

**THE GOVERNANCE OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN SOUTHERN
ALGERIA:
POLITICS, SMUGGLING AND MIGRANT PATHWAYS**

Raouf Farrah

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School of International Development and Global Studies
Faculty of Social Science
University of Ottawa

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Table of content

Abstract.....	p.iii
Introduction.....	p.iv
Chapter 1: A brief history of irregular migration in southern Algeria.....	p.1
Chapter 2: Autopsy of Algeria’s migration governance.....	p.21
Chapter 3: Borderlands, informal institutions and regulation of human smuggling....	p.35
Chapter 4: Migrant pathways in Tamanrasset.....	p.56
Conclusion.....	p.68
Appendix.....	p.73
Bibliography.....	p.83

Abstract

This thesis assesses the governance of irregular migration and the practicalities of human smuggling in southern Algeria. It looks at the drivers, functionalities and institutions governing irregular migration and human smuggling in Algeria's south and along its borders with Mali and Niger. After a brief overview of the history of irregular migration in the Sahara, the study analyses the mechanics and instruments through which the Algerian authorities manage irregular migration. It shows that they often attempt to play a balancing act between enforcing a hard security agenda while taking into account the role of the irregular migration economy for borderland people. Moreover, the thesis offers a micro assessment of migrant strategies and smugglers' modus operandi in the villages and cities along Algeria's borders with Mali and Niger, drawing from extensive fieldwork conducted across the region. Human smuggling appears to be a highly 'regulated activity' through a network of rules shared between the borderland actors. The study presents the features associated with the politics of informal rules of human smuggling, portraying them as contingent on their political and security environment. Finally, the research develops a chapter on the daily lives of migrants in the city of Tamanrasset, Algeria's southern main city, showing how migrants' presence shapes the city's character. It looks in particular at how lodging places, known locally as 'foyers', play an essential role in a migrant's life trajectory. Moreover, the research analyses the complex relationship between smugglers and migrants, notably via the activities of former smugglers ('passeurs') who became owners of 'foyers', playing a critical social role for new migrants.

Introduction

Human mobility is a longstanding feature of people's lives in the Sahara-Sahel.¹ In the central Sahara region, which encompasses parts of southern Algeria, northern Mali and northern Niger, several salient political, socio-economic and climate events have shaped regional migration into a phenomenon with shifting outlines.² Before the independence of Algeria, Mali and Niger in the early 1960s, human mobility was widely practiced across the region. Still, only a small number of people from northern Mali and northern Niger travelled on a regular seasonal basis to southern Algeria to get jobs on construction sites and in agriculture (Bredeloup & Pliez, 2005). Many settled in the Touat region (southwest of Algeria) in rich oases working in palm cultivation. The main Saharan route for migrants at that time connected the regions of Gao in northern Mali to Adrar in southwest Algeria (Scheele, 2009). In order to reach Algerian Saharan oases and cities, migrants travelled with camel caravans, organized by Tuareg and Arab communities moving across the region.³

The birth of northwest African states between 1960 and 1962 marked a new development in the history of regional migration without necessarily changing the logic underpinning human mobility. Artificial postcolonial borders between North African and Sahelian countries were drawn with a limited number of border crossing points. In the 1960s, border controls in Central Sahara remained poorly enforced by states and people moved with a relative ease between southern Algeria, northern Mali and northern Niger. At that time (from the 60s to 70s), most traders and local people were still travelling using

1. If the reader would like to learn more about the features of the Sahara-Sahel, he can consult the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2014) report "An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security": <https://www.oecd.org/development/an-atlas-of-the-sahara-sahel-9789264222359-en.html>.

2. The United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as the movement of persons away from their usual residence, either across an international border or within a state. It includes climate migration, displacement, internal migration, international migration, irregular migration, labor migration, migrant, safe, orderly and regular migration. The notion of the migrant is a broad "umbrella" term that has no definition in international law.

3. The Tuareg people have historically been organized based on confederations: Kel Ajjer, Kel Air, Kel Ahaggar and Kel Adagh. These confederations are located in Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. For a granular description of the Algerian Tuareg and their relationship to the state, see Badi (2012b; 2015).

camel caravans (Lydon, 2009). If an Algerian soldier or a customs agent was posted at the borders with Mali or Niger, that was synonymous to isolation and often 'punishment' because of the harshness of the desert life (Scheele 2009; 2012). This dynamic gradually changed with the introduction of motor vehicles and other factors, including the development of contraband and human smuggling economies. From the 90s in particular, these factors led to increasing flows of migrants from the Sahel to North Africa (Bredeloup & Pliez, 2005), which triggered a series of political and security responses from the states of the region.⁴



Main towns and villages in southern Algeria, northern Mali and northern Niger.

Over the last two decades, the tolerance of the states of the region of irregular migration has fluctuated between complete acceptance of cross-border mobility and full

4. The United Nations Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2000) defines human smuggling as the "facilitation, transportation, or procurement of the illegal entry of a person or persons across an international border". Human smuggling entails that: a) A person illegally crossing over an international border; b) the person involved chooses to be smuggled and has made an agreement to pay another person or group of people to commit a crime; c) Ends when the smuggler gets the smuggled person over the border. You can consult the Protocol at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/middleeastandnorthafrica/smuggling-migrants/SoM_Protocol_English.pdf.

criminalization.⁵ Even though human mobility across the central Sahara can be described as "irregular", migration was not clandestine before the 2000s, that is to say, hidden or dissimulated. However, as south-north bound migration between southern Algeria and the northern parts of the Sahel have become increasingly controlled through legal, security and political mechanisms, it turned fully clandestine. This "clandestinization" of migration not only pushes migrants to cross the desert using undercover routes, but it also harms the local economies (restaurants, lodging, transportation) generated through migration and contributes to erecting the figure of the "human smuggler" (Brachet, 2018).

With the deterioration of the political and security contexts in the Sahara-Sahel, particularly since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 and the outbreak of the rebellion in northern Mali in 2012, irregular migration has become even more clandestine, pushing thousands of migrants escaping notably conflicts, terrorism, climate change or simply searching for a better life to travel through risky desert routes (Micallef, Farrah, Bish & Tanner 2019; Charef, 2014). New security practices reinforcing border controls and prohibitive laws criminalizing the transport of migrants in the name of fighting against human smuggling and trafficking deepened this trend, causing the death of hundreds of migrants each year.⁶ The security turn taken by the states of the region is reflected in the externalization process of European borders in Africa, the asymmetrical cooperation between the states of the region and the European Union (E.U.) on migration and the willingness of local political and military elites, and 'dubious partners', to benefit from the agenda of stemming migrant flows (Raineri & Strazzari 2019). As we will see in this research, stemming migrant flows to Europe in the name of the fight against human smuggling and trafficking has been on the top of the E.U.'s foreign agenda for more than a decade, leading to considerable changes in the region's states migration governance

5. Although a universally accepted definition of irregular migration does not exist, the term identifies persons moving outside regular migration channels. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines irregular migration as "the movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination". For more information, see the IOM website: <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

6. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) runs a global project called the "Missing Migrants Project", which records since 2014. These people die in the process of migration towards an international destination, regardless of their legal status. Missing Migrants Project database has documented the deaths of more than 2,000 people transiting through the Sahara Desert since 2014. These numbers remain conservative. You can see the Missing Migrants Project's website for more information: <https://missingmigrants.iom.int>.

(Stambøl, 2019). Despite the sensitivity of the context, the region's regimes continued at varying levels to position "their" states as *proxy* actors in this transcontinental to extract political and financial benefits (Pastore & Roman, 2020, para. 27; Raineri, 2019).

As for Algeria, the country does not directly participate in programs or policy agendas put in place by the European Union to stem irregular migration in the Sahara-Sahel. Algiers favors an autonomous approach centered around protecting its territorial integrity in the name of national security. With the advent of the fight against terrorism and organized crime in the 2000s and the political events that shook up the Sahel-Saharan region over the last decade pushed, the Algerian state (institutions and state representatives) deploys a discourse and a set of practices that constantly paint irregular migration as a threat to national security (Hesterman, 2013; Farrah, 2020a; Lacher, 2013). However, the way by which the state deals with irregular migration is aligned with the non-mobility order promoted by the EU, as embodied by the regular mass deportation of migrants and the militarization of its southern borders (Amnesty international, 2018; Micallef et al., 2019). Algeria's successive governments have defended the idea that human smuggling and trafficking networks threaten the region's stability while arguing that the state has the sovereign right to act on these matters (Algérie Press Service, 2018b). In official speeches, Algerian authorities portray irregular migration as a security challenge to be subsumed in the fight against organized crime (Algérie Press Service, 2018c). Algeria's treatment of irregular migrants reflects concerns over the rising number of migrants who successfully reach Algeria, despite border security and expulsion operations intensifying. As we will prove, the governance of irregular migration is highly tainted by security concerns.⁷ Paradoxically, it is over the last five years, when the state strengthened its fight against such as a phenomenon, that irregular migrants' numbers rose significantly and Algeria's southern *wilayas* (provinces) became a strategic destination. Notwithstanding the growing interest in south-north bound migration across the central Sahara, there is relatively little

7. Migration governance refers here to all frameworks of legal norms, laws and regulations, policies and traditions as well as organizational structures (subnational, national, regional and international) and the relevant processes that shape and regulate states' approaches concerning migration in all its forms, addressing rights and responsibilities and promoting international cooperation.

research about Algeria's irregular migration governance and the political economy of cross-border movement between Algeria, Mali and Niger.

This research aims to assess the governance of irregular migration and the practicalities of human smuggling in southern Algeria. By the governance, I refer here to the drivers, the functionalities and the institutions, whether formal or informal, that regulate and order irregular migration. I assess how the interests of several actors, namely the Algerian security forces and government, migrants with their strategies and itineraries, and smugglers with their modus operandi intermingle, and how individually they attempt to achieve their ends. In terms of the geographical coverage, I focused my fieldwork on Algeria's borders with Mali and Niger, mostly because cross border movement is the highest in this region. I also analyze migrants' pathways in Algeria's city hub of Tamanrasset, a key destination in southern Algeria. The question guiding this research unfolds as follows: *what are the drivers, functionalities and institutions governing irregular migration and human smuggling in southern Algeria?*

In order to answer the research question, I organized my analysis into four parts. Chapter 1, 'A brief history of irregular migration in southern Algeria' outlines a historical overview of the development of migration in the central Sahara - more specifically in the region encompassing northern Niger, northern Mali and southern Algeria-. This allows the reader to understand how regional migration has evolved from the 1960s to nowadays and how its management has become an object of growing interest among the region's states and international actors. In chapter 2, 'Assessing Algeria's migration governance', I offer an assessment of the migration governance conducted by Algeria's recent governments. I argue that Algeria's migration strategy is driven by conflictual and contradicting interests in which the security forces and the government attempt to play a balancing act between enforcing a hard security agenda at the southern borders and relying on an expulsion deal with Niger to reduce the presence of migrants while taking into account the importance of the irregular migration economy for borderland people. After exposing the main features of Algeria's migration governance, I argue that Algeria's security forces and governments have adopted a tough security approach to fighting against irregular migration in the name

of national security, territorial integrity and effective border control. I also show that the 'expulsion agreement' signed with Niger in 2015 allowing the Algerian authorities to deport migrants in mass expulsion operation is an informal deal and a key instrument of Algeria's strategy to limit migrants' flows.

Chapter 3 'Borderlands, informal institutions and regulation of human smuggling in southern Algeria' assesses the rules and institutions governing human smuggling and irregular migration. It offers a micro assessment of migrant strategies and smugglers' modus operandi in these areas. The data and analysis provided are based on fieldwork done in remote desert villages and cities along Algeria's borderlands with Mali and Niger, namely Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Timiaouine and Tinzaouatine on the Mali border, as well as Ain Guezzam at the Niger-Algeria border. In this chapter, I contest the mainstream argument of the Saharan "porous borders". I also show that the Algerian army's official narrative of "sealed borders" is not accurate (Ministère de la défense nationale, 2021; Chena, 2012). Instead, I argue that cross-border activities are shaped by a set of unwritten rules shared by smugglers, migrants and security officers. Cross-border strategies mobilized by smugglers and migrants vary significantly from one borderland to another, delineating the 'possible and the forbidden' to quote one of my interviewees. As a chapter bringing new material to the literature of cross-border human mobility in the region, I portray the features associated with informal institutions by understanding them as contingent to their political and security environment. Surprisingly, human smuggling appears a highly 'regulated activity' through a network of rules shared between the borderland actors. Therefore, chapter 3 offers a micro analysis on the politics of informality along borderlands drawing from extensive research conducted in Algeria's borderlands with Niger and Mali.

In chapter 4 'Migrant's life in Tamanrasset', I present a reflection on the daily lives of migrants and show how the migrant's presence shapes the unique cosmopolitan character of the city. While Mainstream media and research often portray Algeria as a transit country, I contest this label by looking at how lodging places, known locally as 'foyers', play an important role in a migrant's life and how they impact migrant's lives in the city. I show

that while they are key institutions for migrants in Tamanrasset, the authorities perceive them as accentuating the urban challenges faced by the city (Spiga, 2002). The chapter argues that migrants pass by Tamanrasset have various life trajectories and objectives. Their recurrent victimization by successive governments is misleading as it hides the resilience of communities and individual agency. Moreover, my research also touches upon the complex relationship between smugglers and migrants; the first are not necessarily 'devils' and the latter are not systematically 'victims'. I report on former smugglers ('passeurs') in Tamanrasset who became owners of 'foyers', playing a key social role for new migrants.

These four chapters offer a comprehensive, although non-exhaustive, view of the governance of migration and human smuggling in southern Algeria and how it plays out at multiple levels going from the life of migrants and their journeys to the national politics of migration. More broadly, this research modestly contributes to the reflection on Algeria's irregular migration governance evolution, presenting a new opportunity to deepen this research agenda.

Chapter 1: A brief history of irregular migration in southern Algeria

From the ancestral caravan convoys transporting goods, golds and spices along well-established commercial routes to the present-day figure of the 'migrant' crossing modern nation states' borders, human mobility has been a central feature of the political, social and economic desert lives (Boesen & Marfaing & de Bruijn, 2014; Bredeloup & Pliez 2005). In the area encompassing southern Algeria, northern Niger and northern Mali, the long-standing family and trade bonds have contributed to building contemporary irregular migration foundations.⁸ Human mobility in central Sahara is often represented in the collective psyche of the Western Media through exotic images of Tuareg men wearing blue indigo clothes and traveling freely across vast inhabited dunes. In reality, human mobility is far from such a glamorous cliché (McDougall, 2012). However, such a representation doesn't come from nowhere. Primary anthropological work on the Sahara and its people in the 19th century often embraced a romantic narrative with deep roots in the region's colonial history. More specifically, the numerous attempts by the European powers to conquer the Sahara (McDougall, 2012). Going back to the 14th century, the Catalan Atlas, the most important medieval world map of the region, depicted the Sahara as the land of camel-riding nomads, exotic animals and rich African kings dominating large territories. Later on, the successive failure of Europeans to colonize the Sahara before the 19th century brought the vision of the Sahara as a "land of fear and threat" (Scheele & McDougall, 2012). After colonial powers occupied parts of the Sahara (19th century), the region resurfaced as a territory of wonder. At a later stage, a region where trade and human mobility were essential for life and where high-value resources could be extracted. In the mid-nineteenth century, the French geographer Édouard Blanc drew the most detailed map of the Great trans-Saharan commercial routes, which quickly became a reference material

8. Although there is no universally accepted definition of irregular migration, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines it as the movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the state of origin, transit or destination. Moreover, categories of migrants who may not have any other choice but to use irregular migration channels can also include refugees, victims of trafficking, or unaccompanied migrant children. The fact that they use irregular migration pathways does not imply that states are not, in some circumstances, obliged to provide them with some forms of protection under international law, including access to international protection for asylum seekers fleeing persecution, conflicts or generalized violence. In addition, refugees are protected under international law against being penalized for unauthorized entry or stay if they have travelled from a place where they were at risk (Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137, Art. 31(1)).

for European states and western merchants.⁹ Colonialism, therefore, undermined the long-standing circuits of trans-regional African trade, but foreign powers were unable to entrench local trade or control mobility sustaining such an economy. The reason is that trade circuits were quintessentially anchored into family and community ties, relying on human mobility logic that was inaccessible to foreigners (McDougall, 2012).

In the central Sahara, Tuareg and Arab communities continued to move and exchange dates, salt, livestock, fabric and ancestral products. Between 1920 and 1960, before the independencies of the countries of the region, some Saharan merchants, especially from Arab southern Algerian oases, benefitted from their access to trade routes (between Touat (Algeria) and Gao (Mali) corridor, for instance) and products (mostly dates) to gain new social status, challenging the prevailing political order. Others collaborated with French traders and truckers moving across the desert to gain economic wealth (Scheele, 2011, p.148-149). These truckers started to travel in the central Sahara in the 1940s, transporting equipment and supply material to military posts such as Tamanrasset in southern Algeria or Madama in northern Niger. One of the legends of the Sahara is that foreign truckers in central Sahara, mostly French, organized the primary and contemporary circuits of contraband, transporting cigarettes from West African ports deep into the Sahara.¹⁰ While there is limited evidence of such events, this example shows that human mobility has been a determinant factor in economic success and a strategic asset for those who can move across the Sahara.

Nevertheless, mobility in the region has never implied freedom of movement. The regulation of travel, whether it is conducted by communities and families, states, and later on, smugglers – known locally as "Ishumar" - has historically been an exercise of power to hold political control, restrict access to opponents and cumulate wealth. The foundational work done by Scheele (2009; 2011; 2012) and McDougall (2012) in their respective research reflects the intrinsic dependency between local people's socioeconomic life and the Sahara environment, i.e. between human mobility, space and trade. In their edited book

9. For more information, you can consult Édouard Blanc's profile via the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (BNF) website: https://data.bnf.fr/fr/13756064/edouard_blanc/

10. Interview with a professor of history from the University of Tamanrasset, December 2018.

"Saharan Frontiers", McDougall and Scheele (2016) introduce the concept of the 'human ecology' of the Sahara as a way to conceptualize how political, social and economic developments are highly influenced by the environment and the resources of the region. They invite the reader to rethink the development of the Sahara by taking an "inside-out" look in which human mobility, space and trade are intertwined. Although the concept of "human ecology" is not directly used in this research, it underpins many aspects of the reflection on irregular migration, human smuggling and contraband.

1. The evolution of human mobility in central Sahara

As Algeria adopted a 'socialist' regime at the independence in 1962 and a few years later started subsidizing basic goods and commodities, local Tuareg and Arab traders began taking advantage of price differentials between southern Algeria, northern Mali and northern Niger, transporting goods on a small-scale, mostly to family members on the other side of the border. In 1971, President Boumediene nationalized Algeria's hydrocarbon resources, a development that led to exponential financial growth (Ghozali, 1972). Over this decade, the country undertook massive infrastructure projects (road, schools, power grid and other forms of industrialization), including in the Saharan 'wilayas' (provinces), and a new territorialization was implemented (Blin, 1990; Ghodbani, 2016). Such an economic boom created a high demand for labour which was not met locally or nationally. It brought a Sahelian workforce from neighboring Mali and Niger (Bensaâd, 2009a). It also made route access to reach Algeria from northern Mali and northern Niger a strategic asset. Algeria slowly became a regular destination for a growing number of Sahelians aiming to find decent economic opportunities in southern parts of the country, especially during dry seasons. Malians and Nigeriens - notably from the Houssa community- worked in agriculture, and some settled in the Touat region (southwest) and the cities of Tamanrasset, Ourgla and Ghardaia (Brachet, 2005).

