

The Administrative Boundaries in Eastern Algeria; Dynamic and Spatial Study

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Abstract

The Algerian spatial organization witnessed many forms of administrative division over different periods of time, from the colonial stage to independence.

The analysis of the forms of this regulation shows that its founding principles are based on different backgrounds. For the colonial phase, the agricultural principle was based on the settlement surroundings and the privileges of public companies, and in a later stage, the administrative basis was adopted, as a mechanism for organizing full capacity to act, and mixed municipalities, and, in the transitional phase, the “Douar” was considered as a base unit for spatial organizing, with the objective of integrating the population into the dynamic of development and creating trust between the colonial power and the local population.

As for the post-independence phase, it was characterized in the first years by gathering the municipalities inherited from the colonial era, through the placement of some municipalities under others. After the independence, new administrative divisions were carried out, they were characterized by a return to the old spaces, with boundaries of the ancient “Douars”, established on the basis of tribal system; the goal of these divisions was to monitor local development programs

However, reality confirms that there are imbalances in the system of administrative division, which leads to questions, in the context of globalization, the usefulness of these divisions, under the new global orientation; The most adequate alternative to Algeria's administrative organization, remains the division founded life basins as an adequate functional space for the needs of the population and the governance of the territories.

Key words: administrative boundaries, spatial organization, life basins, functional space, local development, administrative division system.

INTRODUCTION

The territorial organization in Algeria has always undergone transformations symbolized by composite configurations where ancient legacies and imprints of the present rub shoulders.

In each period, there are principles and foundations that underlie it.

The colonial period is one of the most significant historical sequences in the current physiognomy of administrative division. It obeyed the political and colonial demands based on a famous maxim that advocated division as an effective way to rule better.

Starting from this principle, simple in form but treacherous in substance, the occupier managed in a short period of time to break up the bonds that existed within Algerian society. Thus, the territorial configuration based on the tribal system gradually weakened despite the flexibility and strong links that existed between the data of the physical support and the human constructions.

With the advent of the Senatus-Consult, proclaimed on 22/04/1863, the principle of the inalienability of tribal lands was abrogated to allow the extension and prosperity of colonization. This situation has had negative spatial and economic consequences. Thus, the basic territorial unit, which is the tribe, has completely disintegrated since it hardly asserts itself by the autocentric organization. The tribal space gave birth to multiple “douars¹” with reduced territorial dimensions and attributions and therefore easily controllable.

1 Douar: means a territorial portion resulting from the bursting of the tribal division whose presence was not in conformity with the aspirations of the French colonists.

This upheaval in the internal structure of the Algerian society, due to the application of the Senatus-Consult, was materialized by the emergence of several hundreds of “*Douars*” at both, the national level and the Eastern Algerian level. As shown in the following table.

Table1. The « *Douars* » resulted from Senatus-Consult 1863

Spatial Units	Territorial Divisions	
	Tribes	<i>Douars</i>
Algeria	650	1600
EasternAlgeria	264	596
Oum El Bouaghi Province	01	32

Source : Hadj-Aissa L 1979

At the level of the Oum El Bouaghi Province cited as an example, the powerful tribe of Harakta is a typical example of the fragmentation so much sought by the occupier. It was segmented into 32 “*Douars*”.

From the Tribe to the *Douar*: A process of societal disintegration

The multiplication of “*douars*” as a basic territorial unit, without its own legal framework has led to the weakening of the tribe and the acceleration of the process of colonization of agricultural lands. This situation was administratively reflected in the emergence of territorial boundaries, based on the agrarian principle.

ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES BASED ON AGRARIANISM

The Perimeter of Colonization

Its presence is clearly perceptible around Constantine and is characterized by areas of various sizes of up to 6000 ha. Most of them count a panoply of colonial centers whose appearance was of a real support to the extension of colonization in Algeria.

This extension was done in successive stages in a slow but effective way, to spare the susceptibilities of the autochthonous populations commonly called «indigenous». At the level of the city of Constantine, the spatial influence of the colonization perimeters is summarized in the mining below.

