

# **Illicit Flows And Trafficking Southern Europe-Maghreb: A Geopolitical and Criminological Perspective**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Illicit trade is a serious problem for the international community. Globalization has gone through it—even if it is not the most visible one. Although this study focuses on a given geographical area—Southern Europe, the Maghreb and beyond, the Sahel region—it must be clearly seen, and seen beforehand, that this area, although immense, is only one link in a chain of trafficking of all kinds, strictly speaking transcontinental, and that it extends from Hong Kong and Guangzhou in the east to the Gulf of Guinea in the west, via Central Asia, the Black Sea, the Gulf, Anatolia, and the Balkans.

It is an immense trade route that is both “grey” (smuggled legal objects, tobacco, small electronics, etc.) and “black” (drugs, human trafficking, etc.) at the same time; a continuous chain that has existed sometimes for centuries (“Route of the Sultans,” “Route of the Balkans,” “Trabendo” route) whose human elements are inextricably intertwined: smugglers, bandits, pimps, Islamists—separately or together (the “hybrids”).

**Keywords:** illicit trade, globalization, Sahel, Europe, Maghreb, trafficking

# **Flujos y tráfico ilícitos Europa del Sur-Magreb: Una perspectiva geopolítica y criminológica**

## **RESUMEN**

El comercio ilícito es un problema grave para la comunidad internacional. La globalización la ha atravesado, aunque no sea la más

visible. Aunque este estudio se centra en un área geográfica determinada (el sur de Europa, el Magreb y más allá, la región del Sahel), debe verse claramente, y de antemano, que esta área, aunque inmensa, es solo un eslabón en una cadena de tráfico de todos tipos, estrictamente hablando transcontinental, y que se extiende desde Hong Kong y Guangzhou en el este hasta el Golfo de Guinea en el oeste, pasando por Asia Central, el Mar Negro, el Golfo, Anatolia y los Balcanes.

Es una inmensa ruta comercial que es a la vez “gris” (objetos legales de contrabando, tabaco, pequeños aparatos electrónicos, etc.) y “negra” (drogas, trata de personas, etc.); una cadena continua que ha existido a veces durante siglos (“Ruta de los Sultanes”, “Ruta de los Balcanes”, “Ruta de Trabendo”) cuyos elementos humanos están inextricablemente entrelazados: contrabandistas, bandidos, proxenetes, islamistas—por separado o juntos (los “híbridos”).

**Palabras clave:** comercio ilícito, globalización, Sahel, Europa, Magreb, tráfico

## 南欧-马格里布的非法流动和交易：地缘政治和犯罪学视角

### 摘要

非法贸易是国际社区的一个严峻问题。非法贸易已经历全球化—即使它不是最明显的。尽管本研究聚焦一个指定地理区域—南欧、马格里布和更广的萨赫勒区域—但必须清晰且提前看到的是，该巨大地区仅仅是所有非法交易链的其中一环，严格来讲是跨大陆的非法交易，它从东方的香港和广州延伸到西方的几内亚湾，穿过中亚、黑海、波斯湾、小亚细亚和巴尔干半岛。

这是一条巨大的贸易线，同时包括“灰色”（走私合法物品、烟草、小型电器等）和“黑色”（毒品、人口贩卖等）交易；一条已存在几百年的持续交易链（“苏丹之路”、“巴尔干之路”、“Trabendo”之路），这条交易链中的人为因素以无法分开的方式交织在一起：走私者、强盗、皮条客、伊斯兰主义者—单个或是结合在一起（“混合”）。

关键词：非法贸易，全球化，萨赫勒，欧洲，马格里布，非法交易

Conceptually, this study owes a lot to the following studies<sup>1</sup>:

- Two remarkable works by Alain Tarrius: *La mondialisation par le bas*<sup>2</sup> and *La mondialisation criminelle*.<sup>3</sup>
- The penetrating study by Adrien Doron, “From the margins to the world, the turbulent structuring of a transnational market place in ben Gardane, Tunisia.”<sup>4</sup>
- The synthesis study of our Algerian colleague, Hanan Benyagoub, “Cross-border trade and insecurity in North Africa: The case of the locality of Ben Gardane in Tunisia.”<sup>5</sup>
- The research on Morocco by our friend Samir el-Ouardighi, journalist at *Médias24-Maroc*.

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## Introduction<sup>6</sup>

**A**s this study demonstrates, illicit trade is a serious problem for the international community. The reader will find in Appendix 1 some figures to help visualize the seriousness of the problem.

But first, this: to be useful, such a study must aim at originality and access the strategic dimension. It must neglect what is well known, stable, sustainable, and visible. It must focus on what is difficult to see, what tends to be neglected, and what is difficult to detect and understand in time.

What is meant by “illicit trade” is not self-evident. To study it, even on a regional scale, we must consider it from two angles—one geopolitical, the other criminological—which is what we do below.

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1 To facilitate reading, the sources (collected at the end of the study) and references are numbered and given throughout the text, in footnotes with the corresponding year; example (ref. 2, 2018)

2 Alain Tarrius, *La mondialisation par le bas - Les nouveaux nomades de l'économie souterraine* (Paris, France: Balland, 2002).

3 Alain Tarrius, *La mondialisation criminelle* (Vaucluse, France: éditions de l'Aube, La Tour d'Aigues, 2015).

4 Adrien Doron, *From the Margin to the World: The Turbulent Structuring of a Transnational Market Place in Ben Gardane, Tunisia* (2013).

5 Hanan Benyagoub, “Cross-Border Trade and Insecurity in North Africa: The Case of the Locality of Ben Gardane in Tunisia,” May 2018 Synthesis Study.

6 Ref. 32, 35, 36, 37, 2015 ; 40, 2010 ; 41, 2002.

## **The Geopolitical Conception of Illicit Trade**

**G**lobalization has gone through this—even if the one we are interested in is not the most visible. While this study focuses on a given geographical area—Southern Europe, the Maghreb and beyond, the Sahel region—it must be clearly seen beforehand that this area, although immense, is only one link in a chain of transcontinental trafficking of all kinds from Hong Kong and Guangzhou in the east to the Gulf of Guinea in the west, via Central Asia, the Black Sea, the Gulf, Anatolia, and the Balkans.

It is an immense trade route that is both “grey” (smuggled legal objects, tobacco, small electronics, etc.) and “black” (drugs, human trafficking, etc.) at the same time, a continuous chain that has existed sometimes for centuries (“Route of the Sultans,” “Route of the Balkans,” “Trabendo” route) and whose human elements are inextricably intertwined: smugglers, bandits, pimps, and Islamists—separately or together (the “hybrids”).

A whole fauna that is little known to states or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), because most of these merchants and smugglers (yet tens of thousands at least):

- are not permanent migrants—they travel under tourist visas and are therefore little or not noticed by security services, especially in the “Schengen Zone” of the European Union, and
- are not poor or hungry, and therefore are non-existent to NGOs.

Rather, they are drowned and are often invisible in migratory and tourist flows.

**ROUTE OF SULTANS** (which dates back to the Ottoman Empire): Taiwan, Hong Kong, etc., then Central Asia—Black Sea—Turkey—Balkans—Adriatic Sea—Western Mediterranean: cheap electronics, heroin, migrants and prostitutes, tobacco/cigarettes.

**ROUTE DU TRABENDO** (descent): Southern Europe, originally Marseille—Maghreb (Oujda in Morocco, Oran in Algeria)—Sahel and West Africa (Senegal, Mali): consumer goods, “cheap whites” cigarettes; (ascent): Africa, Maghreb, Europe—illegal migrants, cocaine, etc.

