

Fuel Smuggling From Libya via the Border Town of Ben Gardane

Fathi Shâfi'i

MOKHTAR, a young Tunisian at the age of 29, dropped out of school shortly after elementary level, when he was no older than 14. Because of his poor results and his wish to increase his income, the temptations of the unofficial market, which had flourished since the reopening of the border with Libya in 1988, loomed large. In the beginning he worked as an employee in one of the shops selling food smuggled from Libya to the Maghrebian market, popularly known as Suq Libya. Then he worked in a shop that sold smuggled fuel from Libya. He gained experience and built up networks of relationships on both sides of the border. After the fall of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia and Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, the border regions entered a state of lawlessness that helped increase fuel smuggling operations, transforming it into a flourishing black market on the Tunisian-Libyan border. This period lasted until mid-2013, when Tunisian authorities resumed tightened border control in the desert, while the smuggling routes shifted from the desert to the Ras Gadir crossing. During this period, when desert routes were booming, Mokhtar managed to accumulate a capital of about 15,000 Tunisian Dinars, gain his driving license, at the age of 19, and decide to enter the prosperous market of fuel smuggling. He bought a D-MAX pick-up and generated considerable revenue that enabled him to expand his trade field. After the construction of a desert barrier and the tightening of border control since 2013, Mokhtar continued his business using the border crossing in Ras Gadir. He bought two Opel Campos in addition and finally established a shop for his smuggled fuel in Ben Gardane in 2016. He bought more cars for smuggling and had six employees working with him temporarily, while he stopped crossing into Libya and began to invest his profits in real estate and agriculture.

Shâfi'i (2020: 116)

MOKHTAR'S story summarises and reveals the developments taking place in the field of fuel smuggling from Libyan cities to Ben Gardane, a border town of about 80,000 inhabitants in the south of Tunisia, which has flourished for more than three decades and still continues to grow (Shâfi'i 2020). Simultaneously, smuggling is expanding and with it the

number of people involved from both countries, as well as the geographical area of operation and the volume of financial gain. This chapter analyses fuel smuggling practices and addresses the parties involved, as well as gains and dangers resulting from informal and illegal fuel transactions.

Libya's Oil Wealth Encourages Smuggling

The Libyan state is well known and characterised by its oil wealth. It holds the largest proven reserves of crude oil in Africa with 48 billion barrels, which is equivalent to 2.8 percent of the global reserve. Since the overthrow of Gaddafi's regime in 2011, Libyan oil production has had its ups and downs. In 2009, production reached 1.557 million barrels per day, but fell sharply to 462,000 barrels per day in 2011. Since 2017 crude oil production has gradually increased to 811,000 barrels per day and finally exceeded the one-million-barrel mark reaching 1.164 million barrels in 2021. Two-thirds of the production is exported as crude, while the remaining third is refined in Libyan oil facilities. The two most important refineries are Ras Lanouf – which is part of a larger petrochemical complex, oriented towards eastern markets – with a capacity of 220,000 barrels per day, and Zawiya, with 120,000 barrels per day. The latter covers the needs of the entire western region of the country, including the cities of Misrata, Tripoli, Zawiya, Sabrata, and Zuwara, with fuel available at a very low price level. The Libyan market is remarkable for its very low fuel prices: amounting to 0.15 Libyan Dinars (LYD) per litre gasoline and diesel, which equals 0.09 Tunisian Dinars (TND) (0.029 US\$), according to the exchange rate on the black market in August 2022 (1 LYD = 0.61 TND), whereas fuel prices in Tunisia are considerably higher, amounting to 2.33 TND per litre gasoline (0.74 US\$) and 1.79 TND for diesel (0.59 US\$). Libya's oil wealth, its high production, and low prices, thus encourage the expansion of smuggling activities between the two countries, with the city of Ben Gardane being at the centre of these developments.

