

"MY PHILOSOPHY IS NOT A *BORDERLESS* WORLD,
BUT RATHER A WORLD WHERE THE BORDERS ARE *SOFTENED*".

Border

Noun

A line separating one country or state from another.¹

Borderscape

Noun

How borders exist within a particular landscape - the practices we undertake that shapes the border.²

¹ "Border Definition & Meaning | Britannica Dictionary", z.d., <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/border>.

² Oren Siegel, "Borderscape Blog 2: What Is A Borderscape? – Borderscape Project", 7 februar 2022, <https://www.borderscapeproject.org/2022/02/07/borderscape-blog-2-what-is-a-borderscape/>.

Research paper

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ABSTRACT

This thesis challenges the political imagination of the border as a fixed structure, aiming to change the way people think about and interact with borderscapes. It explores how borderscapes, particularly between Morocco and Algeria, serve as platforms for showcasing state identity and ideology while simultaneously becoming spaces where border communities question and redefine these ideologies. Despite the border closure between Algeria and Morocco, border communities remain connected through informal cross-border trade, always finding ways to cross the border to meet their needs and adapt quickly to changing political conditions. The border has always been contested, negotiated, and changed.

Research shows that Oujda, a city in northeastern Morocco near the Algerian-Moroccan border, has stronger historical connections to Algeria than to the western regions of Morocco. The border communities on both sides consider themselves part of the border region rather than strictly Algerian or Moroccan. This is why they often ignore political rules to this day. Through informal cross-border trade, they have created new opportunities for social and economic growth, impacting local markets and ways of living, and fundamentally challenging our understanding of borderscapes.

This thesis proposes design strategies that build on the existing politics of tolerance, fostering the creation of self-organized settlements along an abandoned railroad that once connected Algeria and Morocco. By taking informal dynamics as inspiration for rethinking urban spaces, the idea is to introduce a traveling market on this abandoned railroad, serving as an agent of resilience and change. The long-term vision is for these growing settlements near the border to eventually lead to the gradual reopening of the border.

Keywords: Algerian-Moroccan border, Oujda, borderscape, border-communities contestation, political imagination, informal trade, self-organized settlements, politics of tolerance, dynamic architecture, traveling market, strategy

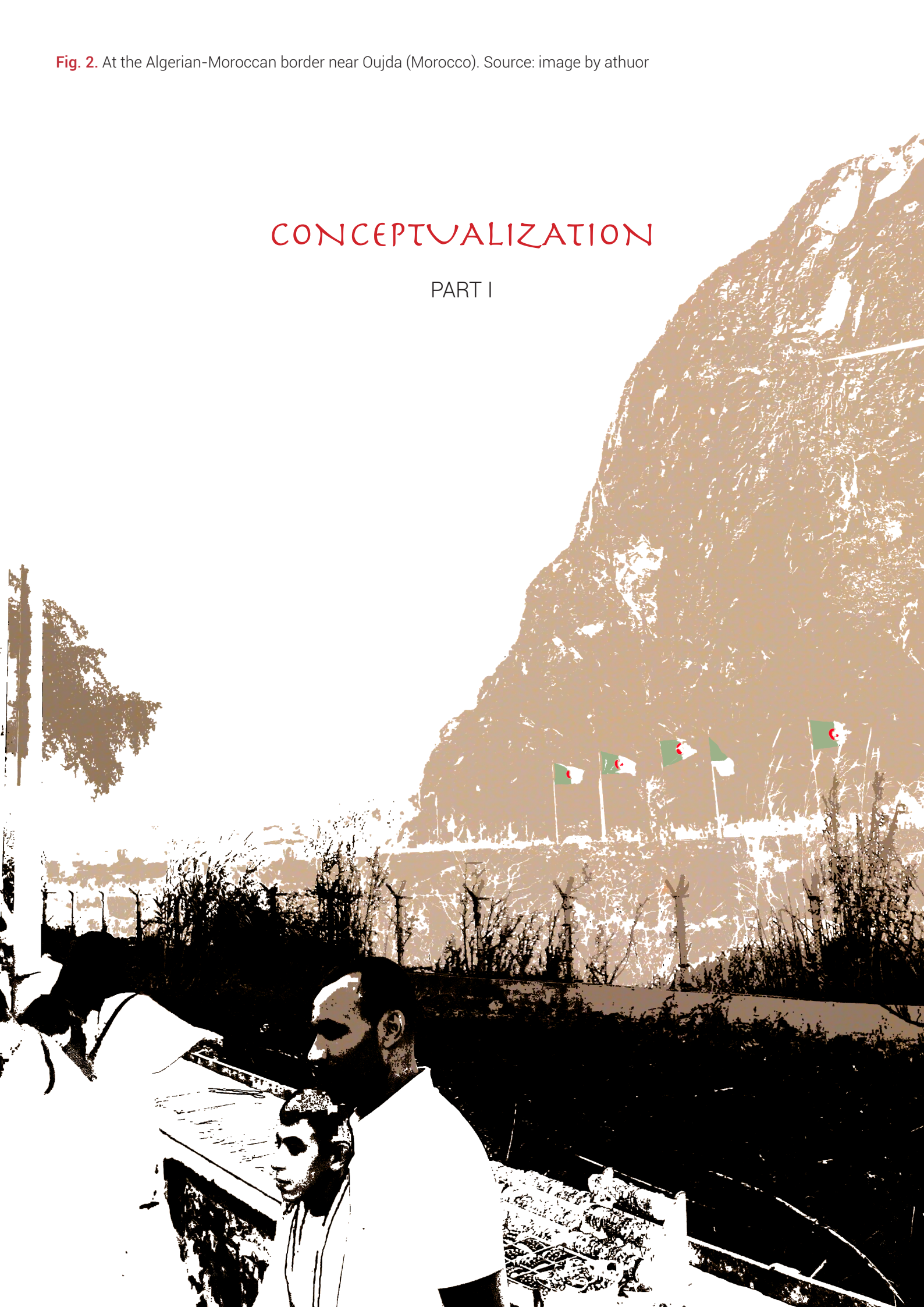


Fig. 1. Road sign illustrations in Florence, Italy, as a visual communication tool to question the boundaries in the city. Source: image by author.

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Fig. 2. At the Algerian-Moroccan border near Oujda (Morocco). Source: image by athuor



CONCEPTUALIZATION

PART I

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Fig. 3. Oujda, located in the northeastern region of Morocco. Source: image by author.

THE CONTESTED ALGERIAN-MOROCCAN BORDER

The thesis emerges from a personal interest. As a Dutch-based second-generation Moroccan migrant, I have regularly traveled to Oujda (Morocco), a city at the closed border with Algeria in the northeastern region of Morocco, where many of my relatives live, 520 km from the capital, Rabat. As I travel back to Oujda over the years, I have noticed the dynamic nature of the border city that depends on cross-border trade with Algeria. I was intrigued by how border communities adapted to the changing political measurements. Despite the border closure between Morocco and Algeria, regions on both sides of the border remained connected through informal trade: informal cross-border trade created a new hierarchy of places and opportunities for the people. The border has always been negotiated, always been contested, and always been changed through time and space.

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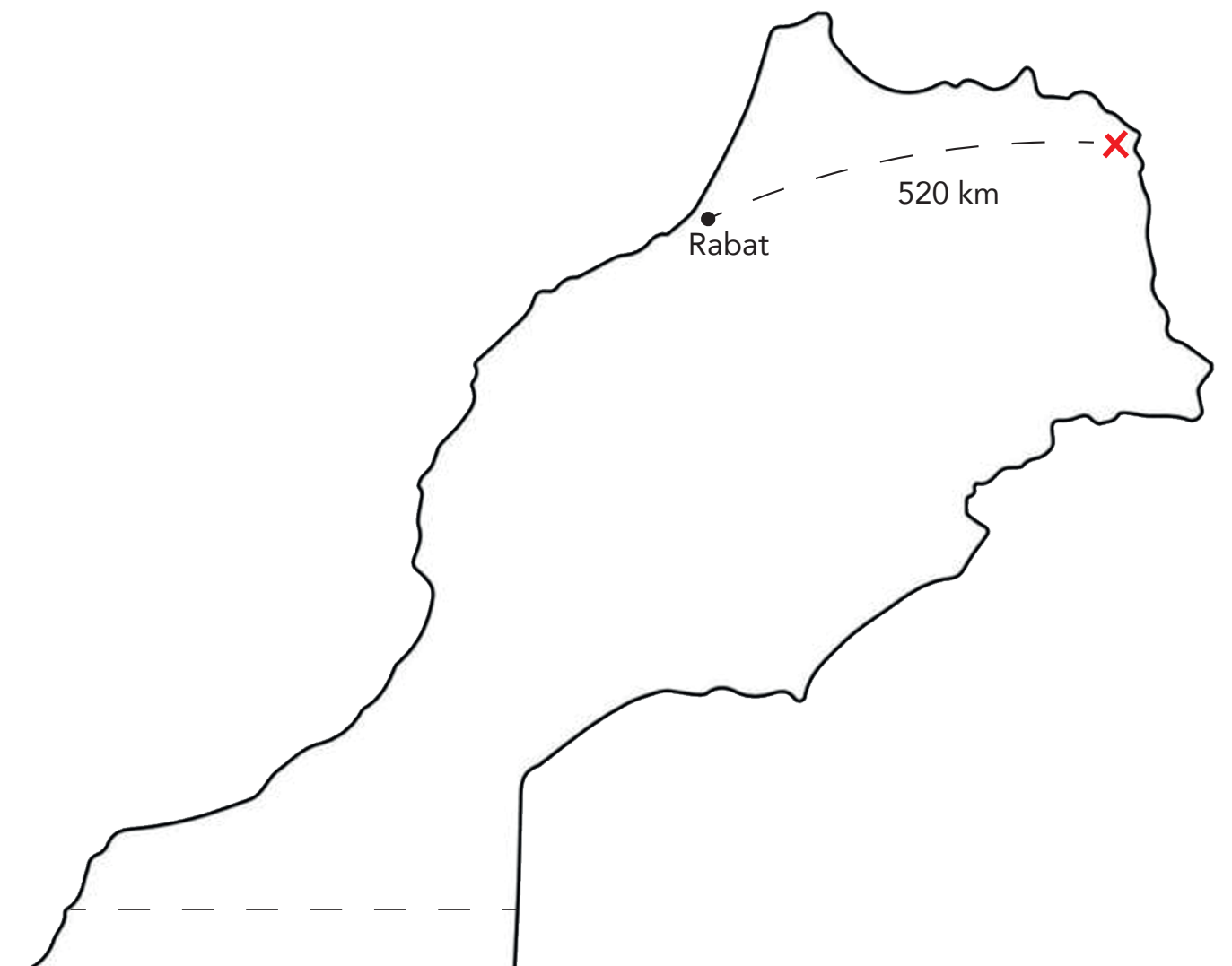


Fig. 4. Oujda, located 520 km from the capital, Rabat. Source: image by author.

(IN)VISIBLE STORIES: QUESTIONING THE BORDER

Contemporary borders tell stories of division, conflict, and war. But also of connection, opportunities, and contestation. The border closure divided families, but it did not disrupt cross-border commercial activities.³ Such stories are also transferred orally among different generations. I remember my grandfather confirming this as he was one of the couriers who traveled to Maghnia (Algeria) as a routine run to deliver goods. This was often in groups in the evening to prevent being seen by the Algerian army. After arriving at the Algerian-Moroccan border, somebody was waiting for them to pick up the goods and send goods from Algeria in return. These were mainly electronic goods.

At that time, a railway system connected northeastern Morocco with western Algeria, which can still be seen to this day. So, when they picked up the goods again from Algeria, they were often taking the train back to Oujda. Before arriving in Oujda, they were throwing the goods out the window of the train, where a friend or family member of theirs was there to pick them up. This was again to avoid the control post at the Oujda station.

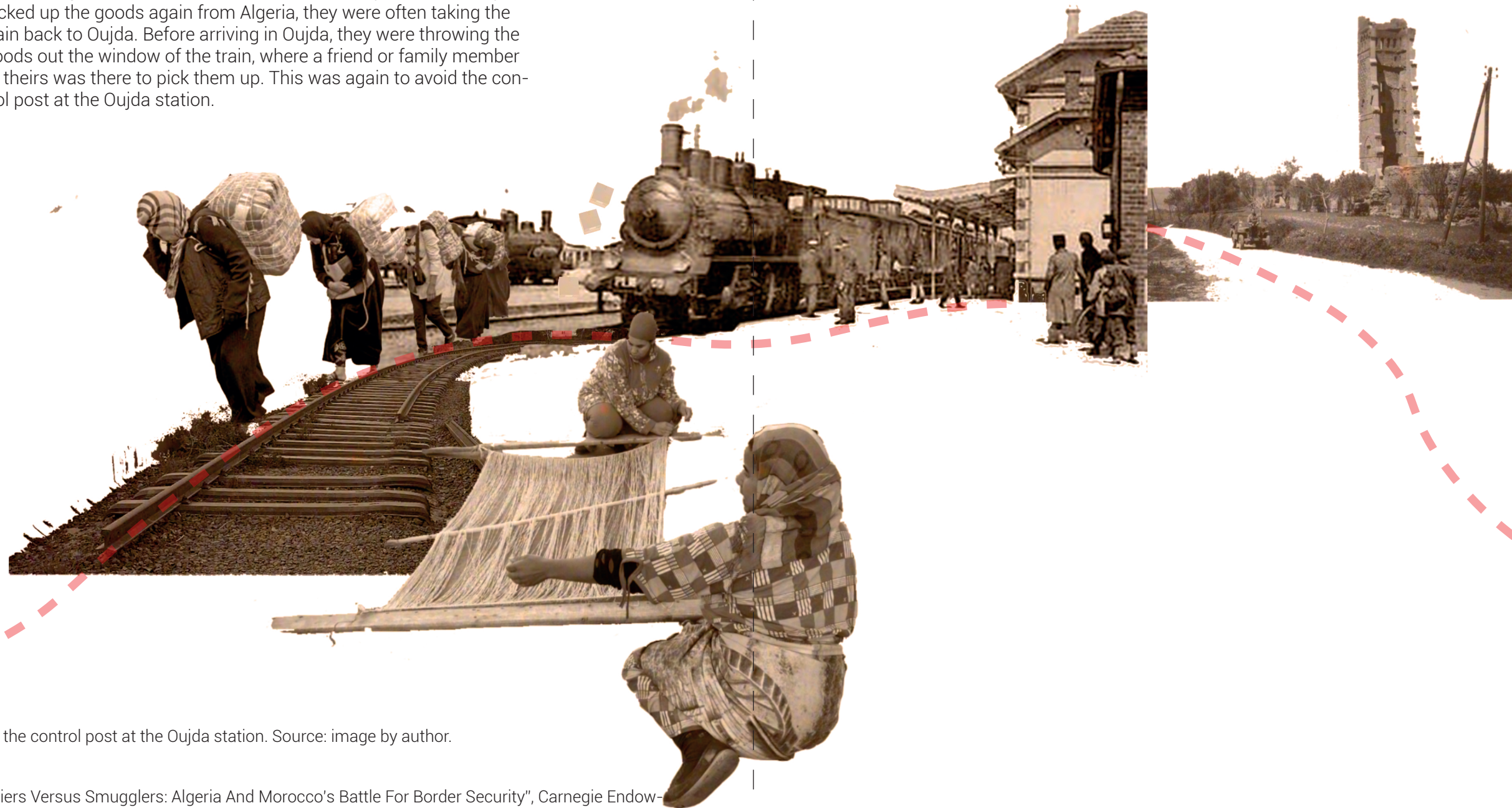


Fig. 5. Families avoiding the control post at the Oujda station. Source: image by author.

³ Anouar Boukhars, "Barriers Versus Smugglers: Algeria And Morocco's Battle For Border Security", Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 19 maart 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/03/19/barriers-versus-smugglers-algeria-and-morocco-s-battle-for-border-security-pub-78618>.

PERCEPTION ON THE MEDIA: YOUTUBE

The borderland is the platform for the state to 'show' its identity and what kind of ideology or vision they want to bring over.⁴ But the borderland is also the platform where such ideologies are being questioned and redefined by the border communities.

To verify the positive mindset of the border communities, I looked at how communities discussed the border situation on the media by translating the reactions given by the platform users. A YouTube video discussed the news of the border closing between Algeria and Morocco. The reactions showed solidarity and verified the strong mentality of the border communities.

👍 24

🗨

Beantwoorden

@makloufmouhli1607

4 jaar geleden

Ce n'est pas un fossé c'est une rivière naturelle et une frontière point et ses images sont une marque fort de sympathie entre nos deux peuples merci à tous ces gens

👍 9

🗨

Beantwoorden

@staifipalestine3225

4 jaar geleden

👍 4

🗨

Beantwoorden

@cecilelegrand8347

2 jaar geleden

Les gens du bled ont vraiment une mentalité différente de celle des gens d'europe au sujet de l'Algérie et du Maroc. Aucune rivalité entre les 2 pays et beaucoup de cohésion une bonne leçon pour faire taire les mauvaises polémiques

👍 1

🗨

Beantwoorden

@mouradzaidi4137

4 jaar geleden

▼ 7 antwoorden

@lahcenea4543

2 jaar geleden

Beaucoup de marocains sont encore en Algérie clandestinement à la recherche du travail

👍 3

🗨

Beantwoorden

▼ 2 antwoorden

Fig. 6. Reactions on Youtube. Source: Youtube.com

⁴ Serena Clark, "Seeing Like A Smuggler: Borders From Below. By Mahmoud Keshavarz And Shahram Khosravi", Journal Of Refugee Studies 36, nr. 3 (23 maart 2023): 580–83, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fead019>.

Engels (VK)

⌵

You will never be able to divide us

▶

A comment showing the strong mentality of the people that they will always adapt quickly to the changing political measurements and that nothing will hold them back. They will always find ways to connect with their neighbors.

Engels (VK)

⌵

In Morocco also has melilla and ceuta. There are houses that are in Spain and the garden on Moroccan territory.

▶

This comment suggests seeing the border region as a united region instead of two separated regions controlled by a fixed structure.

Engels (VK)

⌵

It's not a gap, it's a natural river and a border point and its images are a strong mark of sympathy between our two peoples, thank you to all these people

▶

This person gives a spatial perception of the Al-geiran-Moroccan border. Instead of seeing it as a void that is fixed and controlled by the authorities, we should see it as something that is dynamic and has a strong connection with the people living near the border. The person later thanks the contestation of the border communities.

Engels (VK)

⌵

The people of the village really have a different mentality than the people of Europe about Algeria and Morocco. No rivalry between the 2 countries and a lot of cohesion a good lesson to silence the bad polemics

▶

This comment illustrates how the border communities have a different mentality compared with people who don't live in the borderlands. The communities continued their activities with each other, despite the border dispute between the authorities.

Engels (VK)

⌵

Many Moroccans are still in Algeria clandestinely in search of work

▶

This comment shows how Moroccans are still active in Algeria, despite the border closing. Often in search of (informal) work as they rely on business with their neighboring country. It also verifies the story of my grandfather where he continues his activity with the Algerians.



Fig. 7. A comic showing the separation of mentality between the authorities and the locals. Source: <https://www.barlamane.com/fr/sommet-arabe-lemissaire-algerien-raille-apres-avoir-quitte-le-maroc-en-toute-hate/>

PERCEPTION ON THE MEDIA: COMICS

I also examined comics to understand the artistic expressions of Moroccan and Algerian artists regarding the Algerian-Moroccan border. One comic, in particular, stood out: it depicts the differing mentalities between the authorities, who prevent locals from connecting with Moroccans, and the locals themselves. This comic shows how these communities contest the decisions made by the authorities.

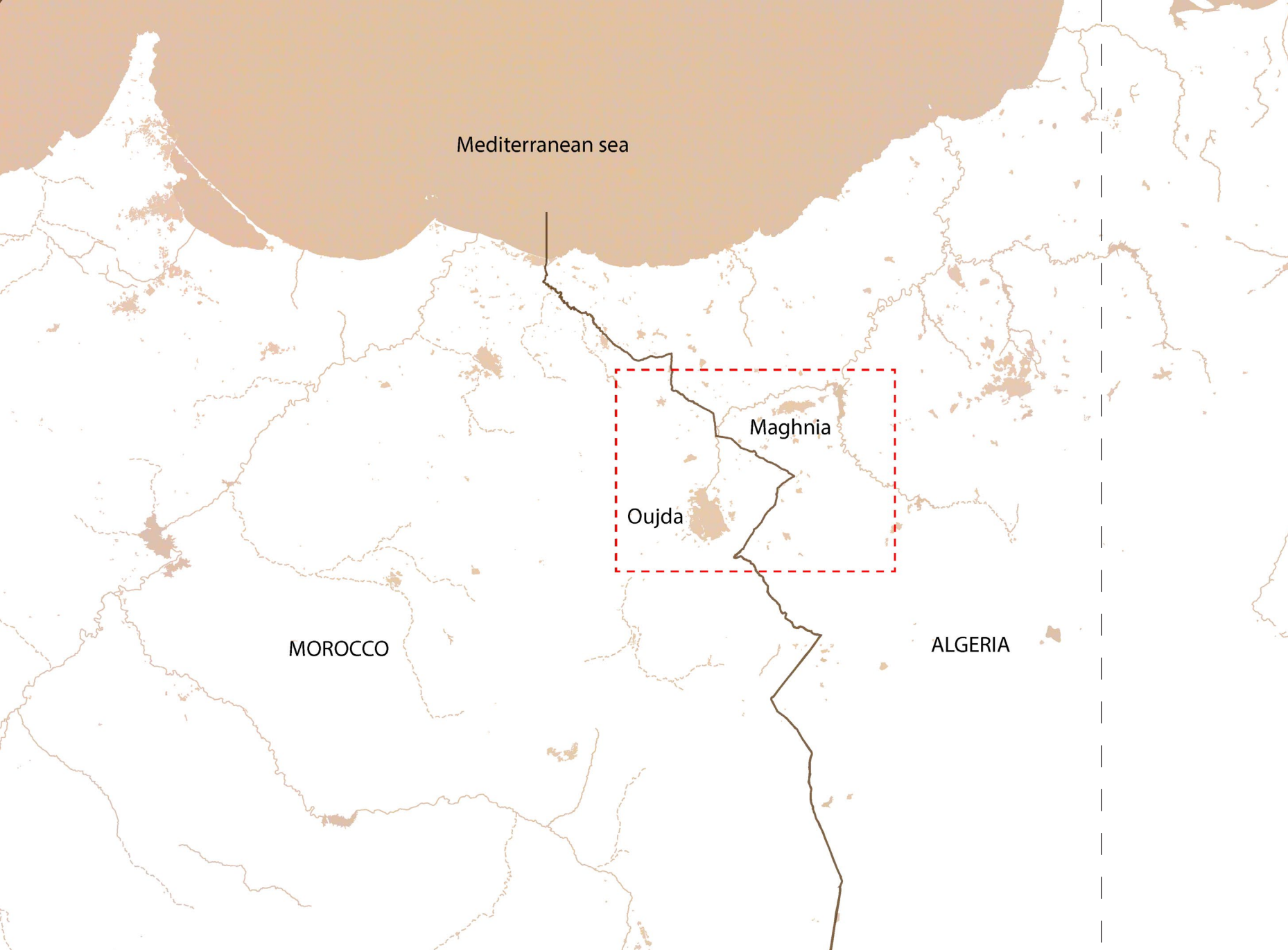


Fig. 8. Oujda (Morocco) and Maghnia (Algeria) sharing a border. Source: image by author.