**BALKAN ROAD** (junction of the Sultan’s Road): Turkey—Balkans—Western Europe; (descent to Europe): same as Sultan’s Road; (ascent to the Black Sea): black money, chemical drugs such as ecstasy.

**SOUTH ROUTE** (junction of the Balkan Route): southern Italy—Libya—Tunisia—the Sahel.

As you can see, there is an immense network of territories, routes, transnational networks, “troubled areas,” etc. And at its heart, a constant and lasting criminal presence of Russian organized crime (Black Sea) mafias from southern Italy and Albania, Balkan criminal circles on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, armed Islamist militias, and criminal gangs.

## **The Criminological Conception of Illicit Trade**

**B**etter than geographers, sociologists, and ethnologists, criminologists know—and can establish the following crucial elements for such a study, especially in its predictive dimension for future threats:

- Criminals do not have a “profession” like honest people do.
- They are used by predatory and opportunistic individuals (or gangs or mafia entities). Their only activity is to spot illicit enrichment opportunities and pounce on them like a wild beast jumps on a weakened gazelle or leaves the herd.
- A great Corsican commissioner of the French police once said, “criminals renounce everything except the booty,” a sentence that has become a famous criminological proverb. Thus, bandits create pipelines or criminal networks and then pass through them everything that can enrich them: tobacco, drugs, sex workers, counterfeit spare parts, etc.
- Thus, all of our research tends to show that there are no professionals in the criminal world considered for this study in a single field, such as trafficking in human beings or tobacco products, but rather criminal entities that move from one illicit source of profit to another, according to the following basic cost-benefit calculations:
  - How much will I get out of this (profit instinct)?
  - How much do I risk if I am stopped (self-preservation instinct)?
- In the same way, criminal ways and routes that they conceive and use are all provisional, temporary, reversible, and subject to constant arbitration and revision. Every conscious bandit knows that time, the durable, the fixed, and the stable are the best allies and friends of states and the police. Doing the same illicit thing in the same place for a long time will result in the certainty of being arrested (if civil peace) or bombed (if civil war).

There is no eternal road, no continuous alliance: for the criminal traffic to continue (uninterrupted), everything else, underneath and behind, must change all the time.

In order to take a good look at this gigantic system, to see where it comes

from and where it goes—and what it does—we will successively address the following points:

- Important data on illicit trade, relating to the field of our study (Southern Europe and the Maghreb)
- The history of France-Maghreb traffic (for more than sixty years)
- A geopolitical vision of “globalization from below”
  - How does this “globalization from below” work?
- A geopolitical vision of troubled areas on a transcontinental scale
- Spotlight on “the mother of all troubled areas” (of the region under consideration) Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir, on the border between Libya and Tunisia, the most problematic border in Africa.<sup>7</sup>

## **EUROPE Trafficking in Human Beings (TEH)**

**B**y inducing and provoking many others, it is necessary to focus on criminal networks smuggling illegal immigrants into Europe. Europol has announced that the number of smugglers (operating in networks) has exploded in the last two years. Europol has even announced a doubling of their number, from ±30,000 smugglers in September 2015 to ±55,000 at the end of 2016 and ±65,000 at the end of 2017.<sup>8</sup>

The origin of these smugglers can be broken down as follows:

Europe (Balkans)	±60%
Middle East	±15%
Africa	±13%
Western Asia	± 9%
Americas	±1%

## **FRANCE**

**A**s cigarette/tobacco smuggling/counterfeiting is a flagship activity of global smuggling, let's observe it in the country of origin of trafficking to the Maghreb. It should be recalled that 80 percent of tobacco smoked in France

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7 “Global Statistics on Alcohol, Tobacco and Illicit Drug Use, 2017,” *Wiley Online Library*, May 10, 2018.

8 “Migrants: 65,000 Smugglers in the Sights of Europol, 13 Percent of Whom Come from Africa,” *Media 24* (Morocco), April 6, 2018.

is in the form of cigarettes, with tobacco taxation bringing in about 14 billion euros per year for the state.

In 2015, France was the European champion in the consumption of illicit cigarettes (bought “on the sly” or on the internet);<sup>9</sup> this analysis focuses on legal cigarettes smuggled into the country, on counterfeit cigarettes, and finally, on the nearby cross-border traffic (from a neighboring country where cigarettes are cheaper).<sup>10</sup> In 2015, sixteen billion cigarettes smoked without purchase at a tobacconist’s (which in France has a monopoly on tobacco sales) represented 27 percent of total consumption:

- Cigarettes bought in the official network: ±61.5 percent (2015)
- Cigarettes legally purchased outside France: ±12.5 percent
- Illegal packets: ±14.6 percent of the total, an increase of +1.2 percent since 2014

The estimate of French officials is less than that of manufacturers, but is still (for 2016) 15 percent of consumption, for a criminal turnover of ±9 billion euros per year. In France in 2018, ±22 percent of cigarettes were bought outside the network of tobacconists, and professionals estimate that in 2020, it is likely to be 40 percent of total sales. Finally, in 2016, 31 percent of the illicit cigarettes smoked in France came from Algeria: we are well on the way up the “Route du trabendo.”

After France,<sup>11</sup> the use of illicit cigarettes is highest in Poland, the United Kingdom, and Italy.

## ALGERIA

**A**lgeria is a huge country of ±2.4 million km<sup>2</sup>, with 6,343 km of borders.<sup>12</sup> Seizures of narcotics by all Algerian State services in 2017:

Cannabis:	± 52.6 tons
Cocaine:	± 6.3 kilos
Heroin:	± 2.2 kilos

Seizures of cigarette cartridges by Algerian customs:

2017: 56,038 cartons

9 “France, the Biggest Consumer of Illegal Cigarettes in Europe,” *20 Minutes*, June 9, 2016.

10 “A Study of the Illicit Cigarette Market in the European union, Norway and Switzerland,” *KPMG*, Project SUN - 2016 Results Commissioned by PMI, Imperial Tobacco, JTI and BAT.

11 “France, the Biggest Consumer of Illegal Cigarettes in Europe,” *20 Minutes*, June 9, 2016.

12 Algerian customs.

2016: 39,515

2015: 23,700

Seizures of bottles of strong alcohol by the Algerian customs:

2017: 62,440 bottles

2016: 150,614

2015: 95,815

## TUNISIA

In this neighbor of Libya, a country totally chaotic since late 2011, the illicit economy, or parallel, represents 15 to 20 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and employs  $\pm 30$  percent of the non-agricultural workforce. Seventy-five percent of Tunisians buy goods or products from smuggling. Seventy-seven percent of imports from Libya to Tunisia are smuggled. In total, the informal sector is said to comprise about 50 percent of Tunisia's total trade.<sup>13</sup>

## MOROCCO

- Counterfeit seizures (2017): 5.23 million units; (2016) 2.25 million
- Seizures of illicit cigarettes (2017): 23 million units; (2016) 12.5 million
- Currency seizures, money laundering (2017): MAD 2.2 billion; (2016) MAD 1.2 billion
- Drug seizures (2017):
  - Cannabis:  $\pm 34$  tons
  - "Hard drugs" (heroin + cocaine):  $\pm 477$  kg
  - Chemical drugs type ecstasy:  $\pm 140,000$  pills<sup>14</sup>

### *Morocco and Cocaine*

Since 2014, South American cartels have made Morocco their number one springboard to Europe for two reasons:

- Morocco has presence in important cannabis exporters to Europe and therefore, well-functioning logistics networks, which can also bribe some officials.

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<sup>13</sup> Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies.

<sup>14</sup> General Directorate for the Surveillance of the National Territory, DGST, and in particular, its Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations, BCIJ, in charge of the fight against transnational organized crime.



