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The Forced Virtualisation of the Borders*

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Algeria Post Arab Spring : The Forced Virtualisation of the Borders

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Abstract

Algeria is the core of the Maghreb and shares land borders with seven countries Maghreb and Sahel countries. However, since 2011, none of the seven land borders is stable and secure. So, even if Algeria is considered as a stable country, this stability is fragile and is likely to be more precarious if the country has to face simultaneously an economic crisis and delicate presidential succession. Domestic incertitude coupled to regional conflicts puts the Algerian borders under unprecedented pressure. Consequently, almost all the governmental declarations expressed worries about the vulnerability of the borders, and assurances about the security services determination to assure the state security. However, to what extent this promise can be entirely fulfilled, regarding the borders' characteristics and the specificity of the context? Why is the virtualization of the borders forced? As regards to the growing permeability of the borders, can their militarization guarantee their security?

Key words: Algeria, Borders, Sovereignty, Securitization, Threats.

Introduction

The globalization has produced a direct effect on the virtualization of the countries' borders. In most of the cases, this virtualization is the consequence of free trade agreements, economic cooperation and easy people circulation. In the most developed cases, the national borders have disappeared, providing room for four guaranteed freedoms (circulation of goods, services, capitals and persons). However, globalization has also strengthened the fears of spreading crises and conflicts. Actually, the 2008 financial crisis started in the United States and spread out all around the world... The war in Syria is no longer a classical civil war but became an international war in which regional and international powers are involved. Many other examples could be given to illustrate the capacity of crises and

conflicts to cross the national borders and impact many non implied parties. Consequently, many countries have felt the necessity of higher protection and seen the borders as the natural way to do so. Hence, instead of opening the borders, they try to strengthen their control on them.

Algeria undoubtedly fits into this second tendency. Since its independence in 1962, this North-African state is the core of the Maghreb and shares land borders with seven countries. During decades, the borders which represented a high security concern were the western one, the Algerian-Moroccan borders. Actually, the strained bilateral relations have always had a direct impact in militarizing the control of both sides' borders.

This article will focus on the post Arab spring period that impacted negatively the security of the Algerian borders. In fact, since 2011, none of the seven land borders is stable and secure. From Tunisia in the north-east, to Libya, Niger, Mali and Mauritania in the western south and the south, several new and old risks are threatening. So, even if Algeria is considered as a stable country, this stability is fragile and is likely to be more precarious if the country has to face simultaneously an economic crisis and delicate presidential succession. Domestic incertitude coupled to regional conflicts puts the Algerian borders under unprecedented pressure. These last years, and regarding the regional tensions, almost all political debates have focused on security issues. Consequently, almost all the governmental declarations expressed worries about the vulnerability of the borders, and assurances about the security services determination to assure the national security. However, to what extent this promise can be entirely fulfilled, regarding the borders' characteristics and the specificity of the context? Regarding the growing porosity of the borders, can their militarization guarantee their security?

To answer these questions, this article will discuss the hypothesis that the virtualisation of the Algerian borders is a forced process because of their deep rooted securitization. In the first section, this article will try to explain why the Algerian leaders find difficult to give up their securitized perception of the borders' security by diving into historical dimension. Then, we will analyze the present characteristics of the Algerian borders and more specifically their virtualisation, through three important cross-border dimensions: human, economic and security dimension.

1. *The Deep Roots of Borders' Securitization*

The borders are undoubtedly considered as a part of the national identity, sovereignty and security. According to Anthony Giddens, when borders merged with national government, violence was established in the heart of national governments. These lasts can do anything to protect their borders because their elimination means the lost of sovereignty (Manijeh, 2014).

The Algerian government has always dealt with borders as a security issue. The process of securitization¹ of the borders has preceded the Algeria's independence in 1962 and never left the Algerian policy towards the borders. In fact, just last March, the National Liberation Front (FLN), the most important support of the president Bouteflika, announced the launch of his a national initiative called the "national defending wall". The FLN called all the political forces and the organizations of the civil society to join this huge gathering in order to face the threats that Algeria is facing inside and outside the country. Surprisingly, the opposition does not develop another speech, far from it. It has also referred to borders securitization but considered that the president is not able to guarantee the security of the borders since he is no longer able to govern² and since the political system as a whole has no democratic legitimacy³. It should be pointed that the securitized opposition speech is surprising because securitization advantages the government positions. Actually, violence and the fear of foreign or domestic enemy have had a deep effect on the borders' perception. In this section, we will explain the impact of different forms of violence in the history of borders securitization.