The "democratization' of motor vehicles in the 1970s dramatically changed the face of irregular migration. Migrants started to travel with freight trucks on top of their loads (Brachet, 2012). They paid a low price that was negotiated with the drivers who took

advantage of the space on their vehicles and their capacity to navigate the desert to make extra money. In that time, most of the trucks departing from Niger travelled to southern Libya, while those departing from Mali moved to Algeria. The risks for drivers were low because transporting people was not criminalized and the ability to bribe officials (policemen, custom officers, and the military) with a small amount of money was pervasive (Brachet 2005a; 2007). Carrying migrants as extra revenue became the norm in the 1980s. Scheele (2009) reported how the figure of *Ishumar* (literally the ‘unemployed’), referring to the figure of the young Tuareg men taking advantage of their knowledge of the Sahara to contraband goods (especially subsidized food part of the ‘lahda economy’ (milk in powder), started transporting migrants using Toyotas and Land Rovers.

The successive droughts of the Sahel in the 1970s and 1980s also intensified Sahelian migration towards Algerian and Libyan territories (Copans, 1975). It led to significant numbers of Sahelian migrants trying to find refuge in North African countries, often settling in Algeria’s and Libya’s borderlands (Bonnecase, 2010). At that time, these migrants – almost all from the Sahel - were not viewed as a problem but rather a constituent of social life (Brachet, 2009). Nonetheless, these natural disasters contributed to forging a different image of the 'southern brothers' who were now seen as 'poor people' and victims of natural catastrophes, conflict and violence. Despite the victimization of new sub-Saharan settlers in southern Algeria, their arrival contributed to enriching the cultural and social life as well as the booming economy of cities such as Tamanrasset (Badi, 2012). In Algeria, the economic difficulties of the early 1980s evolved into a serious financial crisis in 1986 due to the fall of oil prices (Djeghloul, 1986). At that time, the government changed its rhetoric and attitude regarding the presence of migrants in southern Algeria. They targeted irregular migrants in southern cities such as Tamanrasset as a scapegoating strategy in the name of fighting against trafficking activities which were labelled as undermining the state. Between 1986 and 1988, *gendarmerie nationale* raids targeted migrant neighborhoods in southern cities such as Tamanrasset and Ouargla and organized the first series of expulsion operations of sub-Saharan workers who had been working in Algeria for years (Bensaâd, 2009a). Similarly, on Algeria’s southern borderlands, security forces

started to implement robust monitoring and control over migrants' transporters (Brachet, 2009).

Moreover, the 1990-1996 Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali and Niger accentuated the fear among the Algerian political and military elite of a domino effect in southern Algeria (Badi, 2012b). At that time, northern Algeria was in the midst of a civil war that led to the death of over 200,000 people (Martinez, 2000). The Tuareg rebellion led to the displacement of thousands of refugees into Algeria who settled on the outskirts of Tamanrasset and Bordj Badji Mokhtar on the Malian border. Many refugees leveraged communal ties with well-known Algerian Tuareg and Arab families to obtain Algerian citizenship and access to state services and permanent right of residency.¹¹ Unlike Nigerien nationals, Malians enjoy a three-month visa-free entry to Algeria, but many who arrived legally overstayed their visas. Notables from northern Mali, including members of the rebellions, maintained connections to Tamanrasset and the southern parts of Algeria. Algerian authorities ended up tolerating displaced Malians and Nigeriens within its territories for political reasons. The Algerian regime wanted to keep good political relationships with Nigerien and Malian authorities as well as Tuareg rebels. There was a common acceptance among military and political elites that cross-regional human mobility is intrinsically part of the Saharan economy, so there is a necessity to avoid hindering community interests, especially along impoverished borderlands. Whether they are from Tuareg or Arab communities, people from central Sahara share common cultural and commercial affinities. Also, the presence of migrants was confined in remote southern hubs of Tamanrasset, Adrar or Ourgla. From Algiers and the northern parts of the country, where over 80% of Algerians live, this presence was never 'felt' due to the geographical distance between the capital and Tamanrasset (2,000 kilometres).

2. The 2000s years: influx of migrants and new migration patterns

The end of the 90s marked a new period for migration in central Sahara (Brachet, 2009). The rising demand for mobility and emigration towards North Africa among people living

11. Interview with a professor of history from the University of Tamanrasset, December 2018.

in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) boosted the surge of well-structured trans-Saharan human-smuggling systems mobilizing schemes and strategies to travel north (Molenaar & El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017). Most migrants start their journey from West African capitals, taking several buses to reach the most strategic northern Sahel hub, namely Agadez in northern Niger, and to a lesser extent, Gao in Mali. Over the following decade, a whole Saharan migration economy to North Africa developed in the cities of Agadez and Gao (Bensaâd, 2003). The numbers of northbound human flows as well as the routes grew to the extent that a complex human smuggling ecosystem from central Sahara to North Africa became professionalized. Transportation and cross border services to migrants became activities in their own right, allowing thousands of migrants to move annually to Libya and Algeria (Brachet, 2009). In Agadez, the activities related to lodging, food (restaurants), transportation, logisticians and mechanics and other auxiliary activities around the migrant subsidiary economy brought relative wealth and dynamism to the entire sub-region. In "*Migrations transsahariennes: vers un désert cosmopolite et morcelé, Niger*", Brachet (2009) shows how contemporary intra-African migration contributed to change the face of the desert, characterized by cosmopolitan and thriving connectivity. He deconstructs the idea of the desert as an empty space by showing how migration shapes the two shores of the Sahara. Brachet raises the question of the right to mobility, building upon the work on territories and powers done by Grégoire and Bourgeot (2011), and Bredeloup and Pliez (2005) on the human geography of the Sahara through the deconstruction of the idea of the 'migratory peril' to Europe. For researchers such as Pliez (2014), migration is the key feature of Saharan *cit -carrefours* (city hubs) such as Kidal and Gao in Mali, Agadez in Niger as well as Tamanrasset (Algeria) and Sebha (Libya), which thrive as regional hubs for trade, exchange and mobility thanks to the ability of people to move (Boesen & Marfaing 2006; Chena 2016). Bredeloup and Pliez (2005) estimate that the acceleration of human mobility has played a key role in constituting an intra-Saharan migratory space of proximity, notably through seasonal and regular human movements and matrimonial alliances.

Over the first years of the 2000s, southern Algeria experienced its largest influx of migrant flows since independence. According to interviews conducted with civil society

actors, including the Algerian League for Human Rights (LADDH), the number of sub-Saharan migrants reached at least 50 000.¹² Most migrants were living in the southern provinces of Tamanrasset, Adrar, Illizi, and originating from neighbouring Sahelian countries. The overwhelming number of migrants returned home after a few months or years, and only 10 to 20 percent tried to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe (Brachet, 2009). The presence of migrants in southern Algeria in the mid-2000s was tolerated with ad hoc expulsion operations conducted annually. Although there are very limited records on expulsions, most civil society actors believe that the number of expulsions between 2004 and 2014 was relatively small due to the major growth experienced by the Algerian economy as oil prices were very high. This cash flow allowed the Algerian government to engage in massive development programs in terms of infrastructure, housing, and agriculture in the south (Chellali, 2015). Such economic growth has gradually changed the geography of migration in Algeria. Migrants started moving north to settle in larger cities such as Algiers, Oran and Annaba, looking for economic opportunities. The pattern of irregular migration settlement followed the evolution of the Algerian economy. While sub-Saharan migrants had mostly lived in the south of Algeria, they were now working in the north. But more importantly, one of the main differences is that these new arrivals of migrants were no longer dominated by Malian and Nigerien nationals as in the past years. Rather, migrants came from a number of West and Central African states, including Senegal, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, Cameroun and Congo. Most migrants occupied low-skilled and daily jobs by working on construction sites and in restaurants. The other important element which reflects the changes that took place in the 2000s is the longer duration of stay of migrants. This period went from a few months annually to an average of three years in Algeria (Farrah, 2020a). Dida Badi (2012a), one of the well-known anthropologists specializing in southern Algeria and among the rare academics studying the local impacts of migration on Tamanrasset, showed that migrants' participation in the artisanal and small-scale economy has given a dynamic and cosmopolitan feature to the city. Dalila Nadi (2007) observes the same development in Tamanrasset as migrants contribute to the development of local projects and create their own micro-activities in harmony with the local people.

12. This number is indicative. It is based on triangulated data from multiple civil society actors.

3. Manufacturing threats and clandestine migration

In parallel to the growth of the migrant economy across central Sahara in the 2000s, the launch of the Global War on Terrorism in 2001 and the growing European Union's willingness to stem migrant flows departing from the Maghreb have led to major changes in the region (Antil 2006, p.589). Mobility across the central Sahara became a source of concern and a high priority in the US and EU agendas, pushing African states to enforce stronger security controls across North Africa and the Sahel (Bensaâd, 2009b). Foreign powers framed the region as a dangerous area that needs protection from terrorist and criminal threats and a 'porous' gateway facilitating the movement of 'threatening people' aiming to reach Europe (Bonnecase & Brachet, 2013; Choplin & Pliez, 2013). As a consequence, these powers imposed a security agenda that consists of strengthening border controls and capacity building securitization measures (Retainé & Walther, 2011, para.10-12). One of the main initiatives was the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), a program designed to protect borders, track the movement of people, combat terrorism, and enhance regional cooperation and stability (US Department of State 2002). PSI was a US-led effort to assist security forces of Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauritania in detecting and responding to suspicious movements of people and goods across and within their borders through training, equipment and cooperation to wage war on terrorism and enhance regional peace and security. Similarly, the PSI was followed by the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) implemented in 2003, a multi-year US strategy aimed at "developing resilient institutions that are capable of preventing and responding to terrorism in a holistic, long-term manner". Algeria took part in the second iteration of the TSCTP, mostly focusing on counterterrorism operations.¹³

Maghrebi countries were not only ordered to monitor their Saharan borders, they were also required to tighten control along their coasts to stem migrant flows crossing the Mediterranean. During the Seville European Summit in June 2002, irregular migration was entered as a conditional clause for negotiations (Association Agreement with the European

13. The following countries participated in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP): Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia.

Union) with the Maghreb countries and a key component in the European Union's relationship with third countries (European Commission, 2002).¹⁴ The European Head of states declared that they are determined to fight against 'illegal immigration' while favouring cooperation with the countries of origin. While any reference to exerting pressure on the role of transit countries in stemming migrant flows was still taboo at that time, this question started to unfold in November 2004 during the European summit in Brussels. Irregular migration – often described as 'illegal migration' to criminalize the phenomenon - was explicitly linked to the EU's existing and future external relations and negotiations with third countries, wrongly assuming that all trans-Saharan migrant flows are leading towards Europe (Brachet, 2011; De Haas, 2008). From that point, the EU considered that aid would be given to countries that demonstrate a real will to fulfil their obligations in terms of surveillance and limitation of migrants' arrival. The launch of FRONTEX (the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) in October 2004 further pushed for a security-driven agenda (Ottavy & Clochard, 2014). FRONTEX assists most North African countries by training national border guards and providing technical assistance and support on limiting the number of migrants' departure from African shores (Andersson, 2014).

Since the mid-2000s, the externalization of the EU migration governance to third states has been a well-anchored process motivated by a desire to push migration management out of its geographical limits, outsourcing this task to southern partners (Guiraudon, 2003; Frowd 2018). Since then, the concept of the 'externalization' of border management started to be used by a range of scholars and policymakers to describe the extension of border and migration controls beyond the EU territory. This process of externalization encompasses a multi-actor approach in which European nation-states have traditionally sought to have third party states 'solve their migration problems'. It refers to a wide range of practices from border restrictions, rescue operations, law enforcement controls to any measures addressing drivers of irregular migration (Lavenex, 2006;

14. The EU-Algeria Association Agreement was signed in April 2002 and entered into force in September 2005. The agreement sets out a framework for the EU-Algeria relationship in all areas, including trade and regular migration. It aimed to establish an EU-Algeria free trade area, including the complete dismantling of tariffs, by September 2020 – a target that has not been met. For more information, you can consult the European Commission EU-Algeria Association Agreement: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_02_597

Zeghib, 2009). It partly relies on a process of securitization which transposes migration from a question of a social policy to a security one (Boswell, 2003). Tough exceptional measures to enforce control of migrant movements have been requested, then implemented, and ultimately, they turned into the norm (Martins & Strange, 2019). This process not only set programs and policies aiming to restrain migrant flows to Europe, but it also categorized the states of the region into ones of "transit", "departure", or "destination". Countries such as Niger, recognized as a transit state, are at the heart of European borders' externalization in the Sahel (Frowd, 2020; 2018), a process to which the town of Agadez, a major migration hub in northern Niger and the closet town to Algeria, has become the most advanced laboratory (Bøås, 2021, p.63).

Following the 2015 so-called 'European migration crisis' where almost a million people arrived in Europe in one year (BBC, 2015), the European Union and its member states have further prioritized the external dimension of their migration policies, implementing further security arrangements to stem migrant flows along the central Mediterranean route. The EU decided to significantly increase pressure on North African and Sahelian countries and limit flow from the Sahel to the Sahara by restraining their movement along the Niger-Libya corridor and disrupting human smuggling networks. In other words, the EU's normative approach pushed for a new architecture of migration management, as one of its main goals in its relationship with the Sahelian states, especially Niger, became to curb migrant flows (Frowd, 2020). For Tsion (2019), Agadez has been simply transformed into a European extrapolated border. Frowd (2021) developed the concept of borderwork 'creep' to show how border management practices have been extended in the Sahel, developing a taxonomy that divides such practices into three areas: cartographic, 'cross-pollination of policy areas' and technologic practices. His categorization shows how border management practices result from the imbrication of interests between European and local actors.

One of the immediate consequences of such efforts has been the criminalization of human smuggling and transporting in Niger. In 2015, Niger adopted a new 'Loi 2015-36 Relative au Trafic Illicite de Migrants' (Law Against the Illicit Smuggling of Migrants),

which criminalizes the intention and act of smuggling migrants outside the city of Agadez, the last administrative region of Niger before reaching Libya (République du Niger 2015). While the migration economy was prosperous in Agadez and a major source of revenue for communities, less than 15 to 20 smugglers were still active in the city a year after adopting the abovementioned law (Micallef, Horseley & Bish, 2018). The number of 'ghettoes' that formerly housed migrants in Agadez decreased, too, while some migrant transporters engaged in moving Tramadol and narcotics instead (Micallef et al., 2018). The crackdown on human smuggling has also been accompanied by an economic decline and an increase in unemployment, and greater insecurity across the region (Micallef et al., 2018). Therefore, the externalization of migration control deprives locals of their livelihood without offering economic alternatives.

On the other hand, the management of migrations became a form of leverage in negotiations with the UE and a useful bargaining chip in the hands of the Maghrebi and Sahelian countries. Libyan authorities, for instance, used the migration question to negotiate its return within the international fora, while Morocco and Tunisia used it as an asset to solicit and bargain for "development aid", a recurring theme of Euro-Maghreb meetings. Pastore and Roman (2020) showed that non-EU 'transit states', North African and Sahelian states mostly, started to capitalize on the securitized perceptions of migration to position themselves as proxy actors, who can implement restrictive migration policies, especially in the case of Morocco (Belguendouz, 2005, para. 75-79). Building upon the work of Jean-François Bayart, Pastore and Roman (2020, para. 33-34) use the concept of "threat-based extraversion" to analyze the perverse effect of such a development.

One of the key examples is how African states benefit from projects funded under the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability (EUTF), a multi-billion fund (4.7 billion Euros) launched as part of the Valletta Summit in 2015 with the aim of addressing the root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration, and to contribute to better migration management (European Commission 2022). The EUTF brought millions of dollars to third party countries on various programs related to migration management and stability. For some authors such as Martins and Strange, (2019, p.5),

understanding the framing of the EU-African migration governance is key. The authors do not question the unequal feature of this partnership. However, they reflect on how African counterparts of the EU framed the externalization of migration governance and border management in the international fora 'in terms of cooperation, or, in some instances, even symmetry and equal partnership', building upon a more constructivist vision.

Within the Africa-EU migration governance, Algeria's successive governments, unlike other maghrebi countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, have refused to engage in multilateral projects dedicated to migration management funded by the EU, such as the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF).¹⁵ However, Algeria collaborates on a bilateral basis on migration with European countries, especially Spain, France and Italy, on topics such as the repatriation of irregular Algerian migrants (named locally as *harraga*) from Europe to Algeria (Salvador, 2021). Nevertheless, successive governments have instrumentalized the migration question domestically and internationally to their political advantage, playing the gendarme role in limiting migrant flows reaching Algeria and departing from its northwest coast (Meddi, 2019; Farrah, 2019, p.40). Algerian coastal guards also benefited from training offered by EU agencies to secure the borders, which reflects its role in the EU's externalization of its frontiers in the Maghreb over the last two decades. On the legal front, the end of the 2000s decade saw the implementation of laws punishing irregular migration. In 2008 and 2009, Algeria adopted the Law 08-1 and Law 09-01 governing foreign nationals' entry, stay and circulation (*République algérienne démocratique et populaire* 2008; 2009). These laws treat irregular migration as a criminal offense punishable by up to five years in prison and expulsion from the country. The law is severe and makes it extremely difficult for migrants to normalize their status in Algeria, forcing many to leave or to work informally with the risk of detention or deportation. Like Morocco (2003) and Tunisia (2004), Algeria adopted these laws under the increasing pressure imposed by the European Union (EU) to stem irregular migration (Perrin, 2009). In all three cases, the restrictive approach taken by these laws, which is at the heart of the criminalization of irregular migration, replaced the old 'laissez-

15. For more information on Algeria's engagement with the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF), you can consult the Algeria page of the EUTF website: https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/north-africa/algeria_en

faire' policy. Until now, Algeria does not have national legislation on the status of refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, the country adopted in 2015 an informal agreement with Niger 'to repatriate' Nigerien migrants in irregular situations. However, the state has been using this mechanism to expel Nigeriens and non-Nigeriens and reduce the presence of migrants in Algeria (Beratto, 2015). This practice is actually not a new phenomenon as most migrants arrested or stopped by authorities were expelled towards the south (Bensaâd 2017; Minvielle, 2011). Julien Brachet (2019) shows that such policies have not only rendered routes clandestine (off the road) and riskier but, more importantly, 'fabricated' the figure of the human smuggler. Except for Brachet and Bensaâd's work, very few authors covered extensively human smuggling dynamics in the central Sahara (southern Algeria, northern Mali, northern Niger) based on an analysis of its everyday practice. Brachet argues that human smuggling, or more accurately, the transport of migrants, started as an informal and widespread economy and became an illegal activity criminalized by states. This has pushed migrants towards more dangerous routes and transporters of migrants to adapt their modus operandi (Brachet, 2019). With more of an anthropological perspective on smuggling, the book *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century*, Scheele (2012) looked at how contraband and smuggling dynamics are intimately connected to the anthropology of the Sahara and how family links and social ties between families of northern Mali and southern Algeria govern smuggling dynamics. Scheele's book is among the first books on central Sahara which looked at smuggling from the micro-perspective of the borderlands and merchants' cross-border communities between northern Mali and southern Algeria.

