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# Algeria's Borderlands: A Country Unto Themselves

Dalia Ghanem

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## Summary

In Algeria, state formation remains an evolving process, as evidenced by the situation in the country's northeastern border regions. With Algerian officials in these areas permitting smuggling of petrol and certain other commodities over the border with Tunisia and smugglers weeding out security threats even as they go about their illicit trade, the two ostensibly adversarial parties complement each other. This unusual relationship furthers the intrusion of the state into citizens' livelihoods even as it manipulates state authority.

## Key Themes

- The interplay between law enforcement and smugglers calls into question much of the conventional wisdom regarding centralized authority in a modern unitary state. In Algeria, smuggling has emerged as an integral part of the (ongoing) process of state formation.
- State neglect and a shortage of jobs have kept most localities in Algeria's northeastern "borderlands" poor and underdeveloped. As a result, smuggling has taken root, and for some families it is a career bequeathed from one generation to the next.
- Long tolerated by law enforcement officials, cross-border smuggling has over time created a parallel economy. Today, it accounts for most trade between Algeria and Tunisia.

## Findings

- For Algerian borderland communities, smuggling contraband into and from Tunisia is a job prospect at once justifiable and lucrative. Smugglers themselves view the border not as the end of their country and the beginning of another, but as an artificially erected barrier that it is necessary to circumvent.
- From the perspective of local authorities, smuggling functions as a safety valve that relieves some of the economic pressure felt by the inhabitants of Algeria's neglected eastern provinces. Moreover, smugglers enhance the security services' efforts to keep the dreaded triple threat of drugs, weapons, and jihadis at bay.
- In the immediate sense, the tacit alliance forged between smugglers and local authorities blurs the distinction between legal and illegal and erases points along the border between Algeria and Tunisia. In the larger picture, it grants otherwise marginal actors, whether shadowy smugglers or lowly border officials, the ability to circumvent state policy in a manner both organized and sustained.



## Introduction

In Algeria, spatial disparity and economic inequality are intertwined. Many of the provinces situated in the extreme northeast of the country, on the border with Tunisia, suffer from profound socioeconomic marginalization. This situation is unlikely to change in the near future. If anything, the neglect of such far-flung regions is likely to continue and even worsen given that Algeria languishes in a state of perennial transition. In this context, the regime has been able to regenerate itself, albeit without real change, since the independence of the country in 1962.<sup>1</sup>

For communities of the borderlands, smuggling contraband into and out of Tunisia presents one of the precious few job opportunities in a region otherwise characterized by unemployment. The activity takes place on such a large scale that it has created a parallel illegal economy. In centralized and quasi-authoritarian Algeria, a development of this kind requires the acquiescence of representatives of the state.

Indeed, no understanding of the significance of cross-border smuggling in modern Algeria is complete without an appreciation of the fact that, by and large, the smugglers are in cahoots with Algerian border officials. Crucially, this phenomenon is condoned by high-ranking local authorities. The latter's rationale for lax enforcement of the law is that smuggling goods into Tunisia serves as the engine of the local economy in an underdeveloped and marginalized region. Concomitantly, it mitigates resentment of the central government in Algiers.

Were the state to clamp down on smugglers, borderland communities would feel even more alienated and might grow restive. Moreover, without an alternative means of earning a living, some people would continue to engage in smuggling but no longer grant border officials oversight of their activities. Such smugglers might fall prey to the enticements of jihadis—who they have thus far shunned—and take up work transporting them and their weapons back and forth across the border. To grasp just how delicate this whole situation is, this paper considers the context, both spatial and social, within which it exists.

## Where You Live Matters: The Burden of Geography

Algeria is the largest country in Africa, its territory comprising nearly 2.4 million square kilometers. Geographically, it is split in two by the High Plateau, which runs from the country's northeast in a southwesterly direction. To the Plateau's north is an overpopulated coastal strip; to its south sprawls a sparsely populated land mass, a portion of which lies within the Sahara Desert. With Tunisia, its



eastern neighbor, Algeria shares a 1,034-kilometer border. Since the 1980s, several borderlands located within the High Plateau—including Al-Tarf, Al-Ouenza, and Tébessa—have experienced significant population growth owing to lower infant mortality rates as well as migration from villages.<sup>2</sup> This has not been the case with settlements farther south along Algeria's border with Tunisia.