Fuel Smuggling from Libya to Ben Gardane

The operations of fuel smuggling from Libya to Ben Gardane work through multiple stages and the participation of multiple operators on a high level of specialisation according to capital and networks. The cities of western Libya from Masrata to the capital Tripoli, Zawiya and other border cities represent starting points for smuggling fuel to the Tunisian border. Trucks loaded with fuel depart from these Libyan cities towards the areas of Zaltan, 32 km from the Ras Gadir crossing, and the region of Abu Kammash, 20 km from the crossing, or even closer. According to my interviews with fuel traders commuting from Libya to Ben Gardane, the importance of these sources varies. The city of Zaltan is the first destination for Mokhtar and the rest of the traders to refuel, because fuel is always available there at low prices. Purchasing in this city, fuel trade is often combined with the trade of goods like electronic devices and food. But if they only want to trade fuel, the region of Abu Kammash or the Ras Gadir crossing is the main destination for fuel traders.

Table 1: Price of Smuggled Fuel in Libyan Cities

City	Distance from Ras Gadir crossing (km)	Official price in gas stations in Libyan Dinar (LYD)	Price of one qanouni in the Libyan black market	
			In LYD	In TND
Tripoli	170	3.3	14	Tripoli
Az-Zawiya	130	3.3	15	Az-Zawiya
Sabrata	100	3.3	16	Sabrata
El-Agelat	94	3.3	16	El-Agelat
El-Gemil	62	3.3	17	El-Gemil
Zuwara	60	3.3	18	Zuwara
Zaltan	39	3.3	19	Zaltan
Abu Kammash	24	3.3	20	Abu Kammash

Source: Fieldwork, July 2022. Note: One *qanouni* equals 22 litres. TND=Tunisian Dinar.

The prices for smuggled fuel are a lot higher than official prices in the gas stations in Libya, sometimes more than five times higher. They also vary a lot between the different Libyan cities. The closer to the border, the higher the fuel prices get. The unit used in fuel smuggling is a canister of 22 litres. In Libya it is called '*qanouni*', whereas in Tunisia it is named after the French word *bidon*. The huge difference between the gasoline prices in Libya and in Tunisia encourages multiple parties from both countries to enter the field of smuggling fuel from Libyan cities to the city of Ben Gardane (cf. Table 1).

From an historical perspective, smuggling fuel from Libya to Tunisia via the Ras Gadir crossing has been active ever since the borders with Libya were reopened at the end of the last century. In the beginning it was limited to small amounts, using specialised trading cars and for consumption requirements in the city of Ben Gardane. Since the beginning of the new century and with constant restrictions on the import of goods from Libya, the contraband trade with fuel began to flourish and was further strengthened after the collapse of Ghaddafi's rule in 2011. With the entry of Libyan parties into the smuggling process, it has taken on new dimensions and has become a stand-alone trade with an increasing number of employees. Most of the tanks of the smuggling cars have been converted in order to carry the maximum load possible, the smugglers call them *Dank*. New trucks came into action and the new capacities reached almost 600 litres for vans and more than 2,000 litres for heavy trucks, most of them Libyan.

To circumvent Tunisian custom regulations that prohibit the entrance of these substances outside the tanks of vehicles, the capacity of the latter (light or heavy type such as semi-trailers) grew by three to four times, which allows their operators to bring in 1,000 to 1,500 litres per trip. Many sheet workers from Tataouine, Medenine, and Ben Gardane have specialised in the manufacture of this type of tank (Boubakri 2000: 43)

As a consequence of the security chaos in Libya and Tunisia after 2011 and the decline of border control, smuggling fuel from Libya through desert-tracks flourished. Joint Tunisian and Libyan markets specialised in fuel smuggling through border regions such as Karanti and Dharat al-Khas (Tunisian desert areas located near the Libyan border). From the Libyan side, heavy trucks for smuggling came into action, called *Tanta*. They are able to carry more than ten thousand litres. From the Tunisian side, light trucks with the capacity to carry almost 130 *bidon* are used. With the tightening of border-observation by Tunisian authorities from 2013, the declaration of a military buffer zone at the Libyan border, and the construction of the desert barrier, fuel smuggling in the desert regions along the border declined enormously and stopped completely after the terrorist attack on the city of Ben Gardane on March 7, 2016. They shifted to the Ras Gadir crossing instead, where the young Mokhtar and other traders continued smuggling using vans.