4. Deconstructing mainstream views on smuggling and migrant's pathways in central Sahara

In the mainstream literature, human smuggling in the central Sahara is often analyzed through the prisms of "border porosity" as well as through the "non-governable nature" of the region (Miles 2018, p. 201; Timmis 2017; Rousselier, 2018). Some authors, such as Raleigh (2013), suppose that these economies occur in inherently "ungoverned" spaces. Licit and illicit flows, ranging from narcotics to terrorists, weapons, migrants and

essential goods moving across the region, are portrayed as circulating freely through the same desert corridors (Nordstrom, 2017). In central Sahara, this vision of flows movement is based on the presupposition that smuggling has grown on the weak governance capacity of states of the region to regulate the passage of flows across such a vast territory (Timmis, 2017; Browne 2013, p4.). Holland (2015, 2016) and Tendler (2002) argue differently on this specific point. For them, the poor role played by the states of the region in regulating these flows is not necessarily the result of a lack of resources, but rather a strategy of absenteeism which is intentionally implemented and applied by states to gain political dividends out of the smuggling economies (Shaw & Reitano, 2014, p.4). In other words, this conception of smuggling assumes that the state does not actively regulate such economies but does not question that absenteeism is a form of governance strategy. Still, these authors consider that personalized corruption practices shape these economies, cooptation and favoritism between various actors, including border security forces, smugglers, borderlanders, migrants, proving the instrumental role of smuggling that some states wholly or partly assume. Whether it comes to the border porosity or the strategy of absenteeism, these two share an implicit understanding that smuggling takes root in informal institutions, which are seen as either inferior or separate from the official state institutions (Gallien, 2020, p.10). In the literature about the politics of informality and its institutions, Helmke and Levitsky (2004) and, more recently, Gallien (2020) called for the re-examination of the nature of interactions between formal and informal institutions regulate smuggling economies. Helmke and Levitsky (2004, p.37) define formal institutions as “rules that are openly codified, which means that they are established and communicated through channels widely accepted as official”. Informal institutions refer to “socially shared, usually unwritten rules created, communicated and enforced outside officially assigned channels”. For Gillien (2020), informal institutions are neither in competition nor inferior to formal institutions regarding smuggling dynamics in North Africa and deciphering their interconnection, and their everyday practices enrich the comprehension of the politics of smuggling (Gillien 2020, p.11). As we will see later (Chapter 3), the functioning of human smuggling at Algeria’s borders with Mali and Niger obeys dense rules, which are the results of the interaction between the concerned actors.

Furthermore, the dominant coverage of irregular migration in central Sahara focuses on the transcontinental movement of people (from Africa to Europe), although a minority of migrants tries to reach Europe by crossing the Sahara (Brachet, 2007; 2012). Therefore, migrants' local lives and experiences while on the move are indisputably less analyzed (Bensaâd, 2009a). Bensaâd considers that it is not only empirically wrong to focus the analysis on transcontinental migration, but also problematic because intraregional migration is far richer to study from an anthropological and social point of view (Lessault & Beauchemin 2009; Bruijn & Van Dijk & Foeken 2001). In the case of migrants' pathways in southern Algeria, and more specifically in Tamanrasset, little has been done to analyze the factors impacting migrants' lives while they are living in the city. The anthropologist Dida Badi (2012a, p. 205) is one of the few academics who worked on the topic, studying the role and impact of artisanal economies and restaurants run by migrants in Tamanrasset on the city's social diversification and cultural enrichment. Some existing research has covered the dynamisms of Sahara urban cities and migrants' contribution to economic and cultural development in Tamanrasset (Bensaâd, 2009a; Spiga, 2005; Badi, 2012a). However, no research has looked into migrant pathways from the perspective of the 'foyers'.

Most mainstream research publications continue to refer to Algeria and its southern territory as a 'transit area' for migrants despite that many establish themselves in Algeria. However, the notion of transit concerning northbound migration towards North Africa has been criticized (Alioua, 2012). The notion of transit reflects the idea that migrants would be resolutely and uniquely oriented towards the final destination, that is to say, somewhere else other than the place where they are (Alioua, 2012). Mehdi Alioua (2011), a heterodox Moroccan researcher on sub-Saharan migration in Morocco, deconstructs the 'transit' nature of migratory movements by developing the notion of 'pays-étape' (stepping-stone country) to break the myth of the "transit country". The notion of "pays-étape" is assessed as being empirically more correct to describe the role of the Maghreb countries in migratory routes as it refers to journeys punctuated by stages during which migrants work, put down roots in a place, reorganize their time and resources to cross the borders (if needed) and continue the journey. These migrations are often circular and non-linear. The notion of

"pays-étape" also better reflects the social autonomy of migrants and their ability to bypass borders and various barriers such as hiding from the police or finding work. It promotes their know-how contributing to constructing complex spaces in which they somehow manage to move. The analysis conducted on the role of the "foyers" in Tamanrasset (Chapter 4) will mobilize the notion of "pays-étape" to deconstruct the myth of Algeria as mostly a transit country. It also serves as a theoretical reference to expand on the role of the "foyer" in building migrant's agency and pathways.

Whether it is about the functioning of the human smuggling economy or migrant's lives in Algeria's southern hub of Tamanrasset, there is a gap in the literature on how Algeria's irregular migration governance unfolds. This research aims to fill this gap by asking: *what are the drivers, functionalities and institutions governing irregular migration and human smuggling in southern Algeria?*

5. **Reflection on the fieldwork**

I did three-month fieldwork in southern Algeria from October to December 2018. I invested a lot of time building my network of contacts before travelling to the region. I spent two months in the city of Tamanrasset, Algeria's southern hub, where most migrants live. I also travelled along Algeria's wide southern borderlands with Mali and Niger for about a month. I did fieldwork in Tinzaouatine, Timiaouine and Bordj Badji Mokhtar (Mali border) and Ain Guezzam (Niger border), meeting with various actors detailed in the next paragraph. In order to collect data, I opted for a methodology that privileged semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations with granular details collected during long travels in 4x4 vehicles across Algeria's borders with Mali and Niger. These observations focused on smuggling behavior and practices at border crossing points. Because the norms, rules and informal institutions that regulate migration and smuggling are tacit and unwritten, this is simply the best way to do so. I spent dozens of hours looking at how migration and smuggling practices are anchored in daily life in the borderlands and Tamanrasset. The long hours of travel along the borders and discussion with migrants allowed me to collect a formidable amount of data and insights. While I faced some challenges, I never felt that my life was in danger or that I caused harm to my interviewees.

I have constantly taken a conservative approach when dealing with my participants, assessing on a case-by-case basis the risks taken by them in sharing their stories with me. To do this, I was constantly supported in my work by an experienced fixer from the city of Tamanrasset who is well-introduced among migrant communities. He did a great job in facilitating contact with people active in the city and the borderlands. He provided me with a safe working environment, including a secured space to conduct the interviews in Tamanrasset and borderland villages. These efforts enormously smoothed my work in Tamanrasset. For instance, when I visited the borderland of Ain Guezzam, my fixer and I were hosted in his family house in town. We used one of the rooms as a safe space to interview migrants and transporters working in Algeria and Niger. Doing the interviews outside of this home would have been extremely difficult and suspicious as the city is highly monitored by the security forces. It is also worth noting that I conducted some interviews in the same home but without the presence of the fixer. Most of them were migrants who I met, thanks to other migrant participants. It could be argued that the fixer influenced the selection of people interviewed for this research, but I always tried to look for interviewees who were outside his network as well. For instance, although my fixer was from Tuareg origins, I managed to conduct as many interviews with Arabs as with Tuareg people living in borderlands. This vigilance regarding a fair diversity of representation and views among people was also applied during my two months in Tamanrasset.

Moreover, moving across such a vast territory was a daunting task. I spent dozens of hours in semi-private transportation connecting borderlands. My local friends hosted us in the two borderlands of Ain Guezzam and Bordj Badji Mokhtar. At the same time, activists among the Green Tea NGO facilitated my hosting in the borderlands of Bordj Badji Mokhtar and Timiaouine. I lived for a few days with people for whom contraband is their main lifeline. I never felt that this aspect of my fieldwork had adversely impacted the quality of my work or distorted the data collected. On the contrary, the more time I spent with smugglers and migrants, the more they felt confident in speaking openly about what they experienced, enriching the quality of my data collection.

Overall, I conducted around 35 formal interviews across these villages and cities with various participants, including migrants, smugglers, journalists, academics, activists, health workers, law enforcement officers, security personnel and officials (See the Appendix). I also interviewed diplomats from the consulates of Mali and Niger, who are based in Tamanrasset.¹⁶ These interviews allowed me to collect insightful information on informal trade and smuggling but also pushed me to physically navigate the region with over 3 500 kilometres travelled by car to feel what shapes the Saharan life and smuggling dynamics in remote areas such as the borderland cities and villages of Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Timiaouine, Tinzaouatine and Ain Guezzam. For instance, I visited a Saharan trade zone in the middle of the desert called El-Akla (the market) at the edge of the Niger-Algeria border (Micallef & al., 2019). The latter is an open bazaar where most smugglers of the region gather to trade goods and commodities moving between northern Niger and southern Algeria.

In this vein, the study of migration and human smuggling in the Saharan context poses several methodological concerns. The first challenge I faced was the difficulty of access to remote borderlands and the strict security control imposed by the security forces. The sensitiveness of the topic was also a challenge as it was difficult to say the reasons behind my work publicly, especially in borderlands. The timing was also unfavourable for collecting data on migration and human smuggling, as I completed the fieldwork when the expulsion of migrants from southern Algeria towards Niger was high. This added another layer of difficulty. Some migrants and community leaders feared talking to a foreigner, and it required long hours to build trust. Other challenges included the reluctance of security forces, particularly the army and the gendarmerie, to share data. During the full course of my fieldwork, I only managed to get one formal interview with Customs and one informal discussion with a Gendarme official.

I was able to navigate these challenges mostly because I am a man and an Algerian national who understands the cultural context. I had no cultural shock even though social

16. There are no public statistics in Algeria on the presence of migrant communities. According to the data triangulated from multiple civil society organizations, there are less than 30,000 people in Tamanrasset, which represents about one-fourth of Tamanrasset's inhabitants.

dynamics in southern cities are different from northern cities (where I am from). The fact that I speak the Algerian dialect was essential. The French language was also helpful to speak with francophone migrants, and 'blending in' the community was very helpful. Plus, my fluency in English permitted two interviews with anglophone migrants, a growing community in Tamanrasset. Also, I am darker-skinned than the average northern Algerian, so it was easier to blend in with the locals. The privilege of being a well-educated international student was not discussed beyond mentioning the purpose of the research, but it wasn't a blockage, nor did it offer a specific advantage in terms of access to migrants. However, it helped me once for an informal discussion with a law enforcement agent as he valued the fact that I was interested in the topic and well informed. Culturally, it isn't appropriate to pry or ask questions about someone's professional background, which facilitated my work because people saw the "Algerian man".

However, access to women participants was extremely limited because of gender barriers, especially within migrant communities. The only women I had the opportunity to interview and to have a regular informal conversation with regarding the situation of migrants and the smuggling dynamics in Tamanrasset were young women activists, especially those from Green Tea Association, a very active NGO in town. Because of their active work inside migrant communities in Tamanrasset, these women have a very good sense of women's migration pathways and how they mobilize diverse strategies to achieve their goals as women. But beyond their testimonies, I have not had the chance to interview women migrants living in "foyers". Therefore, the gender gap in this research is fully assumed.

This research privileged detailed qualitative assessments based on solid triangulation of data coming from multiple sources. Making use of anonymous sources does not mean that details provided in this research rely on a single anonymized interviewee. All interviewees cited were anonymized to protect their identity following strictly the procedures indicated for fieldwork methodology in the *Research and Fieldwork in Development* (2014) book edited by Daniel Hammett, Chasca Twyman, Mark Graham as well as *The SAGE Handbook of Fieldwork* (2006) edited by Dick Hobbs and Richard Wright. In compliance with the University of Ottawa ethics procedures, triangulation of

data through multiple sources as well as participant observation were key features of this research. Data collected was stored in secure devices at home with double-code encrypted entry. To strengthen my knowledge on how to conduct fieldwork on smuggling in North Africa, I took the initiative to contact Max Gillien in September 2018, who recently edited the Routledge Handbook of Smuggling (2020) to get his insight and advice on the topic as well as on how to research this subject. I also called Mark Micallef, an experienced researcher who did fieldwork in North Africa on human smuggling and migration.

Chapter 2: Autopsy of Algeria’s irregular migration governance

“We will not be the Lampedusa of Africa” (Alilat 2018).¹⁷ It is with these specific words Hassen Kacimi, the former director of migration at the Ministry of Interior of Algeria, qualified the government's intention to deal with migrants coming for Sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing a parallel with the tiny Italian island, where thousands of migrants land after crossing the Mediterranean in harsh conditions, stresses that Algeria does not want to experience the same. Moreover, it is a message to local and international policymakers and observers that Algeria will not play the role of "Europe's gendarme" in a context where the European Union (EU) has deepened the externalization of borders mechanisms in North Africa and the Sahel over the last decade (Pastore & Roman, 2020). Mobilizing such a narrative is also a way to counter the criticisms issued by national and international organizations, such as the Algerian League for Human Rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW), on the treatment of irregular migrants' rights and the violations they face in Algeria (Ligue algérienne des droits de l’Homme, 2018, p.13; Amnesty International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2020). Moreover, in addition to this rhetoric, successive governments often pride themselves in refusing any EU intervention and assistance on irregular migration. “We are now at tens of thousands (of illegal migrants), but shortly, we can talk about hundreds of thousands after Europe closed its doors”, reported Hassen Kacimi, the director of migration at the Ministry of Interior, to Reuters in 2018 (Chikhi, 2018).

Nevertheless, even if Algeria has a high degree of sovereignty in terms of the management of irregular migration and little direct collaboration with the EU on irregular migration, Algeria’s national policy choices on irregular migration remain permeable to international cooperation frameworks aiming to ‘order’ and ‘stem’ migrant flows from North Africa to Europe (Elia & Fedele, 2021). So, what shapes Algeria’s migration governance? This chapter scrutinizes Algeria's national strategy to control irregular

17. The island of Lampedusa in southern Italy has seen the arrival by sea of thousands of migrants over the last years. For more information, see the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR), the Mediterranean Situation, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

migration by looking at the Algerian government's political instruments, mechanisms, and discourses to achieve this specific goal.

1. Irregular migration governance in southern Algeria: from laissez-faire to criminalization

Algeria does not have a Ministry dedicated to migration with a clear mandate of developing public policies. Algeria also does not have a publicly recognized strategy on irregular migrants. Over the years, irregular migration governance has been the result of opaque discussions and a trade-off between the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad. The latter coordinates with neighboring countries for repatriation operations while the police and the gendarmerie organize the repatriation and expulsion of migrants from northern parts of the country to the southern borderlands. In southern Algeria, security forces, including the gendarmerie and the *Police algérienne des frontières* (border police), have the most substantial hand over migration (Farrah, 2020a). Since the fall of the Khaddaffi regime in Libya and the deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel, Algeria's migration governance has been heavily tainted by its regional security concerns over its southern borders. Irregular migration has been increasingly represented as a 'threat' to Algeria's security and territorial integrity over the last two decades. Before the 2000s, the management of irregular migration was not regulated per se. It depended on the goodwill of the *Walis* (Governors) of the southern provinces and, more importantly, security forces, and to what extent the presence of migrants 'bothers' or not the security forces, primarily the gendarmerie. Successive governments rarely intervened in dealing with migrants since the latter's presence in northern parts of the country was low. Such local management of irregular migrants in southern Algeria did not prevent the security forces from conducting ad hoc mass arrests in southern cities and organizing mass deportation operations, primarily via Mali (Amnesty international, 2018, p.4). These migrants were often arrested arbitrarily by local security forces in the name of fighting against crime in southern cities. This '*laissez-faire*' policy not only contributed to reinforcing the intervention of the security forces in

the local management of security forces, but it also did not push Algeria's successive governments to develop a migration strategy.

But since the 2000s, as shown in chapter 1, Algiers' strong control and militarization over its borders in the name of fighting terrorism and crime impacted the management of irregular migration (Chena, 2011; Zardo & Loschi, 2020). The 'laissez-faire' strategy was abandoned in the mid-2000s, favoring stricter control through mass arrests and increasing border surveillance of human smuggling (Amnesty international, 2018, p.4). While migrants had historically been present in the South, their numbers increased in the major cities of the North, in Algiers, Oran and Annaba (Farrah, 2020a). This development pushed the Algerian authorities (government and security forces) to take more action on irregular migration, starting by adopting a legally binding framework against human smuggling and the presence of irregular migration in Algeria. In 2008, Algeria adopted Law 08-1 governing foreign nationals' conditions of entry, stay and circulation of migrants (République algérienne démocratique et populaire, 2008). This law treats irregular migration as a criminal offence punishable by up to five years of prison and expulsion from the country. The law is severe and makes it extremely difficult for migrants to normalize their status in Algeria, forcing many to leave the country or to stay and work informally at risk of expulsion. Incorporating criminal law serves symbolic functions as it demonstrates the government's firm grip on irregular migration through a legal cover. It also legitimizes a political discourse that associates migrants with criminality and illegality, as it is well reflected in the multiple publications of the Ministry of Defense associating migration to illegality and trafficking.¹⁸

In parallel, Algeria does not have national legislation on the status of refugees and asylum seekers even if it ratified several international conventions and treaties on the status and protection of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, including the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and the 1967 Convention Governing the

18. For concrete examples, you can consult the publications of the El Djeich Magazine of the Ministry of National Defense (MDN): https://www.mdn.dz/site_principal/sommaire/revues/images/eldjeich_fr.pdf

Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (OAU Convention).¹⁹ In theory, the question of asylum seekers is not completely absent from the law. Algeria launched the Office for Refugees and Stateless Persons (*Bureau algérien pour les réfugiés et les apatrides*) (Bapra) and the translation of the commitments made by the country on the international scene - reiterated later - in national law. This recognition of the right to asylum is present in the 2020 Constitution (article 50) (République algérienne démocratique et populaire 2020).²⁰ However, in practice, the right to asylum in Algeria remains formal and ineffective. Bapra's activity lacks transparency, and people whose applications are rejected receive no justification since there is no appeal procedure as such. The Algerian Office never recognizes the refugee status of people from sub-Saharan African countries, reserving almost exclusively this status for Sahrawis (United Nations 2021). This situation means for migrants that it is extremely hard, not to say impossible, to receive protection from the Algerian state. It also implies that they can only rely on the UNHCR to demand protection. One can add that UNHCR offices are located in the capital, Algiers and local organizations who provide assistance to migrants, including helping fill papers or simply helping them understand the process, are under significant pressure.

The poor commitment of Algeria on the question of refugees and migrants mirrors its recent participation in the Global Compact for Migration, the first intergovernmental negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to address all dimensions of international migration governance, including the humanitarian, developmental, human rights-related and other aspects.²¹ Algeria participated in the event, but it abstained during the Global Compact vote, even though engagements are not legally

19. For more information, you can consult: a) the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, 1967: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36400-treaty-0005oau_convention_governing_the_specific_aspects_of_refugee_problems_in_africa_e.pdf; b) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951-1967): <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>; c) The UNHCR Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951-1967): <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>. Algeria also ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2003. See <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>.

20. Article 50 of the 2020 Algerian Constitution stipulates: a) International law Any foreigner legally present in the national territory shall enjoy the legal protection of his person and property. b) No person shall be extradited except in accordance with a ratified international agreement or under the extradition law. c) In no case shall a political refugee with a legal right to asylum be handed over or extradited.

21. For more information on the United Nations Global Compact on refugees, you can consult: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/>.

binding. Algeria did not fully endorse its recommendations, arguing that the agreement does not clearly distinguish between 'illegal migration' and 'irregular migration'.²² However, in reality, many of the engagements of the Global Compact are in stark contrast with Algeria's current domestic policies and laws.