- The local bourgeoisie upper classes wish to “party” and buy cocaine for this purpose, as this drug is much purer than it was ten years ago (15 percent purity then; 40 percent today) and costs today (depending on the city where it is bought) from 300 to 500 dirhams per gram (800 dirhams and more around 2010).<sup>15</sup>

The final destination for cocaine remains of course Europe (Spain, the Netherlands, and Germany and the Gulf (the United Arab Emirates [UAE]) by land, sea, or air, but local sales, which are less logistically risky, can also be lucrative.

It should be noted that large international seizures are carried out by domestic intelligence (DGST), which has international contacts in this area.

The first large seizure in Marrakech took place in March 2014 of 226 kilos. Thereafter, the tonnages of cocaine seized in Morocco were enormous: 1.2 t in 2016 (on a boat coming from Venezuela); 2.6 t in October 2017 of 93 percent pure cocaine, packaged in 2,600 1 kg packets, bearing the seal of a large Latin American cartel, and therefore able to be cut five times before resale (resulting in more than 12 t to be resold on the street); in the port of Casablanca in February 2018, 541 kg of cocaine with an exceptional purity of 97 percent (nearly 3 t after cutting).

This is while “mules” coming from Sao Paulo, Brazil are often intercepted at the Mohammed V airport in Casablanca, who have ingested 1 to 2 kg of cocaine in pellets or are carrying a few kilos of the drug in their luggage.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Tobacco, the Ideal Illicit Commodity, and Dangerous Comparisons and Orders Of Thought***

First of all, we need to acquire elements of comparison: as statistics are not always perfect or exploitable in the Maghreb states, it seemed useful to us to propose first more solid data from Bulgaria, a state also inscribed in the Balkans and a rather chaotic zone, and at the outlet of the eponymous road, one of the great world routes of illicit trade and trafficking (human beings, drugs, etc.).

### ***Trafficking and Use of Illicit Cigarettes in Bulgaria***

First of all, let us recall that even today in the Balkans, illicit trade, the most lucrative, remains a common form of economic activity. Trafficking on the Balkan Route thus represents an annual turnover of \$7 to \$8 billion, to be compared, for

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15 “Morocco: The New Target of South American Cocaine Traffickers,” *Media 24* (Morocco), December 2, 2018; “Port of Casablanca: Seizure of More than Half a Ton of Cocaine from South America,” *Media 24* (Morocco), November 2, 2018.

16 “Casablanca: Nearly 2 kg of Cocaine Extracted from the Intestines of a Nigerian,” *Media 24* (Morocco) February 2, 2018; “Casablanca: More than a Kilo of Cocaine Seized Following the Arrest of a Brazilian at Mohammed V Airport,” *Media 24* (Morocco), February 4, 2018; “A Brazilian and a Nigerian Arrested at Casablanca Airport in Possession of More Than 7 kg of Cocaine,” *Media 24* (Morocco), April 2, 2018.

example, to the GDP of Macedonia-FYROM ( $\pm$ \$11 billion), Albania ( $\pm$ \$12 billion), and so on.<sup>17</sup>

From 2007 to 2016, over a decade, the illicit trade in cigarettes in Bulgaria constituted a turnover of 2.5 to 3.5 billion leva (1.28 billion euros, \$1.55 billion).<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning of the period under consideration (2007), illicit cigarettes accounted for  $\pm$ 11 percent of the country's consumption and at the peak (2010),  $\pm$ 31 percent of this consumption. In 2016, one billion illicit cigarettes were consumed in Bulgaria, bringing traffickers 120 to 170 million leva.

A lot of chopped, roll-your-own tobacco is produced in Bulgaria and is mostly sold "under the table": 86 percent of the tobacco consumed in the country is produced there and 75 percent passes through illicit channels. Thus, about 860 million cigarettes can be rolled.

For a small country (7.2 million inhabitants) with a modest GDP (per capita, market price 2016, 6,600 euros), the profits from cigarette trafficking are anything but negligible, and the capacity for corruption (of the economy, officials, and politicians) is significant.

### ***Tobacco, an Ideal—and Dangerous—Illicit Commodity***

- Smokers represent  $\pm$ 15 percent of the world's population; in 2014, the global legal tobacco market was  $\pm$ \$745 billion (90 percent for cigarettes).
- In comparison, the users (within the year, at least once) were:
  - cannabis: 3.8 percent of the world pop.
  - amphetamines: 0.77 percent of the world pop.
  - opioids: 0.37 percent of the world pop.
  - cocaine: 0.35 percent of the world pop.

Tobacco and cigarettes are a light product with easy transportation, high demand, high profits (profit rate: 20 percent minimum), and repression hitting only the bottom rung of the criminal hierarchy. However, contraband/counterfeit tobacco is both a source of income for organized crime and a loss of taxation for states; it leads to significant corruption and massive money laundering. Four global mega-corporations produce 65 percent of the world's tobacco.

### ***Illicit Tobacco and Cigarettes in the World***

- Illicit tobacco" is tobacco produced without tax or license and smuggled, or is produced by counterfeiting. The following are illicit:

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17 Institute for Market Economics, Sofia.

18 "For 10 Years, the Illegal Cigarette Trade has Poured  $\pm$ 3 Billion Leva into the Criminal World," *Novinite* (Bulgaria), February 1, 2018.

- Normal cigarettes sold in contraband (unpaid taxes)
  - Low-cost contraband cigarettes (cheap whites)
  - Counterfeit cigarettes (low-cost illicit manufacturing)
  - Counterfeit raw, chopped, rolling tobacco
- 1 out of every 10 cigarettes smoked in the world is illicit.
  - Counterfeit cigarettes contain on average (versus branded cigarettes):
    - 5 times more cadmium
    - 6 times more lead
    - 133 times more carbon monoxide
    - 160 times more tar<sup>19</sup>
  - Worldwide in 2015, the turnover of illicit tobacco/cigarettes was approximately \$40 billion, including \$5.2 billion for counterfeit cigarettes.

## EUROPEAN UNION

**T**he market for illicit cigarettes in the EU is  $\pm 9$  percent of the total ( $\pm 48$  billion cigarettes), representing a tax loss of  $\pm 10$  billion euros per year.

## AFRICA + MIDDLE EAST

**F**rom 2005 to 2015, the sector in the world where the consumption of illicit cigarettes is increasing the most is Africa and the Middle East. The percentage of illicit tobacco on the entire continent is 15 percent; in West Africa, it is up to 80 percent (at the outlet of the “Route du Sud” and the “Route du Trabendo”). People in the Maghreb (from Morocco to Egypt) smoke a lot and account for 40 to 50 percent of tobacco consumption on the entire African continent.

## Traffic France-Maghreb: The Origin

**T**he “globalization from below” did not begin in one fell swoop, on a fixed date after the collapse of the Soviet Union and 1989–1990, when the bipolar world order was abolished. It had begun long before, notably between France and the Maghreb, after the independence of the 1960s. If this “globalization from below” has its mysteries, it also has its origins, which we now set out.

In central Marseille, there is a rather dilapidated district called “Belsunce.” In the 1960s–1970s, it saw the birth—and was the first capital—of “nomadic cap-

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<sup>19</sup> “Counterfeit Cigarettes Contain Disturbing Toxic Substances,” *ICC-Fraudnet*, August 28, 2017.

italism,” reigning there for a long time. Even today, the tireless swarming “ants,” most often immigrants from the Maghreb and the Sahel, form the basic infantry of “globalization from below.” In the Franco-Spanish-Maghrebian colonial slang, this informal trade, straddling the licit and illicit, is the TRABENDO (contrabando in Spanish).

In the 1980s, its apogee, “Belsunce,” is in reality a colonial post-comptoir, on the informal side. Then, pressed against each other, there are 350 to four hundred stores held mainly by Algerians. About fifty large Algerian families hold most of the stores.