Yet state-run development programs have not kept pace with such population growth. Besides, the Algerian state has repeatedly failed to establish a uniform distribution pattern for investment in the interior regions of the country. For instance, the district of Tébessa attracts more investment than other districts in the province of the same name. Situated between the Aurès massif and the Algerian-Tunisian border, Tébessa district is home to one of the largest phosphate reserves—nearly three billion tons—in Algeria.<sup>3</sup> In 2018, Tébessa district accounted for more than half of the 5,571 small and medium-sized enterprises in the province of Tébessa and 17,546 employees out of 30,600.<sup>4</sup>

The geographic isolation of the High Plateau, together with the fact that much of it lies at a significant elevation, hampers the marshaling of resources and increases the costs of development projects. Even administration is affected. Theoretically, according to the initial administrative plan, there was supposed to be one public official for 341 inhabitants; the reality is one for 1,794 inhabitants.<sup>5</sup>

The poverty rate in the High Plateau region as a whole is triple the national rate, and income inequality stands at 27.7 percent, according to the latest available Gini Index.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the High Plateau's school enrollment rate of 80 percent is a good deal lower than the national average of 91 percent. Access to schools is a problem for many locals, given the distances involved. On average, the nearest primary, middle, and high schools are 16, 14, and 29 kilometers away, respectively. Much the same situation applies to healthcare, with an average distance of 25 kilometers to the nearest pharmacy and 41 kilometers to the closest hospital.<sup>7</sup> As for electricity, again a regional discrepancy is readily apparent. The electrification rate in the north stands at 93 percent of households against 83 percent for the municipalities of the High Plateau. Access to drinking water supply, sanitation facilities, and cooking gas is also comparatively low.<sup>8</sup>

With the High Plateau and especially the borderlands ill-equipped to absorb the annual entry of young people into the labor market, unemployment is an endemic problem.<sup>9</sup> Al-Tarf, which is located 600 kilometers from Algiers and fewer than 50 kilometers from the Tunisian border, boasts

valuable hydraulic and agricultural resources and is home to historical ruins that easily double as tourist attractions. Yet in 2006, only 42 percent of the region's 420,000 inhabitants had a steady job.<sup>10</sup> A decade later, in 2017, unemployment stood at 25 percent for those with a university degree and 10 percent for those without such a qualification.<sup>11</sup>

Another example of this phenomenon is the eastern town of Al-Ouenza, which came to Algerian national attention in 2012 when twenty-two-year-old biology student Ramdhane Mekhaznia, having found no escape from his desperate living conditions, self-immolated.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise known for an iron mine that feeds the ArcelorMittal Annaba steel plant, Al-Oenza includes whole areas that lack basic amenities. In these areas, most roads are degraded, and public transportation ceases after 5:00 p.m. Access to electricity and water remains a significant problem. The absence of solid medical infrastructure is glaring; while it is true that health centers exist throughout the province for medical consultations and disease prevention measures (such as vaccination), Al-Ouenza's only hospital, Boughrara Fouad, lacks general practitioners and specialists. Patients who require surgery are referred to bigger and better-equipped hospitals in Annaba and Tébessa, located 150 and 75 kilometers away, respectively.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of successive governments' inability to provide services and jobs in provinces such as Al-Tarf, Al-Ouenza, and a host of other borderlands, enterprising members of the local community have filled the vacuum. The fact that such an undertaking often entails pursuing an illegal activity, the cross-border smuggling of goods, has rarely presented an obstacle. For one thing, the far-off and neglectful state has fostered an acute sense of alienation among inhabitants of the region, and it consequently enjoys little sway. One young smuggler encapsulated the region's plight with the following observation: "Where you live matters. Here we've been penalized by geography."<sup>14</sup>

## **The Borderlands and the Algerian State**

Smuggling across the northeastern border of Algeria is as old as the modern state itself, which came into existence in 1962.<sup>15</sup> Since then, enterprising inhabitants of the marginalized borderlands have engaged in smuggling and established networks for the purpose. Many such people had relatives living on the opposite side of the border, in Tunisia, on whom they could rely as an initial crop of clientele. These networks have since grown quite extensive and together constitute the largest employer in the area. As one smuggler, interviewed in March 2019 in M'Daourouch, put it, "Everyone smuggles here, even women. . . . It is a matter of survival."<sup>16</sup>

