens."

Also, the sessions of the Crisis Cell emanating from the Medenine Regional Committee for Disaster Avoidance, Confrontation and Organization of Rescue, headed by Said bin Zayed, Governor of Medenine, were neither serious nor eager to launch a quick and effective intervention. It met twice, according to the "official page of the Medenine's governorate": once on September 26, 2022, the date of the first marine combing operation initiated by the fishermen to search for bodies, and then again on October 11, 2022, the date of the second marine combing operation. The committee therefore met both times after the intervention of civilian and

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<sup>9</sup> A direct interview conducted on October 15, 2022 at 09:00 in Zarzis, with Majid, the Secretary General of the Al-Bahar Environmental Development Association.

maritime communities, and these two civilian actors embarrass the authorities.

In the context of a slow and not very serious response from the Maritime Guard, the Navy and local and regional authorities, the Presidency of the Republic issued a press release on October 14, 2022 in which it declared: "The Head of State renewed his instructions to the naval forces and regional authorities to further intensify search operations for the drowned people. The State thanks the population, in particular the ship-owners, for their efforts in support of the military and security forces and civil protection agents."

Thus, everything happens as if the Presidency of the Republic appreciates the efforts of the security forces and calls for more work and research, but the truth is quite the opposite. The security response to searching for bodies was not immediate and serious. Moreover, in his statement made public on October 17, 2022, the President of the Republic stressed that "numerous pieces of evidence prove the involvement of certain actors in human trafficking."

In fact, it is about populism, one of the characteristics of which is to content itself with drawing conclusions and providing easy theoretical answers to crises.

If we think about it rationally, we cannot deny the existence of human trafficking networks, but regarding the case of the September 21 boat, it was guided by "Harraga amateurs", because it was a migratory journey that did not engage in transcontinental intermediary networks. In fact, the whole operation, from the start, was financed with the migrants' own resources. They are the ones who provided the money, the boat and even the captain who will guide the trip, and in this case we cannot speak of human trafficking networks.

The State has not paid attention and has not listened to the signs of the humanitarian crisis, has not hurried to search for the bodies of the disappeared, and has not worked to send development alternatives which could address the economic and social crisis. In fact, during the period between September 21 and October 18, 2022, that is to say, from the date of the departure of the boat from Zarzis until the day of the general strike, the maritime security forces stopped 174 trips organized by irregular migrants and prevented 2,529 migrants from reaching Italian shores. Thus, we can say that the Tunisian State turns a blind eye to the missing and the humanitarian disasters in the Mediterranean, but is able to implement its security approach.



It should be recalled that since the visit of Mrs. Luciana LAMORGESE to Tunisia on July 27, 2020, and her meeting with the President of the Republic, on August 2, 2020, the latter carried out an inspection visit to the seaport of Sfax to ascertain the state of preparation of the National Maritime Guard and the Maritime Region of the Center in particular.

During his visit, the President of the Republic was informed of the various maritime and land equipment available in the port, followed by a presentation during which he insisted on increasing the protection of maritime borders with determination and seriousness, explaining the strict measures that must accompany this operation.

Thus, it is clear to us that the Presidency of the Republic and the State system after July 25, 2021 are concerned with protecting the borders of European countries through their concern with applying a security approach to the question of irregular migration. The President's urgent visit to the port of Sfax, which comes five days after Italian Minister Lamorgese's visit to Tunisia, is the best proof of this.

Not only has the state's response been slow, but Tunisian state sources have become like "Facebook sources", since it is impossible to find a unified source of

official information. In the period from September 26, 2022 and October 18, 2022, we monitored the following statements:

- The Northern Municipality of Zarzis declared the transfer of 6 bodies, and the transfer from Zarzis to Zarzis. We do not know what this might mean: were they transported to the hospital or to the cemetery?
- The municipality of Zarzis announced the transfer of two bodies, and the transfer was also unknown.
- The Zarzis Regional Hospital declared the entry of 23 bodies from September 26 to October 16, and they were transferred to different destinations.
- The regional hospital of Gabès authorized the admission of 8 bodies from September 26 to October 17.

Against this background of conflicting figures, we can confirm that sailors, from September, 26 to October, 18, found 10 bodies, and there are no official figures about the bodies that were thrown into the sea, especially on the shores of the island of Djerba.

This data reinforced the feeling of humiliation, neglect and contempt of the citizens: Bashir<sup>10</sup> repeated the words "they despise us" several times, and the concept of humiliation in the protest action system constitutes "the perfect antithesis of the concept of dignity, respect

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<sup>10</sup>Direct interview with Bashir, previously mentioned.

and equality, and in turn refers to other concepts such as clientelism, tyranny, corruption, bribery and nepotism"<sup>11</sup>.

The remarkable sociological paradox is that the State that was absent from this dramatic scene registered its presence in the bodies of the dead. In essence, the State is a violent institution, but it is invisible to most people in everyday life. We may talk about it in the abstract, but when we face the security forces, we learn to know them differently by feeling them in our skin and our body<sup>12</sup>. The recognition of this does not lie only in physical and police repression. The community of Zarzis learned about this violence through the disrespect and violation of the bodies of the victims. There was no DNA analysis, no purification, no prayer, no farewell before burial. They also learnt about it through certain violations suffered by one of the actors in this process of struggle and solidarity in the region of Gabès when he was looking for the truth about the identity of the bodies recovered from the Gabès regional hospital.

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<sup>11</sup>Zine El-Din, (Al-Habib Estati), "Protest Action in Morocco and the Thesis of Relative Deprivation: In the Need to Diversify Interpretive Approaches," *Omran for Social and Human Sciences*, No. 22, Volume VI, Fall 2017, pp. 165 - 186, p. 171.

<sup>12</sup>Razsa, (Maple), "Bastards of Utopia: Living politics radical after socialism", Indiana University Press, 2015, p. 138.

In this sense, "the State is that human society which is situated in a determined sphere and has the capacity to impose and monopolize legitimate physical violence"<sup>13</sup>.

Based on the above, it can be said that the Tunisian State has succeeded in transgressing the bodies, not respecting the sanctity of the dead, and withdrawing in critical and crisis situations.