Over the last two decades, Algeria has participated in most multilateral frameworks on migration. In 2001, the adoption of the International Agenda for Migration Management (IAMM) became the spearhead of many regional consultative processes. Like other North African countries, Algeria was involved in international talks on migration and border controls. The IAMM is set as common understandings of shared assumptions and principles among states that serve as the basis for migration management (International Organization for Migration, 2005). Then, a series of transnational frameworks on migration were subsequently implemented: the 5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean initiated in 2002, the Dialogue on Transit Migration in the Mediterranean launched in 2003, the 2006 Euro-African Partnership on Migration and Development - known as the Rabat Process, the 2008 Paris Process, the 2014 Khartoum Process and finally the Valletta Summit on Migration in 2015.²³ These multilateral frameworks are regional processes in which several African countries, including Algeria, and Europe, participated to strengthen migration cooperation and the fight against human smuggling (Council of the European Union, 2016). We will not analyze the content of these multilateral frameworks as this is not the focus of our research. However, we can say that these processes had at least two objectives: 1) the establishment of mechanisms to ensure the temporary mobility of regular migrant workers and to adapt labour migration to the needs of destination country

22. Irregular migration refers to the movement of persons to a new place of residence or transit that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. The term 'illegal migration' refers to a status or a process, whereas 'irregular' is preferred when referring to a person. The term 'irregular' is preferable to 'illegal' migrant because the latter carries a criminal connotation. Irregularly entering a country or staying with an irregular status is not a criminal offence but an infraction of administrative regulations. An act can be legal or illegal, but a person cannot. Therefore, the use of the term 'irregular' is favored.

23. For more information, you can consult the European Commission (5+5) Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/five-plus-five-55-dialogue-migration-western-mediterranean_en; the European Commission Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration (2005) https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/dialogue-mediterranean-transit-migration_en; The Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (2006), <https://www.iom.int/node/103011>; The Paris Conference on Migration and Development (2008); The Khartoum Process (2014), <https://www.khartoumprocess.net/>; The Valletta Summit on Migration (2015): <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/11/11-12/>.

markets; 2) the fight against 'illegal migration through enhanced cooperation on deportation and border security in departure and "transit" countries. Algeria fully participated in these frameworks even if it maintained a clear willingness to refuse to enter into a 'migration partnership' with the EU. Algiers has no 'Migration and mobility partnership' with the EU, unlike countries like Morocco and Tunisia, even though the Algeria-EU association agreement has a section on human mobility (Zardo & Loschi 2020).²⁴ For instance, Algeria does not participate in the programming of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF), one of the critical components of the Valletta Summit. Algiers refused to benefit from the direct support programs, except for broad regional projects (European Commission, 2022).²⁵ The successive Algerian governments showed pride in refusing the interference of the European Union and its members states in their affairs, often arguing that the efforts to strengthen border control and stem migrant flows result from the state's own agenda and its managerial and financial capacity (Algérie Press Service, 2018). This attitude stems from Algeria's principles of sovereignty and independence, which dictates that any foreign entity must not influence national policies. They claim that they possess a robust national security apparatus by referring to strong military and police forces, extensive numbers of experienced diplomats, vast intelligence networks and an enhanced counter-terrorism and anti-organized crime focus and capacity that allows them to deal with the migration topic independently. However, despite the lack of direct cooperation between Algerians and the EU on irregular migration, Algiers remains permeable to the discourses developed within these international frameworks (Cassarino & Del Sarto 2018, p.4). Over the years, the state, its ministries, and security forces interiorized practices aligned with the interests of the EU border externalization process without recognizing or publicly assuming such a division of labor.

Zardo and Loschi (2020) analyzed how the EU has failed to cooperate despite apparent convergence between the securitized European and Algerian approaches. Their

24. République algérienne démocratique et populaire, Ministry of Commerce, Association Agreement between Algeria and the European Union (2007), <https://www.commerce.gov.dz/e-accord-d-association-entre-l-algerie-et-l-union-europeenne>

25. Phone interview with an international migration expert, September 2018.

argument draws on the historical development of the Algerian security regime that affected the country's way of conceiving and managing irregular migration. They identified three features that nurture the lack of cooperation: the border management in the broader scheme of Algeria's obsession with national security, the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the state-building process and Algeria's increasing role in the geopolitics of the region. While all these factors are true, they tell us very little about the permeability of Algeria's migration governance, i.e. the degree to which the North African country is influenced by foreign migration agenda priorities and external factors such as the pressures, discourses and actions undertaken under the international frameworks on restricting control of mobility (Cassarino & Del Sarto 2018; Farrah, 2020a). In reality, the adoption of Law 08-1 governing foreign nationals' conditions of entry, stay, and circulation, results from informal pressure from the European countries and institutions to develop a legal system that criminalizes clandestine migration. Countries like Algeria are not 'passive recipients' of the international migration agenda but rather adopt what serves its own interest.

2. The Algerian state at the heart of migration control

The focus of the historical development of the Algerian security regime undervalues the extent to which the mechanisms of migration governance are a way of consolidating the centrality of the state in many countries of the southern Mediterranean. Algeria's official responses to European calls for enhancing migration cooperation are often characterized by silence, even though there are a few differences between the EU and Algeria agendas limiting migration. “Whether this is intentional or not, Algeria plays the de facto role of a *gendarme* - like any other countries in the region- within the policy of externalization of borders, even if it does not take part directly in activities funded by the EUTF”, reported an experienced Algerian journalist working on migration.²⁶ In other words, Algiers's eagerness to portray itself as a country that 'refuses' to play the *gendarme* role in Europe's *gendarme* role management is not entirely accurate. Security mechanisms put forward by Algeria, such as the construction of a sand berm surrounding its southern borders, are never

26. Interview with a journalist specializing in migration in Algiers, November 2018.

questioned because they are in line with the policy of border externalization. Moreover, when the European Union imposed restrictive measures to Sahelian countries that criminalize travel to and through the Sahara-Sahel, such as the law criminalizing the transporting of migrants in Niger (*Loi 2015-36*) in 2015 (République du Niger, 2015), Algiers did not complain about Europe's interventionism close to its borders. It seized this opportunity to further place the state at the heart of migration management through a greater security-driven approach embodied by the construction of the berm to limit the movements of local communities.²⁷ Moreover, the EU does not even mention the impact of the Algerian sand berm on migration governance, which nevertheless renders a tremendous and discreet service to the European externalization policy on migration issues.

Algeria has ramped up its security efforts to unprecedented levels since the Tiguentourine attack in January 2013. The army deployed several tower controls, drones, and mixed units with thousands of soldiers to scrutinize its borders and the sand berm along with Libya, Mali, and Niger (Harchaoui 2018, p.10; Chena, 2012).²⁸ Between 2011 and 2012, 7,000 soldiers were positioned on the Algeria-Libya border, 20,000 soldiers on the other southern borders (4th and 6th military regions of Ouargla and Tamanrasset respectively) and 30 new gendarmerie bases were implemented (Ammour 2013). The timing of such developments as the militarization of the southern borders occurred when Algeria's role as a receiving country for northbound migratory movement became more critical, with thousands of irregular migrants attempting to cross the country from its southern borders (Micallef and al., 2019). Since 2015, the number of migrants heading towards Algeria via northern Niger has grown partly due to the criminalization of human smuggling at the northern Niger-southern Libya corridor (Molenaar & van Damme 2017; Micallef et al., 2019). In November 2019, a representative of the Algerian Ministry of Interior reported that at least 500 migrants try to enter daily to Algeria (L'Expression, 2019), stressing the importance of fighting human smuggling networks. Although a significant number of irregular migrants indeed attempted to enter Algeria that year, such a number is highly overestimated.

27. Series of interviews conducted with smugglers operating at the Algeria-Mali and Algeria-Niger borders, November-December 2018.

28. For an in-depth assessment of the evolution of Algeria's defence policy, you can read Ammour (2013).

The erection of the berm draws a physical barrier for smugglers that undermines the political economy of irregular migration, making the berm an instrument of regulation of migrants' presence. However, at the same time, the Algerian security forces historically attempt to play a balancing act in pursuing state objectives of territorial integrity and security whilst trying to minimize the harm on interests of southern communities, especially for those engaging in small-scale contraband, and to a lesser extent, human smuggling and migrant transporting. While the political-military elite perceives irregular migration as a factor of instability, militarization efforts in southern Algeria to impose strict border control are not primarily oriented towards the limitation of migrant flows (Chikhi, 2018). In other words, migration is not the priority number one for Algeria's security forces in the South, but rather it is terrorism and arms trafficking (Micallef and al., 2019).

The securitization of irregular migration also took other forms. The Bouteflika regime, which remained in power until April 2019, extensively manipulated the migration question to hide socioeconomic failures by developing a xenophobic discourse against the presence of migrants. For instance, Ahmed Ouyahia, the Prime Minister that followed Tebboune's dismissal, declared in a public appearance in summer 2017 that migrants are a 'source of criminality' (Métaoui, 2017). His statement went viral on social media, shocking Algerians and mobilizing civil society. Other high-level officials such as Abdelkader Messahel, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared in July 2017 that migrants were a threat to national security and vowed to step up deportations (France 24, 2017). The Transport Ministry also issued an order forbidding the drivers of public buses to transport migrants; civil-society organizations denounced the order, and some transport directorates refused to apply it (Direct Info Algérie, 2017). An anti-migrant campaign with the slogan 'No to Africans in Algeria' was organized by unknown Facebook pages and fake profiles after these events. However, many activists believe that the regime fueled this campaign to mask dire political and socioeconomic challenges. In the following weeks, young people across the country mobilized against hate speech by launching a successful campaign named '#We_are_Africans' (Christinaz, 2017). The Authorities used the migration question to hide their socioeconomic and political failures and inability to deal with the influx of

migrants. The media have singled out the Algerian authorities as a country leading racist politics against migrants in an irregular situation, denouncing unworthy deportation practices (Rhounna, 2017). However, Algeria's successive governments have stigmatized sub-Saharan's irregular migration and leveraged the migration question as a political tool to distract attention from major domestic issues on the political, social and economic fronts.

The Algeria-Niger 'repatriation' deal: political arrangement to diminish migrant's presence in Algeria

Over the last years, the Algerian regime has relied on a political instrument to lower the presence of irregular migrants in Algeria, which consists on paper with a 'repatriation deal' for Nigerien nationals with the Nigerien government. The trigger of this deal was the death of 92 women and children in summer 2013 who were found dead in the desert of northern Niger, victims of trafficking networks (Masalaki, 2014). At that time, Algerian and Nigerien authorities coordinated their agendas to fight against growing trafficking rings that brought hundreds of women and children to Algeria (Berrato, 2015). Since then, discussions between the two authorities led to implementing a repatriation process to save vulnerable people from the hands of traffickers. The arrangement, which has not been transcribed in any official document, led to the repatriation of over 3600 Nigeriens between early 2014 and October 2015 (Massalaki, 2014; Beratto, 2015). Diplomatic officials interviewed for this research reported that the repatriation worked well until 2015. However, the 'returning' of Nigerien nationals who are potential victims of trafficking was meant to fight against irregular migration. The Algerian government started to instrumentalize this 'arrangement' by using the mechanism of the repatriation operations to organize mass expulsion operations, including for non-Nigeriens, in order to reduce the number of irregular migrants (Micallef et al., 2019, p.60). Algeria expelled around 40 000 people to Niger from 2014 to 2019, including thousands of non-Nigeriens, even though the agreement was limited to Nigeriens. As of 2017, security forces started a crackdown against foyers (migrants' houses) in Tamanrasset, arresting thousands of migrants annually off the streets, from their homes and workplace, regardless of their status (Radio France Internationale, 2020). Over 19,000 Nigeriens and 750 sub-Saharan African nationals were

expelled between August 2017 and December 2018 to Niger, putting significant pressure on Assamaka, the only borderland village in northern Niger (Alarm Phone Sahara, 2020; Amnesty International, 2018). These mass expulsion operations violate the principle of nonrefoulement and Algeria's international engagement regarding refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.²⁹

The repatriation operations became gradually controversial, even though Niamey nodded to Algeria's decision due to the disequilibrium of power between the two countries and the support provided by Algiers in securing Niger's northern border and providing essential aid basic commodities to communities in northern Niger (Brachet, 2009a). From a migration governance perspective, the agreement became a mechanism that has deepened the centrality of the security forces in the management of migration, even if the agreement's content was never made public and had no legal status. The police and the gendarmerie strengthened arbitrary arrests of migrants, and roundups became frequent in cities such as Oran and Algiers, where their presence has been relatively high.

With the lack of a well-thought strategy to govern the increasing presence of irregular migrants and the deterioration of its relationship with the Nigerien government in 2017, Algerian authorities restructured the expulsion operations into two types of convoys.³⁰ The first is what is often referred to as '*convois officiels*' (official convoys), which repatriate only Nigerien migrants in an irregular situation whether they were victims of trafficking or not. Migrants arrested violently are gathered in transition centres and then transported in buses from northern cities to Tamanrasset. From there, the convoys travel towards Ain Guezzam, cross the border and drop Nigerien migrants in the village of Assamaka or the city of Agadez. These 'repatriation operations' are entirely funded by the Algerian government. The second type of convoy is referred to as '*convois non-officiels*' (unofficial convoys). According to Nigerien diplomatic source interviewed, they are the most

29. Refoulement is the forcible transfer of an individual to a place where they would be at real risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations. The principle of non-refoulement prohibits such transfers. This principle is the cornerstone of international refugee law. It is set out in Article 33 of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and Article 2 of the African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

30. Series of interviews conducted with smugglers from Ain Guezzam in the eponymous city, December 2018.

problematic in terms of human rights violations and are not part of the 'deal'. Non-Nigeriens are transported in buses to Ain Guezzam and then dropped in trucks in the middle of the desert in a place called 'Houfra' (hole) or Point Zéro. From there, migrants, including women and children, can walk 10 km to reach Assamaka. These operations put migrants' life in extreme danger, violating the principle of non-refoulement. International organizations and Algerian and Nigerien NGOs such as Alarm Phone Sahara, the Algerian League for Human Rights and Amnesty International regularly criticize these operations (League algérienne des droits de l'Homme (Ligue algérienne des droits de l'Homme, 2018, p. 10; Alarm Phone Sahara, 2020). However, these practices continue despite the closure of the border during the pandemic. Indeed, significant expulsion operations continued over 2020, as more than 23,000 migrants were expelled in Assamaka (Assignon, 2021). The Algerian authorities expelled migrants towards northern Mali, which is considered a conflict zone, until 2019. Between 2017 and mid-2018, over 3,000 migrants were dropped and forced to walk from the Algerian villages of Tinzaouatine and Bordj Badji Mokhtar to Tinzaouatine (Mali) and In-Khalil (Amnesty International, 2018). These repatriation operations have been financed by the Algerian state. In March 2018, a violent demonstration broke out in front of the Algerian Embassy in Bamako, where many young Malians recently deported from Algeria protested against the poor treatment of the Algerian authorities (MaliJet, 2018). Algiers framed these operations as only 'repatriations' of locals from northern communities, not 'expulsion' operations (Beratto 2015).³¹ Since this unprecedented incident, Algeria almost stopped deporting migrants along the Mali-Algeria border.

Six years after the implementation of the agreement with Niger, Algeria's approach to irregular migration has been hamstrung by its lack of a clearly defined vision or public strategy on the issue. The Algerian authorities developed no well-thought and pragmatic migration management strategy system. In July 2017, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, the current President of Algeria, who was prime minister under Abdelaziz Bouteflika, announced that his government would set a clear agenda to fix the 'problem' of irregular migrants (Algérie

31. The notion of 'repatriation' arose in an informal discussion with a law enforcement officer posted in Tinzaouatine (Algeria) in December 2018. This might suggest that the Algerian authorities frame these operations internally (within the security forces) as part of the 'repatriation'.

Press Service, 2017). Tebboune declared at the National Assembly that ‘the presence of our African brothers will be regulated’, promising residency cards to migrants whose presence in Algeria was approved. This card would have given access to work opportunities and essential state services. Tebboune justified this move as an action driven by Algeria's desire to protect the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. However, this promise was neither realized during his short period in 2017 as a Prime Minister nor his mandate as president since December 2019.

This chapter has tried to deconstruct the mechanisms and modes of regulation put in place by the Algerian authorities to govern the influx of migration towards Algeria. We have shown that Algeria did not find a way to reconcile its security concerns with an agile and well-thought-out migration policy driven by pragmatism and the respect of human rights. We also demonstrated that the general management of irregular migration obeys political considerations nurtured by domestic security considerations. We stated that even if Algeria has no official partnership with the EU to stem migrant flows and does not participate in EU funds aiming to limit migrant flows, its security approach makes Algeria play a de facto "gendarme" role in the region, a function that is convenient for the EU as it deepens border externalization in the Sahara-Sahel. The instrumentalization of the repatriation deal with Niger into forcing the mass expulsion of migrants via the southern borders is indicative of how the regime is not willing to put a whole-of migration governance strategy. Even post-pandemic, Algeria continues to regulate the number of migrants present on its territory through this mechanism despite the agreement being not made public or having no legal basis. Unofficial mass expulsion operations act as an authoritarian migration management instrument. Its implementation is the consequence of the disequilibrium of power between the Algerian and Nigerien authorities and the silence of the European institutions on such violent practices since they go together with stemming the flows of migrants in the Sahara-Sahel. While the UN and human rights organizations regularly condemn these expulsion practices without success, the European Union “regrets the difficulties of cooperation with Algeria on migration issues”, reported a diplomat in Algiers.³² Although a strict security approach taints the governance of irregular migration,

32. Interview with a European diplomat in Algiers, December 2018.

it is also the expression of the authorities' preference for opaque management of irregular migration, facilitated by the remoteness of the South and supported by a hard narrative on securing borders and national security. However, as we will see in chapter 3, there is a strong dissonance between the official narrative on the fight against human smuggling and the practicalities of this economy in southern borderlands.

Chapter 3: 'Borderlands, informal institutions and regulation of human smuggling in southern Algeria'

The literature on North African migration often presumes that borders in central Sahara are homogenous, unregulated and porous, suggesting that it is easy for smugglers, traffickers and terrorists alike to cross frontiers (Miles, 2017; Rousselier 2018; Browne 2013). In this vision, cross border movement is portrayed as a consequence of low state capacity and the regulation of informal economies, such as human smuggling, as relying on personalistic and informal institutions. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 1, p.23), Helmke and Levitsky (2004) showed that there is no clear line of separation between formal and informal institutions governing informality and smuggling economies. The latter function in a hybrid fashion in which the interests of a plethora of actors are intertwined through rules that codify smuggling instances. It is important to recall that Helmke and Levitsky (2004, p.37) define formal institutions as "rules that are openly codified, in the sense that they are established and communicated through channels that are widely accepted as official," contrasted with informal institutions as "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels".

Using concrete ethnographic observation and examples collected during my field research and building upon the work done by Helmke and Levitsky (2004) and Gillien (2020), this chapter argues that human smuggling in Algeria's borders with Niger and Mali is governed through a set of differentiated rules shared between security forces posted at the borders, migrants, smugglers and people from borderlands. These rules are characterized by being unwritten, impersonal, shared with no strong hierarchy between them. They are also dynamic, as they evolve according to the politico-security environment, the social dynamics on the ground and the geography – each village or city has its features. By closely researching the functioning and practices of smuggling economies in the borderlands of Ain Guezzam, Tinzaouatine, Timiaouine and Bordj Badji Mokhtar, I found that the two presuppositions: 1) Informality continues to develop because of the weak capacity of the state; and 2) Smuggling

takes place mainly based on personalistic practices of cooptation and corruption, to be empirically weak.

