

**Energy and Sovereignty: Oil and Decolonisation in Algeria and France, 1956-  
1975**

By

GEMMA JENNINGS

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Department of History  
School of History and Cultures  
College of Arts and Law  
University of Birmingham  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis argues that the histories of decolonisation and energy need to be combined in new ways. Through a socio-technical analysis of the hydrocarbon sector, the thesis argues that oil fundamentally reshaped the end of empire and process of decolonisation across France and Algeria.

The analysis adopts the method of 'following' oil and gas across France and Algeria. Traversing the conventional watershed of 1962 and Algerian independence, it focuses on the two decades between the discovery of oil in Algeria in the mid-late 1950s and the mid-1970s, when Algeria stood at the forefront of an international struggle for economic independence and a new global economic order, as a result of its successful nationalisation of oil.

The thesis explores the relationship between an assemblage of 'oil actors,' spanning the state, private companies, oil workers, and local communities, with a focus on how these actors moulded sovereignty and nation-building. I argue that the social and commercial influence of these actors shaped political agency as well as policy application and outcomes in ways that have been overlooked by a historiography which focuses on oil as an economic prize or elite tool. By analysing the nexus of relations that bound oil actors together, the thesis seeks to shed new light on how these actors mediated, interpreted, and deployed imperial structures and legacies. The account uses these perspectives to rethink the conventional chronology of decolonisation across the Mediterranean.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ALN: Armée de libération nationale

BP: British Petroleum

BRP: Bureau de recherches de pétrole

CAMEL: Compagnie algérienne de méthane liquide

CFP: Compagnie française des pétroles

CFP A: Compagnie française des pétroles d'Algérie

CPA: Compagnie des pétroles d'Algérie

CREPS: Compagnie de recherches et d'exploitation de pétrole au Sahara

DICA: Direction des carburants

EEC: European Economic Community

ERAP: Entreprise de recherches et d'activités pétrolières

EXIM: Export-Import Bank of the United States

FLN: Front de libération nationale

FPC: Federal Power Commission

GPRA: Gouvernement provisoire de la République algérienne

GOA: Government of Algeria

IAP: Institut algérien du pétrole

LNG: Liquefied natural gas

NIEO: New International Economic Order

OAS: Organisation armée secrète

OCRS: Organisation commune des régions sahariennes

OPEC: Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

Prohuza: Centre d'études et d'informations sur les problèmes humains dans les zones arides

RTF: Radiodiffusion-télévision française

SAS: Section administrative spécialisé

SIVOM: Syndicat intercommunal à vocations multiples

SN REPAL: Société nationale de recherche et d'exploitation de pétrole en Algérie

SOPEG: Société pétrolière de gérance

TRAPSA: Compagnie des transports par pipelines du sahara

UGP: Union générale des pétroles

UGTA: Union générale des travailleurs algériens

VALHYD: Valorization Hydrocarbon Development Plan

ZAN: Zone d'agglomération nouvelle

## Introduction

### Context

Between 2019 and 2021, nationwide protests rocked Algeria. After thousands took to the streets and sections of the armed forces threatened a coup, longstanding President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was forced to resign. After 20 years in power, Bouteflika, who had been seeking a fifth term as President, had come under fire as a symbol of the entrenched and crooked nature of Algerian politics. Protestors accused the government of poor resource management, embezzlement of the nation's oil wealth, and corruption.<sup>1</sup> The protests drew powerfully on memories of the nation's struggle for independence from its one-time colonial ruler, France, equating the current and colonial regimes while drawing connections between the two uprisings, going so far as to reference the War of Independence as the 'Hirak of our elders.'<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps the strongest colonial continuity identified by the Hirak protestors was the role of France in the Algerian economy, and more specifically, in its oil industry. Since independence in 1962, the oil and gas industry has dominated the Algerian economy, with the sector accounting for up to 98% of the nation's product exports and up to 37% of GDP.<sup>3</sup> The idea that this industry, and by extension the nation's

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<sup>1</sup> Muriam Haleh Davis, "The Layers of History Beneath Algeria's Protests," *Current History* 118, no. 812 (2019): 342. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48614485>; Michael J Willis, *Algeria: Politics and Society from the Dark Decade to the Hirak* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2022): 161-162; 168-170.