Table 2. Colonization perimeters around Constantine

Colonization Perimeters		Date of Creation	Area. in Ha	Territorial Origin	Cultures System
North Part	Bou Malek	1872	2106	Azel Beylical	Cereals-Vine-Arbiculture
	Guettar El Aich	1873	4252	Azel Domanial	Cereals-vine
Central Part	Sigus	1878	1910	Taken from the Tribe Segnia Belonging to Djemaa Ouled Khaled	Cereal growing-Vine
	M’chira	1885	3065	<i>Douar</i> Bou Houfane	Cereal growing -Arbiculture
South Part	Hameau d’Armandy	1895	404	Common Lands Terres ceded by Djemaa (Touzeline)	Cereal growing andIrrigated Crops
	Rouget de l’Isle	1913	5933	<i>Douar</i> Ouled Sellam Domanials Of <i>Aguedel El Beylik</i>	Cereal growing Arbiculture Garden

Source: Hadj-Aissa L 1979

The General Society, S.G.A.

Its implementation was dictated by the desire to participate in the development of Algeria. Several handicaps, financial among others, almost made this gigantic project lapse. But with the support of the major French and European associations

in particular, it was saved by statute and approved by the decree of October 15th, 1865. This company concerned the development of 100,000 ha in Eastern Algeria. Nevertheless, the realization of the SGA has encountered innumerable problems, particularly those related to settlement. Thus, a series of measures were adopted, giving advantage to the lands near the transport network, which forms continuous and homogeneous groups to make the farms profitable.

But this operation did not achieve the initially targeted objectives. On the contrary, the SGA only contributed to the dismantling of large areas, by leasing them in small units, which accelerated its dissolution in 1878 and the appearance of new agricultural cells, including the CAPER.

Objectives of the SGA

- Capital procurement and financing of agricultural, industrial or commercial operations.
- Agricultural development for 100 million francs.

Establishment of the SGA Domain

By benefiting from the best lands, located near the roads and railways, its main purpose was to promote settlement and ensure the grouping of lands to facilitate their exploitation. Its application took place in three phases. In a first phase, it received 82,000 ha, then 18,000 ha in a second phase, which the geographical distribution was as follows:

Province of Constantine. 89,500 ha

Province of Algiers 6,000 ha

Province of Oran 4,500 ha

Table 3. SGA: Distribution of lands based on territorial origin

Regions	Area. in Ha	TerritorialOrigins	Observations
Subdivision of Bône	10430	Azels Oued Besbès-Bou Hammam Gassaa- Fedj Moussa-Aïn Mahra	fertile landsnear transport networks
Zone of Constantine- Guelma	61570	Azel Oued zenati	Partly irrigated lands, wastelands, principal roads
Zone of Guelma-Ain Abid	7070	Azel Sellaoua	Cereals, arboriculture
Subdivision of Constantine	9610	Azel des of Caidates of Ameurs Cherraga.	Irrigated lands, Railways
Total	89 300		

Source: A Passeron.

The Capar and the Successive Dismemberments

It had mainly contributed to the fragmentation of the SGA domain, which lost nearly 30,000 ha, including 20,000 ha in the provinces of Algiers and Oran. In Constantine, 10,000 ha of lands were reserved, mostly, for the extension of colonization centers in small lots. The region between Constantine and Guelma was the one that could be safeguarded. This company proceeded, then, to the alienation of lands for the benefit of individuals. The operation concerned 71 lots, covering the above mentioned 10000 ha. However, the weak spot of this territorial organization based on agriculture foundation, is in the constitution of immense territories, deprived of human presence. This is why changes have been made to certain areas that have benefited from the expansion of their territory to allow them to incorporate a more important population.

The Douar

As indicated at the beginning of this paper, the Douar represents an administrative cell that took shape in 1863, as part of the Senatus Consult. It is a territorial unit in the form of groups of indigenous people, in a portion of space which is well-delimited in size, and can reach considerable areas. The Douar is also an integral part of the municipality of full exercise. It has a particular heritage and has its own moral personality. Its spatial transcription is generally exhibited by family groups, that prefer the circular paving composed of 8 to 10 tents. Moreover, this circular shape is at the origin of its appellation of «Douar». The choice of this administrative unit was adopted, as already mentioned above, to dislocate the tribal structure and to strengthen private property.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE TERRITORIAL BOUNDARIES

Their emergence dates back to 1848 and having as main entity the commune.

The Commune

It is the territorial unity that individualize geographically and is related by ancient traditions. It is an entity recognized by law but whose creation remains independent of it. Thus, the commune is ultimately the administrative district which is more individualized in space both territorially and functionally. On the contrary, in other regions of the country, the logic of tribal organization, then around the douars remains the most dominant form.