¹ "The main argument of securitization theory is that security is a (illocutionary) speech act. 'It is by labeling something a security issue that it becomes one'. By stating that a particular referent object is threatened in its existence, a securitizing actor claims a right to extraordinary measures to ensure the referent object's survival. The issue is then moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with swiftly and without the normal (democratic) rules and regulations of policy-making" (Taureck, 2006, p. 54).

² This is the main argument of Ali Benflis, the challenger of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in the 2014 presidential election.

³ This is the argument of the opposition organized in a coalition called the National Coordination for Freedom and Democratic Transition (CNLTD).

The Independence and the Sand Wars

Boundaries determine territorial jurisdiction of each national government (either land or water border) and, consequently, the national government. Therefore, borders have an important role in identifying national government. Without this territorial jurisdiction, government isn't "realized," and its governance is meaningless. In other words, the existence or absence of borders equates to the existence or absence of government. For this reason, governments allow any military action to protect their borders, often allocate a huge military budget and sometimes launch wars to secure and securitize the national borders. This is what Algeria did through several steps.

The first step of securitization of the borders has not only preceded the independence but also allowed it. Actually, these borders are the fruit of a long violent and political fight against French colonization (1830-1962), ended after a bloody independence war (1954-1962). It is important to notice that independence war could have been shorter and less deadly if the Algerian leaders had accepted the French proposition of dividing the country into two parts: independence for the north, French remaining domination in the south⁴. However, the Algerian fighters refused to give up the south not only because they knew how rich it was, but also because their identity as a future national government was based on kicking out the colonial government from all the territory and replace it as the government of liberty for all the Algerian people. In addition, it should be pointed out that the fighters called themselves "mujahidin", which gives their fight and their cause a religious-sacred dimension that can hardly be bargained.

According to Algerian point of view, colonization comprised a definite territory; the new government could not win its entire identity by governing only a part of it. Besides, the principle of holding the borders inherited from colonization was not only a juridical statement but also a part of the future Algerian state to such extent that Algeria have been defended this principle over the years and in all circumstances.

The second step of securitization of the borders happened just after the independence of the country. It is the "sand war" that opposed Algeria to

⁴ For more details, see (Courrière, 2001; Harbi, 1981).

Morocco. The origin of this war was the territorial Moroccan requests. In order to reestablish the "Greater Morocco", the monarchy demanded the inclusion of the western Algerian regions (Tindouf, Béchar between others) under its sovereignty, because they have been incorporated into Algeria under the French rule. Considering that they fought to liberate all the territory, the then-new Algerian government rejected the request of the Moroccan leaders who decided to attack Algeria on October 13-14, 1963. Despite the superiority of the Moroccan army and the obvious unbalanced of power, the Algerian army resisted to the attack until the intervention of the Organization of African Unity. Its mediation stopped the war in November 1963 but did not end the rancor. The official political speech has maintained alive the feeling that Algerian people were betrayed by their neighbor and that the threat remains big on the other side of the border. It is worthy noticing that like Morocco⁵, Algeria used this borders' war to delegitimize the political opposition movements. Indeed, in the name of preserving the territorial integrity, the armed rebellion of the FFS (Front of Socialist Forces) was neutralized as soon as its members join the national army against Morocco.

These two steps in the Algerian recent history put the borders at the core of the Algerian regime legitimacy. Despite the important ideological shift of 1989, the revolutionary legitimacy that shapes the borders' perception did not lose its sacred dimension. Hence, even the most critical opponents defend the idea that the present national borders are legitimate, rightful and must be protected against any internal or external danger. This consensus has remained strong and gets stronger each time Algeria seemed or was threatened. The war on terrorism was undoubtedly one of these major threats in which the notion of borders was central and paradoxical.