The feeling of being violated by the political system is one of the strong and noticeable feelings of the local community. However, the suffering does not end there. Migration policies, isolation, and border controls have had adverse effects on the lives and livelihoods of fishermen of Zarzis and have contributed to turning the Mediterranean into a liquid graveyard.

### **III. Border violence: criminalized rescue operations and legislation for violations**

In addition to economic and environmental problems, the fishermen of Zarzis face serious problems that threaten their safety in the waters where they work. If Libyan fishing boats have no limits and dare to fish in Tunisian waters, there is no such tolerance for

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<sup>13</sup>Eabrasu, (Marian), "Les Etats de la définition wébérienne de l'Etat", Raisons politiques, vol 1, n0 45, 2012.

Tunisian sailors who venture outside their zone. In recent years, several Tunisian sailors have lived in the wake of attacks, seizures of boats, threats, and hostage-taking by Libyan armed groups, including the Libyan Coast Guard, which was set up through European programs to fight against irregular emigration. This situation of insecurity affects not only the fishermen of Zarzis, but also all Tunisian fishermen who sail near the border areas: in the south-east they are threatened with firearms from Libyan armed groups, and in the north-west they are threatened by the Algerian Coast Guard. Despite everything, the sailors of Zarzis continue to lend a helping hand to people in danger at sea. Rescuing the survivors and communicating with the Tunisian coast guards to retrieve the bodies represents the daily life of the fishermen of Zarzis<sup>14</sup>.

Saving lives, for the sailors of Zarzis, is a humanitarian duty. Indeed, rescue operations are carried out at the cost of their working time and their daily livelihood. In order to be more efficient in their work and to save as many people in distress as possible, more than 100 sailors from Zarzis followed a six-day sea rescue training course organized by MSF (Médecins Sans

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<sup>14</sup>Anne Bisiaux, (Sophie), Jonville, (Marco), "Des pêcheurs pris dans un étai", *FTDES*, Le 06/12/2019.

Frontières) in 2015<sup>15</sup>. In this context, Shams El-Din BOURASSIN<sup>16</sup> states the following:

"The training and courses on maritime safety and rescue, for the benefit of sailors, were very useful to us in the management of the crisis that Zarzis experienced. This helped us enormously in the search for bodies"

While European policies have criminalized NGOs carrying out search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, Tunisian fishermen find themselves at the forefront of rescue operations. Usually when they go out to sea, they increase their water and food supplies in order to be able to rescue any boat in distress that may cross their path.

In addition to the duty of humanity, rescuing boats in danger is an obligation enshrined in international maritime law and in particular in the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) which applies to all ships. The text sets out the obligation of all States to bring rescued persons to a place of safety where the lives of survivors are no longer in danger and

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<sup>15</sup>IBID.

<sup>16</sup> A direct interview with Shams El-Din BOURASSIN, previously mentioned.

where their basic needs can be met. In fact, in the summer of 2018, sailors from Zarzis rescued a boat with 14 irregular migrants on board, and after several attempts to contact the nearest coast guards, they received no response, so they decided to guide the boat in distress to the Italian coasts to disembark the migrants in a safe place. Following this initiative, the entire crew (seven Tunisian fishermen) were accused of helping irregular migrants and were arrested and imprisoned for 22 days in a Sicilian prison<sup>17</sup>.

It should be noted that the European Union designated the EUNAVFOR Med Monitoring Service, also called Sophia: a military operation to rescue and dismantle the economic model of smugglers and human traffickers, in the words of the UNHCR. This military operation, however, closely monitors seafarers in humanitarian rescue operations, and averts the gaze from attacks by Libyan militias. They leave Tunisian fishermen to their fate<sup>18</sup>, and leave irregular migrants alone. The security reinforcements to monitor the borders are enormous. This system turns a blind eye to drowned people and criminalizes sailors and NGOs when they try to save human beings. What is remarkable is that the coast guards are technically qualified to carry

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<sup>17</sup> Anne Bisiaux, (Sophie), Jonville, (Marco).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

out rescue operations, but as they are only concerned with border control, they are not committed to saving human lives. In this context, Majeed<sup>19</sup> advances:

"The European Union reinforces the security approach by providing sentries and surveillance devices without ever thinking of providing a rescue unit or a special rescue plane... On the day of the maritime search outing on October 10, 2022 we have found 6 bodies, but the Coast Guards only retrieved two bodies, considering that their capacities were limited. In fact, they do not have sufficient equipment, nor the necessary know-how. When the Coast Guard came a day later to retrieve the remaining four bodies, they fainted from the smell of decomposed bodies, as they had no special logistical means for rescue, and they were also unable to take on board a body until one of the sailors went down with them to help them lift it. In fact, the stakeholders who strengthen border patrols and security never take an interest in the rescue operations of migrants or the security of the Tunisian coast guards".

In this context, the maritime community always remains faithful to noble values: it is always ready to

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<sup>19</sup>A direct interview with Majeed, previously mentioned.



save human lives or to retrieve the bodies of victims from the Mediterranean Sea.

#### **IV. When the solidarity tide of the people of zarzis replaces the roles of political authorities**

In our interview with him, about the tide of solidarity in Zarzis, Majeed invoked a popular example that embodies the very strong historical solidarity relationship between the people of Akkara (a tribe in Zarzis), who cannot bear to be offended. Their tragedy is one tragedy, and their joy is one, in turn. Majeed expanded on this point by stating:

"We did not expect anything from the State during the Covid-19 crisis, as we provided an amount of two hundred and fifty thousand dinars to acquire medical equipment and supplies. We also provided needy families with all they need in terms of food and drink. These donations were collected from residents of Zarzis and from our community residing in Paris. "

Here, it must be emphasized that the financial resources collected during the days that were allocated to the combing operations to search for missing bodies under the supervision of the "Al-Bahar Association"

were local self-resources. The local and regional authorities wanted to spread the fact that "the local and regional authorities have intervened and donated for the benefit of the solidarity campaign." In fact, this news is unfounded, as the local community is the one who collected resources and harnessed them for the noble values of searching for missing bodies. This becomes clear through the testimony of Salah<sup>20</sup>:

"During the first maritime search outing on September 26, 2022, a resident of Zarzis donated six thousand dinars to us to buy gasoline and supplies for a search and combing trip at sea."