As we will see below, things change with the near civil war that ravaged Algeria in the 1990s. In the year 2000 and thereafter, “Belsunce” is under the control of some 120 families, mostly Moroccan, owning about eight hundred stores spread throughout the south of France and beyond, of which now only  $\pm 175$  is in “Belsunce” itself.

Since the 1980s, these stores have attracted a huge clientele: each year, about 700,000 customers make a round trip from the Maghreb (especially, or during a family visit), including 300,000 to 400,000 immigrants living in Europe.

For those who come from Algeria, the stages of the road (sea or land, private cars or coaches) are then: Oran, Alicante, and finally Marseille.

Annual turnover of Belsunce, around 1987, was about 600 million euros ( $\pm 3$  billion French francs at the time). Belsunce, with its somewhat miserable and decrepit appearance, was then by far the leading commercial sector on the Mediterranean coast of France.

One sells in Belsunce all (licit or illicit) that is untraceable in the “socialist” Algeria of that time: everyday consumer goods, household appliances, and trousseaux for the bride and groom. But also, one sells more discreetly and “under the counter” what is already part of the illicit economy: counterfeit clothes, contraband cigarettes, and car electronics and spare parts (then counterfeit in southern Italy).

At the time, however, the unofficial law enacted by the “Informal Notaries” of the trabendo (which we will discuss below) prohibited trafficking to the Maghreb arms, strong alcohol, sex workers, and drugs—barriers that increased during the crisis of armed Islamism in Algeria (1992–2005, approximately).

Upheaval in Belsunce around 1991–1992 included the near civil war in Algeria, which affected all this Franco-Maghreb trade. Very active in Marseilles, though not very visible, the Islamists of the Islamic Salvation Front, then the (very ferocious) Armed Islamic Group, began to racketeer merchants, demanding from them—on pain of death—that they pay them an exorbitant version of the “zakat,” a religious tax—an Islamist translation of the “revolutionary tax” of the guerrillas of the wars of independence.

Frightened—and rather legalistic—Algerian merchants, already quite fortunate, then resold their stores in Belsunce and fled elsewhere to exercise their talents, in spaces where the Islamist threat is more diffuse, even absent—further away in France or elsewhere in Europe.

At the same time and thereafter (1990–2000), about 1.2 million Moroccans emigrated to Europe. The most gifted for the trade of these Moroccans then took over Belsunce and widened the concept of informal trade hubs, first to other cities in France, Béziers, Nîmes, Perpignan, and Valence first, then elsewhere in Europe, Germany, Belgium, and Italy especially, for the initial use of the Muslim-Maghrebi populations established in the region, or coming to Europe, where their tribal-clan ties attracted them.

Thus, from “Belsunce” to the confines of the Sahel, a gigantic and informal “pipeline” has been built up almost invisibly—many natives of Marseille living in other parts of the city would be very surprised to learn that such a system exists —from the Mediterranean coast of France, irrigates all the Maghreb and the Sahel through the “troubled areas” of Perthus-La Junquera, then that of Andalusia around Algeciras, then through Oujda in Morocco (on the border with Algeria), then Oran, from there all the “bled” and beyond to the confines of the Sahara.

And even, from now on, in most of West Africa. From the 1990s, “Belsunce” acquired a Sahelian dimension, with the arrival of the “river people” (Senegal), mainly Senegalese, but also Malians and Mauritians. “Ants,” then traders and notables, come to “Belsunce” and extend the “catchment area” of the district to the borders of West Africa. Let us insist, the flows going up and down this “Route du Trabendo” concern at the same time and all together individuals, goods, and legal or illegal products:

- The licit side concerns the mode of smuggling all objects of everyday life—first and foremost cigarettes—without paying duties or taxes, a traffic of use tolerated by the regimes in place as safety valves.
- The illicit side affects the very nature of the goods and objects sold: narcotics, fake medicines, counterfeit spare parts—the whole field of dangerous counterfeits.

## **The Geopolitics of “Globalization from Below”**

“**G**lobalization from below operates beneath the States, in their flaws, their shortcomings. Cultural and not only economic, its actors are unexpected—ants of international trade weaving the web of innumera-

ble networks, informal Maghrebian or Senegalese notaries, mafia.”<sup>20</sup>

***The Main Traffic Routes of the “Elusive Globalization,” from Asia, the Middle East, and the Maghreb, to Europe***

Between these routes there are of course overlaps—but not “wars.” There is money to be made for everyone, and each ethnic entity trafficking along these routes knows how to defend itself, using bodyguards, “escorts,” etc.:

- Former Soviet Republics of Central Asia (the “Stans”)—Poland—Germany
- Caucasus—Georgia—Ukraine—Austria—Switzerland
- South Asia—UAE—Lebanon—Greece—Northern Italy—France
- Afghanistan—Georgia—Turkey—Southern Italy—Spain
- Afghanistan—Turkey—Greece—Southern Italy—France—Spain
- Lebanon—South Mediterranean—Maghreb—Spain

Globalization from below” is first and foremost the abolition of borders for the “ants” of illicit transnational trade. Now this erasing of the border is everything but an insignificant phenomenon. For since the domination of nation-states over the earth and still today, over most of the planet, the limit of the geographical or geopolitical world is the border, a mark of sovereignty for the state as much as a vulnerable zone.

Whether intellectual or physical, the border is crucial for defense, security, and intelligence. Today, borders are increasingly porous and are being abused: the deterritorialization of economic, political, and cultural relations; the emergence of new international entities that bypass or span the nation-state; and the global divergence of economic, societal, and cultural spheres from the state. And in addition today, “globalization from below,” is a phenomenon that is, if not new, at least unknown and that we must explain below.

First, this reminder: for two millennia, space and time have formed the two strategic axes of humanity. But the unitary formula “space-time” conceals tormented relationships. For over the centuries, either time or space has dominated strategic thinking. From the nineteenth century to the present day, space has dominated the thinking of Europeans, concerning their great colonial empires.

Here, as Robert Kaplan points out in *The Revenge of Geography*, geopolitics even expresses human destiny. For, he says, the survival of a people goes beyond simple military jousts: climate, harvests, and rainfall determine human and political choices. Of course, the great transcontinental flows of goods, services, and hu-

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20 “Alain Tarrius: Transmigrants are Nomads, Actors of a Globalization from Below,” *Libération*, September 1, 2015.

man beings are also important, whether they are legal, discreet, or outright illegal, as we shall see.

## **The Underbelly of “Elusive Globalization”**

**S**ince the end of the colonial era and the migration of the former colonized to Europe, illicit trade routes have been established that basically resume the historical caravan and peddling routes—less famous than the famous “Silk Road,” but just as real and effective.

With regard to the precise object of our study, an invisible web of discreet trade has thus covered the western Mediterranean and southern Europe for sometimes more than half a century.

Along these routes, for decades or even centuries, there has been a continuous and long-running flow of goods and merchandise that are duty-free and therefore sold as contraband, the state and its customs having been bypassed or even abolished here.