OUJDA AND MAGHNIA: BETWEEN IDENTITIES AND SHARED BORDERS

Much of the economic activity was concentrated in the border cities of Oujda in Morocco and Maghnia in Algeria. Two cities isolated from the economic centers. The cities did for centuries business together through informal trade, as they depend on each other. Informal trade or 'smuggling' occurs all along the Algerian-Moroccan border but is particularly intense between Oujda and Maghnia, around the abandoned railway, which was the old trading route between the two countries.⁵ These cities are the most populated cities around the borderscape and are growing rapidly.

Since the Algerian independence in 1961, the Algerian-Moroccan border has seen different moments of opening and closing: the first closure in 1963, the second from 1975 to 1988, and the third from 1994 to today totaling 30 years of closure.⁶ To put it in perspective - the closure exists longer than the Berlin wall once stood which was 28 years. The authorities have never mentioned the 'real' reason behind the closures, but different scholars believe that the reason is ideological: Morocco's "conservative ideological orientation" and "Algeria's socialist direction, led to the escalation of their relationship."⁷

Whether or not the borders are open or closed, I was told by all my family members that both the border communities from Algeria and Morocco are united by blood, tradition, and especially trade. The northeastern culture is clearly influenced by the Algerian culture as they share many traditions such as clothing styles like kaftans and the use of the Arabic Darija language.

⁵ Max Gallien, "Smugglers And States: Illegal Trade in The Political Settlements Of North Africa" (2020), <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/4116/>.

⁶ Katherine Solberg, "The End of the Line: Understanding the Morocco-Algeria Border" (Boston College, 1 januari 2008), https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1089&context=isp_collection.

⁷ Helen Chapin Metz, Algeria: A Country Study, 1994, <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA27961565>.



Fig. 9. Algerian smugglers giving their perception of their activities. Source: image by author.



The past generations of the border towns in Morocco planted palmeries at the Algerian site, passing the gardens from father to son, until now, when the gardens have become inaccessible because of the border closure.

Fig. 10. A Moroccan date farmer explaining his relationship with Algeria. Source: image by author.

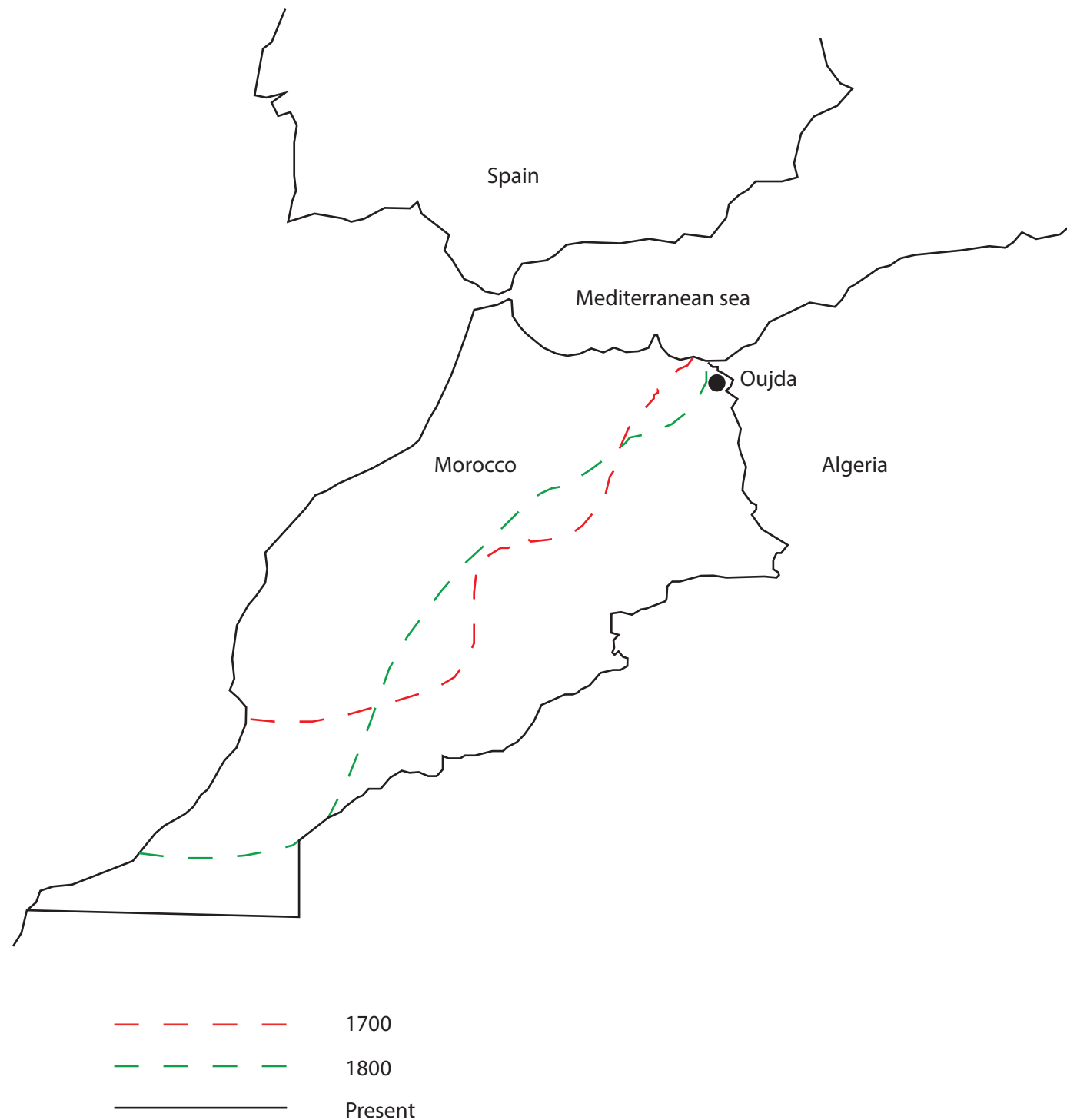


Fig. 11. Map showing the changing nature of the Algerian-Moroccan border. Source: image by author.

CHANGING BORDERS: OUJDA ALWAYS BEEN IN TRANSITION

The city of Oujda has been in transition and affected by its border location throughout its history, which exceeds a thousand years. Around the 17th century, before French colonization, the Moulaya River (fig. 11 shown in red) was considered as the border between Ottoman Algeria and the dynasties that controlled Morocco, according to numerous collected interviews.

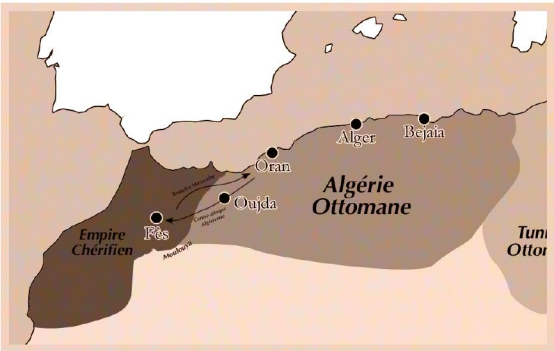
Since the beginning of the 20th century, various European countries have tried to occupy Morocco, particularly the city of Oujda. According to a number of the collected oral narratives, France has been convinced that the city of Oujda is the first link to the occupation of northern Morocco and the elimination of the rear bases of the Algerian resistance. It put pressure on the city against France, which made it enter a war with the Moroccans in the battle of Isly in 1844, which ended in a great defeat for the Moroccans.⁸ France forced Morocco to sign a treaty in the same year, and one of its most important provisions was drawing the borders between the Moroccan state and colonial Algeria, which is still present.

⁸ “Morocco | History, Map, Flag, Capital, People, & Facts,” Encyclopedia Britannica, February 24, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Morocco/Decline-of-traditional-government-1830-1912>.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF OUJDA

Fig. 12. Historical overview of Oujda through time and space. Source: image by author.

Oujda once part of Algeria



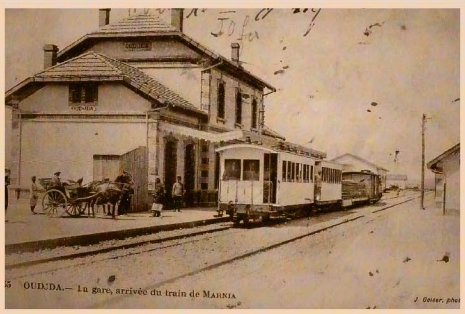
French occupation till 1956



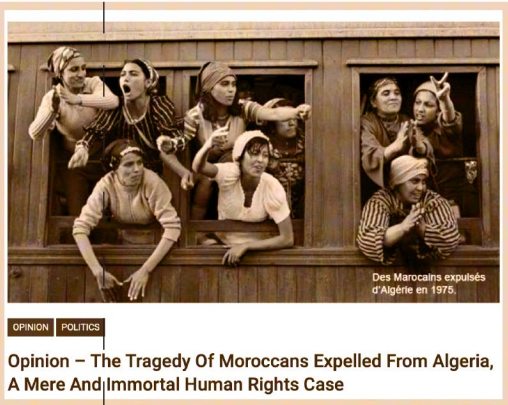
Battle with the French



First train station built



2nd border closing till 1988



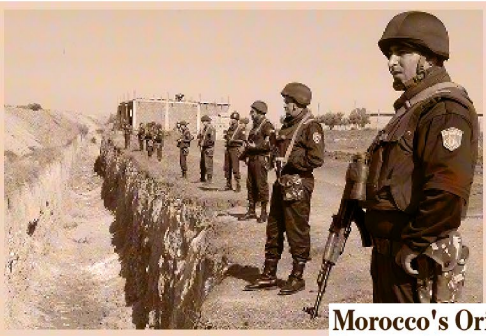
1st border closing till 1964



3th border closing till today



Despite Closed Border, Moroccans and Algerians Find Ways To See Their Loved Ones



Morocco's Oriental Region Soon to Become Important Development Engine - Minister



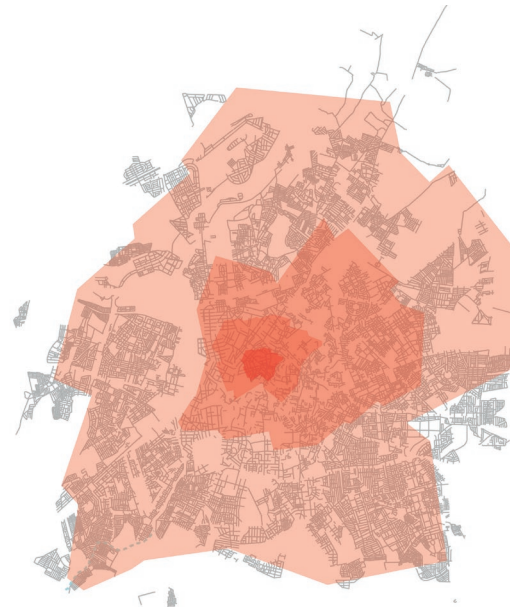
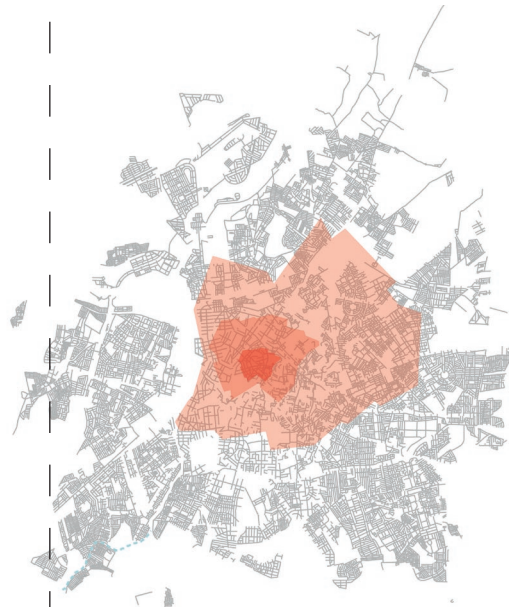
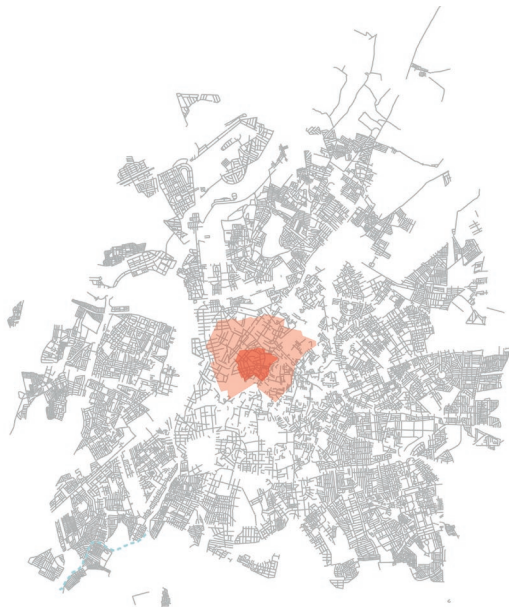
Oujda's fire-ravaged souk - 10 Million to rebuild



Morocco farmers mourn loss of date palms in border standoff



994 1692 1844 1907 1922 1963 1975 1994 2011 2016 2021 2022



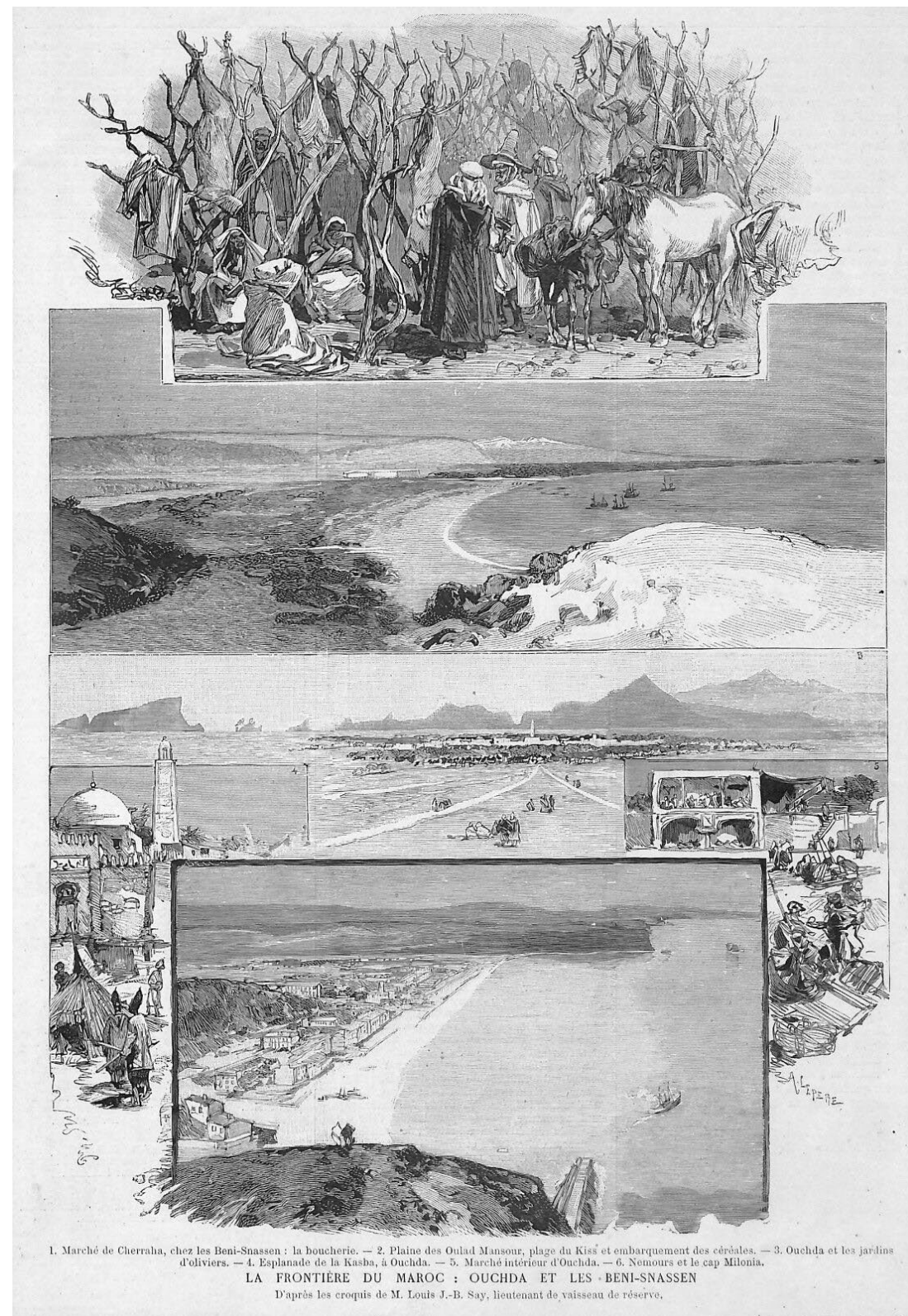


Fig. 13. Border representation of Oujda as a trade hub with common routes, 1884. Source: <https://www.ebay.fr/itm/371840008782>

TRADING ROUTES: CULTURAL SYMBOLS STORED IN THE SHARED MEMORY

According to a number of the collected oral narratives, cities along the Algerian-Moroccan border, including Oujda, do not seriously consider themselves as part of Morocco or Algeria, but rather as part of the border region. This mentality stretches through history, a view which Ouafa Messouss, Rabat-based professor of architecture, also agrees with. Historically, the city of Oujda functioned as a gate and a restpoint for traders and pilgrims heading to Morocco or to the rest of North Africa.⁹

These routes have existed for centuries and only became illicit under the authorities when they closed the border. These routes are like cultural symbols stored in the shared memory of the border communities and traders (fig.3).¹⁰ The routes belong to older times when the border didn't exist, and that's why it ignores the rules of politics to this day. Today, many groups travel these old routes for commercial exchange purposes, avoiding and contesting the border. In the end, informal cross-border trade has shaped life in the region's borderlands transforming it into a significant trading region.¹¹

According to a number of the collected oral narratives, this whole process of trade at the border and avoiding the control post was a continuous cycle, and the city became known for that which led to the name of the city, Oujda, in Arabic: "WAJD" meaning preparing. Or else, a City Always WAJDA (ready) to contest. The process of cross-border trading between the cities became a common heritage and marked its position in the country as a trade hub.¹²

⁹ Ouafa Messouss. (Rabat-based professor of architecture), in discussion with Younes Chergui. March 2024.

¹⁰ Michel Peraldi, "Algerian Routes: Emancipation, Deterritorialisation And Transnationalism Through Suitcase Trade", *History And Anthropology* 16, nr. 1 (1 maart 2005): 47–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757200500042806>.

¹¹ Barriers Versus Smugglers: Algeria And Morocco's Battle For Border Security", z.d.

¹² Hmida. (Oujda based resident), in discussion with Younes Chergui. January 2024.

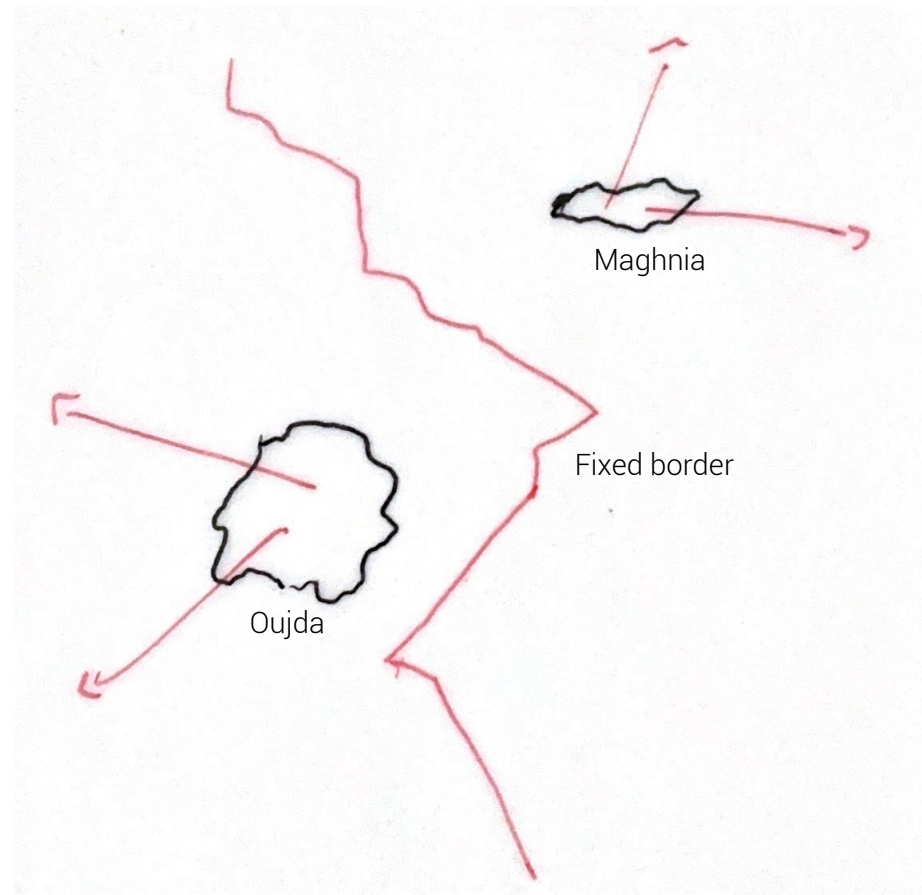


Fig. 14. Perception by the public - the border as a fixed line drawn on the map.
Source: image by author.