In the same context, Majeed adds:

"We tried to compensate the absence of the State by mobilizing our simple means and resources and our limited capacities."

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The forms of solidarity in the local community are a historical cultural habit. In 1907, Zarzis lived through a

<sup>20</sup>A live interview was conducted on October 14, 2022 at 16:00 in Zarzis, with Salah, Secretary General of Al-Bahar Association.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Salah, previously mentioned.

painful event known as the "Year of the Boat"<sup>22</sup>. The events of this story took place in the tribal area on the Libyan-Tripolitan border, represented by the explosion of a huge steamer that killed 37 people and injured 19 others. All of them were fishermen, in addition to the accident also burning 20 small fishing boats<sup>23</sup>. During that incident, forms of solidarity emerged with the families of the victims and the wounded. The tendency of solidarity exists in the local community and the cultural depth is based on kinship and intermarriage. During these days, the inhabitants recalled the "Year of the Boat"<sup>24</sup> incident and other local solidarity stories, and Majeed concluded that this tendency runs deep by saying:

"In Zarzis, we always say "Faza'at Al-Akkara"<sup>25</sup> ", which means solidarity on the Akkari way.

Akkari solidarity is a historical and intimate culture in the local community, and this type of solidarity tide has become a local custom and standard, as Shams El-

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Majeed, previously mentioned.

<sup>23</sup> Salem Al-Abyad, "The History of the Zarzis Peninsula from Antiquity to the End of the French Occupation: A Socio-Historical Study in Local History", presented by: Nouredine Sarib, State Printing Company, 2001, p. 170.

<sup>24</sup> Live interview, conducted on October 15, 2022 at 12:00 in Zarzis, with Salem Al Abyad, academic and politician.

<sup>25</sup> A live interview with Majeed, previously mentioned.

Din<sup>26</sup> says in this context: "We cannot be far from this tragedy (the sinking of the boat), because in Zarzis we have customs and traditions that should not be broken".

The local community spoke of the words "generosity", "fidelity to promises", "chivalry" and values of "honour", which are vestiges of Bedouin society and evoke nostalgia for the elderly. These terms are used today by local actors in their speeches and dialogues in order to titillate collective feelings and to ensure the success of the solidarity campaign and to compensate the absence of political authority. The people who have been settled in this nation for a long time and fused in the tribe and the family, protected by the traditional forms of solidarity, are very faithful to the norms and values of their cultural environment, and find themselves today as witnesses and agents of family and social ties through the revival of values as part of a major transformation<sup>27</sup>.

The local community replaced the roles of political authorities, invoking historical cultural values of solidarity, but did these facts and contexts maintain the

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<sup>26</sup>A live interview with Shams EDDINE, previously mentioned.

<sup>27</sup>Bourguia, (Rahma), "Values and Social Change in Morocco", translated by: Muhammad Al-Idrisi, Believers Without Borders, translations: Department of Philosophy and Human Sciences, Rabat, October 03, 2018, pp. 1, 15, p. 7.

same dose of hope that many citizens had on the night of July 25, 2021?

## V. The July 25, 2021 system: when hope turns to despair

The withdrawal of the state led to a growing sense of desperation among social actors who embraced hope on the night of July 25, 2021. This is evidenced by the testimony of Majid<sup>28</sup> who said that:

"The political position in the face of this tragedy is shameful and weak, and not up to the difficult situation. I saw hope in the July 25 system, but when you see the slowness of the procedures, we feel disappointed."

In a similar vein, Shams Eddine<sup>29</sup> says:

"On July 25, 2021 we had hope because the maritime fishing sector was marginalized before the 25th, and we had a desire for change because there were slogans like "we are of the people and we are with the people". We dreamed of a change and an improvement in the fishing sector, but the situation

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<sup>28</sup>A live interview with Majeed, previously mentioned.

<sup>29</sup>A live interview with Shams EDDINE, previously mentioned.

remained unchanged... Several incidents confirm to us the nonchalance of the new system and the lack of interest of the State regarding the concerns of citizens. We recall in this context the incident of al-Tadhamen neighborhood, the incident of the murder of a young man by customs officers in the middle of the "Place de la République" in Tunis, etc... In fact, we are very disappointed. The President of the Republic must review his accounts and wake up so as not to miss the train".

Another testimony in the same context, that of Bashir<sup>30</sup>:

"I still have hope in the president's system...I always put assumptions such as the following: it is possible that the information did not reach him from the beginning or it was not well communicated correctly and honestly, or maybe there are people who do not want to tell him the truth... But I hope that I will not hear from him the expression "they deceived me" that Ben Ali said before."

Between optimism and pessimism, the continuity of the dynamics of marginalization experienced by the fishermen of Zarzis after July 25, 2021 increase distress

<sup>30</sup>A live interview with Bashir, previously mentioned.

already caused by climate change and pollution of the sea caused by the discharge of industrial and domestic waste, in addition to threats and extortion faced by the fishing community of Zarzis. These blackmails and threats come from the Libyan armed militias and occur in a context where migratory flows have intensified either regularly or irregularly, and in a context where citizens have relied on themselves in the search for the missing bodies. It is in this type of situation that citizens most feel the absence of the State and its inability to solve the problems of citizens, hence "a growing feeling of despair and frustration". In fact, hope can turn to disappointment when citizens realize that their multiple expectations will never be fulfilled. "The first months of enthusiasm will soon pass and the dress of joy will withdraw from what was hidden below", in the words of Spanish sociologist Juan Lenz<sup>31</sup>.

The above-mentioned reasons have shaped the emergence of local protest movements, so we will now discuss the contexts, actors and mobilization resources of local movements.

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<sup>31</sup>Abd al-Rahim, (Hafedh), "Democratic Transition Actors: What Role for the Elite in Understanding the Transitional Phases in the Tunisian Experience?", *Elites and the Democratic Transition. Formation, tasks and roles*, edited by Mahdi Mabrouk, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Beirut 2019, pp. 545, 575, p. 568.