The War Against Terrorism

During the nineties, Algeria faced a very violent terrorism that caused 200000 deaths and thousands of disappeared persons. One could consider this strife as an exclusively domestic affair, since the numerous terrorist groups were Algerians and their goals were related to a political stake,

⁵ The leader of UNFP, Mehdi Ben Barka, was sentenced to death in absentia.

which is taking power. Hence, they claimed that they were fighting for restoring the Islamists right to govern Algeria after the victory of the FIS (Islamic Front for Salvation) in the 1991 legislative elections. However, the notion of borders had an important impact and took a new and paradoxical dimension during that period. Indeed, the borders became synonym of protection as well as nuisance.

On one hand, and from the beginning of the conflict, the Algerian government claimed that the terrorist groups were that resisting and injuring because they get supports from outside. These supports were financial, military, political and ideological coming from foreign media, international NGO's and some "hostile" governments. The conspiracy theory was widely used to explain the resilience of the terrorist groups and their capacity to cause damages. For illustrative purposes, Algeria caught its diplomatic relations with Iran in the mid nineties after accusing Teheran of supporting the FIS insurgency. For their part, the Algerian-Moroccan and Algerian-Saudi relations were very strained for basically the same reasons. While the western neighbor was accused to open the borders to material support (basically arms) to the terrorist groups, the petro-monarchy was blamed for violating the Algerian symbolic integrity by diffusing an aggressive and extremist ideology. The Algerian government has not only considered the wahhabi salafism as a non Algerian ideology but also a danger for its national identity and territorial integrity. Consequently, and according to this first point of view, the Algerian borders were not sufficiently consolidated and needed stronger measures to assure the Algerian security. In order to close this loophole, Algeria decided to close its land borders with Morocco and maintained this decision since 1994. More than two decades later, the Algerian government still considers that the national security requires keeping the borders closed and under the military control⁶.

⁶ According to the 2014 report of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the area devoted to the cultivation of cannabis in Morocco is estimated at 57,000 hectares against 10,000 hectares in Afghanistan. According to the Director General of the National Office for Fight against Drug and Drug Addiction (ONLDT), Mohamed Benhalla, "the cannabis resin which represents the largest amount of the drugs seized in Algeria, comes from the neighboring country Morocco. 80.80% of the cannabis was seized in the western region of the country. In Algeria, about 182 tones of cannabis resin were seized in 2014 against more than 211 tones in 2013, down 13% of the seized quantities, a drop due to the strengthening of the security system at the borders.

On another hand, the strife has turned the borders onto a kind of closing and isolating wall. Is it about the wall of a huge prison? The image maybe exaggerated but it expresses the isolation in which Algeria has been maintained during several years. This isolation had two aspects. The material and concrete aspect consisted in reducing the contacts and exchanges at their strict minimum level. For instance, almost all the western air companies had left the country, making traveling from and to Algeria very difficult. The second aspect was symbolic and consisted in the Algeria's political isolation. It is worthy reminding that the nature and the source of the violence in the country was subject of contradictory debate. On one hand, some defined this violence as the expression of an extremist political party (FIS) who wanted to get to power by any means and in order to make of Algeria a new Afghanistan⁷. On another hand, another analysis consisted in linking the armed groups to the regime refusal to recognize the FIS victory in the legislative elections on December 1991⁸. According to this point of view, several states and media in the world considered the regime was as responsible of the strife and used "political violence", instead of "terrorism". Worst, they also used the famous "who killed who" to accuse the government security forces of perpetrating violence, illegal and immoral actions against civilians to delegitimize the Islamist armed groups.

This means that the securitization of the borders and their militarization have a double impact: on one hand they can provide a certain protection and reduce some threats, but on another hand, they isolate the country from its environment and deprived it of the opportunities this environment can offer. This securitized perception of the borders has a direct consequence on the perception of the borders porosity, which is considered as a constraint or a *fait accompli*.

⁷ This position was lead by the militaries, called the "Janviéristes" and a part of secular and islamist opposition, like RCD and Hamas.

⁸ The FLN lead by Abdelhamid Mehri and the opponent party, the FFS, rejected the "Janviéristes" decision.