## Smuggling as the Occupation *Par Excellence*

The products smuggled from Algeria into Tunisia include gasoline, livestock (especially sheep), auto parts, copper, electronics manufactured by the Algerian brand Condor, perfume, cosmetics, yogurt, powdered milk, and potatoes.<sup>17</sup> Traffic is not one-way, however. Products smuggled into Algeria from Tunisia are similarly varied and include pasta, cooking oil, canned tomatoes, halva, flavored tobacco for water pipes, and bananas.

The most common contraband is gasoline. In Algeria, an oil-producing country, gasoline is subsidized. The price of a liter is up to three times lower than it is in Tunisia. This stark difference ensures the profitability of smuggling gasoline from Algeria to Tunisia—a smuggler earns between \$150 and \$300 per day—and accounts for the fact that it constitutes 75 percent of the economic activity in the region.<sup>18</sup>

On the Algerian side, smugglers obtain the gasoline either directly from a gas station or from tanker trucks that are already part of a contraband network. They then take it to storage houses in or near a border town.<sup>19</sup> Shortly thereafter, it is transported via four-wheel-drive pickup trucks (such as Toyota Hiluxes, Mazdas, or the Isuzu D-Max) to a safe house, pending the expected handover at the border. The operation involves a lookout (*kashaf*), who monitors the movements of the police and the national guard, a porter (*hallab*), who transports the gasoline to the storage house and later the safe house, and the actual smuggler (*knatriyya*), who picks it up and then conducts the transaction at the border.

There is no shortage of demand on the Tunisian side, in large part because Tunisia has its own similarly impoverished borderlands populated by people who cannot afford gasoline at the official rate.<sup>20</sup> A twenty-five-year-old in the governorate of Kasserine who buys smuggled Algerian gasoline and sells it to townsfolk from the family homestead explained the situation thus: “I have a university degree, and I have nothing else to do. We are six people at home, and we were all jobless. I had my diploma with an excellent grade and look at me: I sell smuggled Algerian gas.”<sup>21</sup>

Tellingly, in the Tunisian borderlands, Algerian culture and national symbols permeate local society. This is



*An old Isuzu transports containers for smuggling activity on its way from Algeria to Kasserine, Tunisia.*



*Larger storage house of Algerian-smuggled fuel in Kasserine, Tunisia.*

especially true of Kasserine, the least developed governorate in the country and a place where the Algerian contribution to the local economy is viewed as indispensable.<sup>22</sup> For instance, the Algerian flag flutters above many shops in Kasserine. When protesting government neglect, locals often hold it aloft and even chant Algeria’s national anthem, *Qasaman*.<sup>23</sup>

The porousness of much of the border, a function of the region’s inhospitable topography and a concomitantly less robust security presence, has proven a boon for smugglers. On the Tunisian side, the 350-kilometer stretch of land between Tabarka in the north and Kasserine farther south is dominated by forests and mountain ranges. In lieu of border crossings, smugglers make use of what they call “points of discharge” (*niqat al-tafrigh*). These points are located in hamlets, some of which straddle the border, that remain unmarked on most maps. Examples include Al-M’zara, Abu Derryes, Aaglet H’med, Tbaka, Faydh Omar, Al-Feydja, and Ain Salah.<sup>24</sup>



*Small storage house of Algerian-smuggled fuel in Kasserine, Tunisia.*

## MAP 1

### Points of Discharge Along the Algerian-Tunisian Border



Rarely do Algerians and Tunisians enter each other's territory, though the phenomenon is more common on the part of Algerians than the other way around. According to several Algerian smugglers involved in smuggling gasoline, food products, and copper, Tunisians used to cross into Algeria to place their orders and hire transportation.<sup>25</sup> However, they no longer do so because of the Algerian authorities' tightening of security controls in 2013.<sup>26</sup> These days, Tunisians wait for the Algerian smugglers to make the delivery at a pre-determined point on or—less commonly—just over the border. As an Algerian smuggler from Al-Ouenza explained:

They do not cross, and we rarely cross as well. Today we talk over the phone, and we arrange everything. They are afraid of entering, but we are less fearful of getting on their territory because Tunisian authorities are not as strict as the Algerians. . . . Here, in Algeria, if we are caught, we risk one to three years in prison; in Tunisia, you get fifteen days in jail, and you are out.<sup>27</sup>

Most smugglers are male youths with virtually no other means of securing a livelihood and supporting their families. Sometimes they are slightly older working men with legitimate jobs—including, ironically, civil service jobs—trying to supplement a meager income. Significantly, those engaged in this illicit activity do not consider themselves smugglers. Instead, they view themselves as “entrepreneurs” or “workers.” As one such practitioner of the trade in Al-Meridj put it, referring to the Algerian state, “They call it smuggling! I refuse to call it that. I am an honest worker; I am an entrepreneur, not a smuggler!”<sup>28</sup> A Tunisian from Kasserine echoed this view:

We are honest workers. We do not deal in drugs or weapons. . . . We are decent people. Think about it: who would like to smell gas the entire day and risk getting to prison or be burned transporting fuel? If they fix me [if the Tunisian state offers him a job], I’ll quit smuggling tomorrow.<sup>29</sup>

Motivated by a survival instinct, armed with a set of entrepreneurial skills, and ever ready with a moral justification for what they do, smugglers have refused to allow circumstances to relegate them to victim status. If anything, they have seized the initiative and set about trying to harness their environment, however inhospitable, for economic opportunities.<sup>30</sup> Yet such a demonstration of agency does not suffice to ensure the smooth operation of smugglers’ endeavors. Smugglers, after all, are only half the equation. Their success is very much contingent on their rapport with the equation’s other half: local authorities, in particular border officials.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it is the connivance of Algerian border officials in smuggling activities that serves to involve, albeit indirectly, the smugglers in affairs of state.

### Smugglers and Border Officials: An Improbable Partnership

The borderlands are a place where the authority of the Algerian state is more than nominal yet less than total. The smuggling that occurs there on a daily basis and a large scale reveals that even in a country governed by a quasi-authoritarian regime with strong centripetal tendencies, fragmentation is very much a part of political life.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, government officials are just as complicit as smugglers in furthering such fragmentation. The reasons for this counterintuitive phenomenon stem from the fact that local realities militate against a Manichean legal/illegal approach to matters. Government officials—in the form of local authorities and border officials—recognize as much, and as a result, they are willing to engage non-state and technically criminal actors in an ongoing relationship.

Indeed, perhaps nothing better illustrates the extent to which smugglers are part and parcel of the modern state of Algeria than their collusion with local authorities to facilitate an illegal activity. In and of itself, this is unusual. The unusual becomes supremely ironic when one considers that

inhabitants of the borderlands, especially those engaged in smuggling, look askance at the central government, regarding it as a hegemonic entity intent on restricting everything from their mobility to their very livelihood. It turns out that perceptions of the government's local representatives are another matter. This is due to the *modus vivendi* smugglers have reached with local authorities. The unorthodox arrangement in question enables smugglers to operate without significant hindrance.

Local authorities have two reasons to maintain a *laissez-faire* policy toward smuggling. To begin with, it functions as a safety valve that relieves some of the economic pressure felt by the inhabitants of Algeria's neglected eastern provinces. This includes underpaid border officials, who stand to benefit from bribes doled out by the smugglers. Clamping down on—much less terminating—smugglers' illegal trade would deprive entire families of an economic lifeline and provoke unrest.

The second reason is the service provided by the smugglers. As part of their tacit agreement with the authorities, smugglers steer clear of illicit drugs (like cocaine and marijuana) and weapons. Yet even more important is the fact that they report back to the authorities on those (more often than not jihadis) attempting to traffic such goods. This information is indispensable to the Algerian security services, whose chief focus is on keeping the border clear of jihadi elements.