On these routes, small nomadic entrepreneurs—Moroccans in the west and Turks in the east—operate a clandestine cross-border trade, using deliberate and permanent mobility, quite different from migrations with a sedentary objective. In a van, a car, or even two suitcases, these invisible trade agents transport legal, duty-free goods, sometimes even counterfeit goods, and sell them at low prices:

- To the populations of the former colonized countries; for France, a country in the Maghreb and the Sahel,
- Poor populations (migrants, immigrants, etc.) from rich nations, diasporas from colonial times (from the Maghreb, the Balkans, sub-Saharan Africa, etc.), living in marginalized or outlying neighborhoods in European metropolises, including Marseille, of course, but also Brussels, the Paris region, Berlin, Barcelona, Turin, etc. (the “poor-to-poor” trade). These North African/African populations present in Europe have long learned to keep quiet, to keep to themselves, two important elements of their culture and their lives:
  - Everything related to tribal affairs is hidden from the *Toubabs* (whites) for fear of ridicule or mockery. Hardly ever will a Senegalese or a Malian evoke with a smile, in the course of a conversation, a “cousin affair” (a coded formula that designates tribal stories, comical or serious).
  - Anything to do with the invisible trade, the *trabendo*, which is very present in the neighborhoods where stable immigrants live, is also hidden. In these neighborhoods, discussion forums and internet advertisements present these goods. Young people in particular know very well what electronic novelties, sports clothing, or shoes to buy through this

medium, their performance, and their prices. They order them from the “nomads” they know, often for themselves, but also for acquaintances in other districts or cities.

From the “big ghetto” to the small neighborhood, from the roads of the Trabendo or the Sultans, to the small towns in the suburban crowns, a network is thus created where, by capillarity, all contraband goods, counterfeit goods, etc., circulate.

## **A Massive but Invisible Transcontinental Traffic**

**T**hese tens of thousands of nomads of the transcontinental illicit trade are almost invisible, as they are drowned in the flows of millions of tourists (on their journeys) and in the immigrant population (in Europe). From West Asia to the confines of Central Africa and passing through the Maghreb; from the Caucasus to Andalusia, these flows, networks, and individuals, these goods and masses of grey or black money, thus form the dark, submerged face of international trade.

Does the state emerge unscathed from this massive and permanent invisible trade? No. Since these operations are all carried out outside of commercial or fiscal regulations, it loses taxes and customs, and its officials, customs officers, police, and consular agents are subjected to strong pressure—corruption, but sometimes also intimidation.

Let’s insist that what is transported along these roads is as much part of the “grey economy,” informal, as it is part of the black economy, which is downright criminal.

## **“Globalization From Below”: How Does It Work?**

**T**he entities we describe below are very different from the “classic” mafias, gangs, and criminal networks; the latter are active, sometimes secularly for mafias, in racketeering, trafficking in human beings, drugs, and weapons (sometimes with cultural restrictions, as in southern Italy).

However, the rather unknown “transmigrants” described below, although originally non-criminals, cohabit and ultimately cooperate with these “habitual criminals” in the global areas, spaces, and routes of illicit activity. This, according to the rules and norms of cross-border mobility, and of the underground or invisible economy, is known and accepted by all. The whole creates transcontinental and continuous chains of “grey” or “black” business, finally giving rise to the “discreet globalization” defined and depicted above.

We will speak here of transmigrants, those nomadic entrepreneurs who are invisible because they are most often lost in tourist or migratory flows; entrepre-



neurs operating in ethnic networks and whose behavior is governed by codes of honor drawn from their national or tribal traditions.

Neither emigrants nor immigrants, these active transmigrants in Europe have in fact fulfilled the age-old wish of liberals and libertarians, bringing about a world without borders or taxes. These transmigrants are never or almost never illegal immigrants or “sans-papiers”; they act with their faces uncovered and have authentic passports bearing authentic tourist visas (usually limited to three months of presence on the soil of the country visited).

From the Moroccans of the Maghreb to the Turks or Kurds of Anatolia or Central Asia, passing through all the ethnic entities concerned, they all circulate by “tours” of several months, from home to home, a bit like the fishing campaigns of the Newfoundlanders of yesteryear. This, along routes already mentioned as the “Route of the Sultans” in use for sometimes five or six centuries and founded under the Ottoman Empire: Eastern Iran and Afghanistan, then Turkey and the Balkans, and finally Western Europe.

On the outskirts of the European Union and sometimes now within it (Bulgaria), these transmigrants of the Route of the Sultans can rely on local or regional merchants from the Muslim populations and enclaves of the Balkans to whom they are often united, outside the profession, by more discreet links of belonging to Sufi brotherhoods (Bektashis, Naqhsbandis, etc.): Bosnians, Albanians, Turks, or “Pomaks” of Bulgaria, Muslims of the Serbo-Montenegrin Sandjak, etc.

Let’s now talk about those in our field of study: their mode of action is inspired by traditional nomadism in the Maghreb and the Sahel, imported into Europe where it has been grafted onto ancient local peddling traditions.

As a rule, the nomad remains faithful to his douar, or city of origin. They have no desire for permanent integration into Europe; nor, when they engage in informal trade, specialties or professions. Their science is, precisely, that of nomadism; their expertise is a *savoir-jouer* between diverse nationalities and origins, for the purpose of commercial exchange. This system operates of course by clan “cousinage,” but also by exploiting various migrants or illegal immigrants—the “ants”—for small jobs, all along the chain.

Travelling around in vans or small vans, these informal traders—which we can now clearly see operating in Paris itself, in certain neighborhoods—possess the talents of nomads: they know when to leave, where to go, what to sell where and to whom. They also know how to circulate vital information among themselves, and quickly—a practice known in colloquial French as the “Arabic telephone.” This practice has recently been accelerated—and even become almost immediate—by the use of cell phones.

In this world of transmigrants, the traditions of honor and vengeance of the pre-modern world still exist and are very much alive. The word given between the

actors of the illicit trade is decisive and if it is flouted, the whole network learns about it without delay, the cheater being marginalized—or even eliminated.

Such traditions and practices also prevail in the mafia world: from southern Italy to the Albanian- and Turkish-speaking worlds, there is no doubt that they greatly facilitate exchanges between transmigrants and criminals, when and where they need to dialogue and make deals.

All the more so because at the top of these two systems, the “grey” of illicit trade and the “black” of purely criminal markets, there are superstructures of control and contact with state powers: “dome” for Cosa Nostra and “informal notaries” for transmigrants—in the Marseilles district of Belsunce for example—“notaries” linked to the municipal administrations of Marseilles or to the Algerian state power; authorities that one must know how to appease and cajole—sometimes corrupt, even intimidate—in order to be able to “work” peacefully and without hindrance.

“Notaries” or “domes” of the superstructures, which, it should be noted, all together finance the “grey” or “black” illicit trade. From what transpires from official reports or from the rare confidences of the illicit actors in the field, these financiers are used by Italian or Turkish mafia or by the heads of Russian or Georgian mega-gangs.

Criminal—or at least informal—“investment companies” finance 40 to 50 percent of the sales campaigns along the routes of illicit trade, with the double benefit of substantial interest and sums of changing originally black criminal money to pale grey—from criminal to informal, or even laundered.

In some major ports of the Gulf countries, for example, low-end electronics from Southeast Asia (coming from Japan via Taiwan, or from China via Hong Kong) or high-end objects at the end of the line (sold for 50 to 60 percent less, when new models appear) are bought with money being laundered (from heroin trafficking, most often).

Declared as a “terminal destination,” these objects nevertheless leave, neither seen nor known, to ports near the Balkan route.

A “criminal capital” is advanced by mafia groups, as seen above. Re-exported duty-free from the free ports of various Emirates, these objects leave for the Black Sea ports, then travel along the Balkan route, or even to ports, all more or less out of control, on the Libyan coast, and then take the upward path of the *trabendo* route to Western Europe.

Data from Dubai in 2014 estimated that the trade of such “duty-free goods” in the Emirate’s free ports represented a turnover of \$6 billion per year.

New entities of international illicit circulation, active agents of “globalization from below,” pass through and act in close proximity to criminal or mafia

networks; between them all, a great porosity exists from the French Mediterranean coast to Andalusia and the Italian Mezzogiorno (Southern Europe) and from there to the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus.