In European countries, especially in France, the municipality is the undoubted achievement of the legislator. The latter attributes to it a series of characteristics: natural and historical.

In Algeria, the municipality is defined by a more or less vast territory, whose outline is materialized by the grouping of one or more douars having a capital and managed by a mayor. Its demographic composition is mixed as it is made up of indigenous and European people.

There were two types of municipality.

The Municipalities of Full Exercise «CPE»

They are administrative cells, which are comparable to those in France. They are characterized by a human presence, predominantly European, that approaches sometimes 40% of the total resident population. Their date of geographical creation goes back to 1846, this type of municipality is distributed on fertile lands with high agricultural potential, which are favorable for human settlement: valley, plains, inland basins...etc.) well-connected to roads and well-located near the large sized urban centers.

Table 4. Eastern Algeria: Populations and densities of some CPE in 1954

CPE	Area Km ²	Muslims		Europeans		Total Pop	Densityinha/ Km ²
		Nbr	%	Nbr	%		
Ain Abid	172.68	6278	97.87	136	2.13	6414	34.14
Bugeaud (Seraïdi)	140.27	4987	93.70	335	6.30	5322	37.94
Clauzel (A.H'ssainia)	131.23	6241	98.11	120	1.89	6361	48.47
Collo	24.11	6406	92.16	545	7.84	6951	128.46
Souk Ahras	46.38	18302	80.40	4459	19.6	227.61	490.75
Ampère (Ain Oulmène)	71.68	3468	96.28	135	3.72	3603	71.68
Skikda	231.73	40065	56.91	30341	43.0	70406	303.82

Source: Census of 1954

Looking at the number of Europeans living in full-exercise municipalities, it is clear that their presence is closely linked to the size of the centers where they have chosen to live.

Thus, the proportion of Europeans in small centers such as Ain Abid, Seraïdi, Ain H'saïnia is much lower than in medium-sized centers such as Souk-Ahras, Skikda, where the proportion of Europeans was between 19 and 43%.

The Mixed Municipalities

They differ from the full exercise municipalities by spatial extent and human component. It consists essentially of the autochthonous population called indigenous, living in very large territories that were part of the military subdivisions.

Naturally, the presence of European population in these territories was insignificant. Its management was entrusted to a military officer; as for its municipal commission, it includes both appointed Europeans and indigenous. The capital of the mixed municipality was in the full-exercise commune. Its dissolution or continuance depends on the decision of the General Governor. Geographically, it is similar to a landlocked situation, far from living spaces with strong economic potential. In other words, it is the departure point for large contingents of rural people to better destinations.

In Eastern Algeria, in 1927, there were 34 mixed municipalities. There were significant differences in stand densities between full-exercise and mixed municipalities, as indicated by the following numerical data:

Table 5. Eastern Algeria: Populations et density of some Mixed Municipalities in 1954

Mixed Municipalities	Area (Km ²)	Muslims		Europeans		Total Pop.	Density (inha/Km ²)
		Nbr	%	Nbr	%		
Edough	2079.5	47302	99.07	443	0.93	47745	23
Oued. Cherf	711	32922	99.60	125	0.40	33047	47
Jemmaps	1235.6	45113	99.94	483	0.1	45596	37
Msila	3624	70972	98.06	675	0.94	71627	20
Maadid	1943	58783	99.28	428	0.72	59211	31
Khenchela	9449	90497	99.91	80	0.09	90577	10
Tebessa	11233	105454	99.96	37	0.04	105491	10

Source : Census of 1954

Table 6. Mixed Municipalities Examples population distribution and density

Mixed Municipalities	Area	Population	Density
Akbou	55.22	8981	162.3
Oued marsa	642.89	64050	99.62
Oued charef	711.2	33047	46.46
Barika	4518.1	74765	16.54

Source: Census of 1954

The paving characterizing these territorial units is of two types: the rectangular and the diamond. They often correspond to the layout of the natural environment (rivers and orography).

In spatial terms, they are individualized by huge rights-of-way, largely located in cereal-growing regions with low population rates.

Administrative management is done under the aegis of a «Caïd» of Djamaa whose prerogatives are advisory only. The deliberations are virtually reserved for the municipal commission represented by a French who holds the decision-making power.