For clarity purposes, this chapter is split into two parts following a geographic division. First, an assessment of the governance of human smuggling and contraband at the Algeria-Niger border, and second, a similar assessment at the Algeria-Mali borders. Both sections primarily focus on the unwritten rules shaping the smuggling economies in Algeria's borderlands with Niger (Ain Guezzam) and Mali (Tinzaoutine, Timiaouine, Bordj Badji Mokhtar) which I all visited during my fieldwork. The Algeria-Mali border section focuses only on the human smuggling dynamics while the Algeria-Niger section looks at both human smuggling and contraband economy. That is so because the human smuggling economy at the Algeria-Mali border is functionally independent from contraband of goods which is not the case of the Algeria-Niger border where migrants take part in the contraband system, particularly at the desert market of El Akla. This will be presented in more details below.

1. The governance of migration along the Algeria-Niger border

Most of the smuggling activity along the 1,250 kilometres border between Algeria and Niger takes place along the corridor connecting the Algerian border city of Ain Guezzam to the small village of Assamaka in northern Niger, located only 15 kilometres south of the border. Land border crossings between the two countries have been officially closed since June 2013 for security concerns (Kareche, 2019). Since that year, Algeria built a sand berm of 2 to 4 meters high along its southern (Mali and Niger) and eastern borders (Libya) in the name of national security and the necessity of protecting its vast territory against what the state perceives as a threatening environment (Carayol & Gagnol, 2021). Nevertheless, from 2013 to 2020, the sand route from Ain Guezzam to Assamaka remained partially open and accessible for two actors. A small number of Algerian exporters have been authorized to pursue trade in Niger. They can cross at the official entry point of Ain Guezzam twice per month to export commodities such as dates, pasta or cement. In return, Algerian exporters have to import products from Niger with equal worth. The list of businesspeople authorized to access this trade is elaborated each year by the local chamber of commerce in Tamanrasset, based on criteria such as the type of products

exported, number of employees and the geographical position of the trader.³³ In addition to traders, the second actor authorized to cross the border despite its official closure is given to Algerians who have family in northern Niger. They can move across the border via a different informal exit post located three kilometres south of Ain Guezzam. A mix of law enforcement units constituted by border police units (*Police algérienne des frontières* (PAF), *Gendarmerie nationale*, Customs and sometimes the army, monitor this border crossing post. The latter manage and control the entry and exist of this informal corridor so that local communities can send a limited amount of food and essential goods to their families in Niger. Before taking the desert journey to Niger, local transporters have to obtain a "right of exit" (*Droit de sortie*), locally called "*Passe-avant*" at the Algerian Customs office of Ain Guezzam. This administrative document is valid only for one day and easily obtained by transporters living in Ain Guezzam.

The "passe-avant", a formal instrument of an official institution (Customs), appeared to be a key instrument for the smuggling economy along the Algeria-Niger border through this research project. Thanks to the "passe-avant" mechanism, most daily goods transported from Ain Guezzam to Niger are diverted for contraband. Most Algerian products leaving Ain Guzzam ended up in an informal smuggling market, located on the desert border - but within Nigerien territory- called "El Akla". "El Akla is a unique place in the region. It is a sort of dry port for smugglers. No one controls this market...Everything can be sold here, including food, drugs and arms at very competitive prices", reported a local Tuareg smuggler from Ain Guezzam.³⁴ The market has existed since the early 2000s. However, the market boomed following the closure of the Algeria-Niger border and the declining importance of other traffic hubs across the region, more specifically, the one in the remote village of In-Khalil in northern Mali (Scheele, 2012, p.60).

The modus operandi of contraband run by local smugglers between Ain Guezzam and El Akla is routinized and is shaped by impersonal and shared rules between the security units

33. A trader must be based in one of the three southern *wilayas* (provinces) of Algeria, namely Tamanrasset, Adrar and Illizi. Since December 2021, the number of wilayas that share borders with Niger and Mali rose to five due to the new territorial division.

34. Interview with a local smuggler from Ain Guezzam, Ain Guezzam, November 2018.

(*Gendarmerie nationale* and *Police des frontières*), the Customs and smugglers. Any individual from Ain Guezzam who owns a 4X4 vehicle, masters the desert navigation and can prove residency in town can join the contraband economy through the *Passe-avant* mechanism. Smugglers in Ain Guezzam buy goods (basic food, electronics, fuel) from the city's wholesale stores the day before their departure to El Akla. Early morning, they meticulously load their vehicle with basic goods and commodities (food, fuel, metal...etc.) with the help of usually one or two assistants who take part in the journey. "I need to make sure that nothing might fall while we are driving in the desert and those jerrycans of fuel are barely visible and well-concealed...That is my part of the job", said a young assistant of a local Nigerien-Algerian smuggler living in Ain Guezzam.³⁵ After loading vehicles, smugglers place their 4x4 in line and wait along the main road in front of the Customs office to obtain the "passe-avant". The document costs 1000 DZD (approximately 5 Euros). Once received, smugglers drive to the informal border post towards the El Akla market, under the eyes of the *Gendarmerie* stationed along the main road. When they arrive at the border post, the dynamic between security forces and smugglers is regulated through a set of unwritten rules shared between the law enforcement forces posted at the border point of entry and the smugglers. "There are no specific restrictions on who might (or not) take part in the business, but there are some things to respect", reported a young man assisting his father who crosses the border twice a week. In the smuggler's lexicon, these "things" refer to the rules codifying the contraband and its *modus operandi*. These rules are unwritten, and they are the product of the interaction between formal and informal institutions. While some of these rules include instances of corruption, they remain non-personalistic, i.e., not related to the individual but to the rule itself. They are also unwritten because this characteristic applies as a filter (who knows and does not know the rule) and cannot be publicly assumed by the formal institutions beyond the local communities who benefit from it. The non-personalistic and unwritten features give a degree of stability to law enforcement monitoring the border that is highly appreciated (Gillien 2020). "We prefer to know what is and when it is smuggled rather than face the unknown", reported a Customs agent in Ain Guezzam.³⁶

35. Interview with an assistant of a smuggler from Ain Guezzam, Ain Guezzam, November 2018.

36. Informal discussion with a Customs agent (*Direction Générale de la Douane algérienne*) in Ain Guezzam, October 2018.

Following the definition of informal and informal institution suggested by Helme and Levitsky (2004), the unwritten rules governing smuggling along the Ain Guezzam-Assamaka can be listed as follows:

1. **Always transport goods with a valid daily "passe-avant"**: smugglers who attempt to make the journey to El Akla via the informal crossing point south of Ain Guezzam need to get a valid "passe-avant". This is the most obvious rule. Without renewing their administrative entry document at the Customs' office in town, transporters can be the subject of a costly fine of up to 200,000 DA (approximately 1,000 Euros) and, more importantly, the possible seizure of the vehicle. Therefore, there is no advantage in trying to cross the border without getting the "passe-avant". This rule is respected by all those who practice contraband and migrant transporting.
2. **Never transport weapons, drugs and medicines**: Smugglers cannot cross the border with illicit goods and licit products such as medicines. The Algerian security forces, especially the army and the Gendarmerie units, apply a zero-tolerance approach against their transporters. Any person who risks getting involved in this trafficking is subject to heavy prison sentences, and his vehicle is immediately seized. I interviewed smugglers who use the informal crossing point and who consider arm and drug trafficking as too risky and rarely get into this business. Trafficking networks controlling the movement of weapons, drugs, and medicines operate from outside of Ain Guezzam. They are different from those practicing contraband (those who profit from price differential from selling licit goods). There is a clear delineation between small-scale and dominating contraband players and the networks engaged in arms and drugs trafficking. The army exerts a hierarchy in terms of its "prohibition of flows" in which arms and drugs are at the top, followed by drugs, sensitive electronics and jackhammers used for illegal gold mining, and cigarettes. Next in this scale are migrants, followed by basic commodities including gasoline, staples and food which are seen as 'acceptable' from the state perspective, but this also depends on how security forces assess the security situation on the

ground. Smugglers who operate from Ain Guezzam via the "passe-avant" mechanism know this hierarchy as the unwritten zero-tolerance markets.

- 3. Paying a sum of 1000 to 2000 DZD (5 to 10 Euros):** each smuggler exiting from Ain Guezzam to El Akla slips a 1000 or 2000 DZD note (approximately 5 Euros) in the vehicle's papers before giving them to the security forces. The double of this amount is sometimes required if the documents of the vehicle are not in order. This is an unwritten and shared rule known by smugglers active in the region. Interestingly, this bribe is usually offered to the Customs or the *Police des frontières* (PAF) only. When the army units are around at the checkpoint, the smugglers know they should not slip a banknote. Otherwise, the law enforcement official needs to take the money discreetly or give the paperback with the note. These dynamics occur within a brief period at the border crossing point, and it is often the riskiest moment for the smuggler.

Unwritten rules governing the transporting of migrants in the El Akla-Ain Guezzam-Assamaka triangle

Over the last five years, the El Akla market has become an essential landing stop for migrants looking for temporary employment opportunities before attempting to get into Algeria with smugglers (Farrah, 2020a, p.13). At the entrance of El Akla, I saw a hundred of migrants waiting in the sand or boarding the 4x4s coming from Algeria to offer their services to unload the merchandise to pay for the next stage. According to local smugglers, around 1,000 -1,500 migrants per month attempt to enter Algeria via Ain Guezzam.³⁷ Most migrants will attempt to cross the border with smugglers who practice contraband through the "passe-avant"

37. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) developed a global tool called the Data Tracking Matrix (DTM) to monitor the movement of flows in some specific regions of the globe. This is IOM DTM monitors migrant's activity in Niger through seven active Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) in Niger. However, there is no FMP at the Algeria-Niger border. The northernmost point is in Agadez. For more information, see <https://dtm.iom.int/niger>.

mechanism.³⁸ Interviews with many smugglers and migrants revealed that most smugglers operating in this economy prefer to avoid transporting migrants on their way back to Algeria. “This is a risky take, especially if you meet the army patrolling on your way back to the checkpoint. In reality, this is too risky for small amounts of money”, reported a Tuareg smuggler from Ain Guezzam.³⁹ Those who do not practice contraband using the “passe-avant” hold another view and are more willing to take the risk of transporting migrants to Algeria. They transport only a few migrants in their own vehicles from Niger to Ain Guezzam. Most of the times, the Algerian security forces do not check the Passe-avant tickets when vehicles come back from the market of El Akla. If they are questioned or stopped, they pretend that they participated in the Passe-avant system and that migrants with them (2-3 maximum) are family members. Therefore, the difference between those who participate in the passe-avant system and the others smugglers is that the first might lose completely their ability to benefit from the *passe-avant* system whereas the others don’t have this privilege. “I transport migrants at least one time per week on my way back from Niger. It is good money that pays for my fuel for the week. I do not take more than 2-3 people. If the Gendarmerie asks me who these people are, I say these are my cousins helping me in my business. This is why I take only Nigeriens”, reported a younger smuggler who lives between Arlit and Ain Guezzam and who has dual Algerian and Nigerien citizenship.⁴⁰

Smugglers trafficking larger number of migrants (more than 2-3 people) along the Algeria-Niger border are active outside the border crossing of Ain Guezzam (formal border point used by registered businessmen and informal crossing points used by the *passe-avant* users). Their modus operandi of human smuggling is not new (Tinti & Westcott 2016). Like the cases presented above, the smuggling economy is shaped by a set of dynamic and unwritten rules indirectly negotiated between smugglers, security forces and migrants. The first rule concerns the crossing of the berm. The smugglers operating in the Nigerien territory drop off migrants between one to two kilometers from the sand berm. Migrants have to cross the berm by night in order to avoid security surveillance. Crossing the berm is a terrifying experience as most

38. The commodities that are part of the contraband economy in these borderlands arrive from northern Algeria to Tamanrasset through formal trade circuits. From Tamanrasset, these commodities are transported to Tin Zaouatine, Timiaouine and Ain Guezzam, leaving Algeria as part of the contraband economy.

39. Interview with a Tuareg smuggler from Ain Guezzam, Ain Guezzam, November 2018.

40. Interview with a Tuareg smuggler from Ain Guezzam in the eponymous city, November 2018.

migrants have no indication of where to go and what can happen to them if they are arrested. Smugglers never attempt to cross the berm with migrants, whether by foot or vehicle. They bring the migrants to specific geolocation to cross – locally named the "El pipe" about a pipeline - and give them instructions on crossing the berm and reaching Ain Guezzam. “We are not allowed to get to the pipe...We drop migrants, and they have to walk. That is the deal...Sometimes, I arrange the rest of the journey for them too”, reported a Nigerien smuggler.⁴¹

Similarly, human smugglers active on the Algerian side do not get closer than two to three kilometres from the berm. This is also a shared rule resulting from a cost-benefit analysis as the risk of arrest and seizure is high, and incentives to get close to the berm are few. Most smugglers prefer transporting migrants between Ain Guezzam and Tamanrasset, where they can charge around 8,000 DZD (40 euros) per migrant and earn up to 64,000 DZD (320 euros) per trip. The security forces active in Ain Guezzam are much more tolerant of local smugglers transporting migrants to Tamanrasset than of those operating close to the border, i.e. south of Ain Guezzam. “It is considered a red zone”, as described by an activist in Ain Guezzam. The second rule is that smugglers transporting migrants to ‘Tam’ have to use desert off-roads leading directly to the entrance of Tamanrasset and avoiding checkpoints. For many smugglers interviewed, the modus operandi of the activity is not rooted in patronage relationships with local nobles or members of the security services. Instead, it is a tacit agreement shaped by socially shared rules, communicated, enforced and negotiated by and between smugglers, borderlanders and security forces (Gillien 2020, p.12). In Ain Guezzam, some smugglers referred to the migrant smuggling economy as a "negotiated public good" with contours conveyed between the smugglers and security forces. It is perceived as such because the culture of smuggling and contraband in borderlands is deeply anchored, partly due to the relative acceptance of the state of these economies, and also due to the low number of alternative livelihoods. From a community view, smugglers refer to their business as a transportation service aiming to serve people’s well-being despite the fact that it is prohibited by law.

2. Human smuggling dynamics along the Algeria-Mali border

41. *Ibid.*,

The unwritten rules regulating the migratory economy along the Mali-Algeria border differ from those prevailing on the Algeria-Niger border. This differentiation is explained by geographic, demographic and political-security features specific to the Malian border. The Algeria-Mali border is more populated than the Algeria-Niger one. On the Algerian border with Mali, there are three principal localities: Tinzaouatine and Timiaouine and Bordj Badji Mokhtar, all of which are inhabited by Tuareg and Arab communities. At the same time, Ain Guezzam is the only inhabited place on the Algeria-Niger border. Moreover, Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Timiaouine and Tinzaouatine have their village counterparts on the Malian side, namely In-Khalil, Talhandak, Tinzaouatine in northern Mali. The dual distribution of villages along this border entails that the density of cross-border activities is high. The village of Tinzaouatine is a particular case scenario. Tinzaouatine, locally named "Tinza", is a twin village divided between Mali and Algeria as the two villages are separated by a river (called "Oued") about 50 meters wide. The inhabitants of the two "Tinza" are from the same families. They freely cross the *Oued* under the eye of the Gendarmerie nationale and the *Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad*, the largest political-security coalition in northern Mali and a signatory to the Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.⁴²

West of Tinzaouatine, the Algerian village of Timiaouine is also linked to the Malian village of Talhandak, located about 15 kilometres from the Algerian border. Similarly, the town of Bordj Badji Mokhtar is directly related to the strategic village of In-Khalil (Mali). The Bordj Badji Mokhtar - In-Khalil axis was historically the most critical trafficking route in the central Sahara. In the 2000s, In-Khalil emerged as a strategic transit area for contraband and trafficking (Scheele, 2009; International Crisis Group, 2018). Everything could be exchanged, ranging from drugs to weapons to the famous *Lahda*, the Algerian milk powder consumed in northern Mali and transported from Tamanrasset (Grégoire 2018, para. 25). However, the militarization of the Algeria-Malia border reduced the importance of In-Khalil as a strategic trafficking hub since the Tuareg rebellion and Islamist insurgency in 2012 and the regular clashes between Arab and Tuareg communities from the year 2012 to 2014 to exert control over In-Khalil. On

42. For more information on the *Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad* (CMA), see the group's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/www.azawad24>.

the Malian side of the border, the CMA controls the border villages of In-Khalil, Talhandak and Tinzaouatine, operating at least one checkpoint in these villages.

In terms of surveillance, the Algeria-Mali border is more militarized than the one Algeria shares with Niger. The Algerian army intensely monitors the area around Bordj Badji Mokhtar thanks to the establishment of the sand berm and the deployment of mixed security patrols (gendarmeries, armed forces, border police), radars and checkpoints along the border (Micallef et al., 2019). The Ministry of National Defense justifies the hard militarization of this border as the response against insecurity and terrorist threats in northern Mali.⁴³ The *Jamā'at nuṣrat al-islām wal-muslimīn* (JNIM), the Sahara-Sahel branch of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), led by the former Tuareg rebel Iyad Ag Ghali, is active only few kilometers from the Algerian border (Lounnas, 2019). Also, the army finds regularly arms caches in the region of Bordj Badji Mokhtar, justifying the need for drastic security and surveillance measures. The sand trench is also regularly reinforced by the army since 2013, and the city of Bordj Badji Mokhtar is surrounded by a second trench which makes the entrance in town much harder. Over the past few years, Bordj Badji Mokhtar has become the most militarized area on the southern border of Algeria, and the army applies a "zero tolerance" approach in the name of the fight against terrorism and organized crime (Micallef et al., 2019; Lacher 2013).

Despite the intense militarization of the Mali-Algeria border weakening human smuggling and contraband economies over the last decade, cross-border activities, whether contraband, trafficking or human smuggling, continue to prevail even if contraband declined significantly (Bensassi, Brockmeyer, Pellerin & Raballand, 2017). Small-scale young *shumara* (unemployed) practicing the contraband of essential commodities are those hit the most (Micallef & al., 2019). This section of the research does not focus on the contraband dynamics along the Algeria-Mali border but rather on the human smuggling dynamics only. Human smugglers operating from Algeria's borderlands to the north resumed their activities over the last three years to the extent that the number of people heading to Algeria from northern Mali

43. For more information, see the El Djeich Magazine of the Ministry of National Defense: https://www.mdn.dz/site_principal/sommaire/revues/images/eldjeich_fr.pdf

might overcome the numbers from northern Niger.⁴⁴ Along the Algeria-Mali borders, smuggling continues to develop neither on the back of the weak capacity of the state, nor does smuggling take place on personalized practices of cooptation. Similar to what is observed at the Algeria-Niger border, these unwritten rules shared between security forces posted at the borders, migrants, smugglers and people from borderlands evolve depending on the politico-security situation in Tinzaouatine, Timiaouine and Bordj Badji Mokhtar. The focus of the following sections is to identify the practices of human smuggling from northern Mali to Algeria, far from the mainstream analysis that portrays border dynamics in central Sahara through the border porosity lens, or through the narrative of the Algerian army, which describes the borders as "closed" to the movement of flows.