Individuals or trafficked products generally circulate in the same invisible “pipelines”: cheap Asian electronics, cigarettes, various narcotics, and sex workers, etc. Polycriminal-hybrid globalized networks are thus born and grow, most often complementary, easily accessible to the nomads involved, traffickers or pure bandits.

## **Geopolitics of Troubled Areas**

**I**llicit markets ... criminal trading hubs ... transcontinental routes ... transborder “grey” or “troubled” areas ... in our study on trafficking from Southern Europe to the Maghreb and then to the Sahel, geopolitics is everywhere and the illicit, hidden is just behind it, in the confines. Let us first look at the peripheral trouble spots, around the geographical area that we are studying.

But first: all along these routes, the logistics of “globalization from below.” First and foremost, truckers and their trucks are crucial for all traffic. They are the clients of the sex workers, from whom they also buy cigarettes and the dose of cocaine that gives the energy for the next stage. In their trucks, for a fee or for various favors, they can transport illegal immigrants and all the proceeds of trafficking and “black” cash to be “laundered.”

They represent an enormous logistical army. In the center of the troubled zone of Le Perthuis-La Junquera (at the heart of our subject, to which we return below) there are often, at the same time, more than 3,500 trucks and 5,000 truckers. The same is true of all criminal trading hubs on the China-Adriatic land route.

## **Outside the Scope of Our Study**

**T**HE SOUTHEAST OF THE AREA OF OUR STUDY, the Adriatic troubled zone, Trieste-Bari-Balkans covers precisely, from west to east and from north to south:

- The south of Italy and its mafia lands of Puglia, Campania, and Calabria (Sicily stays away from this traffic, and is a bit conspicuous for it).
- On the other side of the Otranto Canal, the south of Serbia, Macedonia-FYROM, the west of Bulgaria.

These are the lands of trade and trafficking of heroin, cocaine, and cigarettes, which go up the Balkan route, and chemical drugs (amphetamines, ecstasy), which go down it toward Turkey and the Middle East.

It is also a land of human trafficking, where girls from the Black Sea (Moldavians, Georgians, Ukrainians, etc.) are “trained in prostitution” by their pimps, before populating the eight to nine hundred “brothels” on the Mediterranean coast of Spain, from La Junquera (immediately past the French border at Algesiras, opposite Morocco) to La Junquera (immediately past the French border at Algesiras, opposite Morocco).

ALWAYS MORE EAST is the troubled zone of the Black Sea, the outlet of the land route of the Sultans. Small electronics from Taiwan or Hong Kong, blue jeans from China, Afghan heroin, and smuggled “cheap whites” cigarettes from all along the land route pass through there. (Maritime traffic is through Dubai.) Note the importance of two ports, also rather troubled: Poti in Georgia (third port of the country) and Trabzon in Turkey, major places of trafficking on the Black Sea. In 2007, the University of Economics in Sofia, Bulgaria estimated the illicit financial flows between the Black Sea and the Adriatic—passing, precisely, through Bulgaria—to more than \$6 billion per year. Next stop for drugs, cheap small electronics, and girls, is the Balkans, Italy, or Austria—the historical heart of the European Union

IN SOUTH-WEST AFRICA, from the Gulf of Guinea to the Sahel, the trans-Saharan route goes up to Morocco or Libya. This includes cocaine from Brazil, Venezuela, and Central America that moves to the coast of Ghana, Nigeria, and Benin. From Morocco, and its “hashish route,” cocaine goes up to Spain and Portugal; from Libya, clandestine goods go to Southern Italy and Greece, then to the Balkans, and finally to Europe, always.

ON THE WESTERN ASIA-EASTERN AFRICA MARITIME ROAD from Pakistan, Afghan heroin reaches the ports of Somalia, Kenya, or Tanzania and arrives in Libya via Sudan.

## **In the Scope of Our Study**

**F**rance-Spain-Maghreb: Originally, there is a centuries-old tradition of peddling between nations: this, from the cities of the south of France (Marseille), but also Perpignan, Barcelona-Tarragona, Valencia, Alicante, and the troubled Andalusian zone, with Almeria, Granada, Malaga, Seville, and Algeciras in the background. In this troubled zone illicit exchanges and barter (used for money laundering) with the Maghreb take place: cigarettes, shoes and sports clothing, and small low-end electronics against cannabis or heroin.

Cocaine is of course exported to Northern Europe, where it is sold at a much higher price (up to \$50,000 per kilo, roughly, in Stockholm, against e.g., \$12,000 in Miami, Florida), but is also distributed by the brothels on the Spanish

coast, where girls offer clients a “pass” with or without cocaine. Throughout this troubled area, the “criminal order” is maintained (in the red-light districts, during illicit transactions, etc.) by thugs from the Gypsy or North African communities, or from the Balkans, Serbia, or Albania.

On April 22, at the port of Algeciras, Andalusia, the Spanish Ministry of the Interior announced a seizure of 8.7 t of cocaine in containers of bananas from Colombia: “the largest in the history of drug trafficking” in Spain. Five suspects were arrested, in Spain and France. The drugs were distributed in  $\pm 1000$  boxes of bananas, with packets of cocaine labeled iPhone, resulting in a record seizure of drugs “transported in a container” in Europe.<sup>21</sup>

In December 2017 in Algeciras, 6 t of cocaine (210 million euros) were seized in a container of bananas from Medellin, Colombia, the largest seizure in eighteen years. The fifth port in Europe, Algeciras, receives five million containers per year. Spain is the major point of entry for drugs into Europe, as it is close to North Africa (cannabis) and linked to South America (cocaine). To the northwest of Algeciras, Cadiz is also a stronghold of drug traffickers and smugglers. Operating almost openly, they often attack the police.

In the area from Kasserine (Tunisia) to Tébessa (Algeria), which is a zone that is certainly troubled, but modest, day-to-day, the trafficking reported by local customs includes fuel, olive oil, carpets and blankets, cartridges for shotguns (cal. 16 or 12), and finally, cartons of cigarettes (recently, 525 cartons of cigarettes, in March 2018). Nothing strategic for the moment.

### *Africa—Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir: The “Mother of All Troubled Areas”*

Since 2011, Libya has been a chaotic area with 1,800 km of coastline open to all winds. There are six to seven million inhabitants scattered over 1.8 million km<sup>2</sup>; militias and tribes survive thanks to trafficking, hydrocarbons, human beings, weapons, cigarettes, and fake medicines. Plus of course, there is the widespread presence of the most dangerous Islamists, Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, etc., resulting in a very dangerous mixture of the “Ho Chi Minh trail” and the Court of Miracles facing the European Union.

Throughout the country, criminalized militias, which in fact hold the real power, that of arms, arrest, lock up, and execute whomever they want. African migrants who fall into their hands are often detained, locked up, tortured, sold in markets, and subjected to forced labor—or even the worst forms of sexual violence—with complete impunity.

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21 “Andalusian Troubled Zone: Algeciras and Cocaine, May 2018,” *Security Defense Business Review* 194, May 22, 2018.

## **Libya and Migrant Smuggling**

**F**rom Syria and Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt, sub-Saharan Africa and Tunisia, migrants flock to the Libyan coast, a springboard to Europe. While under Gaddafi there were 4,500 passages to Europe in 2010, the passage of migrants has become a migratory tsunami (170,000 in 2014). In 2014, 60 percent of all migrants to Europe took this route, known as the “Central Mediterranean,” from the Libyan coast to southern Italy. For some states in the region and for the Islamic State, these flows of migrants are a strategic weapon; for criminals and human traffickers, they are easy prey.