TRANSITIONAL AND POST-COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

The Transitional Period

The most striking limits are those which appeared in 1956 following the Decree No. 56642 of June 28th 1956, authorizing mixed municipalities to become municipalities governed by the law of April 4th 1884, That is, the jurisdiction that considers the douar the basic administrative limit in Algeria. This territorial unit naturally received the approval of the Government of that time, to implement a rich program of economic and social development.

The aim of this reform is to get the rural autochthonous population involved and adhered in various economic development programs and projects. In other words, a way to establish a climate of trust between governors and governed. In 1958, this territorial reform resulted in 636 municipalities and 29 districts, which the details are as follows:

Table7. Eastern Algeria :Territorial Units per department - 1958

Departments	Districts	Municipalities
Constantine	07	166
Bône	05	124
Setif	05	96
Batna	06	121
Bougie	06	129
Total	29	636

The Post-Colonial Period: 1962-1971

From a recurrent compartmentalization organized around the douar, the post-independence territorial organization is now increasingly asserting itself towards the grouping of municipalities, which were given a particular attention. Each territorial unit had its seat in the main town and is related to spatial dimensions that increase from north to south, due to the density of population and extensive cultivation system. However, this method of territorial management has not remained static. In 1971, the first decentralization measures were adopted and led to the emergence of new entities similar to those related to the following cases:

- Zighoud youcef: Zighoud Youcef and Didouche Mourad
- Hamma Bouziane: Hamma Bouziane and Ibn Ziad
- Tamlouka: Aïn Makhoulouf and Tamlouka

This change in spatial organization is explained by the concern for decentralization, which favors a good distribution of equipment for the benefit of local populations.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN 1971 AND 1979

They have undergone appreciable changes but concern only a part of the municipal territory. It is most often a question of connecting a portion of douar or a mechta within the limits of the mother municipality, whose influence is undeniable whether at the level of customer areas, or those of services attraction areas. These territorial punctures were, in fact, a response to a logic of spatial equilibrium: the municipalities which had a viable economic base and held facilities which are able to ensure the preponderant municipal revenues, saw their territories grow. This naturally concerns the portions of land without resources, which were subject to linking together. There are many examples of this:

- The south-western part of Sigus inserted in the municipality of Ain M'lila.
- The commune of Ouled Rahmoune attached to that of Khroub
- Mechta Mekhalfa attached to Teleghma.

In order to restore hierarchical and spatial balance, the State adopted a vast administrative reform in 1974, advocating the local as a fundamental issue in the orientation of spatial planning. It has also based its policy of socio-economic development on state voluntarism. The State has thus voluntarily promoted settlements of very small sizes to higher administrative functions. The most edifying case is that of Oum El Bouaghi. This agglomeration, which had only 9,000 inhabitants in 1977, had its command power spread over vast territories comprising 16 municipalities.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN 1984 AND 2021

In order to continue its policy of decentralization, the Algerian State adopted an administrative reshaping in 1984. The latter gave birth to 17 new provinces (wilayas) at the national level. In eastern Algeria there were five: Souk Ahras, Mila, Tarf, Bordj Bou Arréridj and Khenchela.

By this measure, the public authorities aim to lower decision-making to a finer level, which is the local level in this case. This is reflected in the promotion of a considerable number of municipalities as main towns, districts (Dairas), and the promotion of secondary agglomerations to municipalities. This administrative function concerns primarily the marginalized areas, where the mountain predominates, such as Bejaia region.

The administrative function is also similar to the steppe areas, south of the high plains and around the Saharan Atlas, whose development needs were increasingly high.

The search for cohesion and socio-spatial solidarity was one of the matrix vectors aimed at the promotion into municipalities and districts (Dairas). Moreover, many are the current municipalities whose spatial configuration evokes a certain parallelism with the old douar boundaries, that once represented the strength of the tribal system.

Gradually, the return to this form of territorialization could be at the root of the much sought-after development, that would rely on the vital forces of the terroir and use finnage as a place of production and sustainable development.

This process of atomization of territorial entities could be used as a means of control of development actions and a better asset for the benefit of the autochthonous population, for the improvement of their living conditions.