## VI. Internal protest movements: contexts and challenges

The effect of the grievances experienced by the population groups in Zarzis, the families of the disappeared, and the feeling of humiliation and inferiority is the main reason for the growth of protests. The withdrawal of the State and the violation of the bodies accelerated the waves of anger. But the feeling of injustice alone is not enough to explain these protests, since local community networks and circles have played an important role in shaping them.

### 1- Associative circles and protest movements

If the ties of kinship, affinity, neighborliness, friendship, fraternity played an important role in the solidarity campaign, they also contributed to the emergence of the local protest movement, because "territorial solidarity is characterized by a spontaneous and mechanical dimension, even impulsive and instinctive, dominated by kinship and blood ties"<sup>32</sup> and by local social networks.

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<sup>32</sup>Rashik, (Abdel-Rahman), "Protest movements in Morocco from rebellion to demonstrations", translated by: Al-Hussein Sahban, Forum for Alternatives to Morocco, Rabat, Morocco, 2014, p. 58.



The local movements in Zarzis have been characterized by a dimension of spontaneous affective solidarity, and this last dimension is formed "with one or more anonymous people, after a moral shock. Solidarity is built in this case, dimensionally (by individuals without political color, the curious, imitators..)"<sup>33</sup>. The violation of the bodies is one of the most striking images that caused a moral shock, not only for the Zarzis community, but for all Tunisian citizens. Consequently, this contributed to the emergence of local protest movements based on passion and local community circles. But analysis in this way leads to simplifying and reducing the movement of struggle to unconscious emotional dimensions on the one hand, and to neglecting the roles of militants who motivate popular mobilization on the other. A person who lives from the reality of injustice will not revolt as long as he ignores the injustice that has happened to him, and this is where the role of fighters lies in creating a framework of injustice and deprivation.

## **2- Local actors: the struggle to give meaning and draw boundaries**

Starting three days after the departure of the boat, the Al-Bahar Association accompanied all the stages of

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<sup>33</sup>Previous reference, p. 59.

the protest movements and also assumed the responsibility of supervising them. These movements formed automatically, but the association worked to contain and frame them, and they were relatively successful in this task. In this context, Al-Hadi<sup>34</sup> says:

"Al-Bahar Association has proven that it is capable of handling the file from day one."

In the course of the struggle, the adversary was defined, the consciousness crystallized, and the boundaries drawn through a set of mobilizing ideas and beliefs between "us" and "them". While some Marxists like Luxemburg and Plekhanov see it as a simple automatic result of infrastructural contradictions, other Marxists like Lenin and Karamshi insist on the need to stimulate these ideas to enable the oppressed class to overthrow the cultural hegemony of which it is the victim<sup>35</sup>. From then on, the actors of the protest are seen as signifiers involved in their activity and their struggle in the production and renewal of "meaning" with other members, as well as opponents, and the

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<sup>34</sup> A direct interview was conducted on October 16, 2022 at 14:45 in Zarzis, with Al-Hadi, Secretary General of the Local Union of Labor in Zarzis.

<sup>35</sup> CONTAMIN, (Jean- Gabriel), "Cadriages et luttres de sens", In Eric Agrikoliansky et al..., *Penser les mouvements sociaux*, la Découverte, Paris, 2010, Pages 55 à 75, p 56.

masses or those who monitor them, such as the media and local and international authorities, all closely involved in the so-called "politics of meaning"<sup>36</sup>.

It is therefore not enough for the situation to be unfair until mobilization appears, and there cannot be mobilization without frames of interpretation, which have three dimensions: the diagnostic framing, the warning framing, and the motivational framing<sup>37</sup>. The Al-Bahar Association worked on the first dimension when diagnosing the situation, which identifies the problem and the responsibilities, and also worked on the second dimension by working on ways to address the problem by proposing a solution or a plan of attack, because it addresses the question "what to do?"

The Motivation Framework is a call to arms and provides a reason to engage in collective action, and includes appropriate "motivation vocabulary" <sup>38</sup>.

Returning to the public discourse, the actors of the Al-Bahar Association and trade unionists of the Local Union carried the responsibility in front of the local and

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<sup>36</sup>Snow, (David), Benford, (Robert), "Processus de cadrage et mouvements sociaux : Présentation et bilan", Traduit de l'anglais (Etats-Unis) par Nathalie Miriam Plouchard, *Revue Politix*, vol 25, no 99, 2012, pages 217 à 255, p 224.

<sup>37</sup>Op.cit., p 226.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. p 229.

regional authorities mainly, and they presented solutions to face the crisis represented by the self-organized operations of combing the sea and the request of public authorities to open graves, verify the identity of bodies and open judicial and security investigations, and stimulated the local community with speeches. What is happening is a behavior of contempt not only against the families of the disappeared, but also towards the local community in general, addressing public opinion in terms of: "contempt for the local community, struggle and steadfastness, etc." Through these actions, the actors of the "Al-Bahar Association" and the Local Union were able to draw boundaries and give meaning to their struggle, and they were able to categorize two actors in the tragedy of Zarzis: "we" the marginalized, and "them" the opponents, represented mainly by the local and regional authority. The "Al-Bahar Association" was able to direct and frame the protest movements, as this testimony from Salem<sup>39</sup> shows:

"The Al-Bahar Association is the example of maritime civil society in Zarzis, and it is not the first time that it has played this role, but it has always exercised its responsibilities within the framework of volunteerism."

<sup>39</sup>A live interview with Salem, previously mentioned.

We know that every protest movement needs resources that motivate it to engage in collective action, so what are the mobilization resources that have been used in local movements?

### 3- Mobilizing resources for local protest movements

The presence of "moral fighters" or "people of conscience" in local protest movements is one of the most important resources that motivated people to engage in collective action. Most citizens see the members of the "Al-Bahar Association" as an example in leading the movements. Moral militants are the real opposite of pragmatic people, whose goal in life is to devote themselves for advocating for just causes with dedication and responsibility. In this context, Pamela Oliver says in one of her articles, "If you don't do it, no one will"<sup>40</sup>.