The Opel Campo, also owned by Mokhtar, has become a symbol of fuel smuggling in Tunisia. Most of the cars do not have any legal documents. Their transport capacity reaches more than thirty *bidon* per trip, an equivalent to approximately 700 litres. From the Libyan side Mercedes cars, some other family cars, and heavy trucks, intended for the supply of goods, are most frequently used for smuggling fuel. The volume of smuggled fuel from Libya to Ben Gardane is high, but difficult to count and still to be properly assessed. According to my fieldwork in June 2022 and statements of the police and custom services at the Ras Gadir crossing, the daily amount of fuel smuggled is close to 700,000 litres, as shown in Table 2.

As soon as the border is crossed, the prices of smuggled fuel rise, sometimes they almost double. In Batha an-Naft, a wholesale fuel market in Tunisian territory, two kilometres away from the Ras Gadir crossing, the price of one *bidon* reaches 25 Tunisian Dinars. In Ben Gardane it already costs two to three Dinars more in the wholesale market and reaches 30 Dinars per *bidon* in retail markets. In Ben Gardane the fuel trade is spread over the entire city, but concentrates on the main road to Ras Gadir, starting from the secondary school Ibn Sharaf, two kilometres away from the city centre, until it reaches the National Guard station Zakara after about four kilometres. Fuel trade takes place in fixed or temporary shops, numbering more than 400, and combines wholesale and retail trade. Shops can also be found in other parts of the city, especially on the main road to Medenine. According to my fieldwork in summer 2022, about 1,200 people engage in the field of fuel smuggling in Ben Gardane. This is more than the number of workers in the currency exchange sector, which have fallen below one thousand in the city.

According to my findings, more than three quarters of the amount of smuggled fuel from Libya to the city of Ben Gardane is diverted to the rest of the country. Its volume depends on distance and price levels. The city of Zarzis has one of the highest consumptions of smuggled fuel. My interviews in four educational institutions in the city of Zarzis during April 2022 reveal that about 80 percent of the parents of interrogated students use fuel smuggled from Ben Gardane, as do about three quarters of Zarzis' taxi and minibus drivers (*Louage*). The city of Medenine comes second in terms of consumption. Again, fuel is smuggled by both family cars and trucks (cf. Table 3).

Table 2: Daily Amount of Smuggled Fuel from Libya through the Ras Gadir Crossing

	Smuggled by vans	Smuggled by heavy trucks
Numbers of vehicles	1000	100
Load of each vehicle	25 <i>qanouni</i>	1,500 litres
Smuggled amount	550,000 litres	150,000 litres
Total		700,000 litres

Source: Fieldwork at the Ras Gadir crossing, June 2022. Note: One *qanouni* equals 22 litres.

Table 3: Daily Quantities of Smuggled Fuel from the City of Ben Gardane

Direction	Device for smuggling	Number	Load per vehicle (litre)	Total load (litre)
Zarzis	Family cars	41	400	16,400
	Light trucks	15	3,000	45,000
Djerba	Family cars	50	200	10,000
Medenine	Family cars	30	400	12,000
	Light trucks	26	3,000	78,000
Governorate Gabes	Light trucks	42	3,000	126,000
Governorate Sidi Bouzid	Light trucks	32	3,000	96,000
Governorate Sfax	Light trucks	26	3,000	78,000
Governorate Kairouan	Light trucks	8	3,000	24,000
Rest of the Governorates	Light trucks	24	3,000	36,000
Total		282	–	521,400

Source: Field work, August 2022.