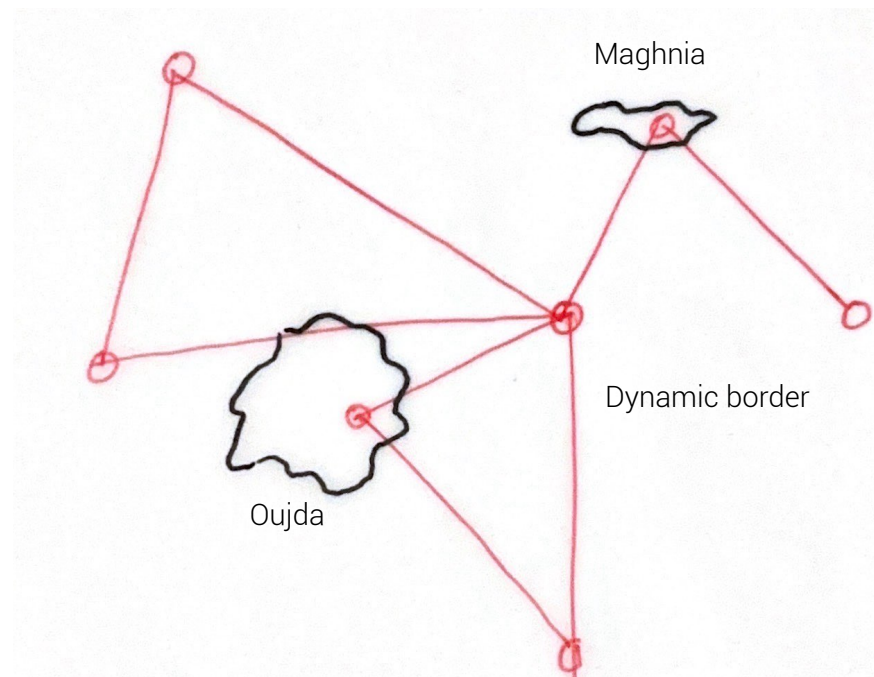


Fig. 15. Perception by the border communities - hidden dynamics that exists in reality at the border. Source: image by author.

PROBLEM STATEMENT (1)

"The general problem is the common perception of borderscapes as closed, marginalized, spaces, resulting in a lack of understanding and investments in borderscapes."

First, the public, not the local (border) communities, tends to understand the borders as a line drawn on the map and as fixed structures controlled by governments, which limits our understanding of the dynamics that exist in reality. The authorities have created this political imagination among the public of separation and disconnection.

However, the border communities, people who live near the border, perceive the space totally different. They see the border as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. An opportunity for economic growth and exchange through informal trade. According to a Moroccan security expert, borders are never truly closed, some people still try to cross the border secretly to trade, which creates opportunities for those who are willing to take risks.¹³

The project seeks to create a different imagination and make the transborder connections clear and something that is known among the people in general and not only by the locals.

¹³ Matt Herbert en Max Gallien, "Divided They Fall: Frontiers, Borderlands And Stability in North Africa", NORTH AFRICA REPORT, vol. 6, december 2020, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/nar-6.pdf>.

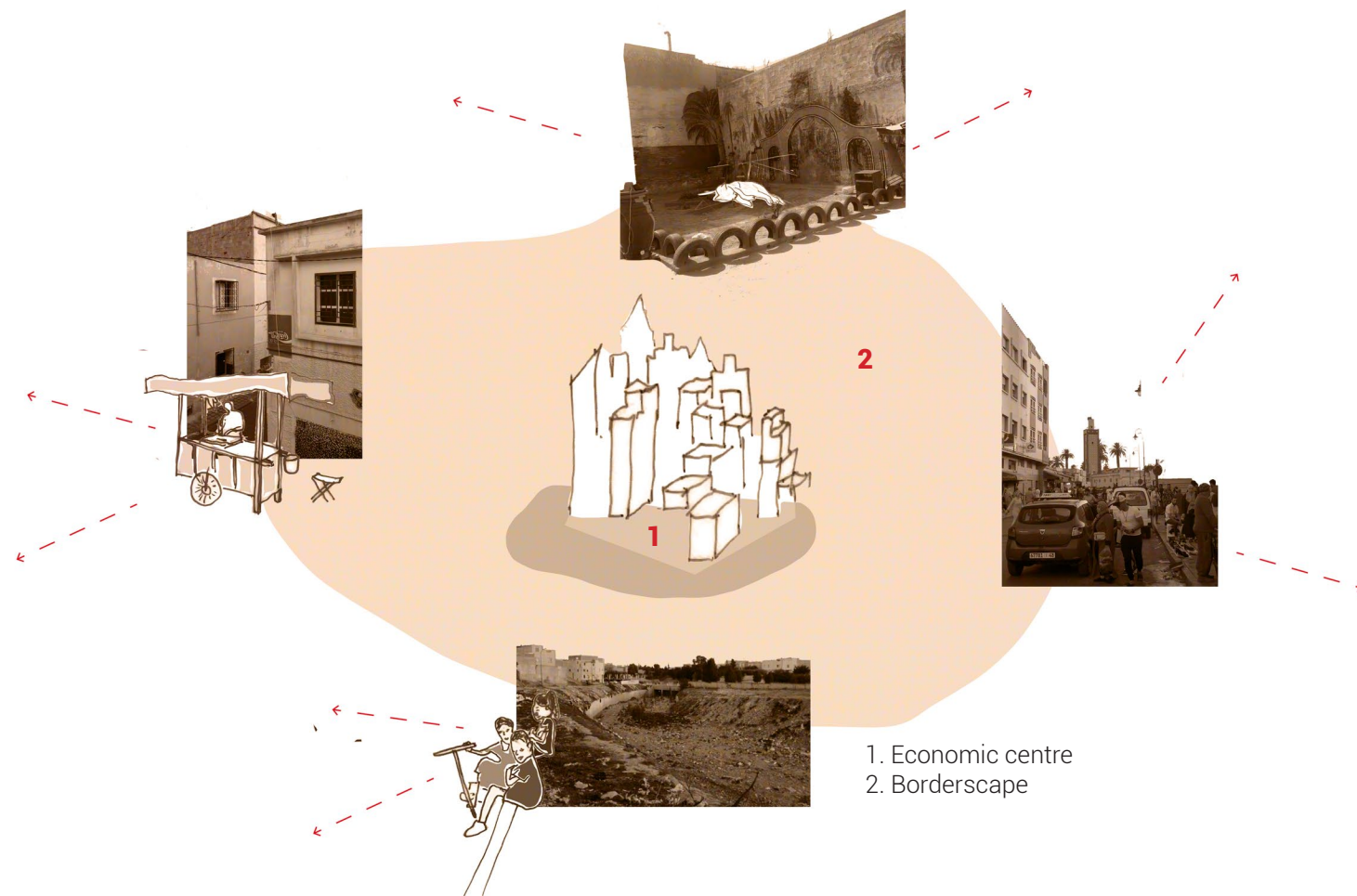


Fig. 16. The northeastern region (2), disconnected from national development efforts (1). Source: image by author.

PROBLEM STATEMENT (2)

"The general problem is the common perception of borderscapes as closed, marginalized, spaces, resulting in a lack of understanding and investments in borderscapes."

The government, on the other hand, perceives borderscapes as marginalized spaces, resulting in little development directed towards these border communities, which leads them in some cases to seek opportunities elsewhere.¹⁴ In the interaction with the physical world, these places often become isolated.

The coastal cities at the west such as Casablanca, Tangier, and Rabat-Salé, make up Morocco's economic centre and were the primary focus of reconstruction during the post-independence period.¹⁵ Between the years 1956 and 2003, the Moroccan government invested a lot in these cities which led to the isolation of the northeastern part of Morocco. Several factors, such as dependence on trade in Algeria and Southern Spain, distance from the major cities, and a poor infrastructural network, contributed to disconnecting the northeastern region from national development efforts until the beginning of the 21st century.

According to a Moroccan government agency that gathers statistics, the economic centers were responsible for creating 58% of the country's wealth. Meanwhile, the eastern borderlands, including Oujda, only contributed with 5.1% of the country's wealth.¹⁶ Also, in the eastern borderlands, about 20% of people couldn't find jobs.¹⁷ The future of the northeastern region is still uncertain, and is seeking for a strategy to redefine its borderlands.

¹⁴ Yasmine Zarhloule, "Defying Peripherality: How Morocco Has Sought To Integrate Its Eastern Borderlands", Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2023, https://www.xcept-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Zarhloule_Morocco.pdf.

¹⁵ Koenraad Bogaert, Globalized Authoritarianism, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt21c4tnr>.

¹⁶ Zarhloule, "Defying Peripherality: How Morocco Has Sought To Integrate Its Eastern Borderlands".

¹⁷ Rising in the East: The Region Aims to Establish a Dynamic, Self-sufficient Economy", Oxfordbusinessgroup, 2014, <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/morocco/2014-report/economy/rising-in-the-east-the-region-aims-to-establish-a-dynamic-self-sufficient-economy>.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What design strategies can be employed to redefine Oujda's borderscape as spaces of connection and exchange rather than division and separation to support the needs of the border communities?

- 1. How are border conflicts memorialized by the border communities and how are they discussed/represented in the media?
- 2. How has the historical context of Oujda, shaped the current dynamic nature of its borderscape?
- 3. What kind of everyday practices of the border communities in Oujda, challenge our conventional understanding of borders?
- 4. What if we rethink borders as part of a larger landscape (border-scapes) rather than just a single site (the line itself)?
- 5. What are the different charecteristics of Oujda's borderscape within the city fabric?
- 6. What role can transient activities play in shaping Oujda's borderscape?

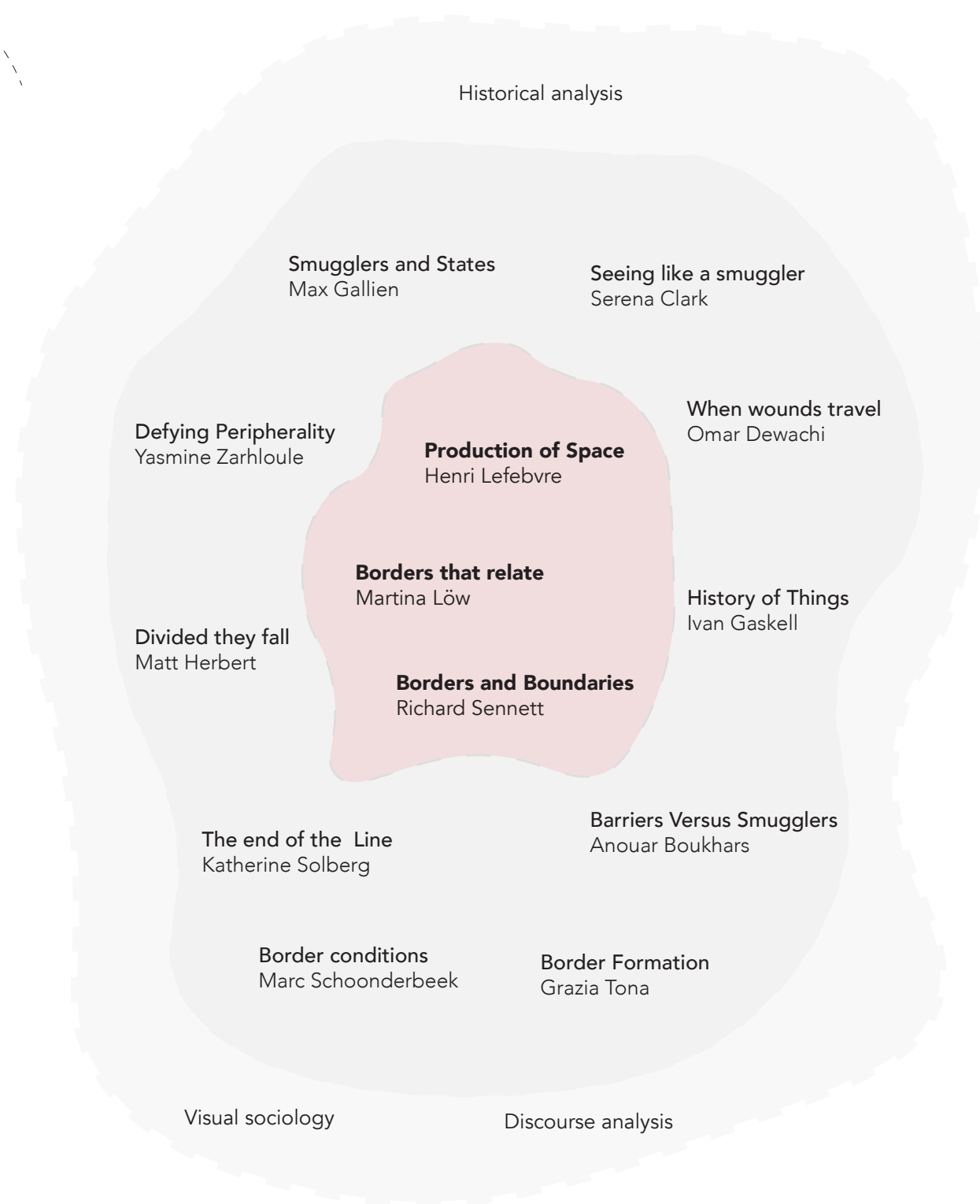


Fig. 17. Diagram of selected, spatial concepts, literatures and research methods. Source: image by author.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This research is a form of situated knowledge that combines historical and archival research with a set of interviews with multiple locals of Oujda. These interviews are seen to add a personal dimension to the historical information that shaped the current dynamic nature of Oujda's borderscape. The research builds further on the theories of Martina Löw 'Borders that relate', Henri Lefebvre 'The production of Space' and Richard Sennett 'borders and boundaries',

For the benefit of this research, the following analyses are conducted:

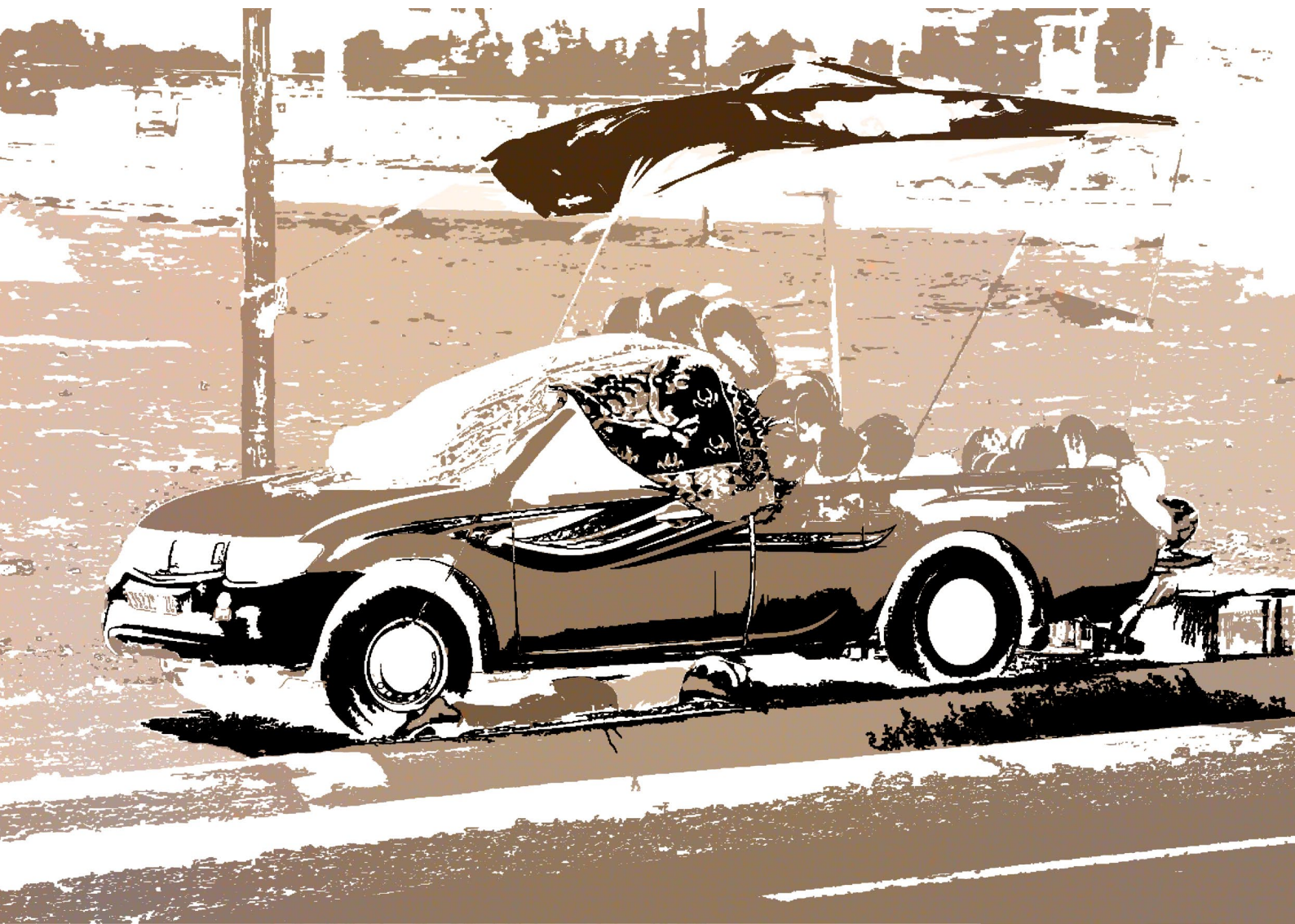
1. Historical research - Analysing conflicts, activities, and moments that shaped the current dynamic nature of Oujda's borderscape. Interviews, photography and postcards are used as research tools to draw site-specific stories.
2. Visual sociology - Analysing visual data to explore how borderscapes are represented in the media, and understanding how these representations shape public perceptions of borders.
3. Discourse analysis - studying and interpreting the understanding of borderscapes. This includes critical analysis of the conceived, perceived and lived space of borderscapes through mapping, interviews, and literature and examining the historical significance of objects, and materials in understanding the past.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ivan Gaskell, "History Of Things", Bard, 1 januari 2019, https://www.academia.edu/41578343/History_of_Things.

Fig. 18. Informal trader waiting for a sell along the roads. Source: image by author.

LIFE ON THE BORDERLAND

PART 2



LIFE ON THE BORDERLAND: DEFYING CONVENTIONAL RULES OF POLITICS

The focus of this chapter is on how the borderscape is controlled and contested by border communities, governments and, how they mediate human relationships among individuals and social groups through time and space. By shifting our focus from a fixed border to a dynamic "borderscape," we can recognize the continuous negotiation and historical flows that shape it. By examining the case of Oujda, this chapter explores how this borderscape defies conventional rules of politics, impacting markets, ways of living, and fundamentally challenging our understanding of borderscapes. To get an understanding of the informal trade process, I started to follow a smuggled product to trace it back to where it is produced or collected and where it lands in the end.

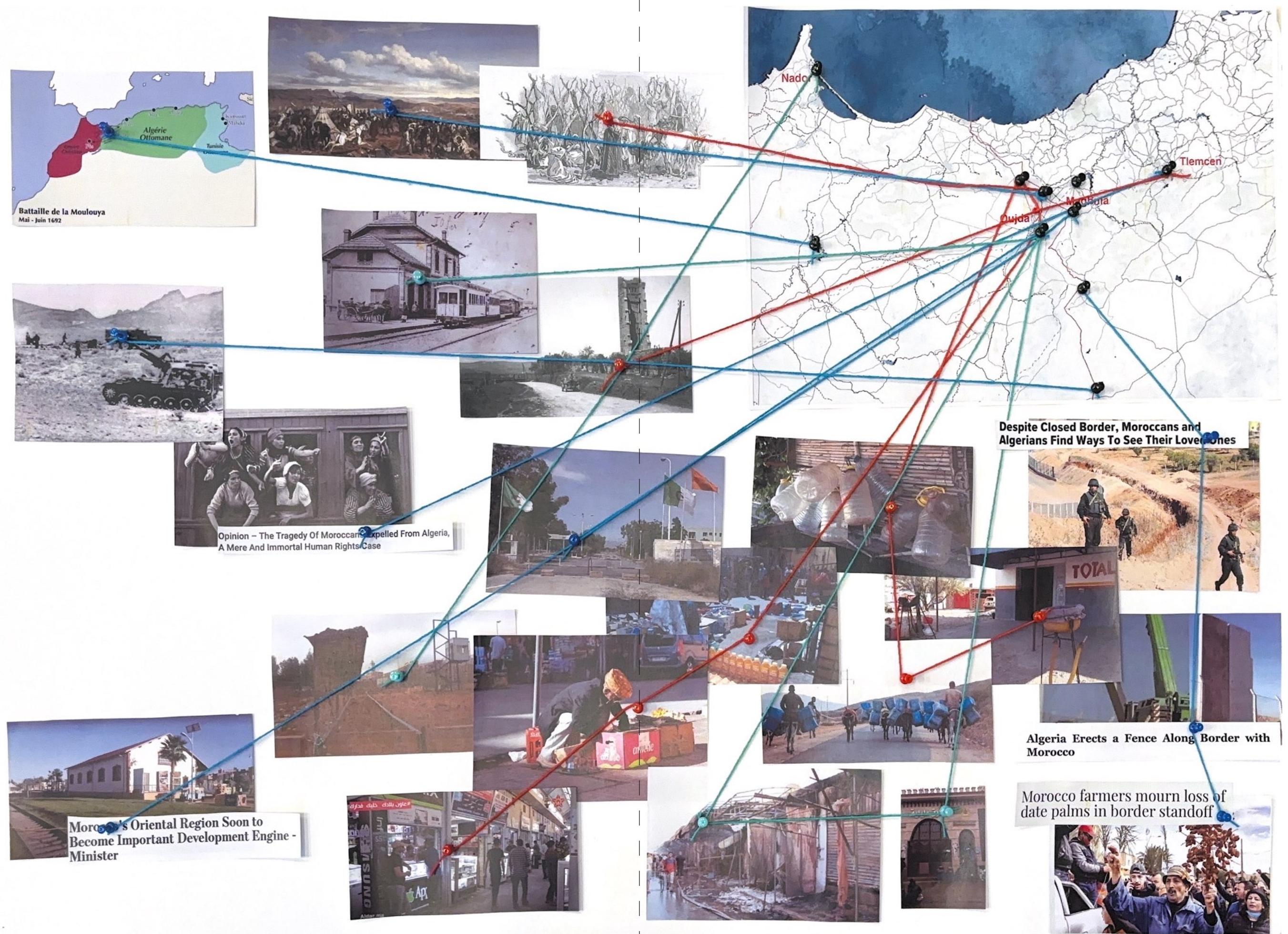


Fig. 19. Moments, activities and conflicts that shaped life in the border region. Source: image by author.