Pictures and banners raised on the day of the general strike played an important role in the mobilization process. They were an explanatory body that expresses itself and gives a vision of the world, its values, and what it aims to achieve. Visual

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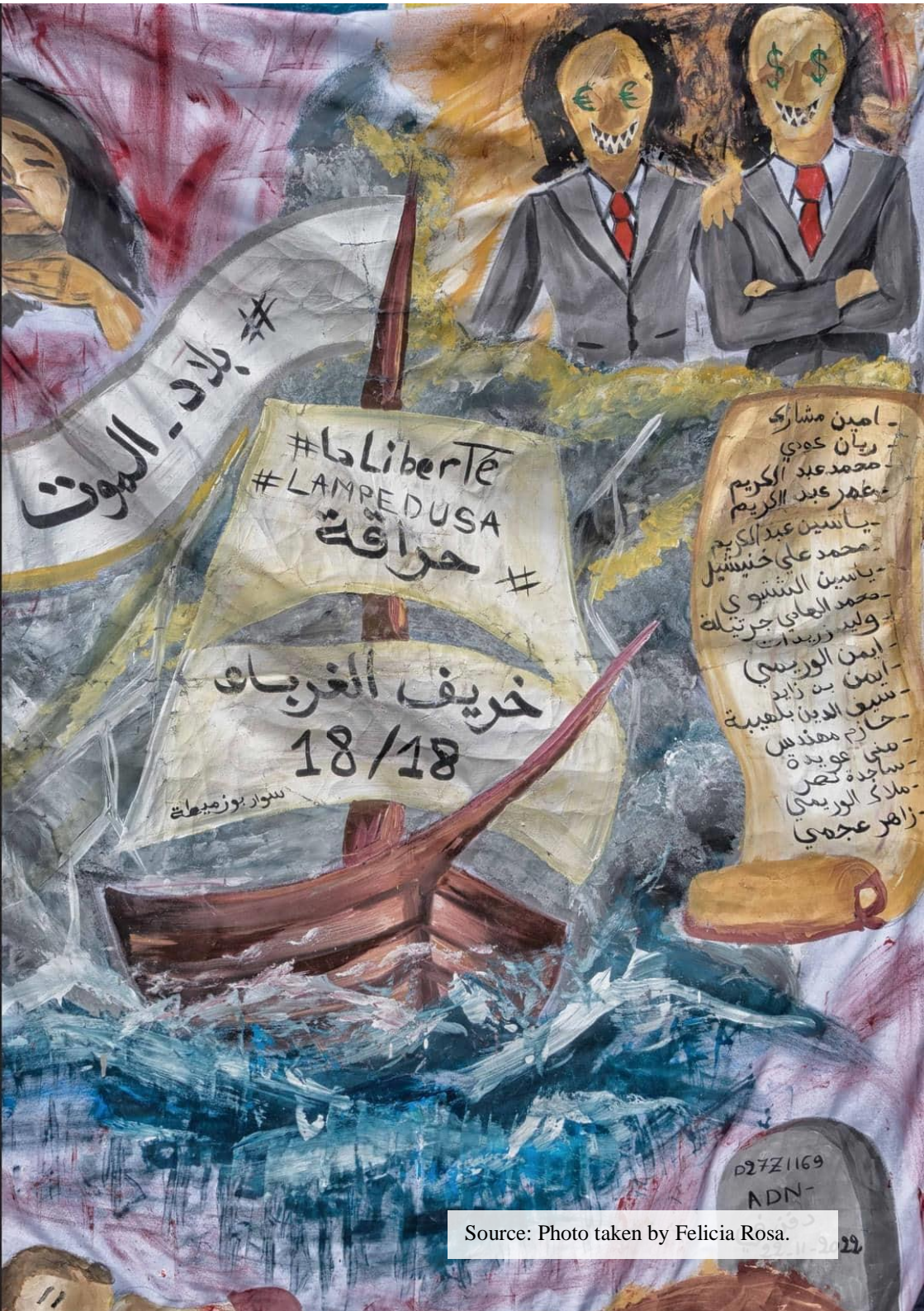
<sup>40</sup>Olivier, (Pamela), "If you don't do it, nobody else will: Active and token contributors to local collective action", *American Sociological Review*, Vol 49, no 5, 1984, pp 601 à 610.

representations constitute guiding pillars for understanding the semantic construction methods of a particular social reality. Images erected during movements were fully involved in meaningful struggles, and the image tends to facilitate the "meaning-making"<sup>41</sup> work of committing to a cause. The banners carried pictures of victims, their names, and local folk examples that define the collective identity based on blood and kinship networks, so that the images and phrases would be a selective stimulus and a mobilizing resource.

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<sup>41</sup>Deze, (Alexandre), "Pour une iconographie de la contestation" *Cultures et Conflits, Iconographies rebelles : sociologie des formes graphique et contestation*, no 91, 92, 2013, pp 13 à 29, p 26.





بلاد الموت

#Liberté  
#LAMPEDUSA  
حراقة

خريف الغرباء  
18/18

سوار بوزميطات

امين مشار  
ريان عهدي  
محمد عبد الكريم  
عظم عبد الكريم  
ياسين عبد الكريم  
محمد علي خنيسيل  
ياسين الشنوي  
محمد الهادي جرتيلة  
وليد زبيدات  
ايمان الوريدي  
ايمان بن زايد  
سيف الدين بلعيبه  
حازم معندس  
منى عويده  
ساجدة نصر  
ملاك الوريدي  
زاهر عجمي

Source: Photo taken by Felicia Rosa.

D27Z1169  
ADN-



Source: Photo taken by journalist Bassam

Actors in the protest movements have also worked to avoid a waning of the "mass protests" that partly reflect the limits of the ongoing escalation, and thus each new mobilization must be more dramatic than the previous to attract media attention and maintain a sense that the movement is growing<sup>42</sup>. While the dramatic narrative is conveyed through images of police repression of citizens, images of bodies lying on the Mediterranean, live videos on local social media pages wandering between cemeteries, hospitals, and authorities' headquarters, and in the streets of Zarzis, tragic speeches, and news of the rushing pain constituted a mobilizing resource in Zarzis.

<sup>42</sup>Razsa, (Maple), p 129.



The public and political actors insisted on a model of raising public awareness by engaging their neighbors and the local community in viable alternatives rather than primarily expressing their disapproval of the authorities and the system. This was a new initiative that responds to the shortcomings of militant protest, and this change of direction reinforces the feeling that a certain limit has been reached in the dynamics of mobilization.