Smuggling and migration routes end their African course on the Libyan coasts. There, an elaborate criminal system is rooted, a multi-ring chain of trafficking. From east to west, the collection of potential migrants takes place from Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Senegal, and Somalia. One of the major “pipelines” goes from Ghana to Libya, via Burkina Faso and Niger; trucks, fuel, refugees, and water points, everything is planned. In the east, a hub at the triple Egypt-Sudan-Libya border, bandits dream of border areas, especially when tribes living off the traffic ride on futile postcolonial dotted lines, as is the case here. As on Libya’s western border, there is also one on the Tunisian side, which we now present.

This is undoubtedly the most important point of our entire study: who can do more, can do less. Therefore, we have chosen to present and describe in detail the most important pole of smuggling and criminal trafficking, by far, of all the territory considered by our study, more important than the troubled zone of Perthus-La Junquera and more dangerous and fraught with criminal implications than the troubled zone of Andalusia-Algesiras.

This “mother of all troubled zones”—absent from the maps of globalization—is that of Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir, in the Tunisian governorate of Medenine, on the borders (for here, how can one speak of a real border?) of Tunisia and Tripolitan Libya (the “border” between these two countries is 460 km long and largely desert).

A globalized but invisible business network and an efficient and structured cross-border parallel trade pole, Ben Gardane (with about 60,000 inhabitants) is located on Tunisian territory; 30 km to the east, Ras Jedir is against the border, on the Libyan side and clearly in the orbit of Tripoli.

### **Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir: Genealogy of a “Troubled Zone”**

*2017-2018*

- Throughout the zone, the specter of “Islamist banditry” prowls around, by criminal infiltration of regional militias or by Islamist contamination of

armed gangs. In all, there are hybrids and a strong toxic cocktail of jihad and smuggling.

- Another concern is raised by the return from Syria and Iraq of jihadists to the Maghreb by land: Algerians, Moroccans, or Tunisians.
- In January 2018, the Islamist and Libyan Brigade al-Jouili, named after its leader Osama al-Jouili, attacked the border post of Ras Jedir (on the Libyan side) with heavy weapons in order to regain control of it (and the juicy traffic). Fighting with the post's security agents, there were two deaths and finally the brigade withdrew.
- In April 2017, in a Tunisian car leaving for Libya carried several hundred thousand euros in gold bars and US dollars.<sup>22</sup> One was found, but how many pass?
- Criminal groups from Nigeria set up in the ports of the Gulf of Gabes. They are there to retrieve drugs first delivered in the Gulf of Guinea, crossing the Sahara, to bring them to Europe.

### 2016

In March, the Islamic State tried to create a caliphate on the border area between Ben Gardane and Ras Jedir. The Tunisian army intervened in force. This resulted in the failure of the I.E., with fifty dead.

### 2015

In March, there was an Islamist attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis, with twenty-four dead and forty-five wounded.

### 2013

The period of 2011–2013 is chaotic in Tunisia as in Libya. Armed Islamists introduce in Tunisia anti-tank rocket launchers, ground-to-air missiles (Manpads), assault rifles, grenades,<sup>23</sup> anti-personnel mines, explosives and detonators, and handguns—the whole arsenal of a future civil war.<sup>24</sup> In Tunisia? For nearby Algeria? For sale on the black market? No one then seemed to know. In Tunisia itself, several armed jihadist attacks targeted weakened law enforcement forces and, at the borders, those forces were unable to confront smugglers backed, weapons in hand, by their clans and tribes.

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22 “Ras Jedir: Seizure of a Large Quantity of Gold Bars,” *Tunisia 14*, April 13, 2017.

23 “Seizure of a hand grenade in the possession of a Libyan citizen at the border post of Ras Jedir,” *Digital Tunisia*, December 14, 2017.

24 Moncef Kartas, “Tunisia and the Security Corollaries of the Libyan Revolution,” *Small Arms Survey 2013*.

In January, the gas site at Amenas, Algeria was attacked by armed Islamists: thirty-seven hostages and twenty-nine jihadists were killed.

*2012*

Libyan Chaos ... Instability in the Sahel ... Malian crisis ... Drugs (cannabis, cocaine), firearms, migrants, smuggling, currency, and armed gangs circulate throughout the Sahel and the Saharan area in constant criminal flows, including the Libya-Mali corridor, passing through the Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir traffic hub.

*2011*

This was a terrible year for the Maghreb and the Sahel: in January, the regime of Ben Ali collapses in Tunisia and in October; that of Gaddafi in neighboring Libya does as well. Chaos sets in; Libyan armed gangs settle on the Tunisian border. Previously, a tacit agreement with the regional authorities allowed trafficking in consumer goods and foreign currency, but prohibited the cross-border passage of weapons of war, narcotics, and jihadists. This was no longer the case.

*2000*

Following the globalization of the decade 1990–2000, the Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir zone began its transnational expansion and began to import massively Asian products, via Hong Kong, Dubai, Istanbul, etc. Tripoli (Libya) became the port of Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir, because little or no taxes were paid there due to local corruption. Also, there was intense fuel traffic from Libya (where it is very cheap) to Tunisia.

*1992–1999*

During this time, there was a severe international embargo targeting Libya for acts of international terrorism. The embargo was circumvented—with intense windfall effect—by the traffic pole Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir; hence there was vast traffic and smuggling between the two countries (luxury goods, medicines, spare parts, etc.).

*1985*

In 1985, there was a political crisis between Libya and Tunisia; Tunisian workers were expelled from Libya, and there was intense trafficking, especially of currency and illegal immigrants, in Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir. Tunisian clandestine workers infiltrate Libya, and their earnings go in the opposite direction, after currency conversion.

*Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century*

Tunisia was colonized in 1881 and Libya was colonized in 1911. This was a historic crossing point on the coastal pilgrimage route to Mecca and the associ-



ated trans-Saharan trade; Ben Gardane (530 km from Tunis) was born around 1898–1900 from the colonial division as a checkpoint on the borders of the two countries.

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## **Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir Border Zone: The Tribal Dimension**

**I**n the whole region, on the Tunisian side, rather, the tribal confederation (in the nineteenth century, nomads) of the Ouerghamma predominates. Within it, there are the Accara, Jebelia, Khazour, Ouderna, and Touazine tribes and on the Libyan side, there is the Nouayel tribe. Historically, the Touazine and Nouayel tribes were allies; as legitimists, these two tribes had long supported Ben Ali and Gaddafi. Forming the “Border Cartel,” these discreet and distrustful tribes avoid attracting attention—no ostentation or conspicuous constructions.

Since the fall of Ben Ali and Gaddafi, other tribal actors have invested the game of trafficking, notably those of Jbel Nefoussa, Nalouti, Zintani, etc., who are more “revolutionary” or Islamist. Among the Ouerghamma, the Ouderna of Tataouine engage in a significant traffic of gold and currency from the jihad of the Syria-Iraq zone, going to the Maghreb, on behalf of the Islamic State, in view of its future establishment. In the youth of these tribes from now on, there are hybrids, local Islamicized thugs, who are fascinated by the Islamic State.

## **Border Zone Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir: History of Trafficking**

**A** zone of smuggling for thousands of years, the Sahara is crossed by more or less legal trade flows from at least the Roman Empire, from sub-Saharan Africa to Libya, then to Italy and Europe. Clans, tribes, and networks of the Tunisia-Libya coast, secularly poor, often have no other choice than to engage in smuggling (goods and individuals): they are the “sons of the frontiers” who have the “knowledge to move” from their homes to the smugglers of Egypt.

Thus was constituted, and grew up at the same time as the Libyan chaos, a cross-border zone of violent lawlessness, observing tribal norms—all the more so since the state (whatever it is) is absent and those who live there have always been perfectly forgotten by the system, that of Tunis as well as that of Tripoli. In the region of Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir, the center of cross-border trade thus represents more than 20 percent of the jobs of the active population.