2. *The Virtualisation of the Borders as a Fait Accompli*

Borders are made to protect the state and the people they live in but some borders are more protecting than others and some borders are easier to protect than others. Algeria is Northern-African country and shares its land borders with seven Maghreb and Sahel countries⁹. It is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea in north, and shares maritime borders with Italy and Spain. It is worthy noticing that the official discourses as well as that of the opposition complain about the permeability of the borders. So, why have the Algerian borders become virtual?

The Human Cross-border Dimension

Algeria is the largest African country and more than 80 percent of the territory is covered by the Sahara. These two aspects means that Algeria is deeply rooted in both the Maghreb and the Sahel regions. It is worthy noticing that the borders are not the result of a long nation-building process but the consequence of the European colonization which split the region into pieces called states, divided people into groups called nations, and created separated destinies from common histories. The absence or the fragility of the nation-state in the region has something to do with this historical fact.

The Algerian Arab-Amazigh identity has a continuation behind the borders and shares a common patrimony with the neighboring people in terms of traditions, language, spirituality, history and destiny. Actually, the Algerians living on the borders have more than neighborhood relations with the population of the other side of the boundaries. Sometimes, the same family is divided between an Algerian part and a Tunisian/or Moroccan or Malian one. For instance, the Kel Ahaggar (Algeria) and Kel Adagh (Mali), live in the Algerian-Malian borders. These two big Tuareg tribes have occupied the same spaces and, then, concluded economic alliances, strengthened by matrimonial alliances (Bellil & Dida, 1993). These close identities are also consolidated by a religious factor. All people of the region belong to sunni

⁹ Morocco in west, Mauritania and Mali in south west, Niger in south east, Libya and Tunisia in east and it has a small border stretch to Western Sahara in west.

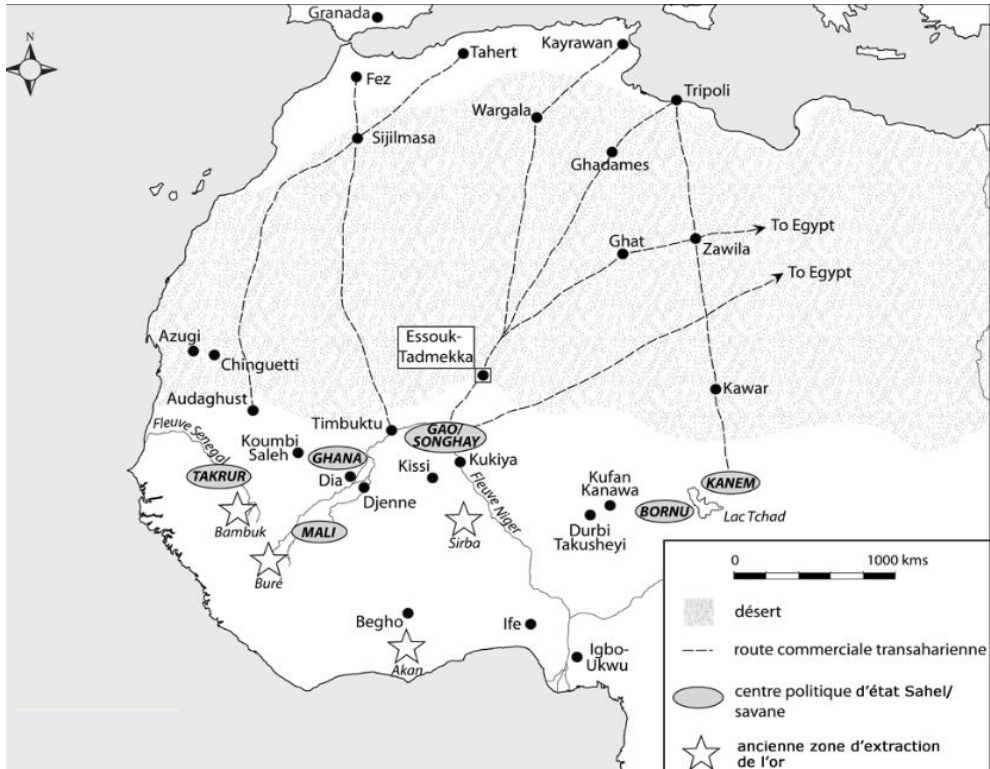
Malekite rite and share a long history of traditional popular religious faith. The *zawaya* (traditional brotherhoods) play an important symbolic authority in Algeria as well as in the neighboring countries. Besides, three cities concentrate this spiritual convergence: Chinguitti in Mauritania known as the 7th Islamic holy city, Tumbuctou in Mali considered as the city of 333 saints and Tadmekka, the previous capital of Adagh, also in Mali (Nixon, 2013). Furthermore, one of three most famous saints of Tumbuctou is sheikh Sidi Aboukassim Kounti, born in Algeria.