Criticizing local actors for rioting, destroying property or attacking police and preserving the "Zarzis Peninsula" is a strategy to ensure that the young, the poor and women come out and join the protests. As the activists of the Sailor's Society repeated to us in all of our conversations:

"This is our city and it must be preserved... We are against acts of vandalism and destruction...and with peaceful demonstrations. Indeed, the activists of the Al-Bahar Association have managed to contain the anger and to turn it into a peaceful protest."

Salah<sup>43</sup> says in this context:

"If the maritime community had not intervened, Zarzis would have been burned."

The focus on peaceful protest and property preservation on the "Zarzis peninsula", coinciding with the local union's entry into this humanitarian and human rights issue, made the general strike very popular. In this grassroots movement, social networking sites have played a catalytic role in generating the dynamism of mobilization.

#### **4- Social networking sites and the protest movement**

Network uprising is not an individual phenomenon, and it would be absurd to think that social media alone can lead to an uprising<sup>44</sup>. But "the relationship between new social movements (for example) and new information and communication technologies can be described as crucial, since computer networks are the engine of these movements". In Castells' expression, "The strong influence that these movements had came largely from their media presence

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<sup>43</sup>A live interview with Salah, previously mentioned.

<sup>44</sup>A live interview with Salah, previously mentioned.

and their effective use of information technology...Therefore, new communication technologies have a primordial role in enabling these movements to survive"<sup>45</sup>. "Social media can also provide impetus for political and social reform and function fully in times of crisis as mobilization tools and information banks"<sup>46</sup>.

Indeed, Facebook pages played an important role in the mobilization and the struggle processes. The owner of the Zarzis TV page travels between hospitals, cemeteries, the port, in the houses of the families of the missing, and in the streets of Zarzis. He accompanies public and even private meetings of the members of the "Al-Bahar Association", transmits news and instantly downloads all available information on his page. He also downloads invitations to demonstrate and protest, as these alternative sites play the role of a "Trojan horse", making it unacceptable to the public to present censored or ignored topics in traditional media

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<sup>45</sup> Barney, (Darn), "The Networked Society", translated by: Anwar Al-Jamawi, revised by: ThaerDeeb, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Beirut, Lebanon, 2015, pp. 185, 186.

<sup>46</sup>Faris, (David), "La révolte en réseaux: Le « printemps arabe » et les médias sociaux", *Revue politique étrangère*, Institut français des relations internationales, vol1, 2012, pages 99 à 109, p 108.

sources<sup>47</sup>. He also constitutes the "counterspace", in the words of the American philosopher Nancy Fraser, who considers that this space represents "a protest against the norms confined to the bourgeois public. The democratization of the communicative space has occurred thanks to the technological development of the media, and thus dialogue is no longer elitist in cafes and universities, but has become open to everyone who has the ability to use technological machines such as the Internet"<sup>48</sup>. This page and others such as Radio Lela Meryam FM page Sawt al-Janoub - or the group "Voice of the Families Victims of Hargua"<sup>49</sup> etc. are open to all audiences, classes and groups.

These networks played the role of communication, as social movements are subject to an inevitable order that can be called "communicative action." The message must be transmitted from the activists or spokespersons of the protest movement to the targets to be mobilized<sup>50</sup>. Thus, the spokespersons

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<sup>47</sup> - Neveu, (Erik), "Médias et protestation collective", In Eric Agrikoliansky et al..., *Penser les mouvements sociaux*, La Découverte, Paris, 2010, pages 245 à 246, p 262.

<sup>48</sup>Riahi, (Naima), "Public Space and Revolutions", Globalization and Revolutions, Supervised by: Hamida Benaziza, Research Unit Thinking in Reasonable Today, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tunis, Al-Atrash Publishing Complex, 2016, pp. 121, 146, p. 136.

<sup>49</sup> «Hargua » means irregular migration.

<sup>50</sup>- Neveu, (Erik), "Médias et protestation collective", op.cit, p 245.

of the movement rely on Facebook in the communicative process, as they upload videos directly to their official page (Association Le Pêcheur pour le Développement et l'Environnement) while providing information on the missing persons or the authorities or informing the outcomes of meetings or the struggle action. Thus, the Internet will not be practical in its essence, "because it was users who gave the Internet new connotations, meanings and importance."<sup>51</sup>

Based on the foregoing, it can be said that there were many motivational resources mobilized by the actors in the protest movements, and the latter was characterized by various forms such as peaceful demonstrations, gatherings in front of the local authority headquarters, statements, and blocking city roads by burning rubber wheels, leading to the general strike. But it is known that most of the movements travel from "do not politicize the movement to politicize it. Was the movement confined to the logic of "depoliticization"?

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<sup>51</sup>- OsorioSevero, (Denis), Shimizu, (Helena), "Mouvements sociaux et facebook : notes sur la technosophie", *Revue Sociétés*, vol 1, no 131, pages 107 à 118, p 111.

## **5- Reflections on borders: Depoliticizing the protest movements or redefining the relationship of protest activity with politics?**

The local protest movements did not go beyond their geographic and demanding circle, as most of the actors blamed the local and regional authorities, and the slogans did not travel to the global dimension. It remained confined to the demand to find the bodies and bury them with dignity. The issue of migration was not raised as a human rights issue, and the protesters, actors did not demand just development or proper funerals and burials for the African victims buried in the "Gardens of Africa" or in the "Cemetery of strangers". The activists of the "Al-Bahar Association" were keen not to involve politics and politicians in the protest movement, combing operations and searching for bodies. Is this enough to say that the protest movements and the tragedy in Zarzis did not acquire a politicized character?