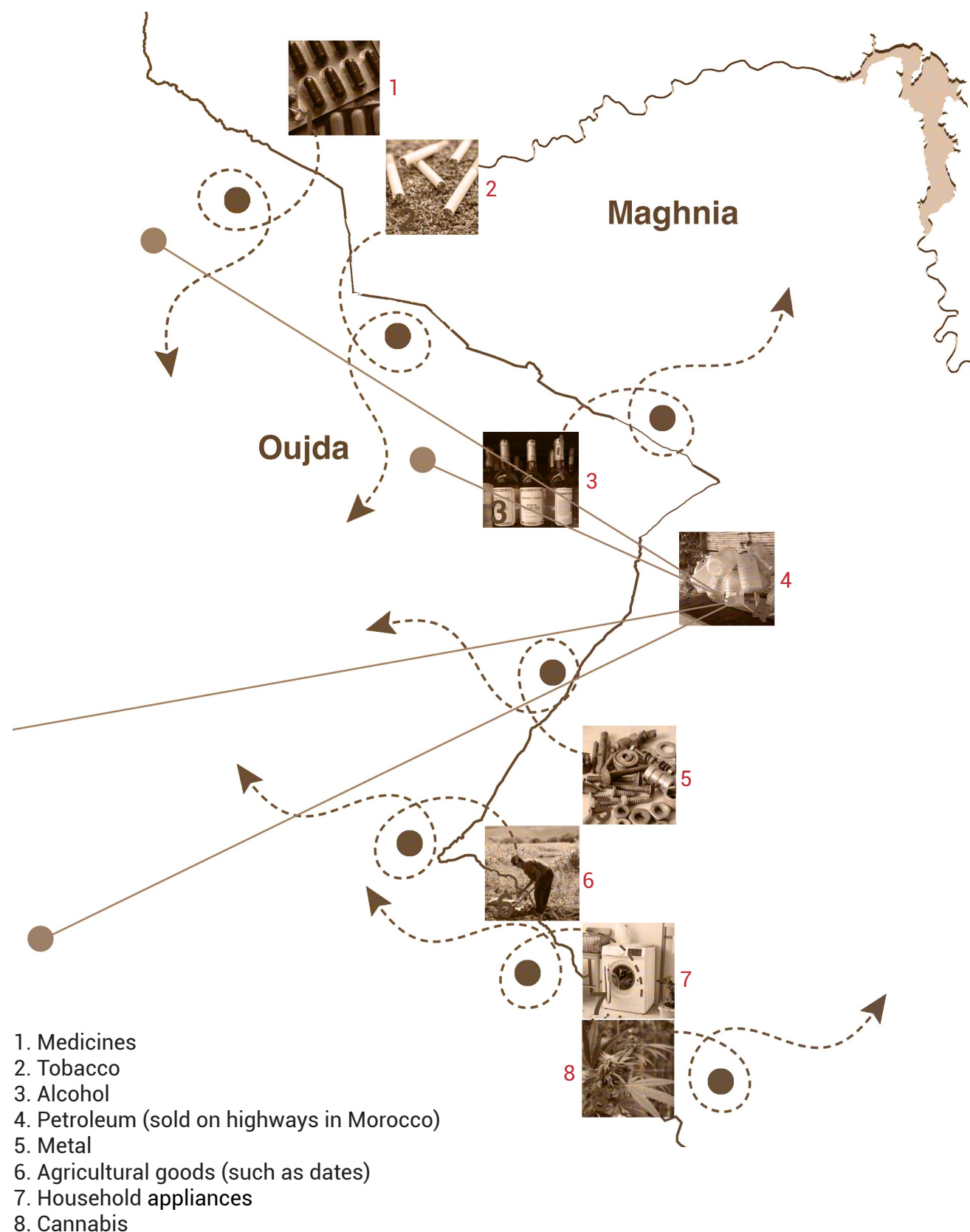


Fig. 20. Products coming in and out from Algeria (Maghnia) and Morocco (Oujda). Source: image by author.

SMUGGLED PRODUCTS: CLOSED BORDERS CREATES THRIVING INFORMAL TRADE

Most of the things that the border communities need on a daily basis and fit on a three-wheeler, a common trading vehicle used in the borderlands, are in some way smuggled. The import happens more on the site of Oujda (Morocco) and the export from Maghnia (Algeria). That is because the products are often much cheaper in Algeria than in Morocco. The common smuggled products are petroleum, medicines, metal, household appliances, tobacco, some agricultural goods, and vehicle parts. The most smuggled (legal) product across the border is petroleum.¹⁹ This has increased due to the rise in prices of fuel in Morocco. Due to the increased activity of smuggled petroleum, communities started to build informal gas stations, often built in houses.

Based on my visits to the city, I noticed there is even a place near Oujda where the smuggled petroleum is stored and sold to local vendors or to other markets in Morocco. The petroleum is often divided into jerry cans or soda bottles, and each vendor carries some of these to sell it on the roads nearby. The result: roadsides full of black-market petrol vendors, often old men or teenage boys, trying to make a living in a neglected borderscape.

¹⁹ Querine Hanlon en Matthew M. Herbert, "BORDER SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE GRAND MAGHREB" (United States Institute of Peace, 2015), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/191018/PW109-Border-Security-Challenges-in-the-Grand-Maghreb.pdf>.



Fig. 21. A petrol vendor explaining his working conditions in Oujda. Source: image by author.

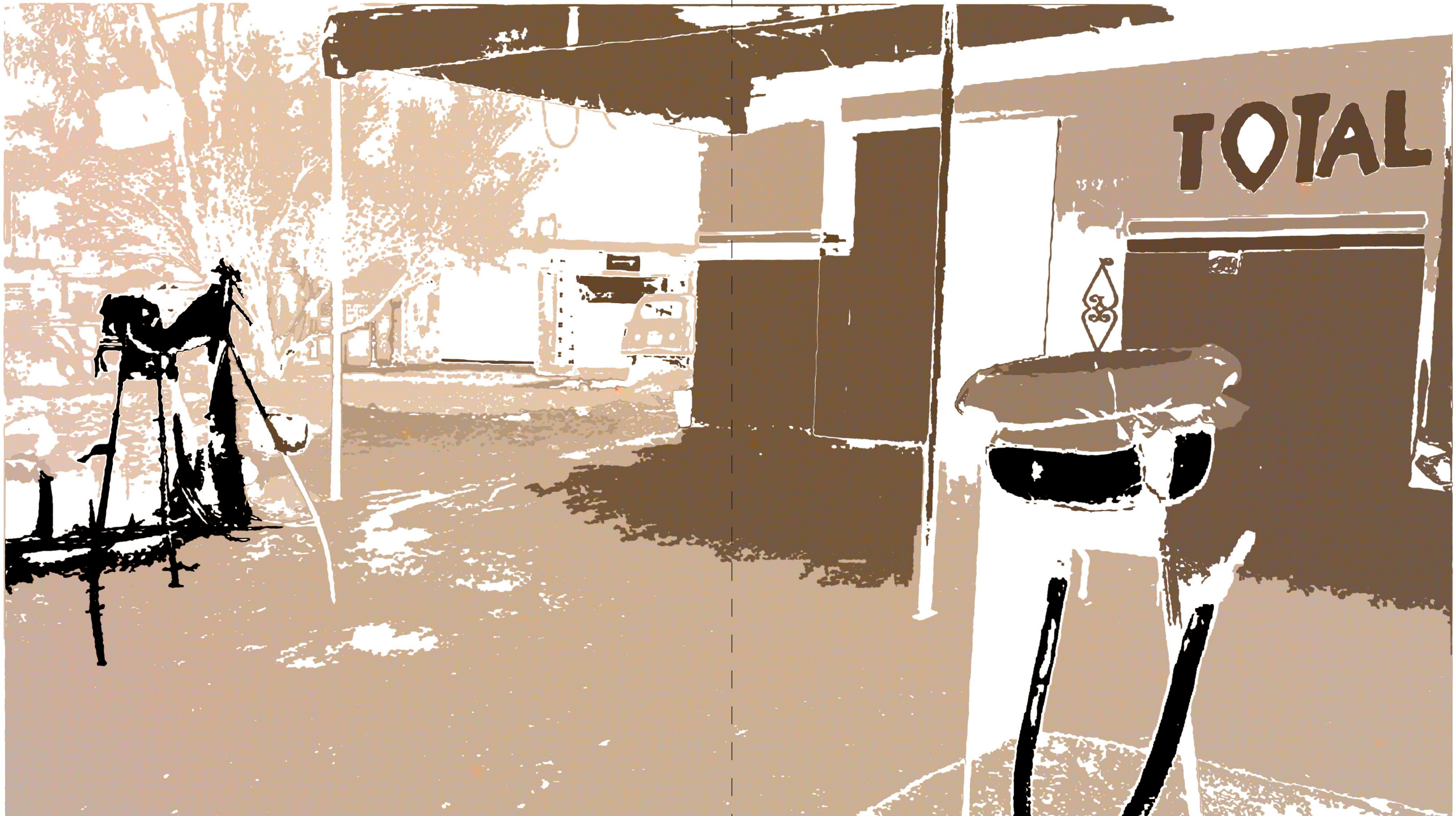
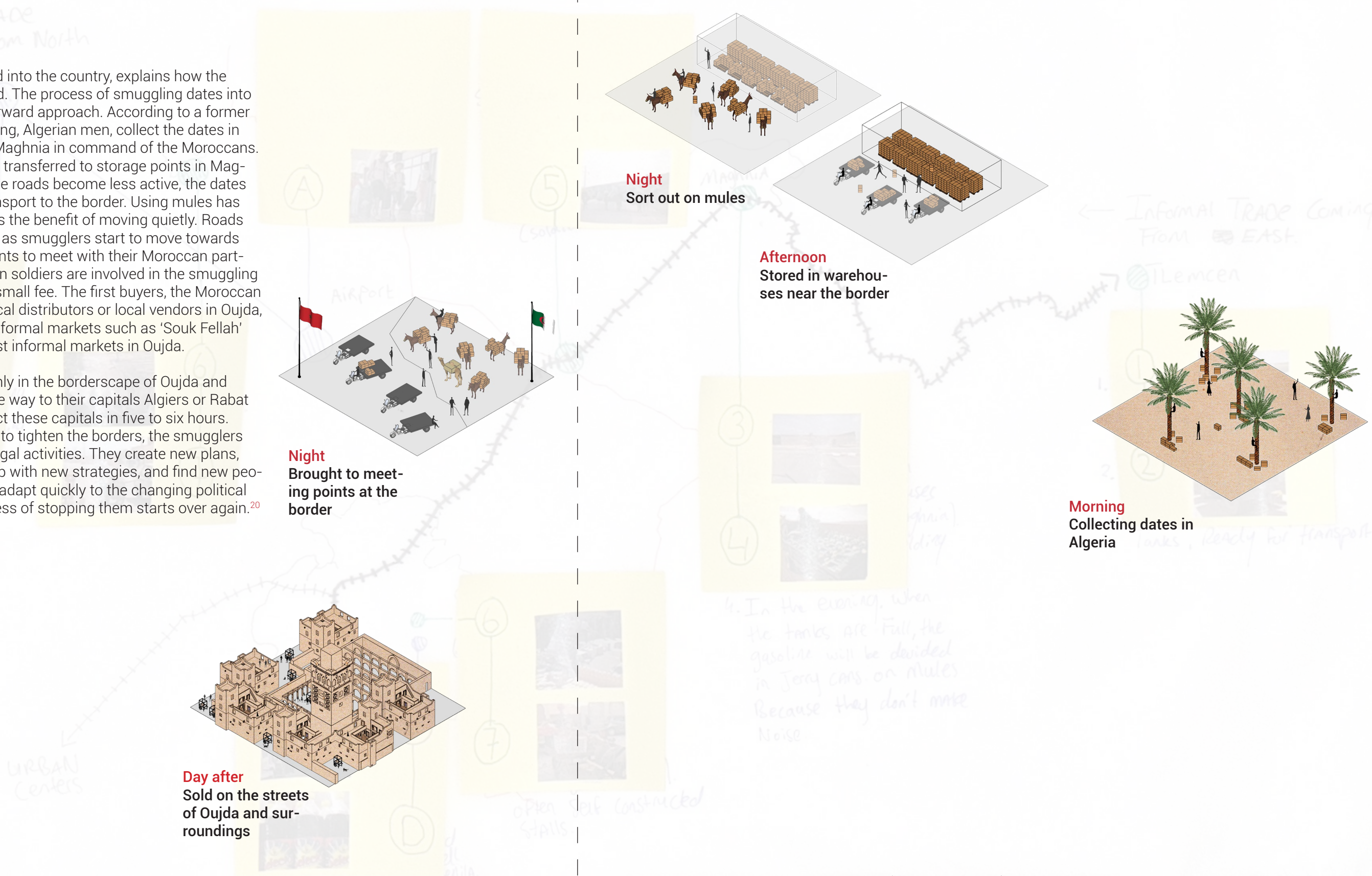


Fig. 22. An informal gasstation built in a house along the roads of Oujda. Source: image by author.

HIDDEN FLOWS: UNDERSTANDING INFORMAL TRADE

The way dates are smuggled into the country, explains how the other products are smuggled. The process of smuggling dates into the country has a straightforward approach. According to a former Moroccan police officer, Young, Algerian men, collect the dates in Algerian farmlands around Maghnia in command of the Moroccans. The collected dates are then transferred to storage points in Maghnia. In the evening, when the roads become less active, the dates are divided on mules for transport to the border. Using mules has a strategic meaning, which is the benefit of moving quietly. Roads along the border, come alive as smugglers start to move towards pre-established meeting points to meet with their Moroccan partners. Sometimes the Algerian soldiers are involved in the smuggling by letting them pass with a small fee. The first buyers, the Moroccan smugglers, resell them to local distributors or local vendors in Oujda, resulting in the creation of informal markets such as 'Souk Fellah' and 'Souk Melilla', the biggest informal markets in Oujda.

The network doesn't exist only in the borderscape of Oujda and Maghnia but stretches all the way to their capitals Algiers or Rabat as modern highways connect these capitals in five to six hours. When the authorities decide to tighten the borders, the smugglers find new ways to do their illegal activities. They create new plans, use different routes, come up with new strategies, and find new people to bribe - the smugglers adapt quickly to the changing political measurements, so the process of stopping them starts over again.²⁰



Abandoned railway (old trading route)

Fig. 23. Understanding informal trade in the borderlands. Source: image by author.

²⁰ Gallien, "Smugglers And States: Illegal Trade in The Political Settlements Of North Africa".

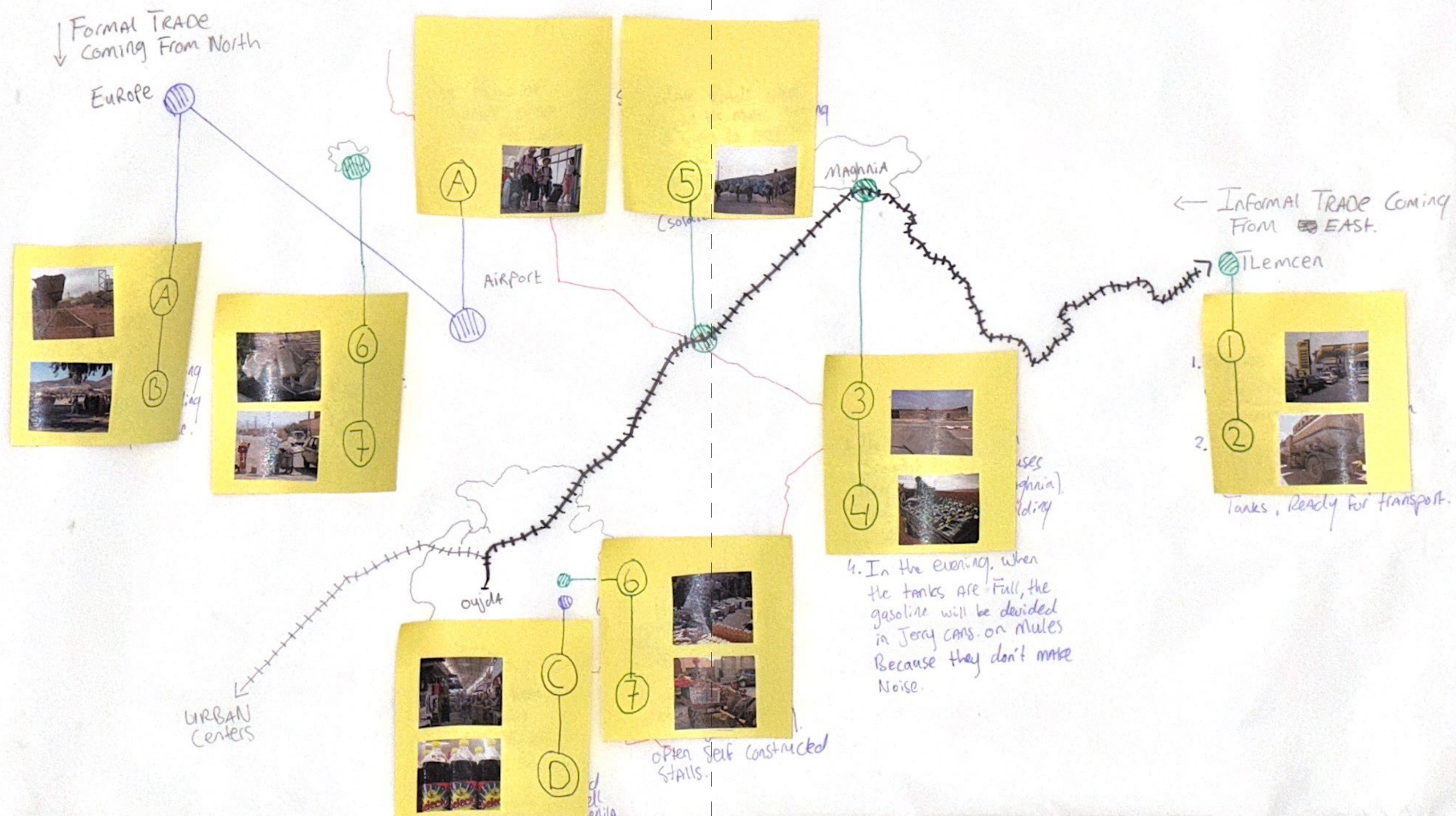


Fig. 24. Mapping informal trade. Source: image by author.

VISUALIZING INFORMAL TRADE: FOLLOWING A DATE

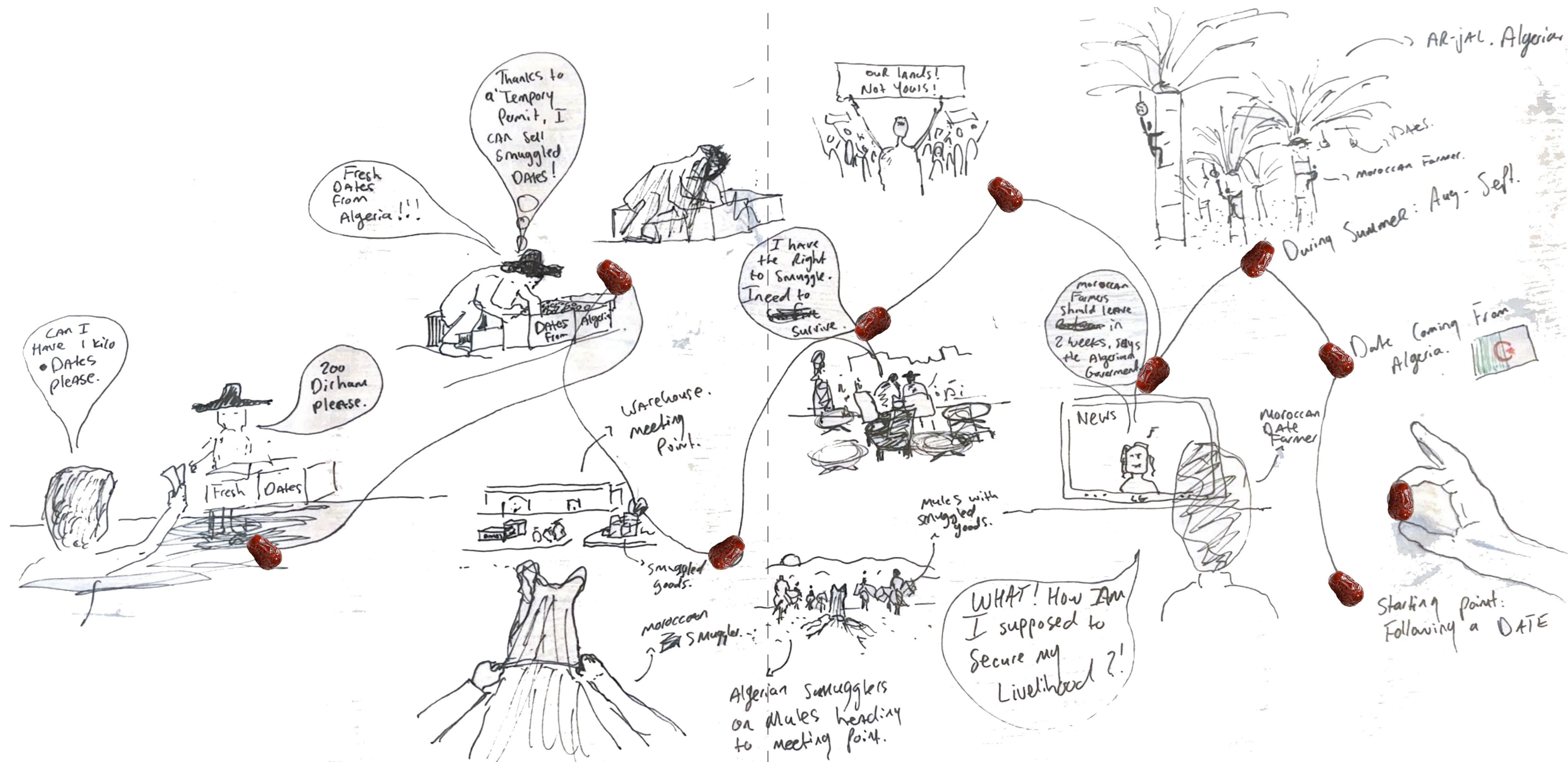


Fig. 25. Visualizing informal trade by following a date. Source: image by author.