Its geographical situation has put Algeria at the core of a huge space of exchanges and social mobility, while the climatic conditions have created an ancestral social mobility, at the vertical level (south to the north and vice versa) as well as the horizontal one (East to west and vice versa). In these rude areas, the link between humans is stronger than the link with the territory. People need to rely on each other to be able to face the harsh nature. As a consequence, people have a dynamic and flexible perception of non fixed territory. In their mental scheme, the territory has functional borders instead of definitive one. In other words, Algeria and its neighbors constitute a huge space of social mobility and diversity. Many examples illustrate this assertion. Hence, the terrible dry periods of the 70's and 80's pushed thousands of Malians and Nigerians to emigrate towards Algeria and Libya (Brachet et al., 2011). Otherwise, many breeders would not have survived in their native country. Earlier in the fifties, many sahelian people came to the south of the then colonized Algeria to build French military bases, notably in Regane (Brachet et al., 2011). Nowadays, Tamanrasset, a southern district, is like Tumbuctou and Agadez, a turning point of very ancient solidarity, commercial and cultural exchanges.

This cross-border human mobility has also political and security causes. Indeed, the recurrent conflicts and instability in Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, in addition to Western Sahara issue have pushed many refugees towards North Africa and Algeria in particular. Some of them want to stop their trip in Algeria before going back home, while some others tried to achieve Europe.

To sum up, Algeria is an inseparable part of its environment because Algerians are inseparable from the neighboring people (Map 1). Ancestral symbolic links bring them together as economic links used to do.

Map 1: Social mobility cross Algeria's borders



Source : (Nixon, 2013).

The Cross-border Economic Dimension

The second factor that expresses the virtualisation of the Algerian borders as a fait accompli is the important exchanges between the populations living on the opposite sides of these borders. It is worthy noticing that most of these exchanges are done through illegal ways, passing through Adrar, Tamanrasset, In Salah and Bordj Badji Mokhtar (from Algeria) to Gao and Kidal (Mali); or through Tamanrasset via In Guezzam to Agadez and Arlit (Niger). Paradoxically, while official trade is ridiculously low (less than 1% of the Algerian foreign trade), smuggling constitutes a structural phenomenon and a permanent link between Algerian people and their neighbors. Actually, the informal exchanges equal 75 times the formal ones: \$2 million against \$150 million only with Mali.

In 2011, 160 trucks crossed the southern Algerian borders per week (OCDE, 2014). Indeed, smuggling across the Algerian borders assure a vital economic function to such extent that it contributes in reducing poverty in some poor areas. For instance, it must be noticed that poverty rate in northern Mali is lower than in the south thanks to the low prices of the smuggled (and subsidized) goods that benefit from the short distance, compared to the southern Mali¹⁰. For instance, the couscous (one the main popular dish in North Africa) is ten times cheaper in Bamako than in Kidal. In Niger, the smuggled products are 30% more expensive in the south than in the north which logically impacts the consumption capacities (Raballand et al., 2014). That is, the more the populations live closed to the borders, the more they profit from the subsidized goods coming from Algeria, the more the ties between populations are strong.

However, this phenomenon has several bad consequences. The first, but not the most dangerous, is financial and economic since it generates tensions in the Algerian market (cyclical shortages) and causes loss of incomes (low taxes). In 2011, the supporting of smuggled goods caused a direct financial loss of \$45 million. Due to government anti-smuggling action, subsidy losses through smuggling for 2014 fell to \$10 million. (Ed McAllister, 2015)¹¹ Furthermore, the most important smuggled good is oil. Hence, 1.5 billion of liters cross illegally the Algerian land borders, which represent 25% of the national production, the consumption of 600000 vehicles and \$12.8 million¹². This phenomenon is likely to continue as long as the Algerian oil will remain the third cheaper one in the world.