The smugglers seem happy to oblige. As one of them put it, "Jihadism is bad for business."<sup>33</sup> His attitude, shared by many of his peers, has served to boost local officials' confidence in their arrangement with smugglers. An Algerian customs agent explained it thus:

We know the smugglers, and we know what they transport. These are good guys who are trying to earn a living in a barren region. They cannot cease their activity, or else their families will starve to death. We know them and their families because we, too, are from this region. . . . They are not dangerous; they are not transporting weapons or helping jihadis get weapons. . . . On the contrary, in a way, they help us protect the borders.<sup>34</sup>

Many of the smugglers interviewed for this paper cultivate cordial and regular contacts with at least two customs agents or members of the gendarmerie. Several employed the same terms when describing how they "buy the road" through



*Old men in Kasserine, Tunisia, sell fuel smuggled from Algeria.*

“small gestures”—in other words, bribes—directed toward such officials. The latter then inform the smugglers when and where they will “open the stretch.” To prove this level of connivance, several smugglers went so far as to display their phone’s directory during these interviews, pointing to the names of security officials who facilitate their work and even offering to call them then and there. In the words of one such interviewee:

We have their phone numbers; we know them, and they know us. We call the mouse [*Al-Far*, the broker or middleman between smugglers and local authorities] and inform him of the quantities and the products. For instance, we tell him that tonight we have twenty containers of diesel and twenty others of fuel, but also olives and other foodstuffs and copper. The mouse informs us what time customs has agreed to let us through.<sup>35</sup>

Thanks to the understanding between border officials and smugglers, there is little friction between the two sides. Indeed, local authorities have allowed smuggling to flourish.<sup>36</sup> Signs indicating that smugglers operate in the open are ubiquitous. For instance, in Algeria’s Bir Al-Ater and Tébessa cities, individual smugglers are known by name to the security forces. In Tunisia, on the road from Tunis to Kasserine, distribution points for gasoline smuggled over the border from Algeria are clearly marked as such.<sup>37</sup> Despite a robust presence on the part of both the Tunisian National Guard and the local police along this road, neither force takes action against those who operate or avail themselves of the distribution points. “You’ve seen it with your own eyes,” said a seller of Algerian gas at one such point. “Even the police come to us to fill up their vehicles. They let us be because they know we are not bad guys, just workers and entrepreneurs. . . . If they don’t, things will explode here.”<sup>38</sup>



*A distribution point in Kasserine, Tunisia, for gasoline smuggled over the border from Algeria.*



*Three brothers offer smuggled Algerian fuel at this roadside selling point in Kasserine, Tunisia.*



## The Limits of Centralized Authority

The interplay between local authorities and smugglers in Algeria (and, to a lesser extent, Tunisia) calls into question much of the conventional wisdom regarding centralized power in a modern unitary state. To begin with, the border is adjusted at will, and on a daily basis, through collusion between the very officials entrusted with policing it and non-state actors engaged in an illegal undertaking. This renders its official demarcation a relative matter.

Correspondingly, regulation of trade, one of the prerogatives of the state, does not apply to goods smuggled across the border. That such smuggling accounts for most of the traffic across the border highlights a unique reality. When it comes to Algeria and Tunisia, the equation that rests on legal trade outweighing its illegal counterpart, a hallmark of the modern state, is inverted.

The implications for the ongoing process of state formation, or the development of a centralized state in Algeria, are even more far-reaching. With border officials permitting smuggling and smugglers weeding out security threats, the two ostensibly adversarial parties actively complement each other. The “informal institutionalization” of this irregular relationship between smugglers and border officials furthers the intrusion of the state into citizens’ livelihoods even as it manipulates state authority.

Moreover, with the relevant authorities condoning and even encouraging such informal institutionalization as a means of ameliorating entirely local socioeconomic exigencies, a crucial aspect of this region’s centrifugal tendencies becomes clear. Essentially, the borderlands take precedence over the state in all matters save for security. In fact, it would not be a stretch to say that the borderlands of Algeria are almost a country unto themselves.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, that the arrangement between smugglers and local authorities has proven durable is no guarantee that it will remain tenable should the security situation on Algeria’s border with Tunisia and Libya deteriorate. In the years since the toppling of former president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali’s authoritarian regime in Tunisia (2011), Salafi jihadi groups have carved out a niche for themselves in far-flung parts of the country—such as regions bordering Algeria. The increasingly close relationship between these groups and drug traffickers, together with the possibility that both have their sights set on Algeria, represents a nightmarish scenario for the Algerian authorities.