HIDDEN FLOWS

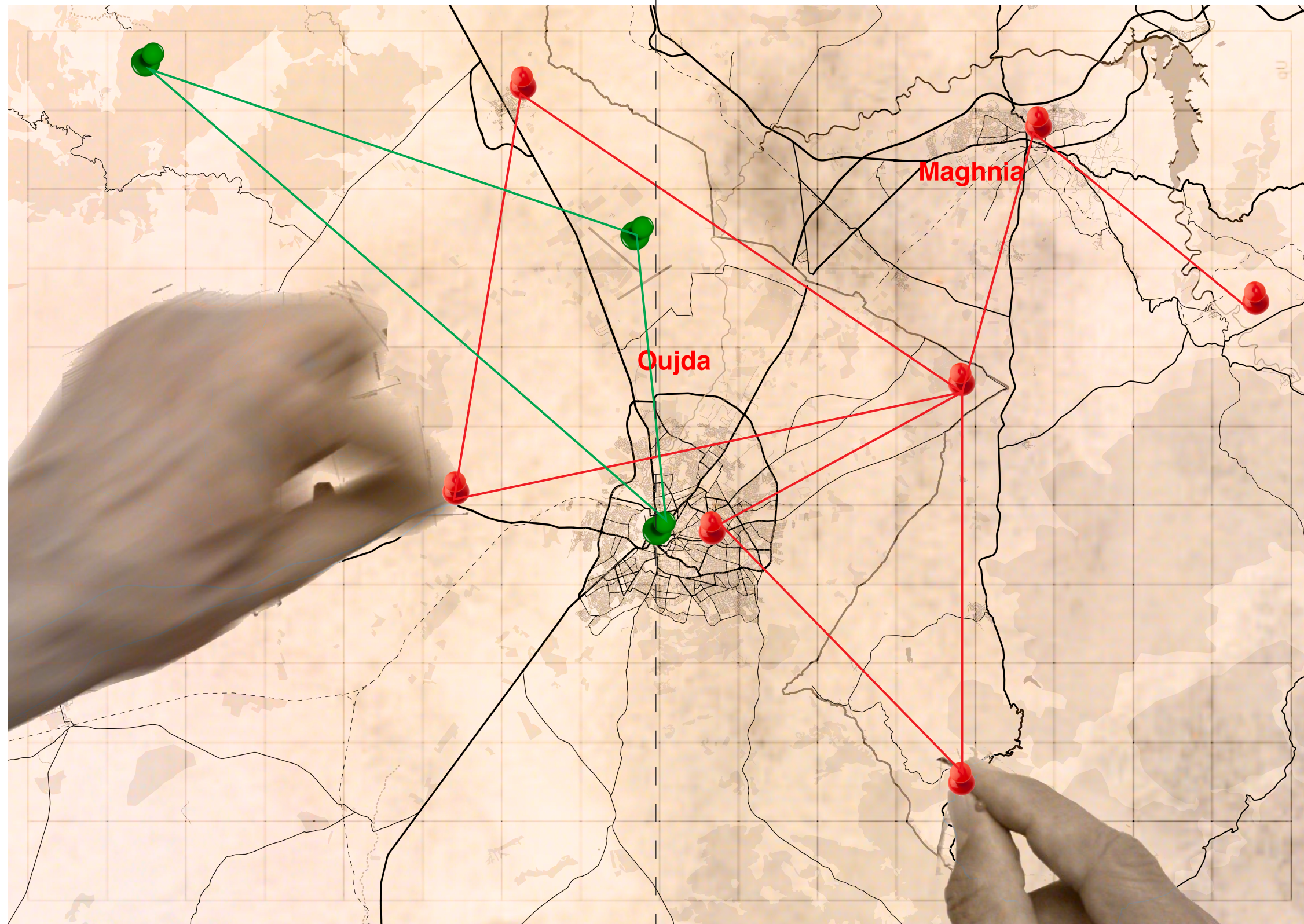


Fig. 26. Making sense of the hidden flows. Source: image by author.

- **FORMAL FLOWS (FROM EUROPE)**
- **INFORMAL FLOWS (FROM ALGERIA)**

CREATION OF SELF-ORGANIZED MARKETS

This high activity of informal trade at the border, shaped life at the border regions. Over the years, Oujda saw a hierarchy of new informal markets appearing, selling products associated with the informal trade to Algeria or Spain.

One of Oujda's well-known informal markets, like the name already suggests is "Souk Fellah", "farmer's market". The stalls within the market are often self-constructed (with steel or concrete) and taking advantage of their informal flexibility.

Overtime, the municipality became aware of this trend and began to build a new market: "Souk Melilla", one of the largest markets in Oujda, for the vendors selling in the Souk Fellah. It is a long-term strategy, to formalize its informal markets.²¹ The result is a large covered market structure that houses the basic needs for the vendors such as electricity and stalls. There is also a small mosque.

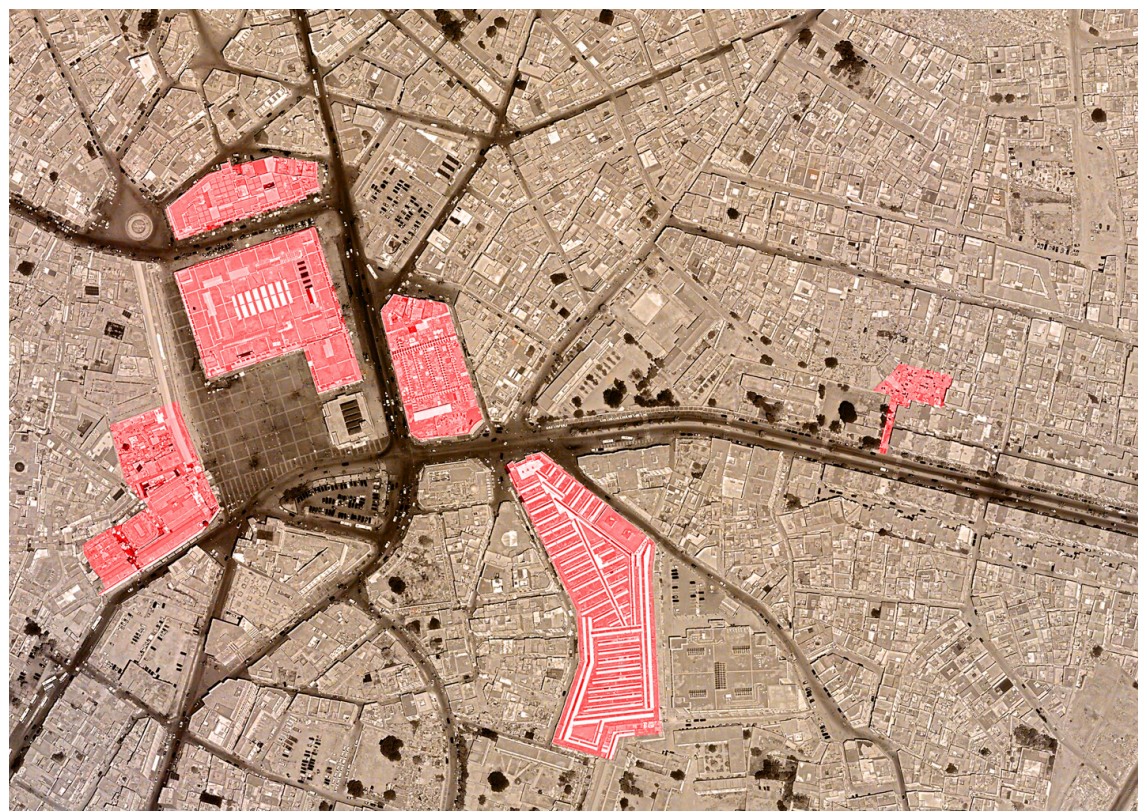


Fig. 27. Map of Oujda centre, showing formal and informal market structures (2024). Source: Google earth

²¹ Gallien, "Smugglers And States: Illegal Trade in The Political Settlements Of North Africa".



Fig. 28. Covered market build by the municipality with the basic needs for the vendors. Source: image by author.

OUJDA'S MARKET REGULATION: A TOLERANCE POLICY FOR COMPENSATION

The authorities, of course, are fully aware of the informal activities of the traders and the origin of their products. The names of the informal markets, already suggest the origin. However, to make it easier for these people who were affected by the border closure, the local authorities don't see the origin of the products as their concern. Instead, through a tolerance policy, a variety of hybrid arrangements were established to tax and regulate the sale of smuggled goods. In order to charge fees from the informal traders, the authorities learned to adapt to give them a "temporary use of public space for commercial purpose".²² Someone who was unemployed and feeling hopeless now holds a temporary license, which gives them hope and a bit of perspective in an uncertain future.

People selling in the hybrid market, souk Melilla for example, do not own their own stores in the market. The stalls are owned and maintained by the local municipality. Instead, the vendors who decided to sell in this market, hold a license to operate in this particular market, typically for around 150 Dirham (€15) per month. A fee for electricity and medical benefits are excluded.²³

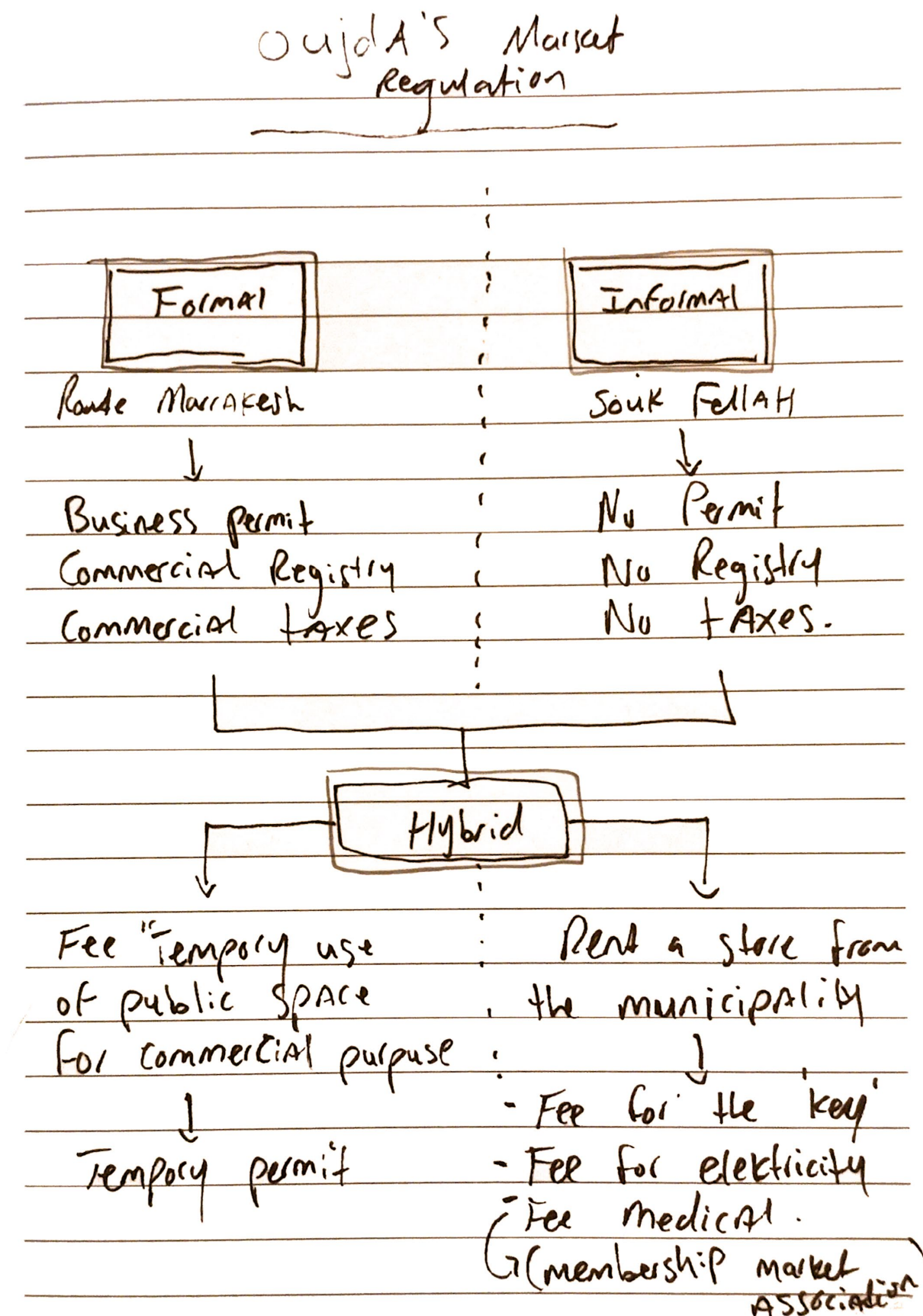


Fig. 29. Notes of oujda's market regulations. Source: image by author.

²² Herbert en Gallien, "Divided They Fall: Frontiers, Borderlands And Stability in North Africa".

²³ Gallien, "Smugglers And States: Illegal Trade in The Political Settlements Of North Africa".



Fig. 30. A street vendor explaining how the authorities and smuggling networks work together or co-exists. Source: image by author.



Fig. 31. Different types of peddlers. Source: image by author.

THE PEDDLER: CONNECTING ISOLATED NEIGHBORHOODS

An interesting group of informal traders are the traveling salesmen, also known as peddlers. These traders fill the gaps in the formal market by traveling to neighborhoods that are somewhat isolated. They provide a door-to-door service for people who, for various reasons, find it difficult to attend markets located in the city center. The main difference between a peddler and a street vendor is that peddlers travel while they trade, connecting different neighborhoods and communities, rather than waiting for customers at a fixed location for a sale.²⁴ Today, many of them operate under different working regulations compared to general informal traders.

²⁴ Peddler. (a traveling salesmen based in Oujda near my families house), in discussion with Younes Chergui. July 2024.



Fig. 32. A traveling salesman explains how he is able to work without paying taxes. Source: image by author.

Fig. 33. Sketch showing the design principles of a caravanserai. Source: image by author.

Storage

On the ground floor, there were a number of storage spaces for the traders.

Entrance

Visitors found there were only 2 main (wooden) gates.

Rooms

On the second level, small rooms were available for travelers to spend the night.

Courtyard

The courtyard was the hub of activity and was the place where worlds and ideas connect and animals rested. In the middle there was often a large fountain that provided water.

Security

The caravanserais housed also soldiers that protected the merchants from thieves. They also send messenger horses, that travelled to larger cities with important news.

THE CARAVANSERAI: WHERE WORLDS AND IDEAS CONNECT

The concept of a 'traveling salesman' has existed for centuries. A network of 'trading routes' was used to connect districts and countries for exchanging products and ideas. These travelers were known as 'caravanners'. Structures called 'serais', also known as palaces, were built to provide them with a resting place along their route.²⁵ The main purpose of these caravanserais was twofold: to provide travelers with a safe place to rest and to house a marketplace where merchants could sell and trade their goods or ideas.

Caravanserais were strategically positioned, often within a day's travel, and were built by private citizens or local authorities. It was common for a caravanserai to have a courtyard, which served as the 'heart' of the building and a place where different worlds and ideas connected. A caretaker oversaw and regulated the activities. Today, caravanserais are translated as hotels and no longer serve the same functions as they originally did.

²⁵ "Caravanserai", z.d., <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/caravanserai/>.

Fig. 34. The abandoned line. Source: image by author.

THE ABANDONED LINE

PART 3



THE ABANDONED LINE: A PHYSICAL CONNECTOR BETWEEN THE BORDER COMMUNITIES

Whether it is at the scale of a city, town, or village the quality of urban life is largely determined by the infrastructure of the connections, public spaces, squares, boulevards, streets, bridges, parks, and transportation - this is the urban glue that binds the individual buildings and communities together.²⁶ Your memory from a trip will be the routes, the journeys, the path you took from your home, the way back, the streets, the connections, the terminal, and the border crossing. That determines the quality of life in the same way the individual building determines that.

It explains why the collective memory of the abandoned railway that used to connect Algeria and Morocco and used as a smuggle route, is so strong. The line is a physical connector between the border communities and tells stories of connection, industrialization, hope, and contestation. Therefore, the abandoned railway is chosen as the project's location.

²⁶ Louisiana Channel, "Norman Foster: Striving For Simplicity | Louisiana Channel", 1 juni 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJNxgV9Rak0>.



Fig. 35. Old train route connecting Oujda (Morocco) and Maghnia (Algeria). Source: image by author.



Fig. 36. New train route turns its back to Algeria - connecting the economical centres of Morocco. Source: image by author.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BORDERLAND

By changing our perception from a border to a borderscape (not the line itself, but everything that moves around), we can light the people, resources, and infrastructures that influence our lives and markets. This includes the abandoned railway where the border communities used to transport their goods from Algeria to Morocco and back.

Nowadays, the new train route turns its back to Algeria and connects its economic centers such as Rabat and Casablanca. Almost like a symbolic gesture towards its neighbor country. With this in mind, I began to see the abandoned railway as an opportunity to redefine Oujda's borderscape - a symbolic gesture to challenge the authorities.



Fig. 37. Abandoned train route becomes an opportunity in redefining Oujda's Borderscape. Source: image by author.

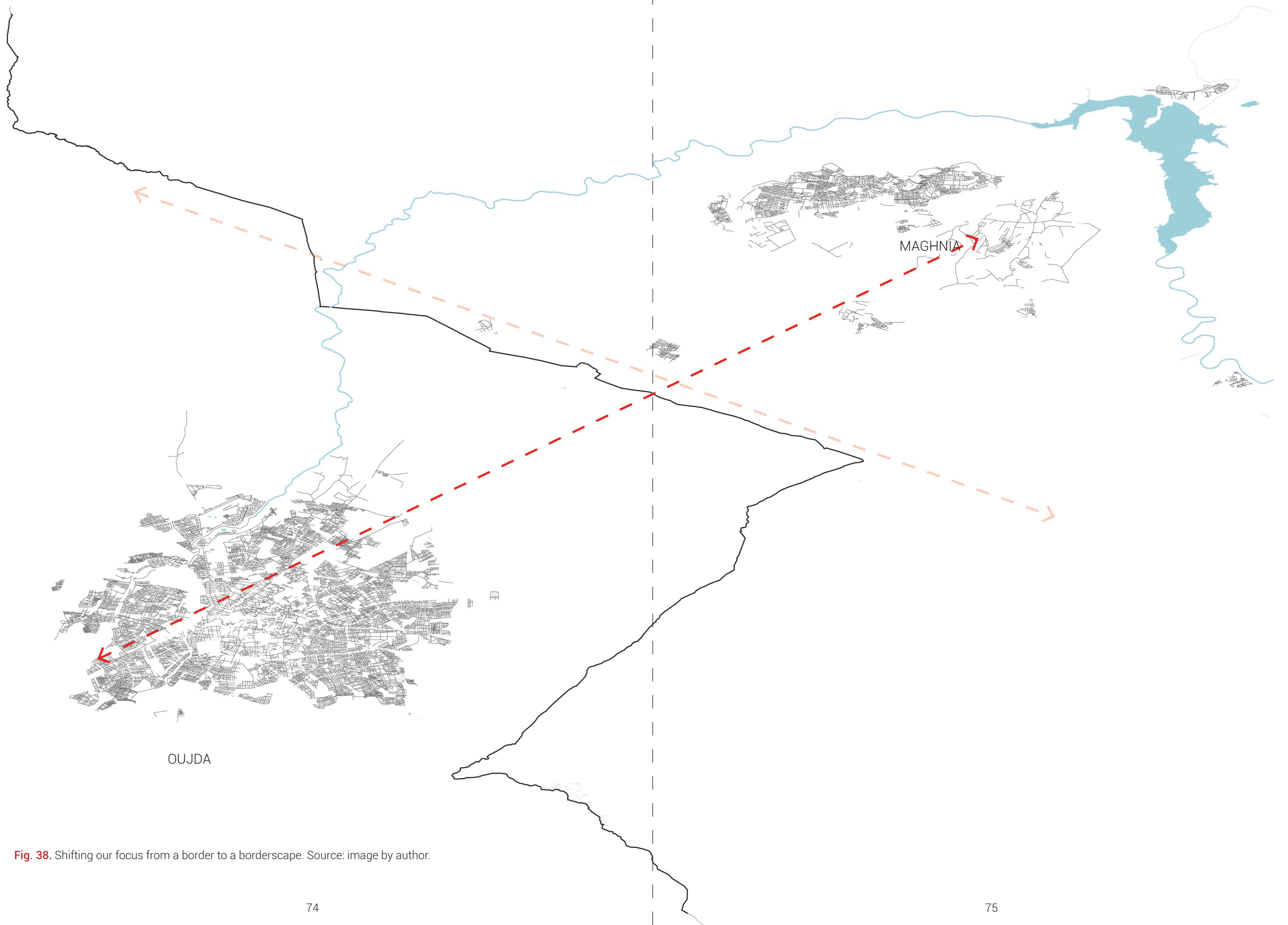


Fig. 38. Shifting our focus from a border to a borderscape. Source: image by author.