It should be noticing that people living in borders have totally integrated smuggling (Map 2) as an ordinary local behavior. Smuggling has perfectly assimilated the borders permeability, the cultural continuity, the existence of ancestral roads' trade, the diverse forms of complicity and the market lows (equilibrium of demand and supply). This complicity represents an

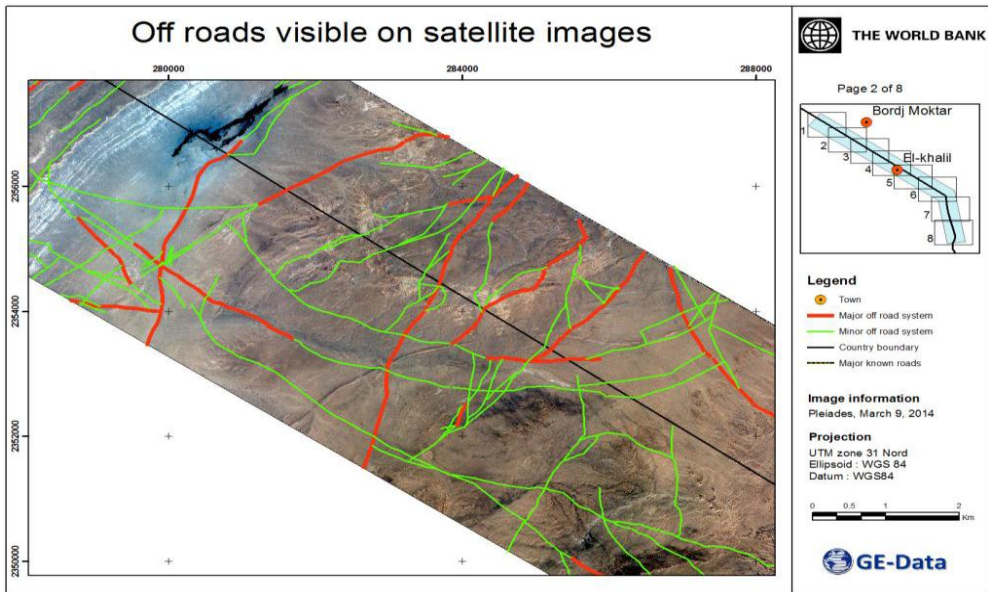
¹⁰ The prices of these goods are attractive because they come from Algeria where they are supported by the government.

¹¹ Ed McAllister, "Anti-terrorism measures to 'close' Algeria's borders increases protest risks as free movement of goods and smuggling affected", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 07 May 2015, <http://www.janes.com/article/51244/anti-terrorism-measures-to-close-algeria-s-borders-increases-protest-risks-as-free-movement-of-goods-and-smuggling-affected>

¹² APS, 24/07/2013

efficient cross-borders organization which guarantees that the products the customs agents had captured will be recovered by their owners after auction sales. This situation has weakened the local authorities and created non-lows areas in which people can get their life incredibly better through informal networks. For instance, in Tamanrasset, a bordering district in the extreme south of Algeria, a smuggler wins dinars 100000 a week, more than the MP salary¹³.

Map 2: The roads of smuggling



Source: *La Normalité de l'informalité: Une estimation du commerce informel entre le Mali et l'Algérie*. The red roads represent the main cross-borders roads, the green ones represent the smugglers' roads.

However, the most worrying consequences of the cross-border smuggling are linked to the fact that the ordinary and tolerated smuggling can take the same roads than the dangerous drugs and arms trafficking. Consequently, what was "tolerated" and "acceptable" in a certain period has become a big security concern since 2011.