The existing literature widely covers the modus operandi by which migrants reach the Algerian border (Cantens & Raballand, 2016; Scheele 2009, 2012). Sub-Saharan migrants who pass through Mali to reach Algeria take multiple means of transport within the ECOWAS to get to the two primary destinations in northern Mali: Timbuktu and Gao. These two cities are the main places of departure for migrants before the great crossing of the Sahara and then heading to North Africa or Europe. According to the International Organization for Migration, if Gao had historically been an important starting point for south-north migration, Timbuktu has overtaken it regarding the number of migrants heading to the city to reach the Algeria-Mali border (IOM).⁴⁵ Also, the number of sub-Saharan migrants who have reached the Algerian border has exceeded those who attempt to access Algeria via the border with Niger over the last two years.⁴⁶ From Gao and Timbuktu, migrants use the services of Tuareg smugglers who transport them through clandestine routes through the *Adrar des Ifoghas* desert. Most human smugglers between Gao, Timbuktu and the Algerian-Malian border benefit from protection from armed groups operating in the region, which facilitate their movement in order to levy taxes on migrants' convoys (United Nations 2019). However, these armed groups are not directly involved in the smuggling of migrants as profits are not sufficiently high. Nevertheless, some members that are either close or members of the two largest coalitions of armed groups,

44. Phone interview with an international expert on migration working for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), September 2018.

45. For the latest data, see the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Data Tracking Matrix (Mali), <https://dtm.iom.int/mali>

46. *Ibid.*,

namely the CMA and the Platform, are involved in securing the passage to Algeria and controlling human trafficking hangar in northern Mali.⁴⁷

The desert routes to reach the Algerian border from northern Mali are numerous, but three main corridors exist. The first one connects the city of Gao to the Malian village of Tinzaouatine via the Adrar des Ifoghas rocky desert. The second goes from Gao to the village of Talhandak via Aguelhok. The third corridor runs from Timbuktu directly to the village of In-Frak near the Algerian border. The desert routes connecting Timbuktu or Gao to the remote village of Taoudenni is rarely used by migrant's transporters because the desert in this area is challenging to navigate. Over the last three years, the two most accessible routes to reach Algeria are the Talhandak-Timiaouine and Tinzaouatine (Algeria) - Tinzaouatine (Mali) routes. In most cases, the smugglers who bring migrants from Gao and Timbuktu to Algeria do not help them cross the border (Tinti & Reitano, 2016). Strategies to cross the border vary depending on the crossing location, destination city, and the modus operandi chosen by the smuggler and migrants. The following sections detail the regulation and modus operandi of border crossing Timiaouine, Tinzaouatine and Bordj Badji Mokhtar.

Timiaouine: flexible entry point towards Tamanrasset

Inhabited by sedentary Tuareg communities, the village of Timiaouine is located 11 km from the border and is also the closest borderland village to the city of Tamanrasset. Most of its population lives on cattle herding and smuggling activities. Of the three locations along the Algeria-Malia border, Timiaouine is the village where the security presence is lowest. The people of Timiaouine explain the lower security presence by the fact that the village has been peaceful.⁴⁸ When I did my fieldwork in 2018, I felt that the general atmosphere in the village was favourable compared with Bordj Badji Mokhtar, for instance, where the security presence

47. In 2018, for instance, the United Nations identified Mahamadou Ag Rhissa (alias Mohamed Talhandak), a member of the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA), as one of the key figures in the trafficking and smuggling of migrants to the Algerian border. He was also charged with human trafficking, including the exploitation and abuse of women. For more information, read Mahamadou Ag Rhissa's profile on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC): <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/mahamadou-ag-rhissa>.

48. According to a local journalist, only one major incident took place in Timiaouine between migrants and human smugglers over the last years. For more information, you can consult Kareche (2016).

is high. Another resident of Timiaouine highlighted that Timiaouine is not a central trafficking hub for arms, drugs and other illegal commodities. Timiaouine also has a tradition of welcoming migrants in distress. In January 2012, the village hosted more than 11,000 Malian refugees who fled the 2012-2013 Rebellion and found refuge in Algeria (Hayed, 2013). These migrants were hosted in a temporary refugee camp run by the Algerian Red Crescent on the outskirts of the village. These factors partly explain what has made Timiaouine the most privileged operating area for human smugglers and a key entry point for migrants crossing the border. A few thousands of migrants attempt annually to travel to Algeria via the many clandestine routes linking the northern village of Talhandak in Mali to Timiaouine.⁴⁹

One smuggler from Timiaouine described human smuggling as a “transporting activity with rules that need to be respected” during the fieldwork. The first rule is similar to the one prevailing along the Algeria-Niger border: 1) no smuggler or transporter can get close to the one kilometer away from the border, and 2) smugglers have no longer the right to enter the village with migrants, so they have to transport migrants immediately to Tamanrasset. Until 2015, most human smugglers operating in the area could travel to Talhandak (Mali) to bring migrants to Timiaouine and host them one or two days before departing towards Tamanrasset. Nevertheless, the presence of migrants in Timiaouine has increasingly become a source of frustration in town, especially for the Municipality, as the number of slums grew over the last years.⁵⁰ These slums are small-scale migrant houses occupied by migrants stopping in town before moving towards the north and most of them are run by Malian migrants. Tensions rarely rose between residents and migrants in Timiaouine. In autumn 2016, however, tensions broke out between a group of West African migrants and Tuareg smugglers that transport migrants from Timiaouine to Tamanrasset. The migrants refused to pay the transport fees, arguing that they had given the total payment to smugglers in northern Mali as both networks are working together. This incident led to violence between smugglers and migrants in the village, and the gendarmerie units were deployed to stop the fighting. “Since this incident, we are not allowed to enter with migrants in the village”, reported Mohammed, an experienced transporter who continued to drive migrants to Tamanrasset.⁵¹ When I asked him how he learned that the

49. Interview with a local journalist from Timiaouine, November 2018.

50. Interview with a smuggler from Timiaouine, November 2018.

51. Interview with Mohamed, a transporter from Timiaouine, November 2018.

Gendarmerie no longer wanted this kind of practice, Mohammed's response was straightforward: "These are things that are negotiated. Between whom? I do not know...However, any information concerning smuggling circulates quickly here. There is no need to write it or to designate someone to publicize it".⁵²

While migrant's smugglers operating in Timiaouine have been avoiding hosting migrants in town since then, the *Gendarmerie nationale*, on its hand, has eased the transport of migrants from the border to Tamanrasset. This does not mean that smugglers operating as "migrant's transporters" do not risk being arrested along their 450 kilometers journey towards Tamanrasset. This risk remains high, but the latitude for smugglers to get close to the border became relatively more flexible. This has led to greater cooperation between smugglers from the two sides of the borders without breaching the "not crossing the frontier" rule. Abbi, a young man from Timiaouine, has been doing so for over a year: "I work with my cousin in *Talha* (Talhandak). We organize the journey so that we bring migrants to Tam. We wait for the good moment in terms of security surveillance. Then, when it is the right time, my cousin transports migrants to a specific geolocation point. He tells them exactly where to cross the berm...In tandem, I wait for migrants in the early hours of the morning 2 kilometres facing the geolocation point.", reported Abbi.⁵³ Therefore, migrants cross the sand berm alone (no breach to rule 1), and they have to walk to find a second smuggler for the remaining part of the journey. This has been the most common strategy to transport migrants from northern Mali to Tamanrasset. Prices charged by smugglers for the Timiaouine-Tamanrasset journey vary between 4,000 and 5,000 DNA (20-25 euros) per person. Depending on the vehicle, smugglers take up to 6 migrants and earn up to 150 Euros in one trip. However, as Mohamed explains, this depends on several factors, including an indirect push to leave more space for smuggling and the security state of play along the Mali-Algeria border. "Sometimes, we have to stop the migrant's transporting business for a month or two. It is very hard. However, when the security level is at its maximum, you cannot work. It is too dangerous, and you are at risk of getting your vehicle seized".⁵⁴ Alike many other smugglers in the region, Mohamed does not see himself as a "criminal" nor as "bad guy" taking advantage of migrant's distress. He positions himself within the category of

52. Interview with Mohamed, a transporter from Timiaouine, November 2018.

53. Interview with Abbi in Timiaouine, November 2018.

54. Interview with Mohamed from Timiaouine, Timiaouine, November 2018.

"transporters" who does good to help people reach their life goal. This perception among migrant smugglers active in southern Algeria is common, not only as a way to morally value their work, but because they truly consider that they also take a great share of the risk. This reality contrasts with the image of the "evil smuggler", often portrayed by most mainstream Media when they cover the topic of migration in the Sahara-Sahel. While migrant smuggling from Timiaouine appears to be the easiest along the Algeria-Mali border, it is, in reality, a permanent balancing act in which the rules that shape the politics of informality are indirectly negotiated, then agreed, but their terms constantly remain open to further adjustments (Gillien 2020). Arranging these impersonal rules is key to security forces and smugglers because, simply, it is a way to shape predictability that reduces the risk of operating in a volatile environment.

Tinzaouatine, crossing the border on foot

Separated by a dry river (called locally "El Oued") most of the year, the twin villages of Tin Zaouatine have the specificity of being divided between Algeria and Mali. This Algerian village is inhabited by a few thousand people and can be reached after at least nine hours of driving from Tamanrasset. Only a few dozen families still live on the Malian side of the village, under the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA). There is no official border crossing point in this area, but the river plays this "natural" role. The *El Oued* that separates the two "Tinzas" – the local name of the village - is a strategic area for exchange. Several wells also exist on the thin river border strip, making it a key source of life, especially for herders. Such a unique geographical position permits local inhabitants to cross the border on foot (50 meters between the two banks) to visit their families, transport essential commodities or food, and for herders, to benefit from the graze on the other side of the border. Local inhabitants can move from one side of the river to the other even if the border has been officially closed since 2013. The closure of the border means that even if Malians are exempted from visas to travel to Algeria (90 days), they have to use the service of a *passeur* (smuggler) to enter Algeria, except for those from Tinzaouatine. The latter can enter by presenting their papers to the Gendarmerie. Cross-border movement occurs under the supervision of the *Gendarmerie nationale* on the Algerian side and the CMA checkpoint posted at the entrance of the Malian village. One should

note that there is no sand berm separating the two Tinzaouatine in this part of the border connecting the two Tinzas. The fact that people are allowed to cross the border informally at the two Tinzaouatine should not suggest that the mobility is open to all types of movements and actors nor that human smuggling is widespread.

On the contrary, it is mainly well regulated through unwritten rules shared between the inhabitants and the security forces. The thin border strip connecting the two villages is precisely where most contraband and human smuggling occurs, while illegal trafficking of arms and drugs happens outside of Tinzaouatine. A sand berm is erected from the outskirts of Tinzaouatine and is closely monitored by the army's units. The intense militarization of the Algeria-Mali border since the upheaval in northern Mali in 2012 has negatively affected the lifestyle of the inhabitants of Tinzaouatine, restricting the mobility of herders and transporters, which is an essential feature of Saharan life. The movement of people and goods between the two "Tinzas" has been reduced and, more importantly, closely monitored by security forces. Herders are now forced to make deviations to reach grazing areas while the young *shumaras* (unemployed) transporting goods and merchandise use the more dangerous and clandestine route in the desert. In May 2020, the Algerian security forces unilaterally installed a barbed-wire fence separating the two Tinzaouatine areas, preventing essential foodstuffs smuggled from Algeria to Mali and pastoralists from crossing the border. While the security forces argued that this measure was to control the flow of people and limit the spread of the pandemic, the reasons behind such a decision remain unclear. The establishment of this wire generated an enormous frustration among local inhabitants (Farrah, 2020c). It exacerbated tensions against the marginalization and exclusion of the borderlands. In June 2020, violent clashes between young demonstrators and security forces broke out in Tinzaouatine after youngsters decided to pull out the barbed wire. Five people were injured, and Ayoub Ag Adji, 17-year-old, was killed after being hit by unidentified live ammunition, raising a massive outrage in Algeria (Abed 2020). While the situation has calmed down in Tinzaouatine after removing the barbed wire, relations between the security forces and the population have hardly improved since then. The barbed wire deadly event has further complicated contraband and human smuggling in Tinzaouatine, weakening the 'trust capital' required to practice smuggling in this environment. The notion of trust rarely surfaces in the public discourse of authorities and smugglers. However, it is a fundamental

element in the preparation and enforcement of smuggling practices, especially when actors occupy circumscribed geographical areas.

When I did my fieldwork in Tinzaoutine between October and December 2018, over a dozen smugglers from Tinzaouatine specialized in transporting migrants from Tinzaoutine to Tamanrasset. At that time, the conditions for crossing the river were untroubled. Still, human smuggling is regulated through a set of rules strictly respected by the well-known smuggler and transporters operating from the centre of Tinzaouatine. Rule number one is that only Malians and, more specifically, those with valid passports can attempt to cross. Crossings at Tinzaouatine take place in broad daylight, unlike in Timiaouine and In-Khalil where migrants climb alone the sand berm. “The Malian Tuaregs, in particular, can enter Algeria quite easily from here”, reported a local smuggler. They need to be accompanied by a local smuggler from Tinzaouatine and enter Algeria in a small number, i.e., no more than four people at a time. Practically, the smuggler would go to Tinzaouatine Mali, to bring essential commodities to the family and return to Algeria before the sunset accompanied by migrants. “We know when the Gendarmerie is permissive or when there is a security personnel turnover. That is usually when we operate. We know the perfect timing and how to take advantage of that without creating more threats to the security forces”, explains Abi, 40 years old Tuareg smuggler from Tinzaouatine.⁵⁵ Certain factors can make the crossing easier. Migrants who have a valid passport and speak the Algerian (Arabic) dialect, which indicates that they have already worked and lived in Algeria, are more likely to cross the border. “This is the third time that I have come to work in Algeria. Over the last three times, I entered via Tinzaouatine. Having a valid passport and speaking Algerian makes it easier for me to enter each time” says Ag Mouhoub, a Tuareg plumber from Kidal who entered Algeria via Tinzaouatine.⁵⁶ Like Ag Mouhoub, most migrants who enter from this borderland are from Tuareg and Arab origins. The latter are young men from northern Mali. Other Sahelian and sub-Saharan migrants enter via Bordj Badji Mokhtar and the Timiaouine.

55. Interview with Abbi, a smuggler from Tinzaouatine, November 2018.

56. Interview with Ag Mouhoub from Tamanrasset, Tamanrasset, October 2018.

The migrants from northern Mali do not try to cross the border outside the area controlled by the Gendarmerie but rather at the river level like most of the residents. This rule allows the security forces present on the spot to benefit from several advantages: it enables the Gendarmerie to filter entries by a physical and visual check without imposing restrictions on border communities. The risks are thus shared between security forces and smugglers who bear almost equal responsibility in shaping the movement at this post. This rule is not written or publicly assumed by the authorities. It results from a specific security context related to the geographical position of Tinzaoutine allowing the supervision of the border without criminalizing the activity of local smugglers. This practice totally differs from the cat-mouse smuggling practice which prevails in Bordj Badji Mokhtar for instance (see above) primarily because of the geographic proximity, i.e. they both live and operate in the same area, between the security forces and the local people. At a practical level, the gendarmerie personnel posted along the "border river" can ask anyone who arrives by Tinzaouatine to show his papers. They ask some general questions and allow most individuals to enter, often turning a blind eye to Tuareg Malians who do not have an identity card because of the ties between the two communities.

When Gendarmerie officers check out their papers, smugglers make sure to slip a banknote (2000 DNA – 10 Euros) without necessarily knowing the gendarme personally. Another fundamental unwritten rule shared between smugglers and Gendarmerie is that smugglers and migrants entering Algeria do not carry any objects or goods. Otherwise, the smuggler is systematically stopped by the Gendarmerie. This rule allows reducing uncertainty for both actors. Even though smugglers are rarely arrested in the daylight in this area, they can be "blacklisted", affecting their financial and reputational capital. "This is the worst-case scenario for us. This is bad for us as individuals and for the whole community. This business is our bread and water", reported Hamza, a young local smuggler.

After migrants enter Algeria, they go immediately to the *Triq el Hwanit*, the village's main street, where there is "transporter rank", taking migrants from Tinzaouatine to Tamanrasset. Like one of the rules regulating human smuggling in Timiaouine, local inhabitants of Tinzaouatine are not allowed to host migrants. Therefore, transporters usually leave

Tinzaouatine in the evening while sleeping in the desert before reaching Tamanrasset in the early morning to avoid being bothered by security forces. The shared rules governing the migration economy do not apply since transporters leave Tinzaouatine. This means that there are at risk of being arrested if they are found transporting migrants. Most transporters mix irregular migrants with local inhabitants so that vehicles look less "suspicious", and they charge expansive transportation services to reach Tamanrasset, taking up to 12,000 DZD (60 euros) per migrant.

Bordj Badji Mokhtar: a risky route towards a fortified city

Around the area connecting Bordj Badji Mokhtar to the remote village of In-Khalil in northern Mali, the Algeria-Malia border is highly militarized. In addition to the intense and permanent surveillance imposed by the army units, the city of Bordj Baddji Mokhtar is also surrounded by a sand trench. The active presence of terrorist groups who are part of the Al-Qaida affiliated group of Jamā'at nuṣrat al-islām wal-muslimīn, combined with the regular identification of arms caches justified a "zero tolerance" approach in the area around Bordj Badji Mokhtar. Such militarization has led to a decrease in the volume of contraband and smuggling economies. From the early 2000s to 2013, most irregular migrants who travelled to Algeria used the Bordj Badji Mokhtar - In Khalil route. However, the route's popularity has been overcome by the path leading to Timiaouine and Tinzaouatine, resulting from the fighting around In-Khalil between Tuareg and Algeria's intensification of security measures. When I did my fieldwork in 2018, less than a dozen smugglers were still active in the area, according to information triangulated from various information sources. As a result, migrants in Bordj Badji Mokhtar, historically dominated by Malians, have declined considerably. "There are not many Malians here now. Since the closure of the border, their numbers have decreased. Malians have moved to cities like Tamanrasset or Adrar to find work and a better life. It is also because there is not much trafficking in In-Khalil... "El Bordj" has almost become a military zone," says a young man from the city.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, despite the difficulties faced by migrants to cross to Bordj Badji Mokhtar, some continue to attempt passing via the village of In-Frak (east of In-Khalil), where the route to Borj Badji Mokhtar is less monitored.

57. Interview with a young man from Bordj Badji Mokhtar, December 2018.

Even if human smuggling remains very low from Bordj Badji Mokhtar, a few smugglers continue to operate. The human smuggling economy remains regulated by a network of negotiated rules that are strongly influenced by the decisions of the security forces. Consequently, the modus operandi for crossing the border between In-Khalil and Bordj Badji Mokhtar is more complicated. On the Malian side, smugglers generally drop off migrants about 5 km west of the sand berm. They fear to get closer as reported by a smuggler: “the security forces can shoot if they pinpoint suspicious movement”.⁵⁸ The smugglers do not take any risk to go beyond this point. Similarly, Algerian smugglers who coordinate with their Malian counterparts do not approach the sand berm because of the risks of reprisals. The first rule is that migrants cross the berm on foot, at their own risk, in the early morning hours, following the instructions given by the smugglers. The Algerian smugglers active in that area around Bordj Badji Mokhtar pick up the migrants 2 to 3 kilometres from the berm. “Getting migrants into the vehicle is the most difficult part. We need to do it quickly and discreetly...The security forces know us, and we know them. But that is the way we have to act. Everything must go quickly”.⁵⁹ Interviews conducted in Bordj Badji Mokhtar with community leaders indicate that these smugglers are all known by the security services. They perform what Gilliens (2020, p.10) names the “cat-mouse” smuggling game, in which smugglers and security forces play with their own strengths following rules that structure, control, and regulate their interactions. One local smuggler interviewed described it as a “chess game” in which the price of getting caught transporting migrants closed to the border has to be part of the price. “If I am arrested, in most cases, I can negotiate a price for my release and my vehicle, and migrants are systematically deported. Suppose I manage to bring migrants in the vehicle. In that case, the deal is that they cannot stop me, at least to the border”, reported an experienced smuggler from Bordj Badji Mokhtar. This anecdote is reflective of the “informal arrangement” that shapes the nature of the relationship between smugglers security forces and migrants. Andreas (2009) developed an analysis on the policing of US-Mexico borders that enriches reflection on smuggling dynamics around the Bordj Badji Mokhtar. In this specific area of the Algeria-Mali border, the routinization of these “border games” defies standard features of interactions often portrayed

58. Interview with a young man from Bordj Badji Mokhtar, December 2018.

59. Interview with a smuggler from Bordj Badji Mokhtar, December 2018.

as unstructured. While the statement above suggests that such relationships are primarily based on clientelism, the routinization of these arrangements render such practices impersonal and widely shared (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). In some cases, the interactions that play out between the smugglers and security forces during the cat-mouse experience may be the prelude to security arrangements that maximize the chances of achieving goals. Some among the most experienced and well-connected smugglers to the security forces report on suspicious activities and share information with them on border dynamics and potential threats. In that way, these smugglers consolidate their role as “part of the border”, ultimately decreasing smuggling costs and shaping the power balance with security forces.