Yet were the government to enact stringent security measures that curtail smuggling networks’ activity, it would thereby shut off the safety valve that is critical to relieving the economic pressure bearing down on countless families in the borderlands. This would in turn rupture the amicable relationship between local authorities and local communities. In fact, if unaccompanied by a success-

ful effort to rejuvenate the borderlands, a crackdown on smuggling would impinge on the region's parallel economy and more than likely lead to social upheaval. Such a move would also force smugglers to go underground and dampen their motivation to serve as the eyes and ears of border officials tasked with apprehending jihadis and drug mules. Even more alarmingly, a clampdown could drive smugglers and jihadis into each other's arms. The state would thus have midwived a security threat even more dangerous than the one it sought to stamp out.

## Conclusion

The Algerian government is aware that a strictly security-focused solution to the dilemma it faces would upset the socioeconomic equilibrium of the borderlands. There is a “rationality of alternatives” behind granting smugglers leeway to go about their illicit business.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the state is cognizant that semi-independent actors have established an economic system that is more streamlined and efficient than its own and that these actors enjoy considerable social clout. The larger realization on the part of the government is that, despite a decades-long push toward centralization on its and its predecessors' part, the state remains fragmented. As a result, in recent years the concern in Algiers seems to have shifted to ensuring that, much as smugglers and border officials complement each other, the disparate fragments making up the state remain at least loosely synchronized.

This shift on the part of the government gives rise to a number of possibilities, two of which are readily apparent. The first is the establishment of a free trade zone with Tunisia. Erstwhile smugglers could conduct their business both openly and without incurring customs duties, thereby obviating any need for illicit trade. At the same time, such an initiative would enable the government to intensify its monitoring of activity in the region as well as keep Algiers and the borderlands in synch. Another possibility consists of local authorities—with the central government's approval—deepening their relationship with the smugglers and further involving them in the state's efforts to secure the border. This could involve carving out well-defined remunerative roles in the sphere of monitoring and information-gathering. Such a solution would offer the advantage of continuity, given that a demonstrably effective arrangement is already in place and can presumably be enhanced. In a sense, it would also mark the logical conclusion of the informally institutionalized relationship between smugglers and the state described in this paper.

## About the Author

**Dalia Ghanem** is a resident scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut where her work examines political violence, radicalization, jihadism, and civil-military relations with an emphasis on Algeria. She also focuses on the participation of women in the military as well as in jihadist groups. Ghanem has been a guest speaker on these issues in various conferences and a regular commentator in different Arab and international print and audio-visual media.

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## Notes

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- 13 In 2017, two women died because of the absence of a doctor on duty. See Lakehal Samir, “Tébessa: une commission ministérielle dépêchée à l’hôpital d’Ouenza” [Tébessa: a ministerial committee dispatched to Ouenza hospital], *El Watan*, March 31, 2017, <https://www.elwatan.com/edition/actualite/tebessa-une-commission-ministerielle-depechee-a-lhopital-douenza-31-03-2017>.
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- 15 Even earlier, as a matter of fact. Organized smuggling dates to the French colonization of Algeria (1830). During the Algerian struggle for independence (1954–1962), weapons were smuggled from Tunisia to the military wing of the Front de Libération Nationale, the main Algerian opposition group, via Tunisia. See Jacques Valette, “1956 : le FLN porte la guerre d’Algérie en Tunisie” [1956: the FLN carries the war of Algeria to Tunisia], *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 2006/4 (no. 224), 65-79, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-guerres-mondiales-et-conflits-contemporains-2006-4-page-65.htm#s1n2>.
- 16 Author interview with a smuggler, M’Daourouch, Algeria, March 27, 2019.
- 17 Khelifa Litamine, “2,5 tonnes de pomme de terre algérienne saisies en Tunisie” [2.5 tonnes of Algerian potato seized in Tunisia], *AlgerieEco*, October 5, 2019, <https://www.algerie-eco.com/2019/10/05/25-tonnes-pomme-terre-algerienne-saisies-tunisie/>.