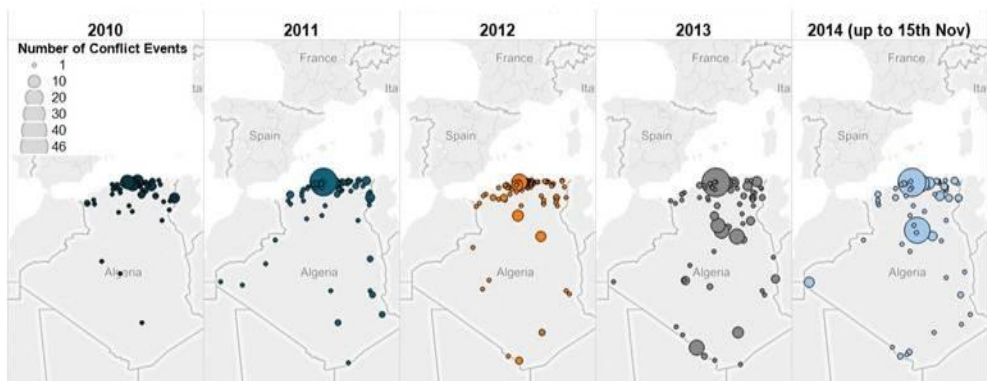
¹³ «Corruption et contrebande à Tamanrasset», *El Watan*, 09/07/2014, <http://www.tamanrasset.net/corruption-et-contrebande-a-tamanrasset/>

The Cross-border Security Threats

The two previous points introduce logically to the third one. The human and economic cross-border continuations lead understandably to security continuation which includes interdependence and easy spreading threats. These lasts have considerably increased with the collapse of Libya and instability of Tunisia and Mali.

These threats have economic origins as well as security-military ones. Firstly, the socio-economic issues analyzed above can easily turn to security concern since the borders between classical smuggling that aims earning one's living and new smuggling that implies complicity with criminal groups are getting thinner. This collusion can be a deliberate choice or an imposed fait accompli. In fact, there is growing pressure coming from the youth which does no more accept the marginalization their parents have always lived in. The Algerian southern regions are no longer the quietness regions they used to be in the past when they were the contradiction of the usually contesting northern cities. Besides Amenokal Ahmed Idabir (a Tuareg leader), has already warned the political authorities about the potential consequences of remaining exclusion and frustration of the youth¹⁴.

Fig. 1 – Number of conflict events by location in Algeria, from 2010-15th November 2014



Source: <http://www.crisis.acleddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Figure-2-Number-of-Conflict-Events-by-Location-in-Algeria-from-2010-15th-November-2014.jpg>

¹⁴ «Amenokal Ahmed Ibadir, Situation dans le sud : Entretien avec, chef suprême des Touaregs», TSA, 15/01/2015.

The figure 1 shows that the social movements have increased significantly in the south since the beginning of the Arab spring. This region was relatively secluded from this type of social tensions before this period. Most of these riots are short-lived, low intensity and geographically limited. If they can arise on the least pretext in the northern cities (a defeat in a football match, the distribution of housing...) (Dris-Aït Hamadouche, 2013) the contestation in the south is linked to the feeling that the population live under socio-economic marginalization. Contestation in Ghardaïa, Ouargla and In Salaha regions mix between economic frustrations and social marginalization.

Secondly, the disappearance of Libyan state and the regional chaos have thrown the Algerian borders in an unprecedented vulnerability. Since 2011, Algerian military forces have to assure the security of the borders with weak or inexistent counterpart on the other side, which makes the mission harder than it already is. The first consequence of this new situation is the spectacular increase of the weapons discovered on the Algerian territory¹⁵. In this context, more the defense ministry announces he caught weapons, more the worry increases about the arms shipments that escape from the security services. In addition to the quantity aspect, the regular security reports show that the quality of the weapons seized is changing. Compared to the past ones, the present seizures include more dangerous, modern and sophisticated weapons¹⁶. Consequently, one of the most formidable risks would be another attack against hydrocarbon basis which represents the country's economic heartland¹⁷.

In addition to arms trafficking, the porosity of the borders are also used for drug trafficking. This last includes West Africa in a huge cross-border network. Like arms' case, drug trafficking is getting more and more worrying since the drug implied is changing, moving from the "simple" cannabis to the alarming cocaine. This trafficking generates \$900 million per year in this African sub-region (IEEE & IMDEP, 2013) This shift is not a coinci-

¹⁵ APS, 11/04/2016; Lamine Chikhi, «Wary of disorder in Libya and Mali, Algerian army targets southern smuggling», Reuters, 11/05/2015.

¹⁶ Akram Kharief, «Saisies d'armes : Du jamais vu dans l'histoire de l'Algérie», El Watan, 15/04/2016.