Actors in the local community have abandoned many political references, and the voice of the local human rights struggle has been raised instead of the political struggle. In all the discourses, the activists of the "Al-Bahar Association" emphasize that politics should not be involved in this issue, given that politics and politicians are not in the service of humanity, a

rhetorical argument that succeeded in attracting population groups to a collective struggle. The argumentative dimension is a form of struggle-discursive mobilization carried out by mobilizing actors and militants, and they are inseparable in almost all social movements, as the French sociologist Juliette Rennes says: "There is hardly any mobilization without an argumentative dimension and no general arguments without mobilizing actors"<sup>52</sup>. This argumentative dimension is not without a socio-historical context and how arguments are used in different times and contexts. The argumentative approach shows how mobilizing actors tend to defend a cause and attack competitors or opponents to rely on types of arguments that are part of the long term, but by its suitability for different times<sup>53</sup>. Thus, we can show the relative depoliticization of the protest movements. What was happening is a re-definition of the relationship of the protest field to the political according to the current context dominated by populist voices. Discourse here is a constructive force: it contributes to the initiation of the production of themes (themes of knowledge in Michel Foucault's words) social life (and serves as well) in social life, their transformation

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<sup>52</sup>- RENNES, (Juliette), "Les formes de la contestation, sociologie des mobilisations et théories de l'argumentation", *BNS Press, A contrario*, vol 2, no 16, 2011, pages 151 à 173. p 151.

<sup>53</sup>- Op.cit., p152.

and their later reproduction, and this means that discourse has an effective relationship with reality and that language denotes reality in the sense that it builds meanings.<sup>54</sup>

The actors of the protest worked on mastering the language of communication with the demonstrators according to the spatio-temporal context. According to Foucault, "the unity of discourse does not depend on the permanence and uniqueness of a subject, but on the space in which various subjects arise and are constantly transformed"<sup>55</sup>. But the discourse is ultimately used by local actors for political purposes, whether they are aware of it or unconsciously, as Chaim Bellermann says in the language of Michel Foucault: "The argumentative style has become a social practice inseparable from knowledge, power and the making of ideology"<sup>56</sup>. Discourse is, according to Michael Pakhteen, how we can bring ideology to the world<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> FAIRCLIFF, (Norman), "Discourse and Social Change", translated by: Muhammad Anani, The National Center for Translation, Cairo, 2015, p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> Op.cit., p62.

<sup>56</sup> - Perelman, (Shayim), "The Sociology of Argumentation and Critical Discourse Analysis: The End of Positive Epistemology and the Beginning of Pluralistic Epistemology", translated by: Anwar Taher, Al-Hiwar Al-Maddin website, website and date of its visit: [ahewar.org/b\\_ebat/show](http://ahewar.org/b_ebat/show), on November 13, 2020 at 15:21.

<sup>57</sup> Mirghani, (Hashem), "Language as an Ideology Approaching the Concept of Speech Diversity in Bakhtin", World of Thought magazine, National



Thus, the protest movement can be politicized from a sociological point of view, since political action in the broad sense is an act aimed at influencing the management<sup>58</sup> of the national economy, or a measure that seeks to conform to interest group strategy. According to many philosophers, politics is a "truth procedure"<sup>59</sup>, just like love, art, and science. What do we mean here? It is certain that for public opinion, nothing is further from politics than concern for the truth. Thus, the actors highlight the local realities associated with the crisis and the high human cost without overtly entering politics and this is one of the mechanisms of the action of struggle in a transitional populist context.

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Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, Kuwait, No. 185, March 2022, pp. 103, 138, 111.

<sup>58</sup> Durant, (Claude), "La signification politique de l'action syndicale", *Revue française de sociologie*, n° 9-3, 1968, pages 320 à 337, p 325.

<sup>59</sup>Badiou, (Alain), Lancelin, (Aude), "Eloge de la politique", Champs essais, Flammarion, 2019, p 11.

## Recommendations

In conclusion, we will present some recommendations that we consider, within the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES), to be important, urgent, objective, inexpensive and logical.

**1-** Establish a national plan and an approach of rescue operations at sea: This approach should include many actors who will be responsible for setting up a civil protection structure specializing in rescuing at sea. This structure should cover the entire coastal strip with a mobile phone network to facilitate emergency operations.

**2-** Develop a national guide to deal with maritime disasters: When a disaster occurs, there is always great confusion in the transmission of information; there is an overlap between regional, local and national authorities, security and military forces mainly when it comes to bodies of victims. Who will transport the bodies? Where to bring them? Who will receive them? What will they do with them? Etc...

The objective is for all the bodies of the victims to be buried with dignity, in compliance with all legal and health provisions (including DNA analysis). It is very

important to build a data repository of unidentified bodies.

**3** - Implement a working methodology to deal with the issue of missing persons from irregular migration: In fact, it is clear that irregular migration is not going to stop immediately or in a short term, and it is also clear that the European Union is still betting on the security approach and working more on strengthening border controls, and it turns out that the crises in the countries of the South will continue. Therefore, it is essential to have an administrative apparatus which should be composed of specialists and multidisciplinary experts in health, security, social affairs, migration, as well as civil society actors who will be responsible for dealing with the families of the victims, the collection and organization of data, the facilitation of all the stages of the genetic analysis of the bodies, the taking of fingerprints, etc.

**4** - Strengthen the logistical capacities of fishermen: Nowadays, the coastal fishing sector must be strengthened, because it is always this sector which was, and which will continue to be, in the front line during irregular migratory waves. Fishermen were trained in how to deal with sea calamities as well as maritime protection and rescue. The State must provide them

with the necessary logistical means so that they can carry out rescue and assistance operations in the right conditions.

**5** - Improve the political management of irregular migration: The political discourse should go from the top of the pyramid of power to the bottom. Political discourse will also have to provide solutions, because performance and political communication are important during times of crisis.

**6** - The establishment of places dedicated to the burial of bodies inside municipal cemeteries: in the context of the continuing border violence, it is certain that we will continue to find unidentified bodies, these bodies will have to be presented for genetic analysis and will have to be buried in a decent manner in "spaces or squares of solidarity" within the cemeteries so that they are not discriminated against, since the graves of foreigners within the cemetery "Le Jardin d'Afrique" are the target of great discrimination.

**7-** Designate September 21<sup>st</sup> as the National Day of Victims Missing at Sea in Tunisia. It will be a moral lesson to give to the authorities to denounce their indifference towards the tragedy of Zarzis and to recall the suffering experienced by the families of the victims.