What has emerged from this chapter is that human smuggling along Algeria’s southern borders with Mali and Niger is a densely regulated activity. Informal institutions at border crossings, meeting points along the border and desert markets like the El Akla near Ain Guezzam serve to structure, normalize, and shape not only the contraband economy but the human smuggling economy as shown in the beginning of this chapter. The pattern that emerged along this research is the strict separation between licit and illicit goods and that the migrant economy evolves significantly from one border node to another. The rules regulating human smuggling are regularly negotiated between security forces, migrants, smugglers and people from borderlands. They are impersonal, unwritten, dynamic and shared between, with no strict hierarchy between these actors. Human smuggling appears as a highly regulated and segmented economy with dynamics features that affect its routes, prices and modus operandi in a significant way.

Chapter 4: Migratory pathways in Tamanrasset

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter p.25), the use of the notion of transit or ‘country of transit’ for Algeria, and more specifically southern Algeria, is debatable. The notion of transit suggests that migrants reaching a final destination that is different from where they live. Yet, as soon as migrants arrive in southern Algeria and Tamanrasset, they must integrate themselves there, live, work, trade, build relationships before they try to take the next step. Migrants need social and physical relays, they make stops, locate themselves in time and space, find all the necessary information, connections and resources (economic, social and symbolic) to pursue their objectives. Very often, migrants work for a few months to a few years in Tamanrasset before returning to their country of origin, or leaving elsewhere, a place X, where they think they will build better life options (Minvielle, 2011; Bensaâd, 2009a). These routes are often carried out without administrative authorization. They are a long way from the idea of a space of transit. The notion of "pays-étape" (stepping-stone country) does better justice to the spatial configurations produced by these moving populations as they try to overcome borders which are not as porous as the literature claims (Browne, 2013; Miles, 2008, p.201). It also better reflects the difficulties that these migrants face in passing all the "hardships", i.e. all the obstacles encountered not only at the geographical limits of the state, but also inside it. From the city hub of Tamanrasset, it is becoming increasingly difficult for sub-Saharan migrants to ascend to northern towns due to tight controls imposed by security forces.⁶⁰ They must adapt themselves to this reality, often depending on relay points.

On the basis of several interviews carried out in Tamanrasset, the majority of migrants consider that the city is their main point of destination at the time of their arrival. The majority of those questioned see Algeria as a country that can help them build what they call "future options" and a relatively stable country in which migrants can find decent jobs, and save money to be sent to family members. Even when speaking about the few thousand migrants who annually plan to reach European coasts, the long journey inherent to irregular migration does not allow us to refer to the notion of transition, because most of them find themselves stranded

60. Interview with a member of the *Ligue algérienne des droits de l'Homme* (LADDH) (Algerian League of Human Rights) in Algiers, December 2018.

in a country or a region for various reasons and often for a long period of time. Therefore, migrants try to rearrange a temporary life in their stepping-stone country, as is the case for several of the people interviewed in Tamanrasset.

This chapter covers migrant's pathways in the city of Tamanrasset by assessing the elements contributing to their social embeddedness. It aims to fill research gaps on the local lives of migrants in Tamanrasset as the city represents a key stage in circular migratory journeys. It does so through the underestimated role of the "*foyers*" which play a fundamental role in shaping, determining and orientating these journeys. We show that these "foyers" challenge the idea that migrants are in transit as they end up constructing migrant's life itineraries despite the hard living conditions in most of them. For this purpose, this chapter is divided into two parts. First, we present the local dynamics of migrant's life and its evolution in Tamanrasset. Most migrants are well-embedded in the economic life of the city even if they face ghettoization issues in some neighborhoods and pressure from the security forces. Secondly, we deconstruct the political economy of the foyers and the role it plays in shaping migrant's experience in Tamanrasset.

1. Migrants in Tamanrasset: between social embeddedness and security pressure

The town of Tamanrasset has always been at the heart of human and commercial circuits of the Sahara-Sahel region. It grew from a tiny military post in colonial times, from which French forces controlled the Hoggar Mountains, to a modern town and the capital of the eponymous wilaya (province) with over 120,000 inhabitants (Spiga, 2002, p.83). Tamanrasset is located in the Tuareg territory of Tassili Hoggar and the majority of the indigenous population is of Tuareg origin (Toureg du Tahhaagart). Since Algeria's independence, Tamanrasset has seen the arrival of several successive waves of Saharan communities from southern Algeria, in particular from the regions of Touat, Tidikelt and Gourara, and Sahelian communities from neighboring countries, mostly from Niger and Mali. These migrants have often fled drought, violence, political instability, underdevelopment or have settled in Tamanrasset to find economic opportunities. Others established in Tamanrasset due to strong marital ties between communities of the region. These marriage and trade relations, as well as the successive waves

of droughts in the Sahel, played a key role in the settlement of migrants in southern Algeria (Spiga 2005, p. 92). The attractiveness of Tamanrasset among sub-Saharanans has steadily increased since the end of the 1990s, supported by a rapid increase in inter-regional transport (buses) within the area of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Molenaar & El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017; Brachet 2012a). As a confluence point between the Sahara and Sahel, Tam - as called by the young people of the region - has become a strategic destination point for human mobility between Niger, Mali and Algeria. But just like the urban expansion of the city over the past two decades, the "Tamois" population has also been blended to the point where it has become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Sahara-Sahel as migrants from central and West Africa and from the Sahel have come together (SPIGA, 2002; Farrah, 2020a). Henceforth, the Touareg and the Arabs of sedentary southern Algerians, the "Harratine" - the descendants of the freed black slaves -, a large population of North Algerians locally called "Nass el Til", and dozens of migrant communities often in irregular situation, known locally as "Suwadin", live side by side in the city (Badi, 2012b; Farrah 2020a). Thanks to Algeria's financial boom in the 2000s due to the sharp increase in oil prices which is a major source of income for the state, Tamanrasset has experienced a significant urban development through construction, rehabilitation or the expansion of strategic infrastructures (Spiga, 2005, p.85). The city now hosts a university, an international airport, a dozen neighborhoods, more than a thousand social housing units as well as the general district of the 6th military region and the headquarter of the *Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint* (CÉMOC) (the Committee of Joint Staffs of the Sahel) (Farrah, 2020b).⁶¹ The trans-Saharan highway (N1) which crosses the Algerian territory from the north all the way to Niger passes through Tamanrasset. Even though the desert part of the road is in poor shape, this infrastructure allows human and trade flows from Algiers up to the border town of Ain Guezzam.⁶²

The contemporary history of the economy of Tamanrasset is intimately linked to the much-awaited Assihar trade fair ("foire de l'Assihar"); an annual event that brings together traders from more than fifteen countries of the Sahel and West Africa to buy and sell various products

61. The CÉMOC is a regional security cooperation initiative launched by Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. It aims to fight terrorism and organized crime in the Sahara-Sahel space. For more information, see Farrah (2020b).

62. Algeria has technically completed the last section of the trans-Saharan highway which should link Algiers to Lagos by road (4,800 kilometers). However, the northern section of the Algerian part has not been completed yet.

and goods under a special tax regime. The Assihar trade fair has a special status in Algerian economic legislation. During this annual market, all the export and import restrictions on most products and customs charges are lifted for traders and entrepreneurs from southern Algeria. As in a sort of modern barter system, local and foreign traders exchange their products at equivalent merchant volume price. Everything is sold during the Assihar trade fair: exotic fruits and vegetables, semi-finished products, spices, electronics, household appliances, fabrics, clothing and vehicles. According to the head of the Tamanrasset Chamber of Commerce, the Assihar trade fair creates more than 5,000 direct and indirect jobs, and above all, represents 25% of the turnover of exporting traders registered in Tamanrasset at the local Directorate of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.⁶³ Therefore, the Assihar is a strategic event for the city while being a time of increased human mobility in Tamanrasset. In 2016, however, the Algerian authorities decided to close the place where the trade fair is held in the city-center as a fire incident earlier that year had caused material damage. The closure of the Assihar market led to a massive frustration among the local population (Le Maghreb, 2013).⁶⁴ Rumours in town suggested that the army wanted to claim this strategic area in the heart of Tamanrasset to turn it into an extension of its barracks.⁶⁵ The Assihar market plays an important role in the economy of Tamanrasset, and is in line with the willingness of the authorities to encourage local economic development of southern cities and borderlands as well as the trade growth with neighboring countries (Le Maghreb, 2019). The trade fair was suspended for three years, and it was only in March 2019, under the pressure of traders, that authorities again launched the Assihar trade fair.⁶⁶ Beyond its commercial dimension, the Assihar trade fair has greatly contributed to shaping the "social face" of Tamanrasset. Interviews carried in town indicate that the Assihar trade fair period is marked by an influx of migrants in search of employment and economic opportunities. In other words, the Assihar represents a place of trade and a space for informal jobs not only among the local and migrant small-scale traders already living in Tamanrasset who exhibit their products there, but also for newcomers who "find their place" by forging links and working. During the Assihar trade fair, it is clear to an observer that

63. Interview with the head of the Tamanrasset Chamber of Commerce, December 2018.

64. The Assihar site is located in the city center of Tamanrasset. It is used throughout the rest of the year for the weekly market.

65. Series of interviews with activists from Tamanrasset, October-December 2018.

66. The fair trade is at the junction of a modern trade regulated by the state and old merchant practices of the *caravan serail* during which the traders gathered in places of depots in the middle of the Sahara to exchange products through a complex barter system.

foreigners involved in trade circuits deconstruct the figure of the "poor" migrant, i.e. young impoverished man without "skills" and income seeking to cross the desert to reach Europe (Badi, 2012a; Nadi 2007, p. 284). Everyone who visit the market will witness that these migrants are the heart of the Assihar fair trade. They participate as fabric merchants, jewelers, restaurant owners, street vendors, unloader of products and boxes...etc. Their profiles are eclectic and all of them play a fundamental role in the economy of Tamanrasset.

Over the past two decades, the economic dynamism and urban feature of Tamanrasset have attracted migratory communities from all walks of life, especially among the Tuareg, Arabs and Hausa groups. Even though there are no official figures on the number of migrants in Tamanrasset, interviews with the Algerian League for Human Rights (LADDH) and the local NGO Green Tea indicate that at least 25,000 migrants lived in Tamanrasset in 2019, around a quarter of the total number of irregular migrants in the country (approximatively estimated at 100,000 migrants in Algeria by the end of 2017 according to the LADDH).⁶⁷ This figure makes Tamanrasset one of the most important place in terms of the number of migrants in Algeria. Also, the profile of migrants reaching Algeria has changed significantly over time, according to data collected by these organizations. Before the 2000s, most migrants came from central Sahel countries, i.e. Mali and Niger (Minvielle, 2011). According to Green Tea, which is the only organization that collects primary data on migration in Tamanrasset's neighborhoods, not only has their number increased sharply over the past decade, but this has been accompanied by a process of diversification of nationalities. At least 30 African nationalities are represented in Tamanrasset. The migrants come from West Africa, Central Africa and the Sahel. The results of the 3,722 questionnaires collected between 2016 and 2018 are as follows: 18% of migrants are Malians, 17% Nigeriens, 16% Guineans, 10% Beninese, 6% Cameroonians, 6% Congolese (DRC), 6% Ivorians, 4% Nigerians and 17% of other nationalities.⁶⁸ These migrants are French-speaking, Arabic-speaking, Berber-speaking, English-speaking and they also speak Hausa or Wolof. These indicative results show the cosmopolitan character of Tamanrasset. While migrants from the Sahel represent more than a third (35% between Malians and Nigeriens), the

67. Series of interviews conducted with the Algerian League for Human Rights (LADDH) and the local NGO Green Tea between October and December 2018 in Algiers and Tamanrasset.

68. These results do not follow a scientific collection method. These are second-hand and indicative data that were generously provided by the Green Tea NGO. Therefore, they are strictly indicative.

Sahelians no longer represent the majority of the population like before, even though their presence remains significant. A member of the Green Tea NGO, who also is an engaged doctor in Tamanrasset, recalls that “*the south of Algeria has always been a welcoming land and a land of work for the communities of northern Mali and Niger. Some communities, like the Houassas of Niger, are integrated into seasonal migration circuits. Each year, they leave their village during periods of drought or the low agricultural season to work in Tamanrasset. This is part of the city's landscape*”.⁶⁹

Data collected during the same period – on the basis of the same questionnaire - show that the reasons for migration are dominated by the lack of opportunity (67%), poverty (9%), insecurity (9%), and other reasons such as religious or other types of segregation (around 15%). These figures confirm that most migrants in Tamanrasset should be categorized as economic migrants. This is especially visible at the main thoroughfare of the city center and in neighborhoods such as Gaat El Oued, Sersouf Féraïlle and Matnalatalat, where hundreds of young sub-Saharanans sit on the sidewalks waiting for job opportunities. These people are part of a first category of migrants composed of young men hired exclusively for daily tasks. Usually, contractors looking for workers know where the migrants gather, they pass in front, call for "daily work" and pick them up on their 4X4 vehicles. These young men are mainly employed on construction sites to load or discharge various materials or to do manual jobs which require limited or no technical skills.

The second category of migrants is composed of skilled migrant workers and artisans. The latter are mostly Sahelians living permanently in Tamanrasset who work in plumbing, electricity, carpentry, sewing, jewelry making and materials transport sectors. These migrants find opportunities through their community contacts and work on a regular basis with local entrepreneurs and artisans. For example, in the neighborhood of *Sersouf Féraïlle*, whose name refers to construction materials, the above-mentioned migrants rub shoulders with each other on a daily basis and fully participate in the economic circuits of the city. While visiting the shops along the main street of *Sersouf Féraïlle*, one can see migrants from various backgrounds working in artisans and carpentry workshops run by Algerians who employ sub-

⁶⁹. Interview with Mohammed in Tamanrasset, December 2018.

Saharans, cutting the earthenware for wholesalers or unloading recovery goods such as scrap metal which is locally called "Zoubia". For some of migrants such as Aissa, a 21-year-old Nigerien from the city of Agadez (Niger) with whom I spoke, the migratory journey towards Tamanrasset is governed by clear socioeconomic objectives, while being strongly shaped by family choices. Aissa, who has been living in Tamanrasset for a few months at the time of the interview, recounted his experience as follows: *“My father worked in Tamanrasset as a metallurgist for two decades while we (the family members) lived in Agadez. My brother has been in Tamanrasset for five years, he picks up zoubia from the Algerians in Sessouf and sells it in Arlit... I knew Tamanrasset long before I decided to come here. For our family, it has always been our land”*.⁷⁰

The third category consists of migrants working in restaurants and cafés. This activity plays an important role in the life of local and migrant communities. Many young sub-Saharan are hired as cook's assistants or waiters in the cafés and restaurants that populate the city center as well as neighborhoods such as Gaat El Oued. These jobs are less well paid compared to daily work on construction sites, but it is considered less physically intense and allows a more sustainable income.⁷¹ However, almost all migrants work informally, i.e. with no access to social protection. Migrants among the Nigerien community are particularly involved in owning restaurants renowned for the quality of grilled sheep meat (*méchoui*). These owners are more established in the community than most migrants which causes a certain discrepancy in terms of social status. Their restaurants are highly appreciated by both Algerian and foreigner inhabitants of Tam, contributing to deeper social links between communities whilst increasing the multicultural feature of the “Tamois life” (Dida, 2012a, p. 204). This assertion is confirmed by the words of Mamadou, a Nigerien who runs a formal restaurant in the main avenue of the city’s center: *“Everyone comes to eat at my house...from the police to the migrant workers to the young soldiers in the barracks. My restaurant is everyone's home. There is no problem here. At least, I don't feel that way.”*⁷² For Badi, these restaurants are more than culinary places, they are instances of social interaction where daily practices of ordinary life and privileged relations

70. Interview with Aissa, a Nigerien migrant living in Tamanrasset, October 2018.

71. Series of interviews conducted with migrants from Mali and Niger in Tamanrasset between November and December 2018.

72. Interview with Mamadou, a restaurant owner in Tamanrasset, November 2018.

between Algerians and migrants are shaped (Dida, 2012a, p.207). Whether they are regular restaurants in downtown Tamanrasset or informal ones in the Gaat el-Oued and Serssouf neighborhoods, these are bottom-up economies generating social horizontal dividends for the “Tamois” society. Moussa, a Nigerien owner of a restaurant at the center of Tamanrasset told me that: *“In my restaurant, we find slata méchouia (an Algerian salad made with peppers and olive oil), the brik (fried Algerian rolls made with potato and minced meat) as well as Nigerien grilled meats. I employ 5 people and have been working with Algerian suppliers for a decade. I don't have any papers here ... but why is that important? The police knows me and comes to eat at my place. I am not an immigrant. I am Tamois”*.⁷³

To conclude, the increase in the presence of migrants, which have become more diverse, have profoundly changed the face of Tamanrasset. Migrants now come from a large number of countries in the Sahel, West and Central Africa to find employment and refuge in Algeria. On average, they stay for a longer period and they get integrated in the social and economic fabric of the city (Chenaoui and Belhadj 2016). Their life in Tamanrasset is far from the imaginary of transit. Migrants work, exchange, immerse themselves in and bring back to life some of their know-how. In addition to the working space, the foyers are spaces where they amplify their social ties with a certain impact on migratory journeys.