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- 22 Ministère du Développement Régional et de la Planification, “Indicateur de développement régional: Pointer les difficultés pour orienter les efforts et suivre le progrès: Gouvernorat de Kasserine” [Ministry of Regional Development and Planning, Regional development indicator: Point out the difficulties to orient efforts and monitor progress: Governorate of Kasserine], Institut Tunisien de la Compétitivité et des Études Quantitatives [Tunisian Institute for Competitiveness and Quantitative Studies], July 2012, 10, <http://cgdr.nat.tn/upload/files/13.pdf>.
- 23 Ismain, “Des Tunisiens, portant le drapeau Algérien demandent l’asile” [Tunisians holding the Algerian flag, asking for asylum], *Réflexion*, February 11, 2012, [https://www.reflexiondz.net/Des-Tunisiens-portant-le-drapeau-Algerien-demandent-l-asile\\_a15947.html](https://www.reflexiondz.net/Des-Tunisiens-portant-le-drapeau-Algerien-demandent-l-asile_a15947.html). See also R.B.H, “Le désespoir pousse des Tunisiens à porter le drapeau algérien et à se diriger vers les frontières” [Despair drives Tunisians to carry Algerian flag and head for borders], *Business News*, February 10, 2012, <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/le-desespoir-pousse-des-tunisiens-a-porter-le-drapeau-algerien-et-a-se-diriger-vers-les-frontieres,520,29266,1>.
- 24 Between Algeria and Tunisia, there are six border control posts: PCT–Oum T Boul, Poste-frontalier Babouche–Ain Darahim, Heddada–Sakiet Sidi Youssef, Bou Chebka, Bir Al-Ater, and Hazoua.
- 25 According to law 05-17, ordinance 05-06:2005, article 10, “Smuggling of fuel, seeds, flour, floury substances, foodstuffs, livestock, seafood, alcohol, tobacco, pharmaceutical products, commercial fertilizers, work of art, archaeological heritage, pyrotechnic articles, as well as all other goods, is punished with a prison sentence of one to five years and a fine equal to five times the value of the confiscated goods;” see “Loi relative à la lutte contre le contrebande,” Ministère de la Justice de la République Algérienne Démocratique et Populaire, [https://droit.mjustice.dz/loi\\_lutte\\_contrebande\\_fr.pdf](https://droit.mjustice.dz/loi_lutte_contrebande_fr.pdf).
- 26 The incident is known as the Ain Amenas hostage crisis. In January 2013, a group of jihadis, who are believed to have set off from Libya, took control of the oil and gas site of Tiguentourine in Ain Amenas. No fewer than 800 people were taken hostage and thirty-nine were killed. The attack came as a major blow to the Algerian security forces and was followed by a tightening of border security. See United States Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2013—Algeria, April 30, 2014, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53622a088.html>.
- 27 Author interview with a smuggler, M’Daourouch, Algeria, March 2019.
- 28 Author interview with a 27-year-old smuggler, Al-Meridj, Algeria, March 2019.
- 29 Author interview with a 32-year-old seller of Algerian gas, Kasserine, Tunisia, March 3, 2020.
- 30 Michael Eilenberg, *At the Edges of States: Dynamics of State Formation in the Indonesian Borderlands* (Leiden, KITLV Press: 2012), 53.
- 31 Janet Sturgeon, *Border Landscapes: The Politics of Akha Land Use in China and Thailand* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press: 2005), 30.
- 32 Eilenberg, 288.

- 33 Author interview with smugglers, Algerian-Tunisian border, Al-Meridj, M'Daourouche, and Al-Aouinet, March 2019. Several interviewees pointed to the importance of their business “remaining clean,” meaning unsullied by an association with dangerous activities such as terrorism.
- 34 Author interview with a customs agent, Algerian-Tunisian border, March 27, 2019.
- 35 Author interview with a smuggler, Kasserine, Tunisia, March 3, 2020.
- 36 There were a number of informal fuel distribution points on the road from Tunis to Kasserine, especially in Sbeitla and Chrayya, two towns in North-central Tunisia.
- 37 For more on smuggling in Kasserine, see Hamza Meddeb, “Young People and Smuggling in the Kasserine Region of Tunisia: Stories of Dispossession and the Dynamics of Exclusion,” *International Alert*, May 2016, <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/young-people-and-smuggling-kasserine-region-tunisia>.
- 38 Author interview with a seller of Algerian gas who is in the business with his cousin, Kasserine, Tunisia, March 3, 2020.
- 39 Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.
- 40 Joel S. Migdal and Klaus Schlichte, “Rethinking the State,” in *The Dynamics of States: The Formation and Crises of State Domination* (Routledge, 2016), 26.



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