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## Chronology of the most important events: from the departure of the boat September 21, 2022 to the general strike of October 18, 2022

- **September 21, 2022 at night:** A five-meter plastic boat left the shores of Zarzis, carrying 17 migrants: a one and half-year old baby girl and her mother in the mid-twenties, a twenty-year-old girl and 14 young men and minors between the ages of 14 and 31 Most of them are from the Sahel neighborhood in Zarzis, among them unemployed people, precarious workers, and high school students.
- **September 22, 2022:** The news about leaving persons was cut off and the people feared a catastrophe, given that the weather was bad on the night of September 21.
- **September 23, 2022:** Zarzis lived through the reality of local protests in front of the Naval Guard Center and in front of the maritime security guards with the aim of putting pressure and forcing the security forces to carry out a naval combing operation.
- **September 24, 2022:** The families of the missing persons are still waiting for news and information about the fate of their relatives.

- **September 25, 2022:** With no information available about the missing persons, the sailors and the citizens of Zarzis decided, on the evening of September 25, to carry out a marine combing operation organized by the "Al-Bahar" Environmental Development Association".
- **September 26, 2022:** The sailors went out in a sweeping operation at a distance of between 35, 45 and 60 miles towards Lampedusa, then dispersed north to south to reach a total distance of 250 miles. During that day, the sailors found two bodies about 35 miles from the shore of Zarzis and reported them to the naval guards, and a body was photographed by one of the sailors. While they were in the process of searching for missing persons, a rumor emerged that the missing persons were being held by some Libyans. After this rumor, the sailors left the sea, and the photo that was taken of the dead corpse was not shown to the families, considering that the families had merged within the square of hope and that their children were in Libya.
- **September 27, 2022:** The two bodies found by the sailors were buried by the northern municipality of Zarzis in the "Gardens of Africa" cemetery without being subjected to genetic analysis.
- **On 28 and 29 September 2022:** the families of the missing persons in particular and the citizens of Zarzis in general were waiting for news about the missing

persons, as the rumor of the presence of their children in Libya gave them hope.

- **September 30, 2022:** Citizens found a dead body on the beaches of Zarzis.

- **October 01, 2022:** Parents are still waiting for news about their relatives.

- **October 02, 2022:** Two bodies came out between Hassi Jerbi beach and Lalla Mariam in Zarzis.

- **October 03, 2022:** Families are still waiting, and this waiting is accompanied by protest movements calling for the intervention of local and regional authorities to solve the crisis.

- **October 04, 2022:** the sea threw two bodies on the shores of Zarzis.

- **October 05, 2022:** the sea threw the body of a girl "Malek" on the beach of Aghir in Djerba near a small valley called Wadi Al-Mamoura, and on the same night she was identified by her sister who recognized the body of "Malek" through a bracelet where her name was engraved as well as through her clothes. She recognized the body of her sister through a bracelet where her name was engraved as well as through her clothes. After this event the families lost hope that their relatives are alive in Libya

■ **October 06, 2022:** Land search by sailors and citizens, given that Malek was found on land and not in the sea. Priority was then given to land search along the shores. On the same day, a woman from Al-Sawahel neighborhood saw that picture taken by a sailor on September 26, and since she saw the picture, she was sure that the body belonged to her son, as she recognized him by the color of his pants and some other details.

■ **07, 08 and 09 October 2022:** Continuing to search the beaches with the escalation of protests.

■ **October 10, 2022:** The marine giveaway under the supervision of the "Al-Bahar" Association: the departure of 13 large boats for coastal fishing and about 12 or 13 small plastic boats for recreational fishing. The boats headed about 30 miles in the direction of Lampedusa, and the sailors found six bodies about 18 miles from the shores of Zarzis. The naval guard's response to these incidents was slow, especially in the process of removing the bodies. In fact, after being informed of the location of the bodies, the marine guards arrived after more than two hours. On the same day, the Local Union of Labor in Zarzis issued a statement making the authorities responsible for this crisis by calling on them to intervene urgently in the search process for the bodies of missing persons.

■ **October 11, 2022:** Another sea surge with almost the same number of boats. On this day, the sailors covered 25 miles east in the direction of Zarzis, and other boats reached about 35 and 40 miles, and the sailors found one body. An improvement was noticed in the naval guard's handling of the matter that day. It was noticed that after they were informed of the presence of a body, the guards arrived at the scene about 10 minutes later. On that day, it was confirmed that the bodies that were buried in the "Africa Gardens Cemetery" on the dates of September 27 (the two bodies found by the sailors on September 26) and October 02 belong to the missing persons from Zarzis who boarded the boat on the night of September 21, and were buried without genetic analysis.

■ **October 2, 2022:** a local administrative body was held at the Local Labor Union of Zarzis: the body discussed the issue of missing persons and it was agreed to carry out a general strike in coordination with the Regional Labor Union of Medenine, more interaction and coordination with local civil society represented mainly by: the Employers' Union, the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights, the Farmers' Union, the "Al-Bahar" association.

■ **October 13, 2022:** Integrating the legal dimension into the protest movement through the formation of a

joint committee between lawyers, families of missing persons, and the "Al-Bahar" Association.

■ **October 14, 2022:** a popular gathering in front of the delegation of Zarzis, and expulsion of the governor of Medenine by the citizens. The protest movement expanded on same day, as the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) organized a stand in solidarity with the families of the missing persons in front of the Municipal Theater on Habib Bourguiba Street. Many activists and actors in the civil and political society participated in this movement.

■ **October 15, 2022:** an expanded meeting at the headquarters of the Local Union of Labor in Zarzis between the Local Union, "Al-Bahar" association, the Employers' Union, the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights, the Farmers' Union, in preparation for the general strike.

■ **October 16, 2022:** a local administrative body was held and decided that October 18, 2022, will be the day of the general strike. On that day, sailors found a body on the Zarzis beach, and it was discovered after genetic analysis that it was one of the missing persons since the night of September 21.

■ **October 17, 2022:** A naval excursion organized by the "Al-Bahar" Association to search for the rest of missing bodies. The sailors reached about 45 miles in the

direction of Lampedusa and then combed north to south, but no body was found during that day.

■ **October 18, 2022:** The day of the general strike. It was a popular mass strike, with a success rate of 99%.