2. The "foyer" as a place of construction of migratory pathways

The vast majority of irregular migrants in Tamanrasset settle in what the local populations call "foyers"; these are makeshift dwellings, often solid but unfinished, which resemble slums (see photo in Annex). Each foyer generally houses between 10 to 30 migrants who share a small common living space: a small courtyard with an outdoor kitchenette, a large shared bedroom and a shared bathroom. Living conditions in the "foyers" are often very difficult (Minvielle, 2011). The majority of the "foyers" are located in the neighborhoods of Gaat El Oued and Sersouf feraille (Farrah, 2020a, p.15-16). Traditionally, the "foyers" were divided by "nationality", but this practice is less frequent. Nonetheless, the divisions between “Muslim”

73. Interview with Moussa, a migrant living in Tamanrasset in November 2018.

and "Christian foyers" are still persistent.⁷⁴ "Foyers" visited for this research were only occupied by male as there is a strict division between men and women, especially among Muslim communities. "Foyers" for women were not accessible for this author but according to interviews conducted with women activists who visit on a regular basis these places to provide humanitarian and medical support, the same rules (division per nationality, leadership of the foyers, respect of the elders) are applied. The discipline and management of each "foyer" is the responsibility of the head of the "foyer", who is usually the most experienced person in the group or the one with the longest life experience in Tamanrasset. The choice of the foyer head obeys to cultural considerations, such as the respect of the elders' authority, but also instrumental considerations such as the need to benefit from the networks and the experience of the elders. The interviews carried out with the heads of "foyers" in these two districts confirm this feature. The head of the "foyer", who is often the owner of the place, plays the role of mentor for the young migrants who arrive in Algeria. He takes them under his wings in return for a modest rent, usually between 2,000 and 4,000 DZD (10 to 20 euros) per month, depending on the number of people per "foyer". Many migrants crossing the border are approached by intermediaries in Ain Guezzam (Algerian-Nigerian border) or on the side of the Malian border to put them in contact with the heads of "foyers" in Tamanrasset. In other words, they place migrants in these accommodations before or as soon as they arrive in the city. These intermediaries charge around 2,000 DZD (10 euros) per migrant for each transaction; a cost that can be borne by the head of the "foyer" in return for a service or work performed by the new migrant. A set of commercial and informal activities are structured around the life of "foyers". Many of them in the district of Gaat el Oued open their kitchens to offer fast and cheap food appreciated by the daily workers. New migrants who do not have enough income to pay their first rent, work as cooks' assistants or housekeepers. Mahamadou, head of the Nigerien "foyer", who has been living in Tamanrasset for more than a decade and who owns a restaurant adjacent to the "foyer", says: *"When friends (transporters) contact me to ask if I can accommodate a migrant, I never say no. I accommodate new migrants to work, sleep and eat even if they have no money, they help me in the restaurants in return. This is my way of welcoming my brother"*.⁷⁵

74. Although there is no official data on migrant's presence, the number of Christians in Tamanrasset remains very small. This was confirmed during several interviews with the heads of local "foyers". They estimate that around 80 to 90% of the "foyers" are "Muslim".

75. Interview with Mahamadou, Tamanrasset, October 2018.

Observations made in the field show that members of the same “foyer” are an important collective of actors in the life of Tamanrasset neighborhoods. The “foyer” represents a place for making the social bonds through which the migrant weaves his first social networks that help him overcome the internal barriers of the host country and society. Migration is accompanied by an individual and collective imagination that research has often overlooked or analyzed through the prism of the “fantasy of migration towards Europe” (Alioui, 2005, p. 42). Each migratory trajectory that starts from place A to place B is preceded by a reflection which makes the objectification of the decision operative. This reflection feeds the priority strategies that the migrant tries to implement to achieve the pre-established goal. However, the construction of the migratory journey is not a static act partitioned off in a linear route. In Tamanrasset, the imagination and the life of the migrant are strongly influenced by the life of the “foyer”. The “foyers” are central places where migratory imaginaries are (de)-constructed and shaped to the point of transforming certain life routes. In Gat El Oued, Mohamadou, a Burkinabé migrant told us: *“I entered Algeria after a long journey through West Africa and northern Niger. I wanted to settle in Tamanrasset for a while to work, collect money, before hitting the road to Morocco and then to Spain. I thought that it was my dream, but after speaking with my friends at home, I realized that this risk is not worth it. I prefer to work here, make a living and try to send money to my family.”* The “foyers” are places of life whose social value is underestimated because they are considered to be on the fringes of formal urban life. However, thanks to the endogenous conditions of these areas, they are an excellent place for migrants to get integrated in the urban life of Tamanrasset. Many migrants interviewed for this research reported that the “foyer” played a fundamental role in their migratory journey and their life decisions. *“I got my first job thanks to Intallah (the head of the “foyer”). One of his friends was looking for someone to work for 3 months on a construction site in Ourgla (1,500 km north of Tamanrasset). I was unable to locate this city on the map, but I trusted him. Hamdoulah, this allowed me to work, to make contacts and to save money to support the family”*, says Ahmadou, a mason from northern Niger.⁷⁶ If the adventure of crossing borders can be experienced as a form of autonomy that is built through hardship, migrants can also experience enormous difficulties once they are in Tamanrasset, where the role of “foyers” becomes so important.

76. Interview with Mohamadou, a migrant living in Tamanrasset, December 2018.

The rapid development of "foyers" in neighborhoods with a high migratory presence has generated important challenges for the city's urban planning. The anarchic expansion in some of these neighborhoods is an urban reality that the authorities were unable to control or develop in time (Spiga 2005, p.96). In Tamanrasset, more than 50% of migrants settle in the three districts of Gat El Oued, Tahaggart and Serssouf Féraïlle. Many of the local people who used to live in these neighborhoods sold their homes to move to other areas of the city, creating the beginnings of a phenomenon of rampant ghettoization (Farrah, 2020a, p.16). This process of migratory concentration in certain neighborhoods has justified the securitized approach by which the security forces (police and gendarmerie) have tried to control the migratory phenomenon in recent years. Over the past three years, the number of "foyer" raids, arrests and deportations of migrants living in these neighborhoods has increased exponentially, while Tamanrasset has a reputation for being relatively untouched by the highly-securitized and authoritarian management of sub-Saharan migrants in comparison to cities in the north. The police forces of the Bureau of Research and Investigation (BRI), a police force with a harsh reputation in Algeria, intervene more regularly in these neighborhoods and regularly demolishes the newly built "foyers". *"Every day, I take a 20-minute detour by motorbike to avoid the corners where the police are generally found at the entrance to the neighborhood. I'm not doing any harm here, but the police are attacking the "foyers" and we're considered as criminals. It's hard to live with this fear"* says Moussa, a Nigerien living in Tamanrasset for 2 years.⁷⁷ In February 2020, the local authorities launched a massive demolition operation of 'illicit houses', most of them run by migrants, in the name of recovering land plots for tourism or for the state. This is the largest operation conducted in Tamanrasset since 2016 when around 3000 houses, including 'foyers' for migrants, were destroyed (Kareche, 2020).

Beyond the security approach taken by the police and the gendarmerie, NGOs are under strict monitoring with regards to the activities offered to migrants. On the other hand, the Algerian Red Crescent local branch in Tamanrasset, has been denying any sort of bad treatment against migrants. "They are treated well in Algeria, they can find a job, live as normally as possible, have access to healthcare and their children go to school...Those who are

77. Interview with Moussa, a migrant living in Tamanrasset, December 2018.

repatriated are mainly illegal Nigeriens, brought to Algeria by violent trafficking networks. We absolutely have to return them to their homes,” said the Director of the local office of the Algerian Red Crescent (CRA), an organization known to be close to the regime in power (Berriah 2018). The "good" treatment reported by the Algeria Red Crescent is contested by international and national organizations including Amnesty International. The latter published a report in 2018 named "Forced to leave" which details how migrants' basic human rights are violated at the arrest in foyers or streets, and how they are deported in inhumane conditions (Amnesty International, 2018).

In this authoritarian context, the NGO Green Tea tries to deconstruct this security approach by building bridges between the local communities and migrants by offering multiple services to migrants (medical care, distribution of medicines, counseling and psychological assistance, preparation of an asylum application, etc.). Abbi, one of the young volunteers of the NGO, told us *“We carry out counseling sessions in the "foyers" because they are places where migrants feel safe. They know us thanks to the honest reputation we are enjoying in the city now”*.⁷⁸ Having made three field visits with the Green Tea teams in the Gaat El Oued district, I have seen how much the work is greatly appreciated by the heads of the "foyers". The "foyer" represents a unique space in which the migrant forges his primary social network. "Foyers" are fully anchored in the social fabric of the city of Tamanrasset not only because of their growing numbers in migrant-dominant neighborhoods, but because they shape migratory pathways in an unprecedented manner despite the security pressures they face and the difficult living conditions. From the migrant point of view, the foyer is the most strategic space as it embodies the idea of a place of refuge, especially when the migrant is not working or recently arrived in town. At the same time, on a practical level, the pressure exerted by the raids and the demolition of certain homes makes these spaces less and less safe. But it remains in the imagination of migrants, a place of life that structures their perception of the migratory journey and influences their subsequent choices.

78. Interview with Abbi, a young humanitarian volunteering in Tamanrasset, December 2018.

Conclusion

The starting point of this research was to assess Algeria's migration governance in southern Algeria. We started by showing that Algeria's migration governance is heavily tainted by a security approach that relies on the limitation of migrant flows through the enforcement of a militarization of borders and a mechanism for deportation based on an informal deal with the Nigerien government. At the same time, the research found that the Algerian authorities are aware that the migration economy is vital for communities in southern Algeria, especially people who live in borderlands. That is why the authorities attempt to balance security concerns related to the instability surrounding the country's territory by considering the importance of the migration economy and being more flexible on the ground within strict bounds to this economy. We showed that successive governments instrumentalized the presence of migrants to hide political failures. More broadly, Algerian authorities have not gone public with a strategy on irregular migration despite regular criticism by national and international actors. One of the most direct implications induced by the lack of a public strategy is the hegemony of the security approach over a well-thought policy approach driven by human rights that is consistent with Algeria's international commitments towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Migration is seen from the state's point of view as a security issue rather than a policy priority. Yet, it is precisely this vacuum that leaves room for security forces to exercise leverage over the treatment of migration and subsequently subsume irregular migration within its broader security agenda. Moreover, we showed that even if Algeria does not take part directly in the EUTF funds and has no official agreement with the EU on border externalization, the militarization of borders embodied by the construction of the sand berm and the introduction of sophisticated technologies is particularly opportune. Even though the Algerian authorities do not position themselves publicly as a *proxy* actor limiting migrant flows for EU partners – they actually express pride in not taking the gendarme role- they do so in reality, and they likely extract political benefits beyond the migration agenda, such as tacit support from partners. Such a topic is overlooked partly because of the opacity of the treatment of irregular migrants. Although the management of irregular migration has been the subject of a few debates over the last years, such as the one initiated in 2017 by

the former Prime Minister and current President, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, on the regularization of vulnerable communities, such debates were quickly enclosed due to government changes. Many activists believe that a draft bill to regularize migrants' presence is in the drawers of the Ministry of Interior, but none of the players interviewed for this study could confirm it. This opacity is also mirrored by the scarcity of information on Algeria's harmonization with neighboring countries on irregular migration. There is very little information on such collaboration, including the informal repatriation deal with Niger which Algeria's authorities have instrumentalized and has become a key instrument to lessen migrant numbers in Algeria. The topic can be discussed during bilateral meetings or within the framework of the Border Committees that Algeria maintains with Mali and Niger. Still, there is very limited policy engagement taken afterwards. From a governance perspective, Algeria's Border Committees with Niger are technical forums for arbitration and decision-making on migration, but security concerns dominate these sites. They are also political spaces that mirror imbalances of powers. These forums deserve better attention from academic and policy researchers.

Beyond the state's migration governance approach, this research also offers an empirical focus on human smuggling that has informed our analysis of how irregular migration unfolds in the context of the rising demand for migration from the Sahel towards southern Algeria. Empirically, I have shown that most human smuggling in Algeria's southern borderlands is governed through a dense hybrid network of rules emanating from the interaction between formal and informal institutions and shaping the very features of the local governance of cross-border movement along the borders with Niger and Mali. Smugglers, migrants and security forces constantly (re)-negotiate rules through their everyday practices, which differ from one borderland to another. I have shown that the codification of these rules is unwritten, and their enforcement occurs outside official channels. More broadly, human smuggling at Algeria's border with Niger and Mali plays a regulatory role in the overarching political economy of border management. The politics of migration and human smuggling are as diverse as the strategies deployed by the state to exert control over it. In line with the balancing act played by the Algerian authorities between security concerns and the interests of local people in borderlands, our findings

also break the myth of the zero-tolerance-to-human-smuggling narrative deployed by the Algerian security forces with differences between borderlands. For instance, we illustrate that the acceptance of the human smuggling economy in Bordj Badji Mokhtar is lower than in the borderland of Timiaouine. One of the implications of this analysis is that the state, as a set of institutions, needs to be brought back into the study of human smuggling, not through its absence or the corruption of its institutions, but through its regulatory potentialities and their impact on the economy itself. By the state here, we mean every official institution or state agent (customs, police, gendarmerie, army, walis...etc.) that directly or indirectly play a role in the migration and smuggling economies. The debate on the intersection between security forces, smugglers and migrants should go beyond patronage and clientelist relationships, as should the state's alignment of interests on these economies. That is to say that state institutions embodied by the security forces units do not systematically share the same interests regarding migration and human smuggling. For instance, in Ain Guezzam (Algeria-Niger border), we observed that customs agents were keener to give more flexibility in terms of mobility to smugglers who participate in the contraband economy via the *passee-avant* system than the gendarmerie. The latter limits smuggler's schedule (when and from where they can cross into Niger) and their ability to move after reaching an unknown daily number of crossings. Therefore, customs and gendarmerie's agenda are sometimes at odds, but their non-alignment is invisible and can only be observed after recurrent trips through the border-crossing point. This question is still overlooked and deserves greater attention in the study of borderlands, migration and illicit economies, and political science in general. Due to the very limited number of interviews achieved with Algerian officials, I have not had enough material to develop further this observation. The internal non-alignment of security forces units has implications on the way smugglers perceive and compartmentalize their 'negotiation strategies' with them. Scholars on the Sahara-Sahel would also benefit from more research projects looking at the internal organization of border crossing, examining how smugglers get access and collect information on security forces' positions and intentions at the border, and how they diffuse information among their 'smuggling community'. The role of the 'community' in sharing, collecting and diffusing information is key in the power balance dynamics versus state actors to pursue their goals. In that spirit, researchers might benefit

from methodological innovation that mix ethnographic methods and their deep contextual knowledge with the opportunities offered by comparative, quantitative and social network analysis designs.

In a similar vein, the perception among some smugglers that access to border crossing is a ‘public good’ can open an enriching debate on whether or not they consider their business as a form of access to a *de facto* rent. Although the revenues extracted from the human smuggling economy are the result of negotiated, unwritten and shared rules, one can wonder about the existence of a form of rent linked to borders in a context where economic opportunities are very limited and where the citizens of border areas consider that they do not benefit from equal access to state’s resources accessible to other citizens. Such a hypothesis must be tested with more interviews with smugglers. It should also be assessed based on Algeria's new administrative division in December 2021, in which the borderlands of Bordj Badji Mokhtar and Ain Guezzam have become *wilayas* (provinces) in their own right (Agence Press Service 2021).⁷⁹ Researchers can also benefit from the extensive literature on rent-seeking and intersection with borderlands and informal institutions.

One of the broad initial objectives of this research was to deconstruct the transcontinental nature of irregular migration from the Sahara to Europe. The idea that most migrants are moving across the desert to travel to Europe is empirically hard to prove. We showed in this research that northbound migration from the Sahel to Algeria is more complex than the "transit country" assignment. Despite the security challenges and economic hardship, migrants stay longer have expanded their territorial deployment in Algeria. The growing presence of migrants in Tamanrasset and the diversity of their profiles give the city of Tamanrasset a uniquely cosmopolitan character. Migrants' embeddedness into the economic life plays a vital role in the multicultural feature of the town. Again, the topic deserves a deeper analysis and more ethnographic work that can be uncovered by in-depth empirical research. Issues such as the impact on the migration

79. The Algerian authorities operated in February 2021 a new territorial division which promotes to the rank of ‘wilaya’ (province) the administrative districts of Timimoune, Bordj Badji Mokhtar, Béni Abbès, Ouled Djellal, In Salah, In Guezzam, Touggourt, Djanet, El M'Ghair, and El Menia.

economies, the closure of borders, and the restraint on smuggling opportunities in borderlands during and post-pandemic are salient. A sociological reflection on the consequences of expulsion operations on migrants' physical and psychological health is needed. It overlaps between human smuggling and trafficking practices, which has not been treated in the research. Cross-cutting studies on the abovementioned topics and implications, broadly speaking, would enrich our understanding of the political economy of mobility, migration and smuggling in central Sahara. This research has aimed to contribute to this agenda modestly.

Appendix

I. List of interviews

Interviewee	Position/Status	Place	Date
Professor	Professor of History at the University of Tamanrasset	Tamanrasset	2 December 2018
Nigerien male migrant	Unemployed	Tamanrasset	6 November 2018
Women community leader	Head of Social Programming for a local NGO	Tamanrasset	18 October 2018
Malian male migrants	Working in a construction site	Tamanrasset	23 October 2018
Ivoirian migrant	Unemployed	Tamanrasset	5 December
Guinean migrant	Cook	Bordj Badji Mokhtar	25 November 2018
Malian migrant	Unemployed	Tinzaouatine	12 November 2018
Syrian migrant	Unemployed	Tamanrasset	1 November 2018
Algerian journalist	Journalist in El Watan	Algiers	25 December 2018
Algeria journalist	Journalist in Liberté	Algiers	3 October 2018
Nigerien male migrant (20s)	Assisting a merchant	Ain Guezzam – El Akla	5 December 2018
Women activist	Activist for a Croissant Rouge Algérien (CRA)	Tamanrasset	17 November 2018
Women activist	Activist for the Green Tea NGO	Tamanrasset	11 November 2018
International migration expert	IOM Expert	Phone interview	29 September 2019
Malian official	Attaché at the Malian Consulate in Tamanrasset	Tamanrasset	19 October 2018
Malian community leader	Head of a "foyer"	Tamanrasset	1 December 2018
Algerian young man	Smuggler/Transporter	Bordj Badji Mokhtar	23 November 2018

Migration activist	Coordinator at the Alarm Phone Sahara	Phone	5 Janvier 2019
Nigerien community leader	Head of "foyer"	Tamanrasset	7 October 2018
Binational (Malian/Algerian) young man	Smuggler active along the Algeria-Mali border	Tinzaouatine	15 November 2018
Algerian young man	Smugglers operating along the Algeria-Mali border	Bordj Badji Mokhtar	20 November 2018
Guinean community leader	Shop owner	Tamanrasset	7 December 2019
Cameroonian migrant	Cook	Tamanrasset	9 December 2018
Migrant from Benin	Construction worker	Timiaouine	29 November 2019
Malian migrant	Plumber	Tamanrasset	12 October 2018
Nigerien migrant	Owner of a restaurant	Tamanrasset	9 October 2018
Nigerien young man	Smuggler active along the Algeria-Niger border	El Akla/Ain Guezzam	28 October 2018
Nigerien migrant	Unemployed	Ain Guezzam	26 October 2018
Algerian activist	Algerian League for Human Rights (LADDH)	Algiers	19 December 2018
Togolese migrant (woman)	Housekeeper	Tamanrasset	12 November 2018
Algerian community leader (woman)	Head of a local NGO and Lecturer at the University of Tamanrasset	Tamanrasset	19 November 2018
Malian community leader	Head of a "foyer"	Tamanrasset	3 December 2018
Nigerien community leader	Head of a "foyer"	Tamanrasset	5 December 2018
Migrant from Burkina Faso	Unemployed	Timiaouine	27 November 2019
Malian migrant	Factotum	Tinzouatine	14 November 2018

Customs agent
(informal discussion)

Direction Générale de la Douane algérienne
Ain Guezzam

27 October 2018

II. Pictures



A Nigerien migrant working in the kitchen's "foyer" (Tamanrasset). November 2018.



One Malian community leader (left) and the owner of a foyer in the Gaat El Oued neighborhood (Tamanrasset), October 2018.



Activists from the Green Tea NGO providing assistance in the Gaat El Oued neighborhood, December 2018.



The main street of the borderland village of Tinzouatine (Algeria), November 2018.



Smugglers stopping at a well along the Algeria-Niger border, November 2018.



Smuggler's vehicle down in the middle of the route connecting Ain Guezzam (Algeria) to Assamaka (Niger), October 2018.



Smugglers driving towards migrants waiting at a geolocation point, November 2018.

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