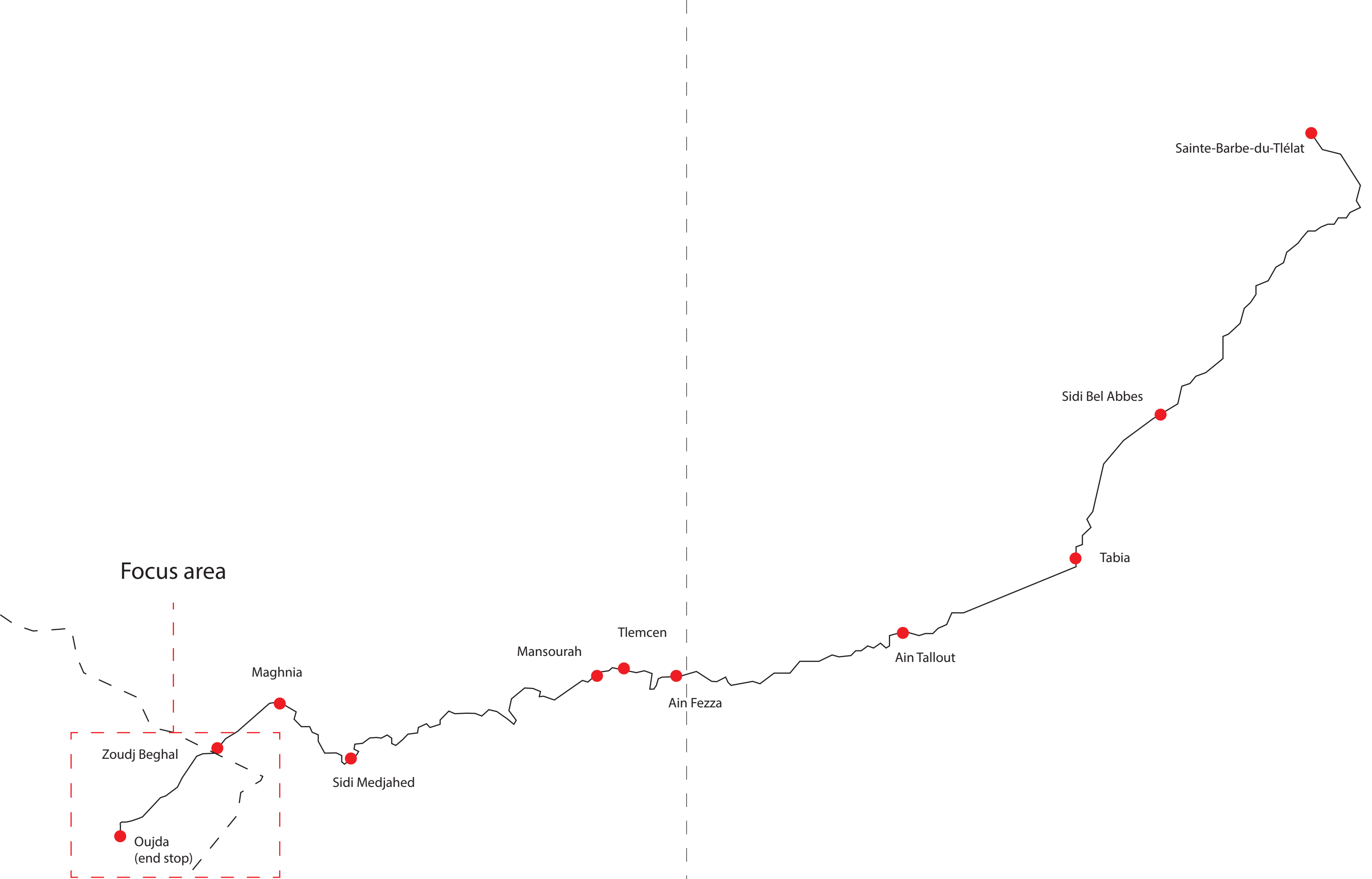
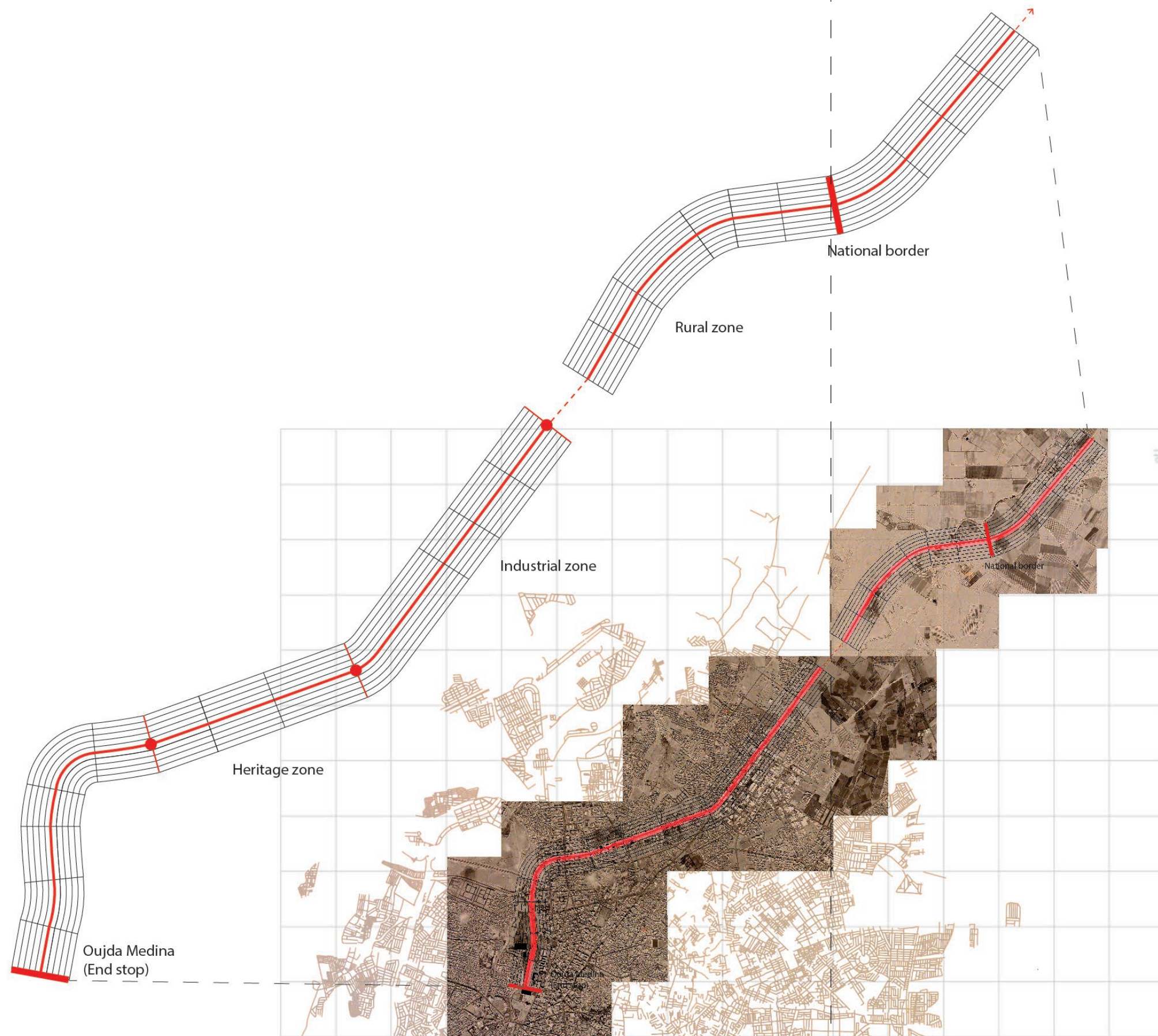


Fig. 39. The existing line and the focus area. Source: image by author.

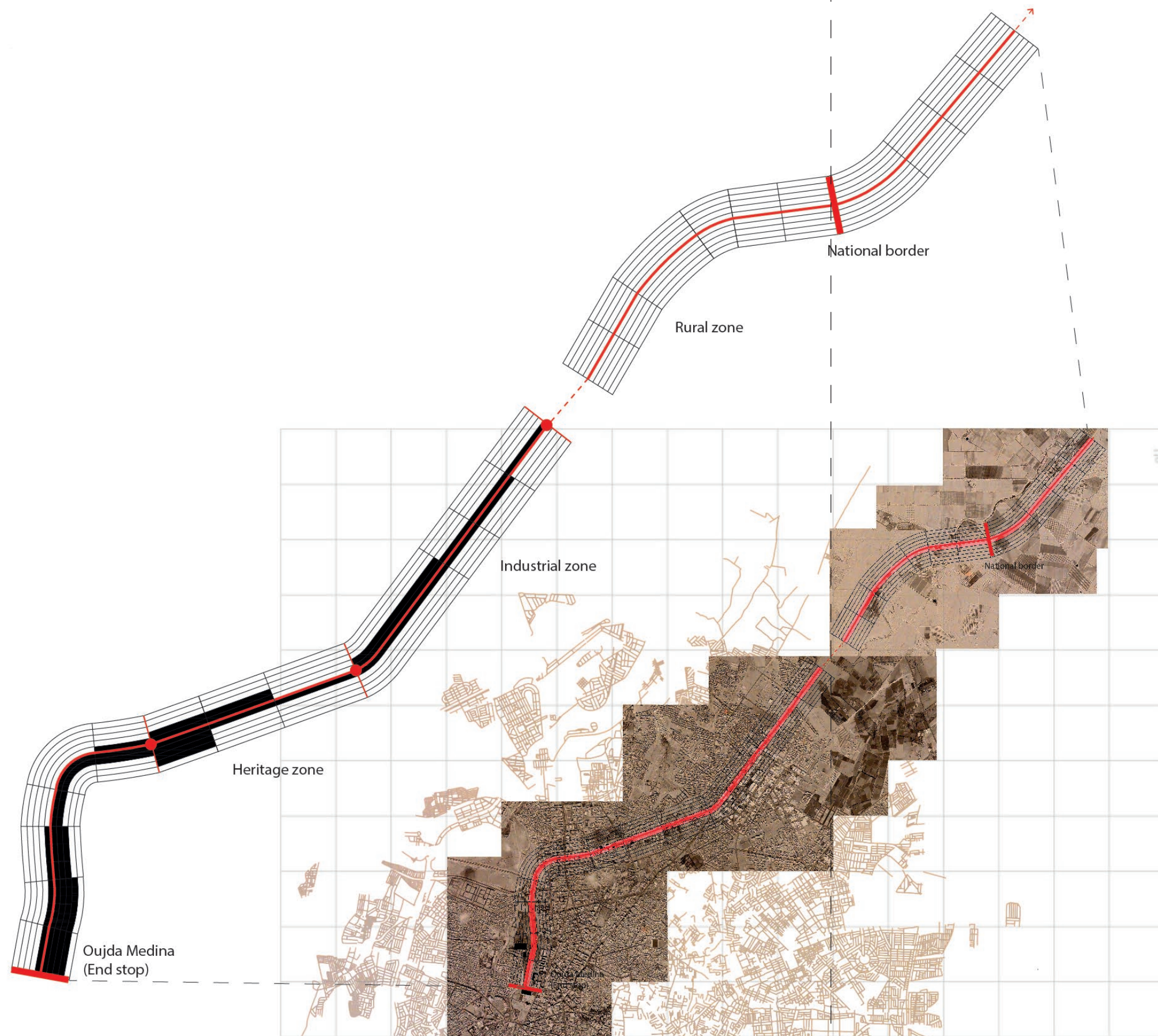


THE ABANDONED RAILWAY: A SECOND BORDER

What are the different characteristics of Oujda's borderscape within the city fabric? In order to analyze this, I tried to indicate the different characteristics of the railway and its surroundings. The railway cuts through neighborhoods and communities and therefore, it can assume a different nature on one side than on the other side. A measurement layer has been placed over the track to measure its characteristics. The more "symmetric" the diagram, the less contrast between the two sides. The thickness of the diagram indicates how hard the 'second' border is. The thicker, the more present the railway. Thin areas are softer and allow the transition easier from one side to the other side.

Some parameters such as the amount of amenities, no-man's land, high activities, physical borders, and geographical differences are analysed to understand the abandoned line in its context.

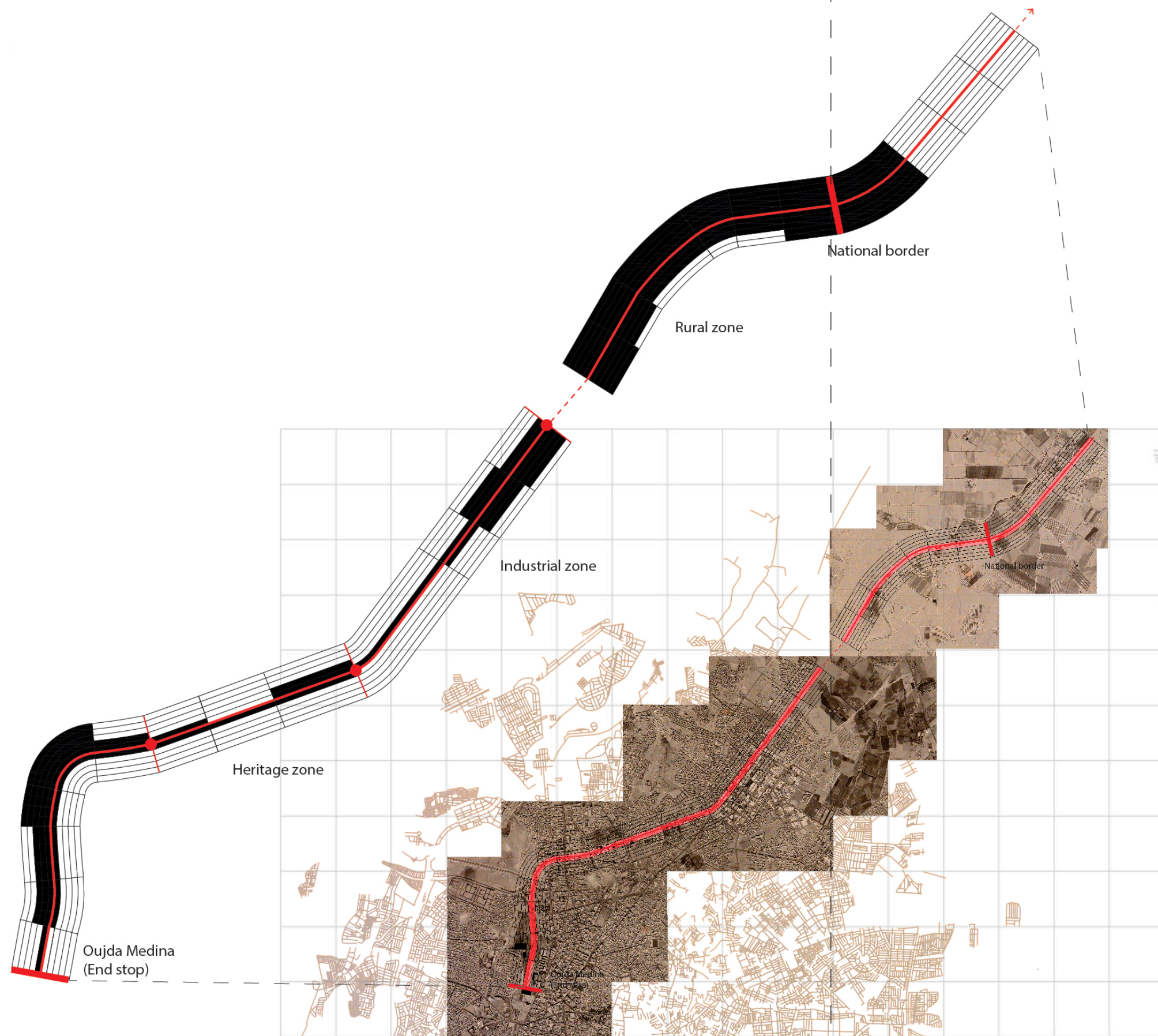
Fig. 40. The borderscape as an analitical model. Source: image by author.



AMENITIES

This parameter clearly indicates where life is to be found: there's a shortage of amenities around the corner of the track and between the industrial area and the national border. As a result, these areas are where the initial interventions could take place to address these gaps.

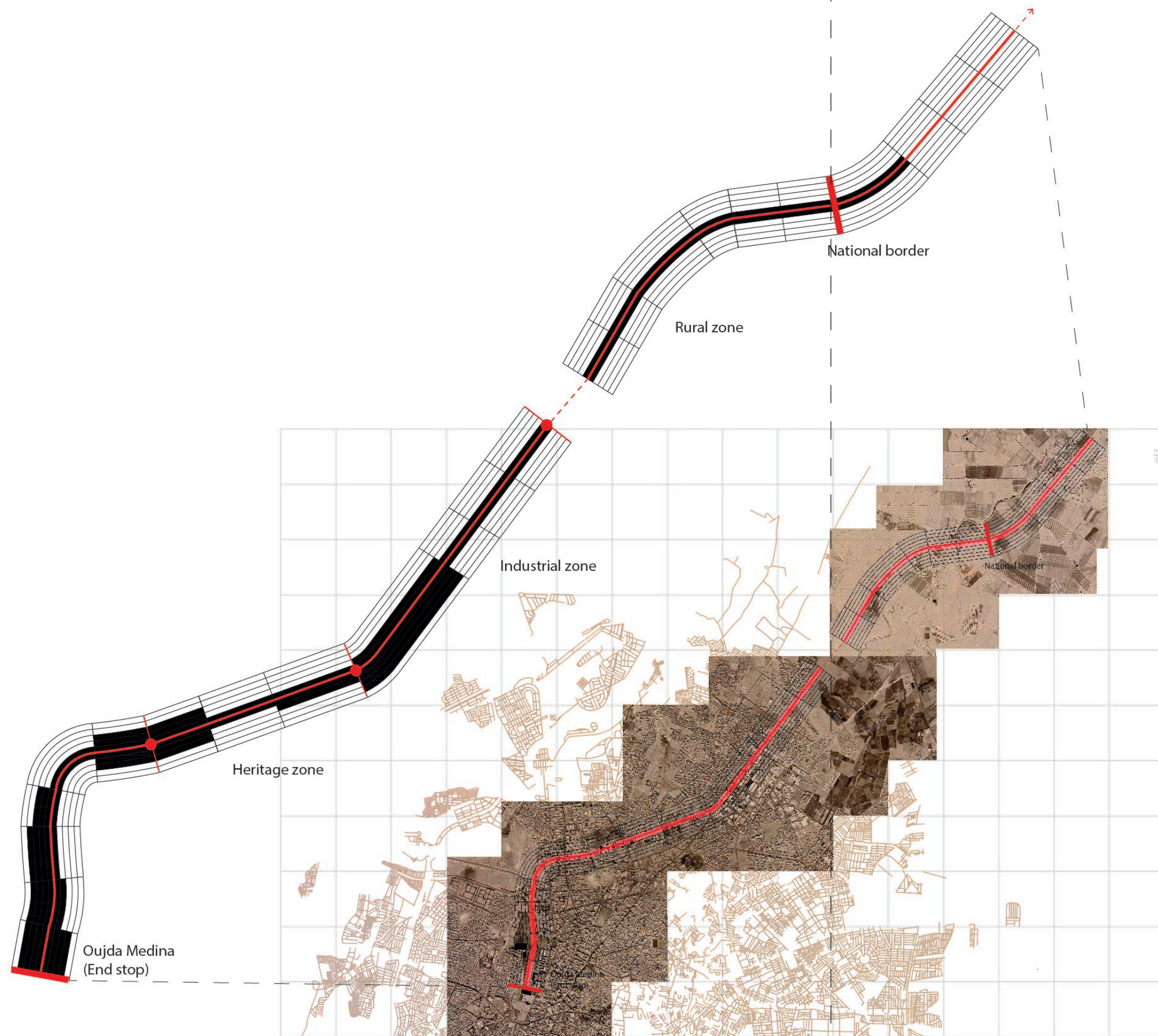
Fig. 41. Map indicating the amount of amenities per area. Source: image by author.



NO MAN'S LAND

To address the lack of amenities, it is important to find an undeveloped plot of land as our starting point. Once again, the focus is on the areas with the greatest need for intervention, where the aim is to enhance the existing infrastructure. It is again around the corner of the track, between the end stop and the heritage zone, which is underdeveloped in terms of urbanization. Therefore, I see these zones as potentials for the initial interventions.