In Eastern Algeria, the allocation of new administrative functions concerned 342 municipalities out of a total of 571 in 1984. Many of these territorial cells have retained the old douar boundaries, as highlighted in the data contained in the following table:

Table 8. Eastern Algeria: The douars promoted in municipalities in 1984

Provinces	Municipalities 1974	Municipalities 1984	Municipalities /Douars	%
Bejaia	28	52	13	25
Jijel	17	28	03	10.7
Skikda	22	38	04	10.5
Tarf	/	24	06	25
Guelma	35	34	02	05.9
Mila	/	32	08	25
S.Ahras	/	26	10	38.5
B.B.Arréridj	/	34	09	26.5
Setif	34	60	15	25.5
O.E.Bouaghi	18	29	13	44.8
Tebessa	18	28	03	10.7
Batna	34	61	18	29.5
Khenchela	/	21	08	38.1
M'sila	23	47	20	42.6
Eastern Algeria	229	571	132	23.1

Source :Various Census.

The numerical importance of the administrative entities that have kept the Douar as a boundary decreases from northern to southern areas.

At the level of the steppe zones, this situation is systematic. It concerns the provinces (wilayas) of Khenchela, Batna and M'sila. Thus, spatial compartmentalization, based on the principle of small territorial unity, is favorable to a balanced management of the development process.

In the wilaya of Oum El Bouaghi for example, the territorialization with atrophied spatial dimension came in one way or another to restore the economic and spatial balances. The most striking example is that of the Harakta tribe, whose douar segmentation following the administrative division in 1984, was of a better contribution for the residents.

The inconsistency that marked these administrative boundaries, for a little over a century and a half, has proven to be untimely. And it is thanks to the return to the local level that the trend of balance and the gradual blurring of disparities seem to hold more and more, even if some spatial antinomies are still present. but whose intensity across the country and called for has decreased drastically in the wake of the 2021 creation of new wilayas in the South.

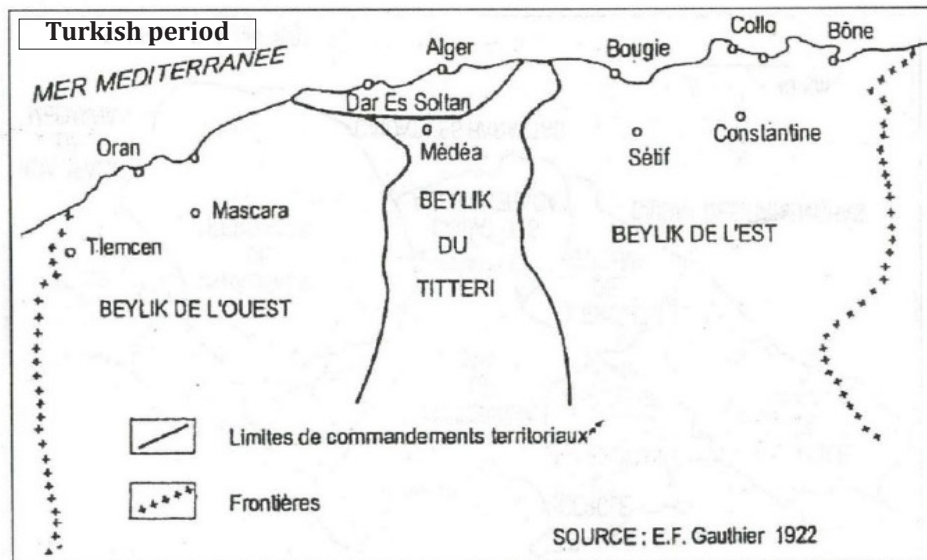
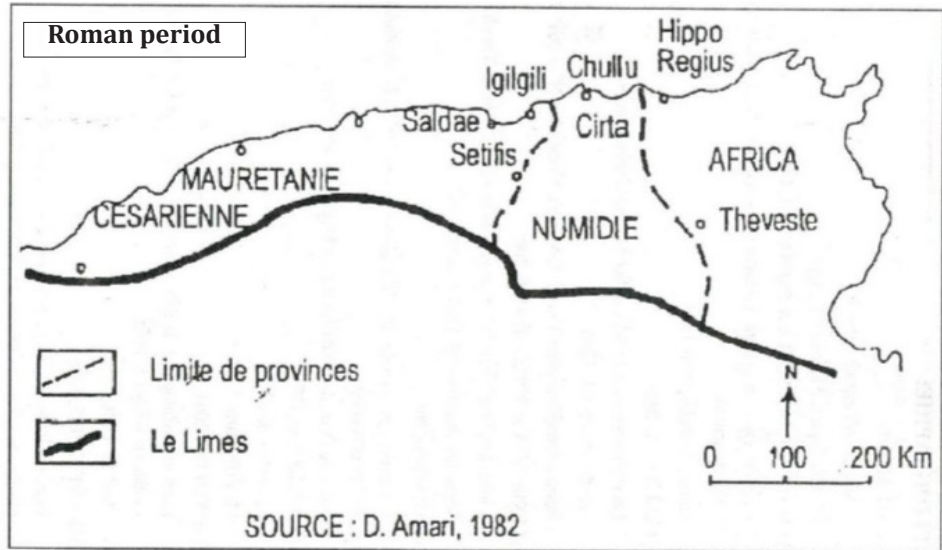
CONCLUSION