Opposite to this is the demand in the island of Djerba; here, only small amounts of smuggled fuel are consumed. Smuggling possibilities are restricted due to the gate of the only connecting island bridge, which prevents the passage of trucks loaded with fuel for security reasons. After the attack on the El Ghriba synagogue in Djerba in 2001, security measures were tightened at the entrances to the island and since then have largely prevented fuel smuggling operations. Smuggling only occurs via little vans and in limited quantities not exceeding 120 litres per car.

The neighbouring cities in the Governorate of Medenine are the most important consumers of smuggled oil from Ben Gardane, due to four reasons: the geographical proximity (Zarzis 45 km, Medenine 78 km, and Djerba 100 km); the significant size of the population which accounts for part of the demand; the high frequency of traffic to and from Ben Gardane; and the simple fact that smuggling is easy on these roads. Moreover, smuggled fuel prices are low, and the quality of Libyan oil/fuel is higher than the Tunisian. The consumption of smuggled fuel in the Governorate of Tataouine is limited to the neighbouring areas, namely Samar, Qasr Oun and Beni Mhira, and only supplied on a small scale due to the small population. The whole region has no more than fifteen thousand inhabitants. The other cities of the governorate obtain smuggled fuel from the Dehiba crossing. Fuel coming from contraband trade is the main commodity which leaves the city of Ben Gardane towards the cities of the governorate Gabes. During the same fieldwork period in April 2022, I obtained the information that almost half of the fuel smuggling cars belong to owners from the governorate of Gabes, which has the second biggest demand after the governorate of Medenine. Moreover, the governorate of Sfax is also an important consumer of smuggled fuel from Ben Gardane. The respective supply structure becomes visible along the National Road No. 01, connecting the cities of Gabes and Sfax, and also in Bahri and Habib, where smuggled fuel is offered for sale in large quantities. Fuel, as an illegal commodity, also reaches most of the cities of the governorates Kairouan and Sidi Bouzid and, to a lesser extent, the governorates at the coast, such as Mahdia and Sousse. The illegal trade flourishes particularly in periods when fuel prices in Ben Gardane fall below thirty Dinars per *bidon*, while the revenues depend on the distance (cf. Table 4).

Actors in the Two Countries

There are several actors in fuel smuggling operations: gas station owners, wholesalers, retailers, truck drivers and families, to name those from the Libyan side. Before 2011, the role of Libyan parties was rather limited. There were only a few families involved, coming to Tunisia for tourism or medical treatment, some of them owning heavy trucks for commerce. At that time, most of the Tunisian traders on the other hand received fuel from Libyan gas stations in border cities. But after the political upheavals in Libya and the collapse of Gaddafi's regime, several parties entered the illegal business smuggling fuel to Tunisia and created a new reality.

Table 4: Profit Margin of Fuel Trade between Ben Gardane and other Tunisian Cities

Intended destination	Profit margin per <i>bidon</i> (TND)	Intended destination	Profit margin per <i>bidon</i> (TND)
Zarzis	1.5	Hama	3
Medenine	1.5	Sfax	4 to 5
Djerba	5	Kebili	3
Mareth	2	Sidi Bouzid	3 to 4
Gabes	2 to 3	Gafsa	3 to 4
Bir Ali	3.5	Kairouan	4

Source: Fieldwork, September 2018. Note: One *bidon* equals 22 litres.

From then on, Tunisian traders could no longer receive fuel from official gas stations. The Libyan owners of the gas stations constitute the first group involved in this trade. They started to sell most of the fuel provided officially for their stations outside the legal framework for high profits, often asking more than double the normal price. This group has been active in most cities in western Libya, from Misrata to Zaltan. According to my experiences in Libyan cities, about one third of the Libyan gas stations do not serve ordinary customers anymore, but sell literally everything to the black market. In many cases Libyans are thus forced to buy their gasoline outside the gas stations at a price that is three to four times higher than the official price.