The whole border area of Tunisia-Libya is a tormented quasi-desert that can only be crossed, along difficult tracks, with a good knowledge of the terrain and powerful 4x4s. The posts of the Tunisian Border Police and the National Guard are far away and the area is easily crossed for those who know the terrain.

In this favorable environment, at the Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir pole, large *souks* (markets), “Souk Libya” and then “Souk Maghreb,” have been set up and installed, mainly selling the products of smuggling facilitated by corruption. The stores are on the Tunisian side and the warehouses are just behind the Libyan “border,” one supplying the other by a constant *noria* of vans and vans. Around the souks are parallel foreign exchange markets and transport logistics: a lost corner of the desert, supplied directly from Hong Kong, Dubai, Istanbul, or Algiers.

Toward the interior of Tunisia, Ben Gardane supplies Medenine, Kairouan, etc., which now have their own Libyan souks. Finally, nomads come there to get their supplies and then feed eastern Algeria.

### **Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir Border Zone: What Is Sold There**

**L**ICIT-COUNTERFEIT: alcohol, sports articles, livestock (sheep), coffee, various fuels (Libya), shoes, cigarettes (highly taxed in Tunisia, counterfeit or not), air conditioners, cosmetics, canned goods, blankets, plasma screens, household appliances and electronics, glasses, counterfeit medicines, construction metals (iron, copper), optics, perfumes, spare parts, tires, oriental carpets, kitchen utensils, clothing, stolen vehicles, etc.

CRIMINAL ILLICITY (drowned in the “tolerated”): firearms (looting of Gaddafi’s arsenals), cannabis (local consumption, Libya, Egypt), cocaine, Subutex, Tramadol, etc.

### **Ben Gardane-Ras Jedir Border Zone: The Financial Center**

**A**t the center of the financial system of the “Border Cartel”—indispensable to a great trade that is now transcontinental (reaching as far as China, via Istanbul and Dubai)—powerful money changers, the Sarafas, command smuggling and trafficking; corrupting politicians and civil servants, they “protect” and exploit at the same time the other actors of the illicit cross-border system: traders, couriers, etc.

This medieval-type system, whose primary mission is to ensure the convertibility of Tunisian and Libyan dinars (for Tunisian workers in Libya), is still based on inter-tribal friendships and one’s word.

It also drains money from tourists (the Ben Gardane region has not benefited from tourism projects, which explains its economic precariousness) because it offers generous exchange rates—the system requires a lot of hard currency for its international trade. Finally, this financial system attracts legitimate Tunisian merchants who thus escape the exchange restrictions of their central bank and change without having to fill out any declaration.

**APPENDIX 1:  
FACTS AND DATA ON GLOBAL ILLICIT TRADE**

Illegal trade, criminal entrepreneurs, and illegal transnational networks together constitute the “dark side of globalization.” Illegal trade is defined as traffickers and “narcos”; these illicit powers base their power on the fortunes they have after money laundering. Through violence, intimidation, and corruption, they infiltrate the legal economy and at the same time constitute:

- a serious threat to the stability of states
- an equally serious threat to the public health of the world’s population
- a constant threat to the honesty of the markets.

Whether they serve organized crime or terrorism, counterfeiting, smuggling, piracy, etc., they have a significant economic and social impact. In 2016, various United Nations offices estimated the turnover of the various criminal sectors observed and analyzed by them:

Counterfeiting and smuggling	±\$460 billion/year
Narcotics	±\$320 billion/year
Illegal tobacco	±\$40 billion/year
Trafficking in protected species (animals/vegetables)	\$8-\$20 billion/year
Illegal gold extraction/trafficking	±\$2.5 billion/year
Illicit diamond mining/trafficking	± \$1 billion/year

For other criminal categories, another estimate (2014) gave the following figures:

Illicit deforestation:	\$52-\$157 billion/year
Illegal extraction/trafficking of minerals:	\$12-\$48 billion/year
Fuel theft:	\$5-\$12 billion/year
Trafficking in small arms:	\$1.7-\$3.5 billion/year
Traffic in cultural goods:	\$1.2-\$1.6 billion/year

More broadly, the global cost of illicit trade (economic and social) in 2013 was estimated at \$737-\$898 billion; in 2022, this same illicit trade will generate revenues of between \$1,540 and \$1,870 billion.

Over the same period, the global losses in taxation were:

2013:	\$96-\$130 billion
2022:	\$197-\$230 billion

The illicit trade also causes many jobs to be lost around the world:

2013: 2 to 2.6 million jobs lost

2022: 4.2 to 5.4 million jobs lost

Areas most impacted by illicit trade: tobacco/cigarettes, small electronics, light mechanics and spare parts, alcoholic beverages, and mobile telephony

Criminal markets: drugs, prostitution, and human trafficking; trafficking in hazardous waste-toxic waste, etc.

Illicit sale (smuggling) of legal products: antiques, fauna and flora, pirated or counterfeit goods, tobacco, alcohol.

### ***Sale of Stolen Goods: Automotive, Electronics***

As a result, the criminal threat to global trade is growing, especially to the transportation and financial sectors and supply chains—criminals love anything that moves, circulates, etc.—and they have a passion for the criminal element.

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For the most dangerous illegal trade, that of counterfeit medicines (brand or generic) or “fake” drugs, the supposed contents may be incorrectly dosed, absent, or different, or they may be sold with falsified packaging. In the world market of fake medicines, we find (to the nearest 1 percent):

drugs without the active principle/molecule	±32 percent at all
drugs with an incorrect principle/molecule	±20 percent of the whole
drugs with a different principle/molecule	±21 percent at all
correct product but falsified packaging	±16 percent of the whole
impure or contaminated product	±9 percent of the whole
exact copy of an original product	±1 percent of the whole

Fake medicines account for about 10 percent of the total sold worldwide but up to 50-70 percent in some poor countries. Africa receives about 42 percent of all fake medicines. For the World Customs Organization, the global market for fake medicines is about \$200 billion a year. These fake medicines are said to cause (directly or indirectly) up to 700,000 deaths per year worldwide.

## **APPENDIX 2:**

### **THE ARAB PERSIAN GULF, SMUGGLING AND COUNTERFEITS**

There is significant presence of counterfeit goods in the countries of the Arab Persian Gulf and particularly in the UAE. There are two reasons for this:

- It involves a society of rather well to do, even rich, consumers.
- On a geopolitical scale, the region is the only equidistant hub of Asia, Black Africa, and Europe; it is very close to the Middle East. In fact, the European Union notes that the UAE is often used for the transit of many shipments of counterfeit goods from Asia. In the UAE itself, with the exception of the stricter Emirate of Abu-Dhabi, the following counterfeit goods are readily available:
  - Tobacco

Due to careful surveillance, counterfeit cigarettes are rare on the spot, but circulate massively through the free zones, especially from the small Emirates in the north, from Asia to the Black Sea or Europe (via seaway).

**Industry** Fake refrigerators, fans or air conditioners, fake computers and printers, car batteries, chargers or batteries for telephones or computers, neon tubes, vehicle parts; fake accessories, parts, and consumables (ink cartridges), car parts, cooling cylinders (used in refrigerators and air conditioners).

**Pharmacy and parapharmacy, cosmetics, and herbalism** Fake Viagra, Cialis, Levitra, Suprax (antibiotic), Olay creams, body lotions, shampoos, soaps, slimming products, etc.

**Luxury** Watches of various brands and origins, handbags, suitcases, sunglasses, perfumes, clothing from about twenty known brands.

**Electronics** Cell phones (so well made that it is almost impossible to distinguish them from the real thing), hands-free kits, fake headsets, etc.

**Food** Saffron packets, chocolate bars, soft drinks.

**Sportswear** Clothing, sports gloves, etc.

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