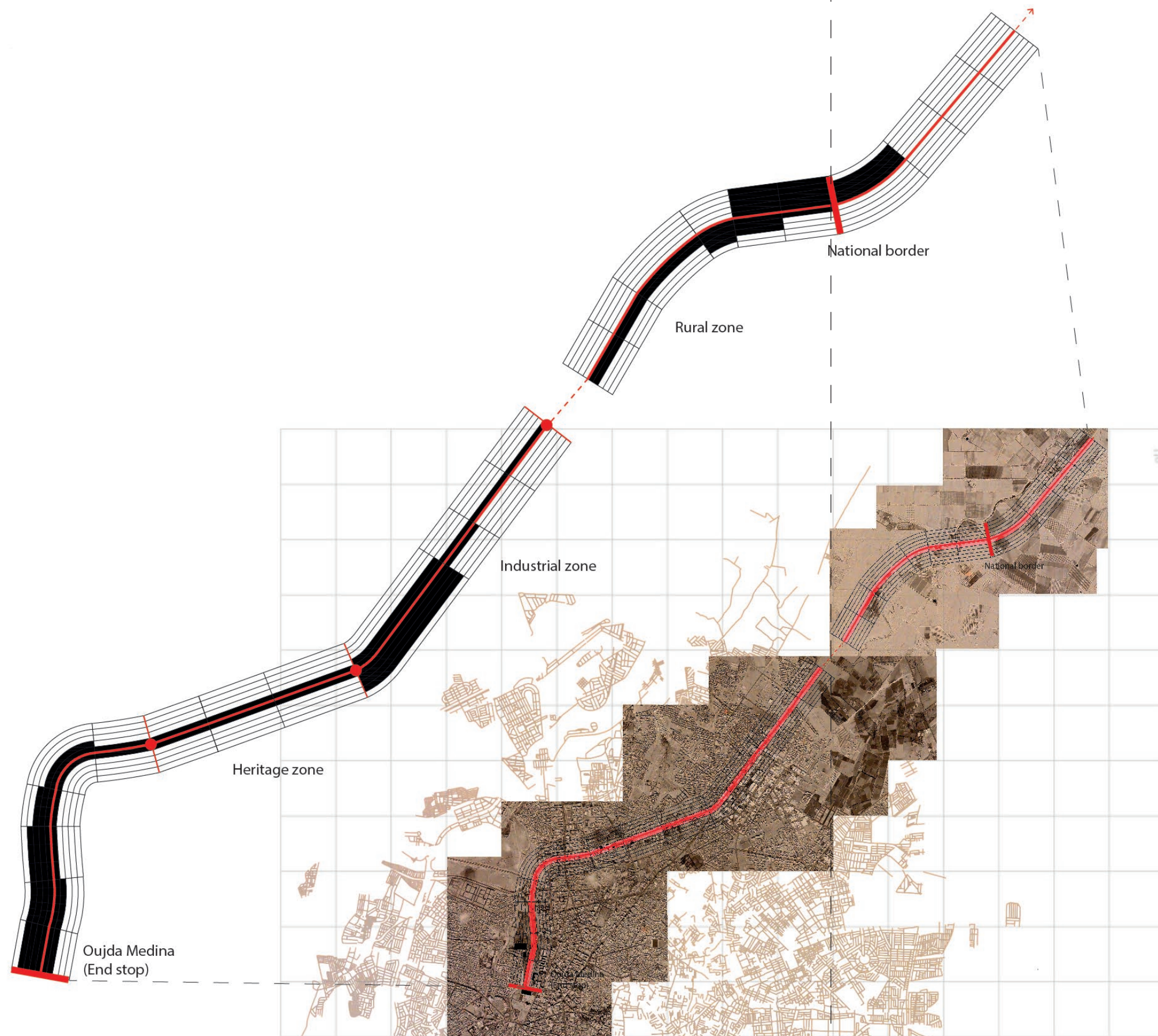
Fig. 42. Map indicating underdeveloped areas around the line. Source: image by author.



HIGH ACTIVITY

The end stop in Oujda serves as a bustling hub where trains arrive and depart, situated alongside the vibrant medina. Additionally, a new sports park has been constructed near the historic first train station of Oujda, attracting in visitors. Lastly, a significant industrial zone contributes to the bustling atmosphere with its noise and activity from industrial machinery.

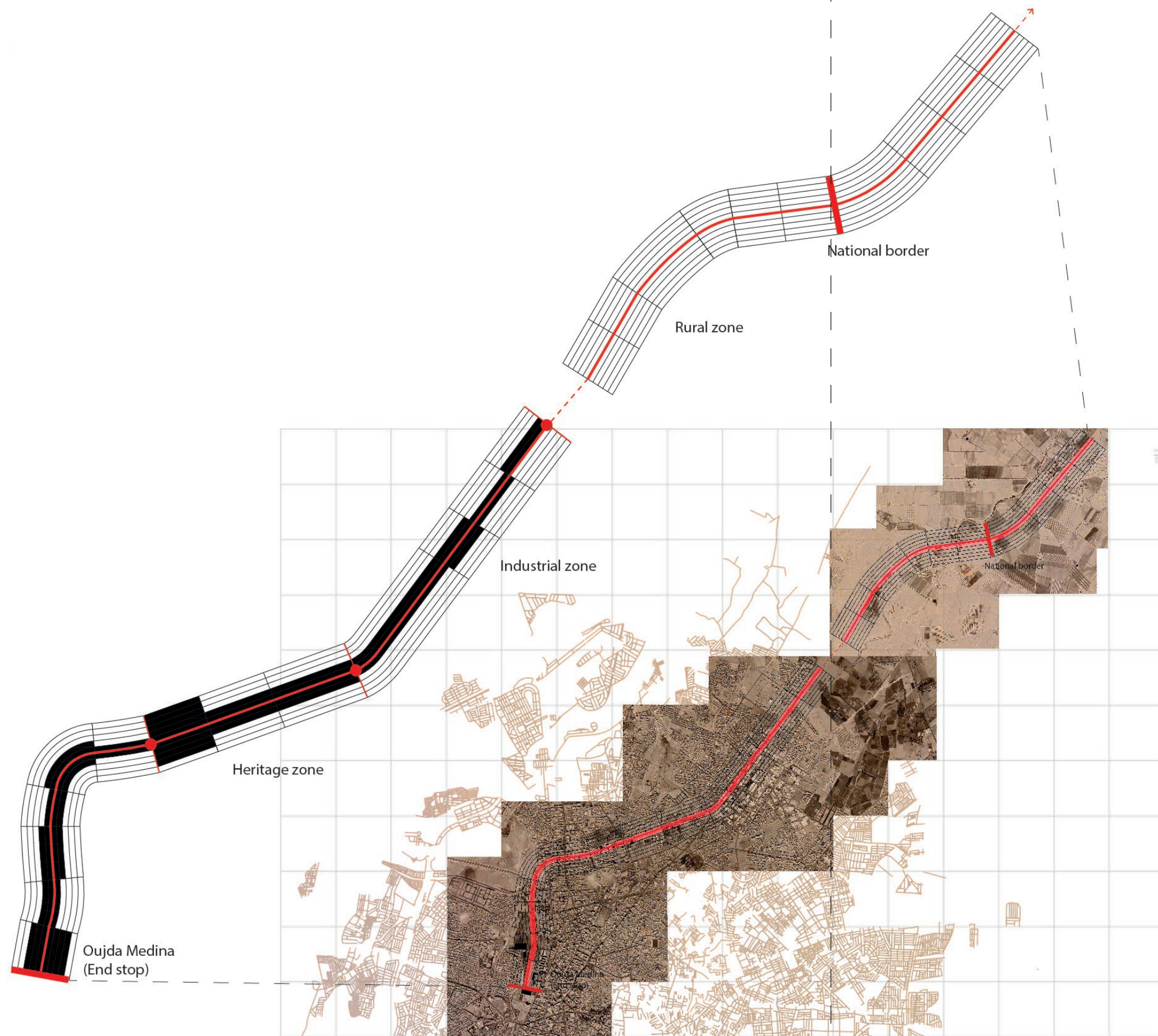
Fig. 43. Map indicating areas with high activity around the line. Source: image by author.



PHYSICAL BORDERS

The intense activity of the industrial zone serves as a physical barrier that hinders the connectivity between communities in the surrounding. Moreover, both the national border and the end stop of Oujda serve as barriers to physical interaction with neighboring communities.

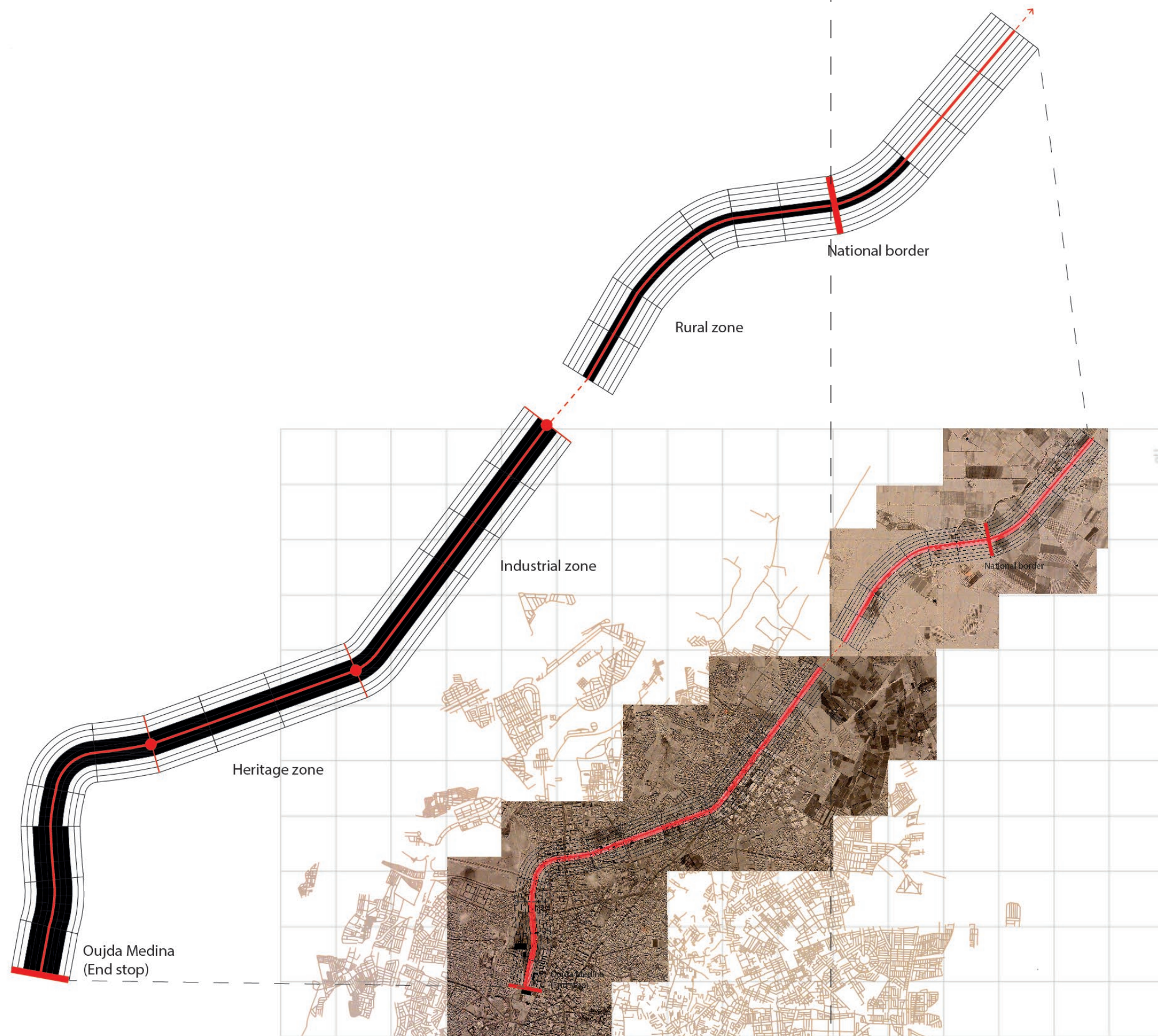
Fig. 44. Map indicating physical barriers around the line. Source: image by author.



BUILDING AGE

During the colonial era, in 1920, Morocco saw the construction of one of its earliest train stations under the French command. Today, its heritage value stands as a testament to Morocco's history, reflecting the architectural and cultural influences of that era.

Fig. 45. Map indicating the building ages around the line. Source: image by author.



GEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

As you follow the railway towards the national border, the elevation of the surrounding terrain gradually decreases. The level at the end stop is around 540m above sea level and 440m at the national border. A difference of proximity 100m as you travel along the track towards the border.

Fig. 46. Map indicating geological differences around the line. Source: image by author.

Fig. 47. Map highlighting the existing condition of the surroundings and its potentials. Source: image by author.

Abandoned station



Abandoned station



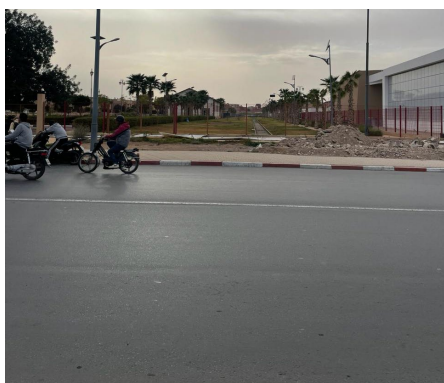
National border

New train station

Industry

SITE POTENTIALS

The location can provide a number of opportunities for interventions. For example, repurposing the abandoned stations along the route could be beneficial as integral elements of the design. Additionally, the presence of construction companies within the industrial zone offers access to building materials, facilitating on-site construction for the interventions.



SITE CONDITIONS

During a site visit last summer, I captured several photos depicting the current state and condition of the train tracks. As shown in the images, the area is predominantly used for waste disposal, and clear barrier elements have been created to further isolate the train tracks from the urban fabric. Additionally, new roads have been constructed, creating clear breaks from the existing railway lines.

Fig. 48. Photos showing the condition of the line. Source: photo's by author.

Fig. 49. Two pioneers discussing their strategy for the borderscape. Source: image by author.

THE 'HIDDEN' PLAN

PART 4



THE HIDDEN PLAN: HOPE AND A NEW FORWARD INTO THE FUTURE

What design strategies can be employed to redefine Oujda's borderscape as spaces of connection and exchange rather than division and separation to support the needs of the border communities?

The strategy aims to create a future where borderscapes become satellite cities that establish an additional type of citizenship based on shared values and collective memory. These cities will seamlessly connect diverse communities and cultures, allowing for exchange. In this world, boundaries that once separated us will no longer be barriers but pathways to social and economic growth. The objective is not a borderless world, as it is important to preserve cultural traditions and heritage. Instead, the aim is to move toward "softened borderscapes" that promote the exchange of ideas (social), goods (economic), and traditions (cultural), creating a sense of a global village. According to Teddy Cruz, an architect, urban theorist, and professor of Urbanism at the University of California, rather than seeing borders as spaces of division, we can view these zones as opportunities for political creativity.²⁷

Based on the conducted analysis, the design strategies are based on three principles:

- 1) Capitalizing on the politics of tolerance that already exist, fostering the creation of self-organized settlements through informal activities to challenge the authorities.**
- 2) Recreating the dynamic nature of the borderland through transient activities.**
- 3) Implementing a hybrid philosophy of Morocco's conservative ideological orientation and Algeria's socialist direction.**

²⁷ Marc Schoonderbeek, *Border Conditions* (Architectura & Natura, 2011).

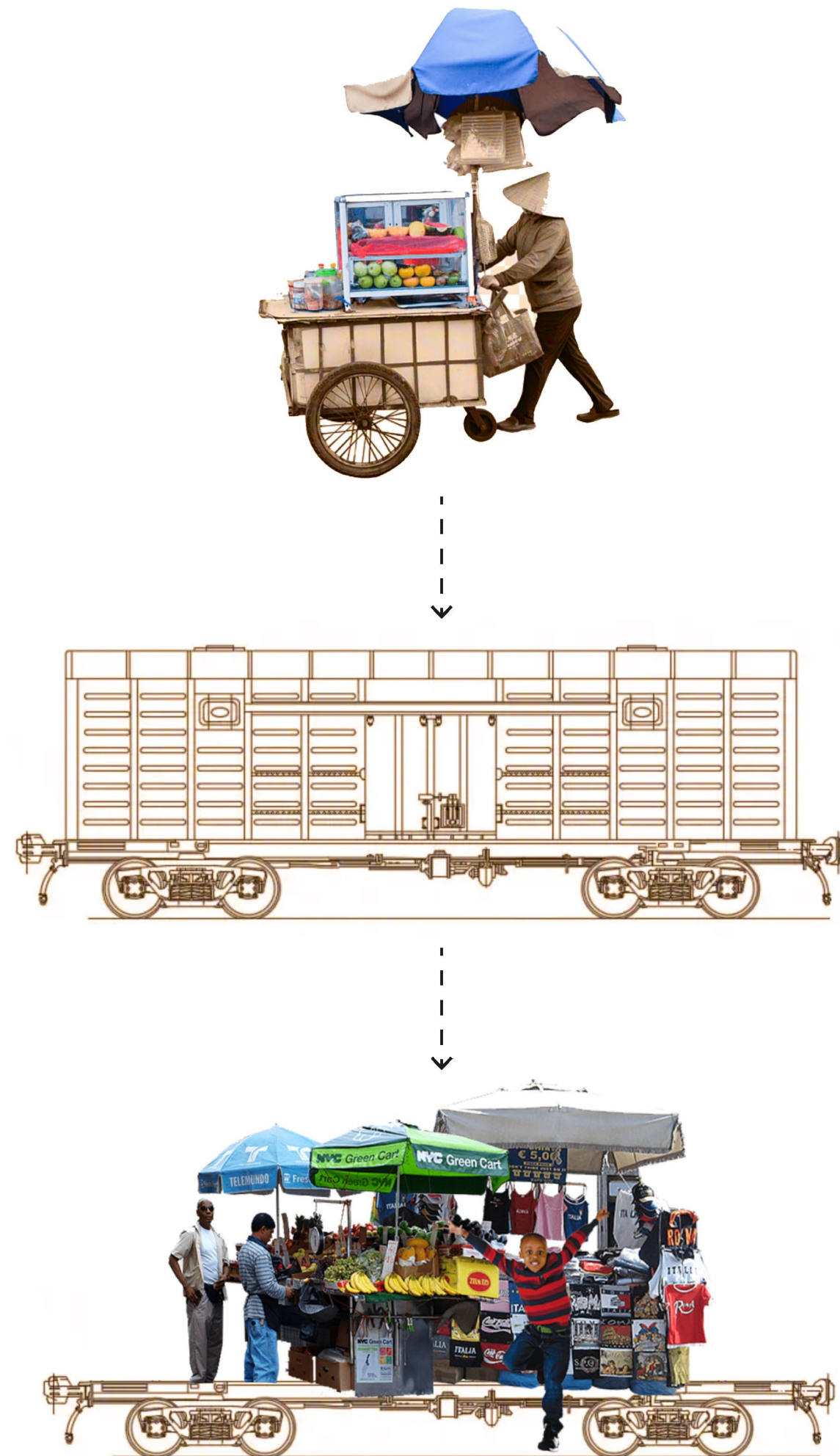


Fig. 50. Concept explaining the idea of a traveling market. Source: image by author.

MOVING MARKET: THE INFORMAL AS INSPIRATION FOR RETHINKING URBAN SPACES

When we think of railways and train stations, we think of spaces of economic growth, connections, and exchanges. This technology allows us to live in transition. Every day, trains cross several spatial boundaries, moving from one station to the next. These transitional places are also known as non-places - places you need to reach your destination.²⁸ We usually don't stay in these places for very long. The interesting part is the fact that these kinds of places seem to evoke a feeling of coming home, even though they are typically impersonal. How is it possible that people experience a feeling of coming home in such places? Perhaps over time, I have discovered the feeling of coming home comes from the visual uniformity that unites these places. It doesn't matter where you travel: each transitional space like airports, train stations, and gas stations, look all the same worldwide. These places don't judge and represent all the good we are as a humanity. It doesn't matter what your background is, how much money you have, or the color of your skin, if you're a man, woman, or child. It's an accepting global village.

The aim is to recreate the dynamic quality of transitional spaces. Drawing inspiration from the traveling salesman and capitalizing on the abandoned railway track, the idea is to introduce a traveling market. This traveling market would serve as an agent of connectivity and exchange between border communities. Those who participate in the market are the ones who keep the train moving, producing the products or ideas that the train carries and transporting them to different districts. Local communities could simply buy something from the market as it makes a stop.

²⁸ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction To Supermodernity*, 2009, <https://www.amazon.com/Non-Places-Introduction-Supermodernity-Marc-Auge/dp/1844673111>.

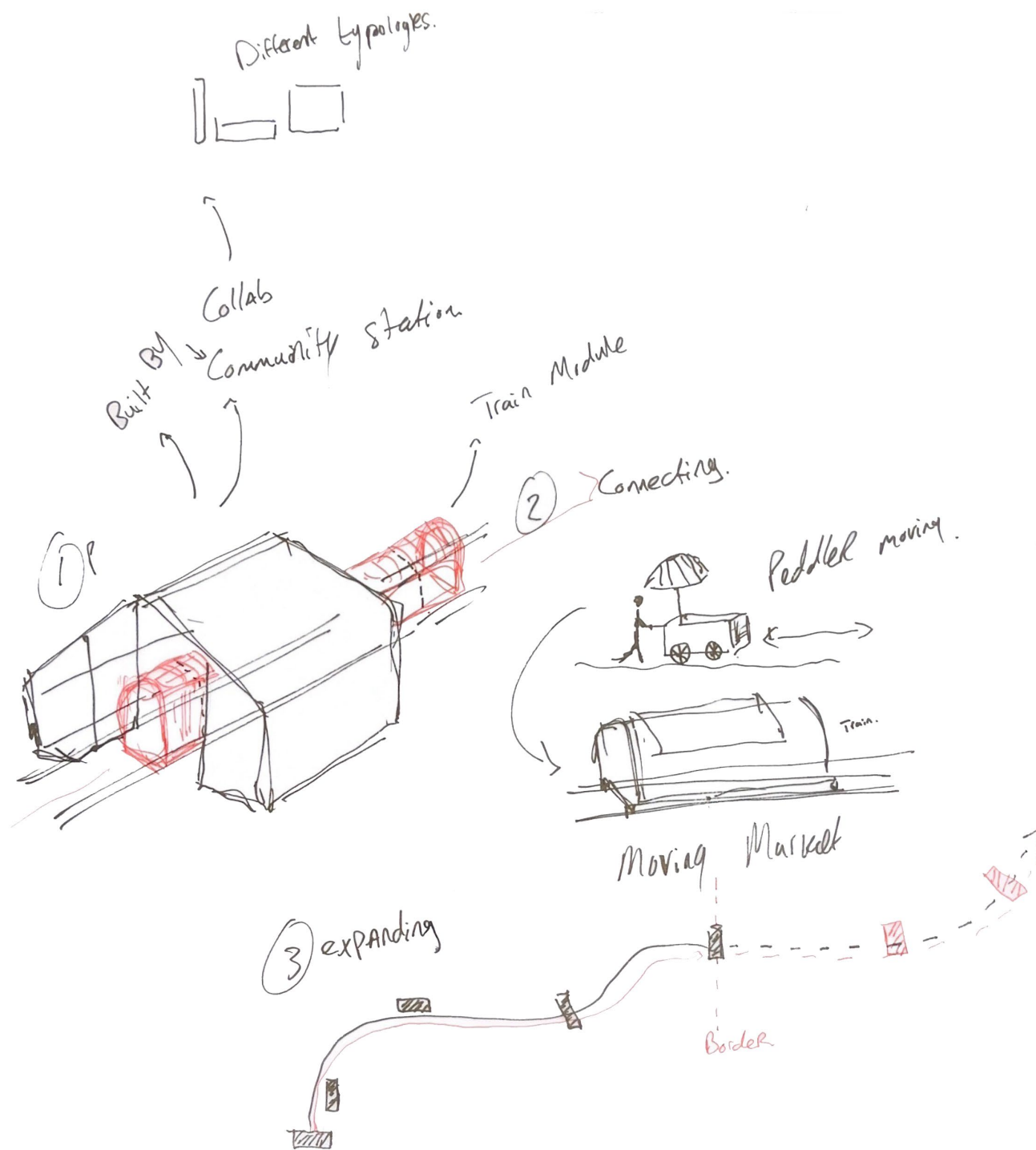


Fig. 51. Sketch showing the concept of traveling market as part of a bigger geopolitical move. Source: image by author.