¹⁷ In Amenas gas facility, which produces 18% of Algeria's exports, was attacked in January 2013. It is still a trauma.

dence. Hence, drug trafficking became one of the main terrorist financial resources. AQIM, Ansar Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa have moved beyond making money from kidnapping ransoms (Caulderwood, 2015). Their funds also come from the cocaine crossing the Atlantic Ocean, from Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, to western Africa, and the Algerian Sahara (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes , 2014). Besides, by 2014, there had been a major increase in cocaine seizures in Algeria.

If it is established that terrorists are not the main drug traffickers, it is also verified that they have concluded a deal with drug sellers by providing them security (Lounas, 2014). This alliance allows criminals and terrorists to profit from this very lucrative cross-border trade and to face together the security actions.

Then, the militarization of the borders is the direct consequence of the transnationalisation of the threats. Algeria has closed 6400 km of its borders with Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Libya, and placed its border crossings under military control. Hence, 70000 troops have been deployed and defense zones forbidden to civilians have been created the length of Algeria's land borders, with a shoot-to-kill policy on vehicles not responding to identification requests (McAllister, 2015). The militarization of the borders has succeeded their securitization, with this paradoxical result: the borders have never been more vulnerable.

Conclusion

This article tried to analyze why and how the Algerian borders are getting more and more virtual. It showed that this virtualization is not the result of a deliberate choice but the consequence of *a fait accompli*. From this point of view, the securitization of the borders and, then, their militarization has a very controversial impact. Yes, it reduces smuggling but has aggravated the situation of the populations who survive through informal trade one on hand, and pushed the smugglers to look for protection from criminal group, on another hand. Thus, a forced virtualisation of the borders is the consequence of securitized perception of these borders.

However, this deduction is not inevitable, far from it. Indeed, the specificity of the region engenders the specificity of the borders which, finally, artificially divide similar areas, and unsuitably separate connected populations. Subsequently, there is another possible perception and management of the borders in which their virtualization would be prepared, planned accompanied and rewarding for both sides of the borders. For instance, in the economic field, the Algerian government could profit from the ancestral exchanges to launch an ambitious transnational economic program of regional development. It could start with energy investments of Sonatrach and Sonelgaz¹⁸. The region of Assihar in Tamanrasset (the important district in the south of Algeria) could become an industrial zone by including actors from the other sides of the borders. For instance, exotic fruits or livestock could constitute the basis of fruitful cross-border agro industry to reduce jobless which constitutes a persistent problem and a source of tensions¹⁹.

Incontestably, Algeria is likely to feel a growing need for a “soft” and wanted virtualisation of the borders that implied to stop seeing the borders’ virtualisation as a constraint but as an opportunity. This shift in the perception of borders’ security is far to be an easy step. It is conditioned by the de-securitization of the borders which is linked to a deep political change. Actually, if the militarization of the borders can be explained by the regional instability since 2011, their securitization cannot be justified by referring to the present geopolitical context, since this securitization has preceded it. By contrast, this securitization goes side by side with securiti-

¹⁸ These two public companies produce and sell oil and gaz. Sonatrach is the largest oil and gas company in Algeria and Africa. The company operates in exploration, production, pipeline transportation and marketing of hydrocarbons and by products. The international strategy of the company includes operations in several parts of the world namely: in Africa (Mali, Niger, Libya, Egypt), in Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Great Britain), in Latin America (Peru) and in the USA. With a turnover nearing \$56,1 billion in 2010, Sonatrach is ranked first company in Africa and 12th in the world. It is also 4th world LNG exporter, 3rd world LPG exporter and 5th World Natural gas exporter. Sonelgaz (Société Nationale de l'Electricité et du Gaz, National Society for Electricity and Gas) is in charge of electricity and natural gas distribution in Algeria. It was established in 1969 and was given a monopoly over the distribution and selling of natural gas within the country as well as the production, distribution, importation, and exportation of electricity. It employs nearly 20,000 people.

¹⁹ «Commerce interafricain : l'Algérie mise sur le sud du pays», *Le Midi Libre*, 14/04/ 2012.

zation of politics, governance and legitimacy which includes the demonization of the “other”, presented as the potential enemy. That is to say that the constructive virtualisation of the borders can hardly become true without the de-securitization of the political system.

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