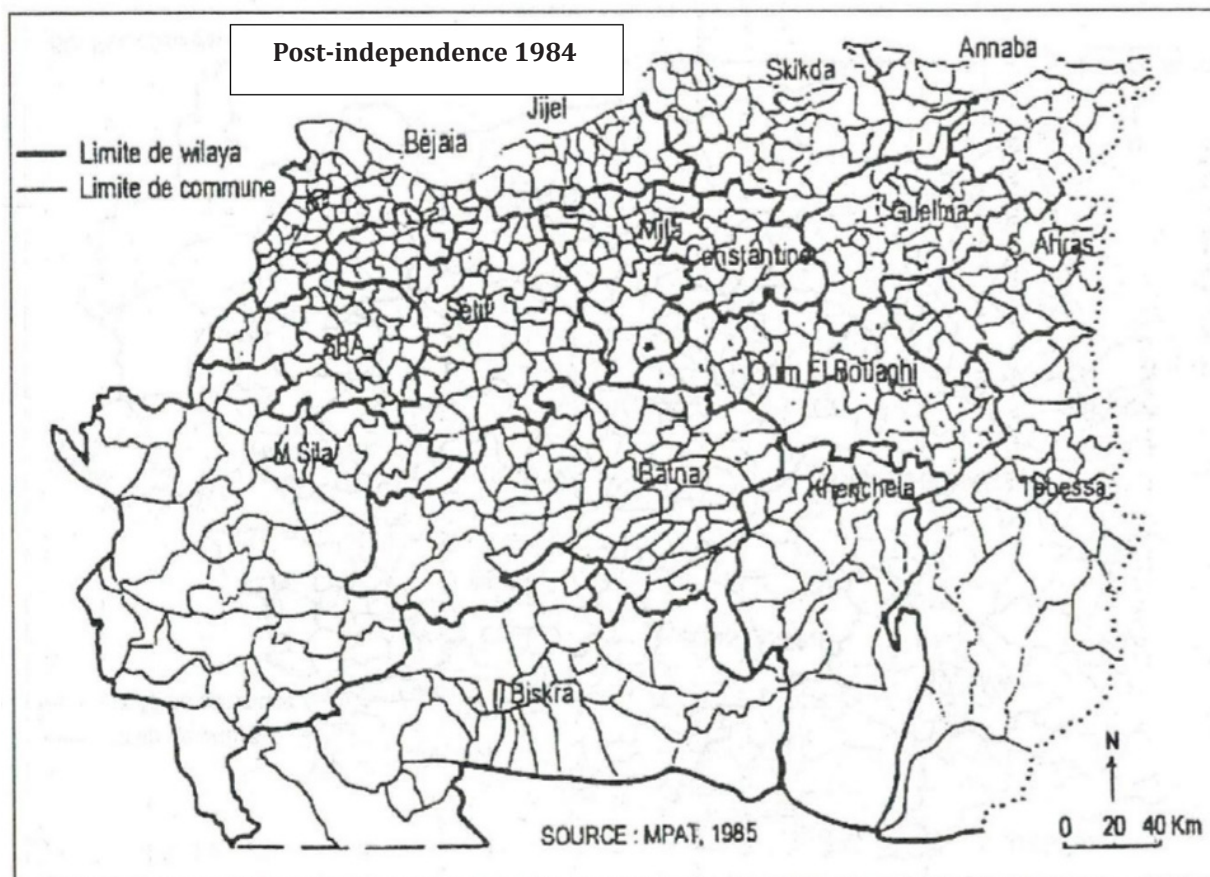
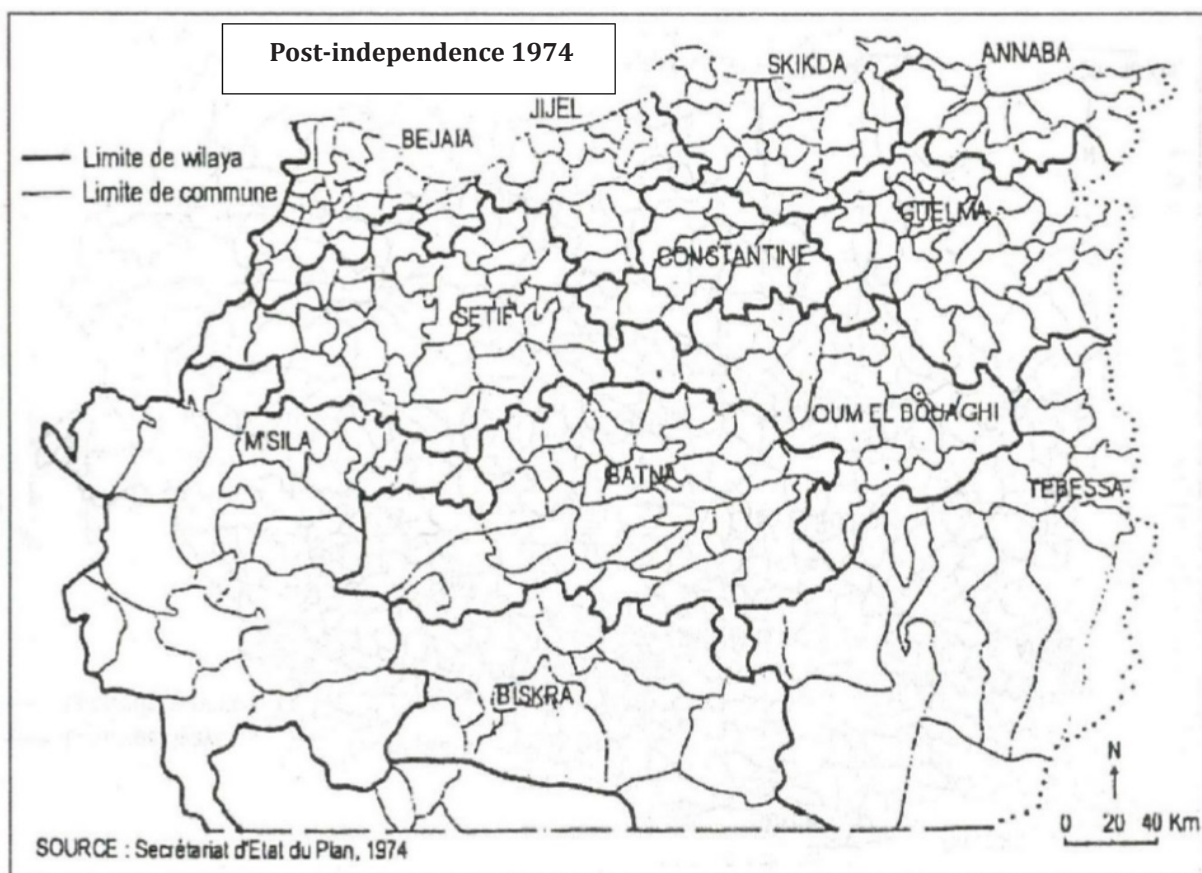
The inconstancy of the administrative boundaries in Algeria, as the series of maps visible in the appendix highlights, follows multiple mutations resulting in sometimes diametrically opposed logics.

At present, in the era of globalization, we wonder whether the administrative division continues to be a beneficial form of organization for the development of territories or, on the contrary, does not it call into question considering other forms of management for the larger territories incorporating new units, from near or far.

In this sense, we wonder whether the model of living basins, whose territorial configuration emanates from the areas of influence of each municipality, will not constitute a model to be followed in the governance of spaces, knowing that the division into basins of life is nowadays, perceived as the optimal area of space operation.

Appendix





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