COMMUNITY STATIONS: PLACES FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMICAL GROWTH

The concept is part of a larger strategy to establish community stations, or 'modern caravanserais,' along the abandoned railway track. Over time, people begin to settle in these stations and surroundings, causing them to expand toward the national border and putting pressure on the authorities. Once the authorities decide to reopen the border, the stations and the train itself, which houses the market, cross the border, reaching communities on the other side. These stations serve as platforms for exchanging ideas and creating work opportunities, whether by selling their knowledge or purchasing desired products when the train stops. The aim is to capitalize on local skills and materials while amplifying local voices, stories, and issues, fostering a sense of community cohesion and belonging.

If there is one thing we can learn from history, it's the cyclical pattern of border closures and openings. With this in mind, I believe that the border will open in the future and that authorities will cooperate once communities begin to settle and create their own markets, mirroring the establishment of self-organized informal markets in Oujda.

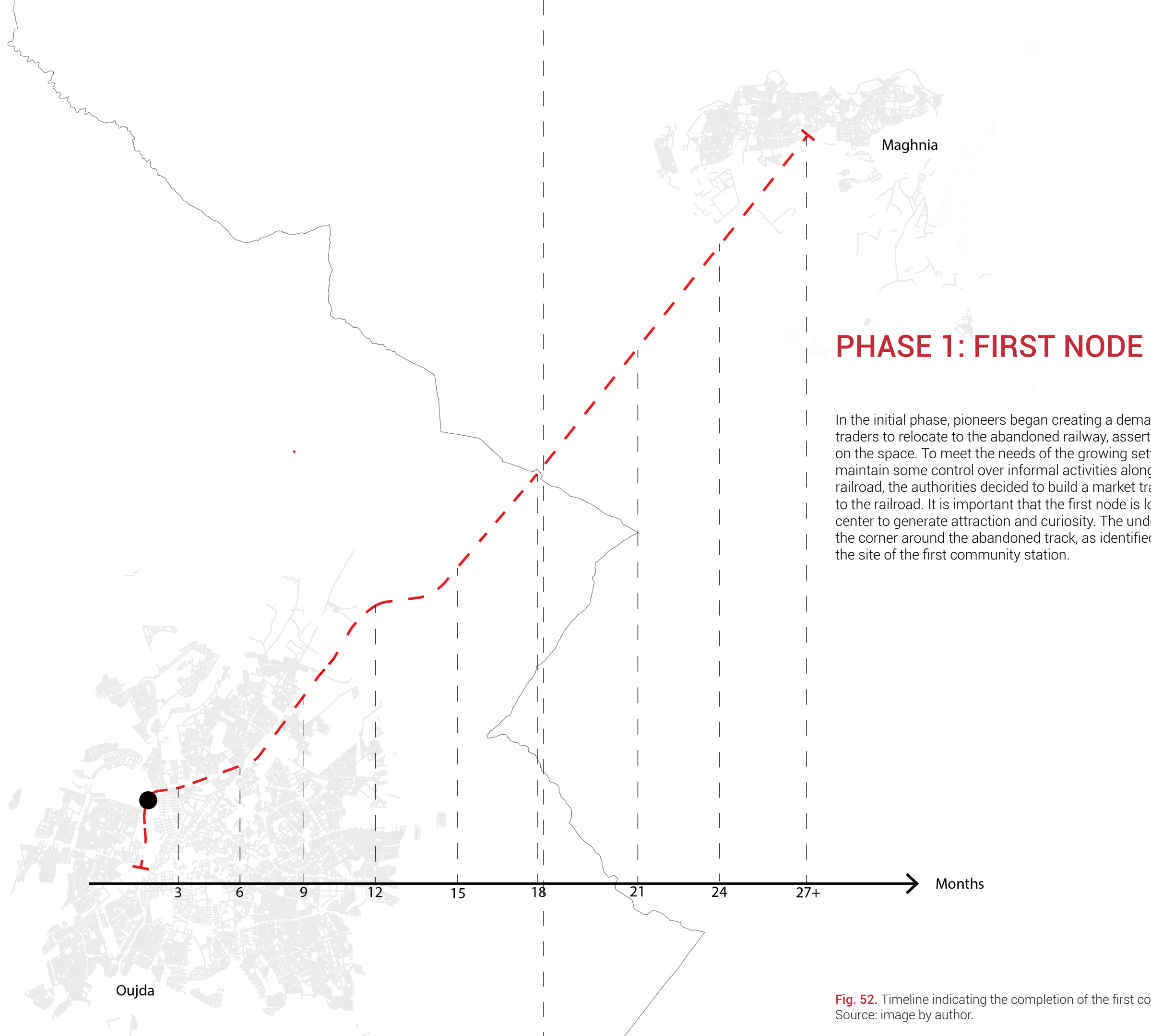
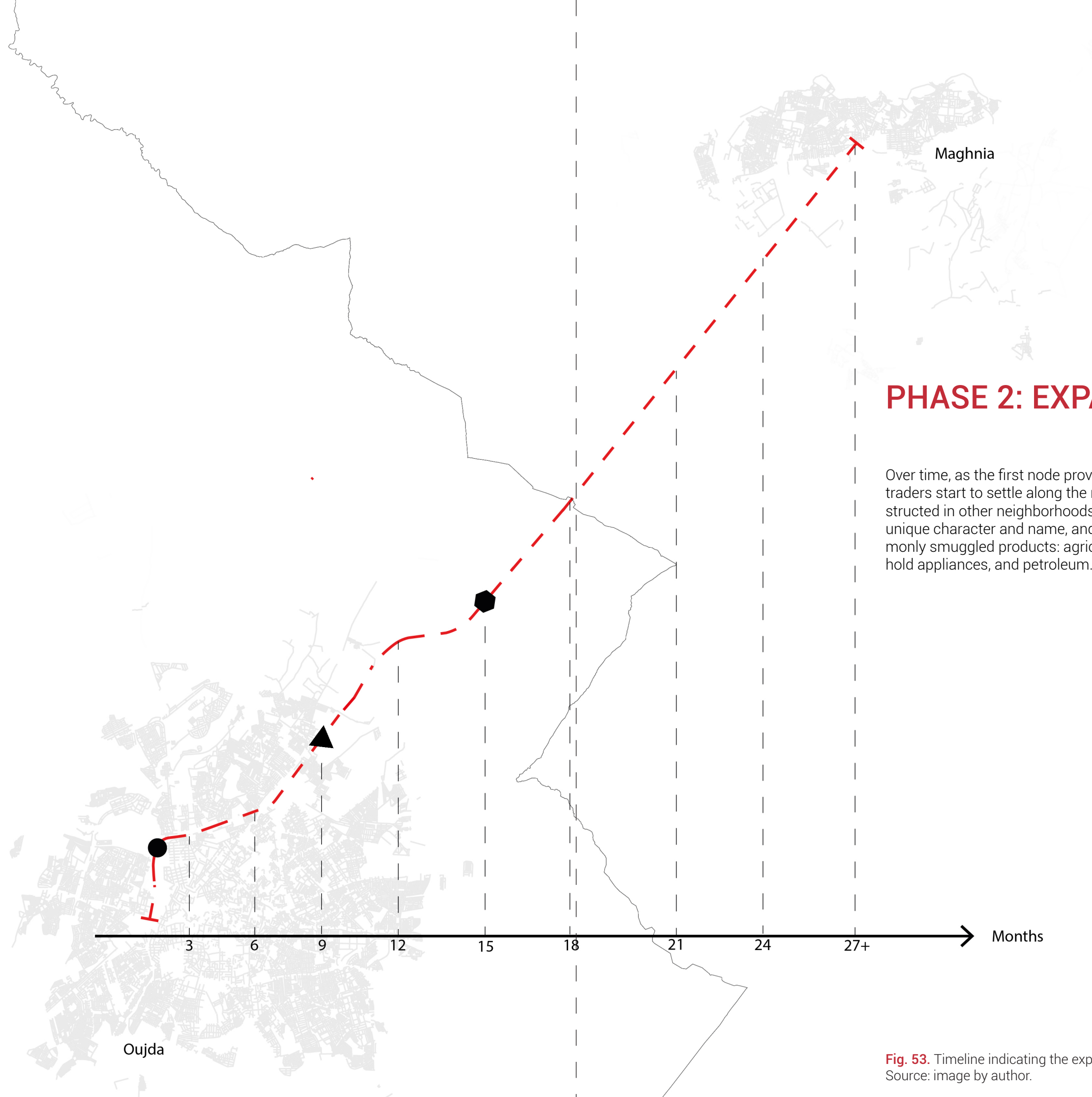


Fig. 52. Timeline indicating the completion of the first community station.
Source: image by author.



PHASE 2: EXPANDING

Over time, as the first node proves successful and more informal traders start to settle along the railroad, additional nodes are constructed in other neighborhoods and districts. Each node has its own unique character and name, and they sell some of the most commonly smuggled products: agricultural goods, vehicle parts, household appliances, and petroleum.

Fig. 53. Timeline indicating the expanding phase towards the border.
Source: image by author.

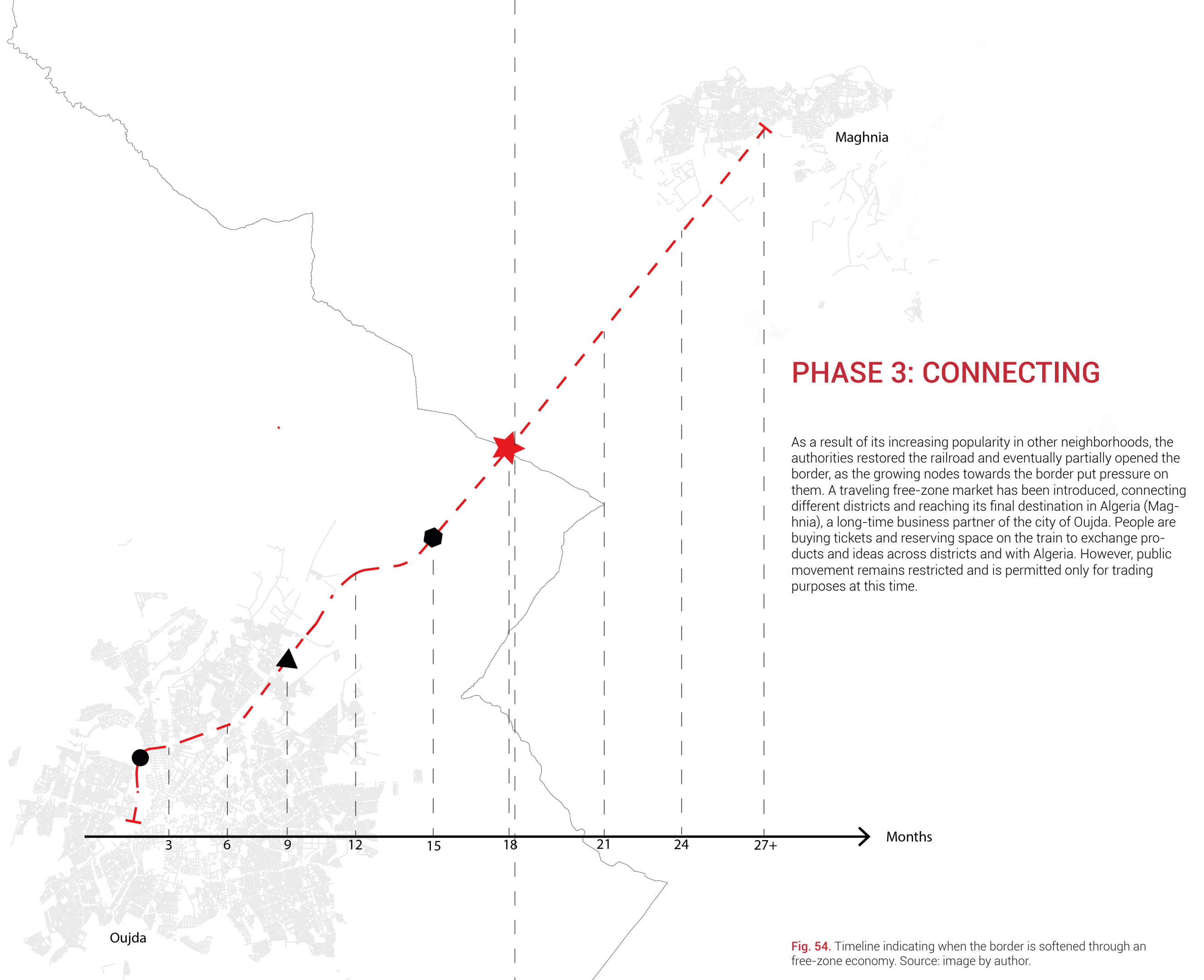
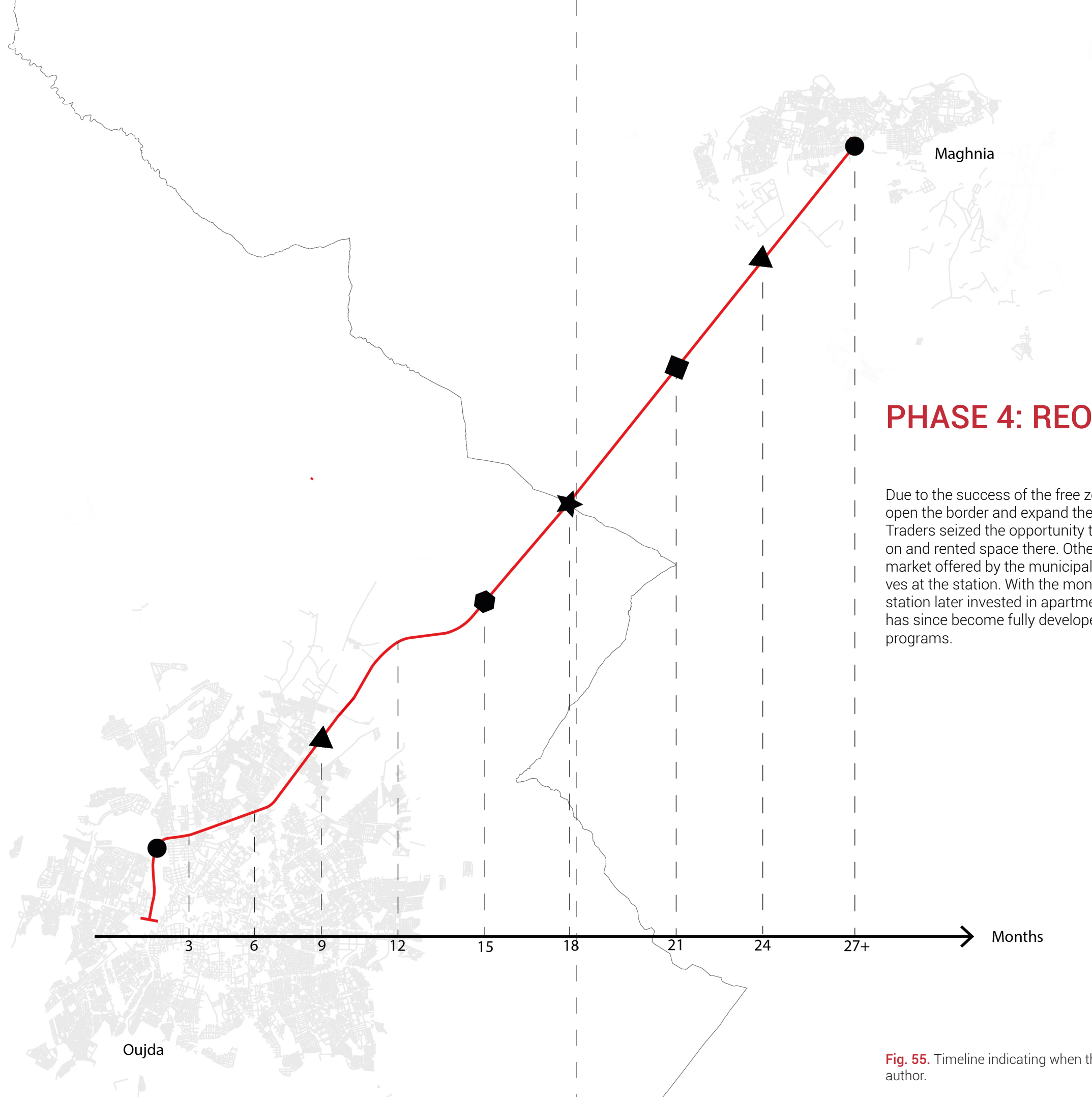


Fig. 54. Timeline indicating when the border is softened through an free-zone economy. Source: image by author.



PHASE 4: REOPENING

Due to the success of the free zone, the authorities agreed to fully open the border and expand the stations towards Maghnia (Algeria). Traders seized the opportunity to accumulate wealth at the station and rented space there. Others reserved stalls for the traveling market offered by the municipality, which they could set up themselves at the station. With the money earned, some shop owners at the station later invested in apartments above their shops. The station has since become fully developed and inhabited with community programs.

Fig. 55. Timeline indicating when the border is opened. Source: image by author.

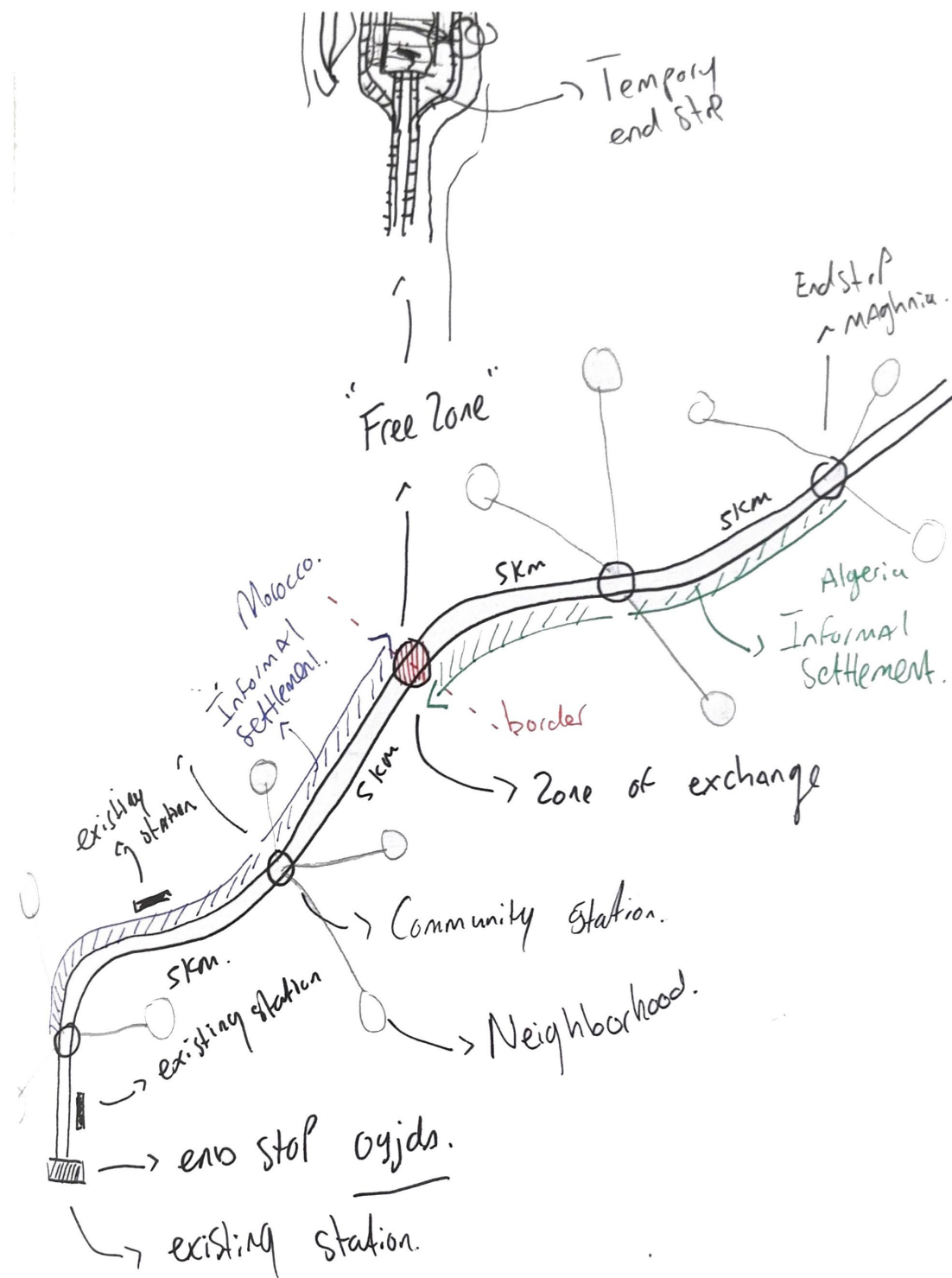


Fig. 56. Sketch showing a well-connected network of community stations and neighborhoods. Source: image by author.

ECONOMICAL NETWORK

Each community station is linked to a set of neighborhoods, with each neighborhood having its own 'nearest' community station. This results in a well-connected network of community stations, ensuring that each neighborhood can access a station within a 5km distance. Between these stations, there is space for settlements to emerge, fostering a new type of citizenship in the borderlands.

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Peddler. (Oujda based informal trader), in discussion with Younes Chergui. July 2023.

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