After 2011, official gas stations in Libya came under the control of armed militias and major wholesalers, hence the majority of fuel quantities became part of the black market and the traders have a huge amount of capital at their disposal. This group specialises in smuggling fuel from cities in western Libya towards the Tunisian border. They have established extended social networks with Libyan and Tunisian parties and control the distribution channels of fuel, selling predominately to Libyan retail traders. Retail traders, on the other hand, represent the largest number of actors in the field. They work in most Libyan cities and their number increases with the proximity of the border. Most of them are found in Zuwara and Zaltan, where they run shops specialised in fuel trading. With the decline in commodity trade, their number further increased and some of them extended their activities to the Tunisian territory. They started smuggling fuel on a daily basis through the Ras Gadir crossing to Batha an-Naft, and achieved rather high incomes, up to 1,000 Libyan Dinars.

Libyan truck drivers constitute another group of actors. They are designated to transport goods to and from Tunisia legally, but usually smuggle significant volumes of fuel when they come from Libya. This is a consequence of both their high numbers and their huge tanks, exceeding a capacity of 1,500 litres (cf. Table 5), while the distance of transport itself does not consume more than one fifth of the fuel. Concerning numbers: In 2015 about 68,000 Libyan heavy trucks were registered crossing to Tunisian territory. In 2020, despite the measures taken because of the Covid pandemic and the closure of the borders for more than half the year, the Ras Gadir crossing still registered the entry of al-

most 25,000 Libyan heavy trucks. 'Unrequired' fuel is sold all the way from the Ras Gadir crossing to the governorate of Gabes.

The majority of Libyan families that come to Tunisia for tourism, medical treatment or trade sell the fuel out of their car tanks in the city of Ben Gardane. And although the single quantity is quite small, their high numbers contribute to a significant volume of illegally traded fuel: It accounts to about one quarter of the quantities smuggled. Since 2011, with the liquidity crisis in Libya and the large difference in prices between Tunisia and Libya, many Libyan traders and families live off smuggling fuel in order to afford food and medicine. According to my interviews during 2019 with Libyan traders that engage in fuel smuggling, the majority stressed the importance of these incomes to provide financial liquidity.

On the Tunisian side there are the traders from Ben Gardane and those from outside the city. In both cases those involved in the smuggling of fuel from Libya to Tunisian territory are highly specialised according to their field of operation. Due to the ongoing continuity of fuel smuggling over many years and the large number of workers in this field, we can distinguish between two types of actors in Ben Gardane: mobile and stationary traders. Mobile traders move on an almost daily basis between Tunisia and Libya through the Ras Gadir crossing, some of them even more frequently than once a day. Their number is not stable, but according to several personal observations and interviews between 2019 and 2022, they exceed a thousand. More than two-thirds are originally from Ben Gardane, most of whom are young adults between the age of 20 and 45 years. Most of them dropped out of school early, as more than two-thirds did not finish secondary school. The remaining traders originate from other cities of the Medenine governorate (10%), and also from the governorates Sidi Bouzid (9%), Kairouan (7%) and others (7%). These actors combine the smuggling of subsidised food from Tunisia to Libya with commodity trade from Libya to Tunisia. They make relatively high profits, sometimes amounting to thousands of Tunisian Dinars per trip and many of them own more than one car for fuel smuggling. A few of the traders from Ben Gardane also specialise in smuggling fuel to the city of Zarzis and the island of Djerba by using vans. On the other hand, there are stationary traders like Mokhtar. They run established shops for smuggled fuel in wholesale and retail markets in Ben Gardane, most of which are situated on the road to Ras Gadir. Their number exceeds 400, all of them have shops. They often work all day long without interruption and run a large number of procedures.

Since 2011, smuggled fuel has also attracted individuals from outside. They also operate from the city of Ben Gardane, but come from different regions. Their number is constantly increasing due to the significant profits and the continuous restriction on commodity trade. The largest group originates from other cities in the Medenine governorate (38%), others come from Gabes (21%), Sidi Bouzid (16%), Sfax (13%) and elsewhere (12%). Most of the traders are male, but some women, about 60, also work for different parties in Ben Gardane. According to fieldwork, the actors make varying profits (cf. Table 6).

Table 5: *Libyan Actors Involved in Fuel Smuggling from Libya to Ben Gardane*

Social group	Device	Quantity per device
Fuel traders	Vans	400 to 600 litres
Libyan families	Family cars	60 to 150 litres
Libyan truck drivers	Heavy trucks	1,000 to 1,500 litres

Source: Field work, August 2022.

Table 6: *Capital and Financial Revenue of Fuel Smugglers*

		Number of traders	Volume of capital ^a	Financial revenue
From Ben Gardane	Mobile	710	5,000 TND	500 TND per trip
	Stationary	1,000	More than 10,000 TND	3,000 to 5,000 TND per month
Governorate Gabes		126	500,000 TND	300 TND per trip
Governorate Sfax		81	500,000 TND	400 TND per trip
Governorate Sidi Bouzid		48	500,000 TND	400 TND per trip
Other governorates		45	500,000 TND	Between 400 and 500 TND per trip

Source: Fieldwork, 2019 and 2022.

^a The high amount of capital of traders from outside the city of Ben Gardane derives from the high price of the vehicles approved for smuggling, which exceeds 5,000 Dinars. Most of them are cars acquired from rental companies, that sell new cars in instalments.

The price of fuel smuggled from Libya to Tunisian territory rises with increased distance from the border, but it always remains much lower than the official prices at Tunisian gas stations. Despite the large number of people involved in this illicit smuggling and high revenues to be earned, this trade remains unstable and dependent on the situation at the Ras Gadir crossing. The growing number of movements and people moreover contribute to the emergence of new risks.

Growing Risks

Vans are used for fuel smuggling from Libya to Ben Gardane – all of them are old, and most of them are not regularly inspected (technical, safety inspections), they do not possess the necessary legal documents, and are not registered at the Technical Agency of Land Transport. According to my interviews in 2019 with about 200 fuel traders, more than 40 percent of the vehicles do not have Tunisian license plates (81 cars out of a total

of 200 cars) and were smuggled from Libya (cf. Table 7). The local expression for those cars is *rabbit*, and most of them are of the types Campo, Peugeot 505 or Renault 18, as well as the German car Jetta Volkswagen, which has a large storage capacity.

This illegal situation of fuel smuggling cars contributes to the growing level of social and security risks. The number of accidents has risen dramatically because of the lack of technical inspection and because most of the smugglers drive excessively fast and recklessly in inhabited areas as well as on the national roads. According to the same fieldwork, the intervals between technical inspections of the vehicles are more than four years for half of the respondents, and about a quarter haven't been inspected for more than ten years. On the other hand, the cars used for smuggling fuel from Ben Gardane to the rest of the Tunisian cities do have the necessary legal documents due to the large number of controls on the roads. In fact, most of the cars used within Tunisia are rather new, while most of the modified cars that are used for cross border fuel smuggling are rather old and do not comply with minimum safety conditions. Their tanks have been extended in order to transport fuel amounts of more than 500 litres. Due to this high load and long waiting times at the crossing while motors are running, cars sometimes catch fire. In 2019, the civil defence force of Ben Gardane recorded five burning cars that were used for fuel smuggling. Most of these incidents occurred on November 19, 2019, at the Ras Gadir crossing. The official website of the Ministry of Interior describes one incident:

Ras Gadir – Ben Gardane / Five Injured among Civil Defence Forces after the Explosion of a Vehicle Tank

During fire-fighting operations due to a cable fire in a vehicle at the border crossing Ras Gadir, on the morning of the 19th of November 2019, the vehicle's tank exploded and five individuals of the civil defence forces of the city of Ben Gardane were injured. According to the district administration of the civil defence forces of Ben Gardane, the seriousness of the injuries vary, three individuals are in critical condition. They are currently being transported to the hospital for burn injuries and the severely injured to Ben Arous for treatment. Other injured will be treated according to their state of health in the regional hospital in Ben Gardane.

Source: Ministry of Interior (2019)

According to the traffic police of Ben Gardane, fuel smuggling cars (from the city of Ben Gardane to other Tunisian cities) have caused about fourteen accidents since 2016, most of them fatal due to excessive speed and the high load of fuel smuggled. Their load exceeded 2,500 litres per car. Most of the cars catch fire in these accidents, resulting in high property damage and personal injury.

Fuel shops are widely scattered throughout the city of Ben Gardane. According to personal estimates, more than 400 shops spread from the National Guard station Zakra up to the region of Jalal. Most of the shops do not comply with minimum safety regulations, and many of them are close to residential areas and to other trade shops. Many fuel smugglers in the region build stocks of gasoline when prices drop, which can reach up to 20,000 litres. Most of them are stored in iron or plastic containers, and these stocks are prone to explode when temperatures rise during summer.

Table 7: Share of Fuel Smuggling Cars in the City of Ben Gardane (going to Libya) without Legal Documents

	No Tunisian certificate of registration	With technical inspection certificate	With insurance certificate	With vignette
By number	81	10	15	14
Percentage	41%	5%	8%	7%

Source: Field work, 2018 (n=200).

On occasion these shops catch fire and burn down, which often leads to serious material damage and sometimes loss of life. Since 2015 the civil defence forces of Ben Gardane registered the combustion of five fuel shops, causing two deaths and many injuries. These fire-fighting operations require great efforts from the civil defence forces, who often have to request fire trucks from neighbouring cities.

Fuel selling shops also constitute a serious threat to the environment. While emptying and filling smuggling cars, high quantities of fuel are spilled and seep permanently into the ground causing the pollution of soil and groundwater. The consequences are visible in the serious deterioration of vegetation around the fuel shops. According to one of the fuel traders, every shop loses approximately five litres per day. In the case of leaking containers, the loss reaches up to twenty litres a day. With about 400 shops across Ben Gardane, the amount of leaking oil reaches up to 2,000 litres per day. This loss also contributes to a growing risk for pedestrians as well as scooters and motorcycles slipping, and where fuel leaks onto the road there is a growing risk of skidding cars and traffic accidents. This highlights the negative effects of fuel smuggling on soil and groundwater, an incident that has been repeatedly observed in the study area for more than 20 years and is more severe in the diesel trade compared to gasoline.

Conclusion

Mokhtar's story is a true story from a border city where most of the job opportunities are linked to the unofficial market and the smuggled goods trade with Libya. With continuous restrictions for Tunisians on bringing goods from Libya, the non-liquidity of banks for Libyans since 2011, because this commodity is abundant in Libya, and due to the large price differences between Tunisia and Libya, smuggling fuel appeals to many. Therefore, many social groups in the two countries engage in smuggling fuel from Libya to Ben Gardane in a first step, and then to other Tunisian cities in a second step. Whole networks have specialised in smuggling this substance. They are precisely organised and assign the parts to regions. The city of Ben Gardane has a pivotal role within these networks, which remain unstable in their activity, as it depends on the situation at the Ras Gadir crossing and on those in charge of the crossing from the Libyan side. Despite many decisions announced by Libyan authorities to prevent smuggling, it is constantly going on

and generates high profits. Mokhtar and his employees remain among the main beneficiaries, but the increasing dangers associated with fuel smuggling make it an activity of multiple jeopardies, especially for road users and when it comes to human life.

Acknowledgement

^a The information and data provided in this chapter either result from the authors' dissertation (Shâfi'i 2020) or are based on the author's own experiences in border trade, including participant observation and fieldwork between 2019 and 2022. For developments in the recent past see Boubakri (2000) and Meddeb (2016). This chapter was written in Arabic; Leonie Nückell provided a preliminary translation of the text. The translated version has then been further edited.