<sup>2</sup> Davis, "The Layers," 342; Abdelkader Berrahmoun, "Inside the Hirak: The Dynamics of a Mass Movement for Social Justice and Human Rights," *International Journal of Human Rights Education* 7, no.1 (2023): 3. <https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol7/iss1/8>. For an account of the ways in which juxtaposing and extending accusations of colonialism into the present day have been used by protest movements or anti-government discontent more broadly see Thomas Serres, "'Give Us Back Our Oil': Claims for Justice in Light of Algeria's Colonial Past," *Jadaliyya*, 4 November 2013, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/29734>.

<sup>3</sup> Oil as a percentage of export revenue sat at around 50-60% in 1962 and 1963 and peaked at over 98% in 2010 and 2013, whilst in GDP oil's peak was in the late 1970s, rising again in 2008. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Operations Department, "The Economy of Algeria," 21 May 1964: 15. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/es/787361468203990386/pdf/multi0page.pdf> The World Bank,

economy, was never really decolonised has haunted Algerian politics for decades, and has repeatedly erupted into powerful social protests.<sup>4</sup> The Hirak movement, for example, took aim specifically at the ‘imperialist’ proposals to liberalise the state-run oil sector and allow fracking. Indeed, fracking has been a deeply contentious issue in Algeria since the mid-2010s, when French proposals to frack for gas in the Algerian Sahara were made public, despite the practice being illegal in France itself due to environmental concerns. Opposition to such proposals has often been overtly anti-imperialist, with slogans including ‘No to imperialist collaborators’ and “Oh De Gaulle, take your children, Algeria is not your country.”<sup>5</sup>

The strength of this discourse of a ‘failed’ decolonisation due to hydrocarbon neo-colonialism is perhaps surprising given that Algeria was one of the first nations ever to successfully nationalise its oil sector. Nationalisation was a move that ultimately inspired the greatest transfer of global wealth in peace time in history.<sup>6</sup> This thesis focuses on the historical roots and realities of this seeming contradiction between a

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Data Development Indicators, “Fuel Exports as % of Merchandise Exports and Oil Rents % GDP,” accessed at <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=TX.VAL.FUEL.ZS.UN&country=DZA> and <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PETR.RT.ZS?end=2021&locations=DZ&start=1970&view=chart>. All accessed 12 December 2023. Aurèlia Mañé-Estrada et Roger Albinyana, “Revisiting *Rentierism* through the Lens of Algerian Gas,” *Revue Internationale des Etudes du Développement* 251 (2023): 45, 55. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ried.8149>

<sup>4</sup> Serres, “‘Give us back’,” Naoual Belakhdar, “When unemployment meets environment. The case of the anti-fracking coalition in Ouargla,” *Mediterranean Politics* 24, no.4 (2019), 420-442, DOI: [10.1080/13629395.2019.1639026](https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2019.1639026).

<sup>5</sup> Naoual Belakhdar, “‘Algeria is not for Sale!’ Mobilizing Against Fracking in the Sahara,” *Middle East Report* 296 (Fall 2020); Arjun Chavindi, “Digital platforms as tools: Rise of Anti-Fracking protest movements across the world,” *NIAS Quarterly on Contemporary World Affairs* 20, nos.2 and 3 (2020): 5. [https://globalpolitics.in/pdf\\_file/articles/Frackingarjun.pdf](https://globalpolitics.in/pdf_file/articles/Frackingarjun.pdf); Belakhdar, “When unemployment meets environment,” 433; Miriam R. Aczel, “Public opposition to shale gas extraction in Algeria: Potential application of France’s ‘Duty of Care Act’,” *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7, no. 4 (2020): 1360-1368. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2020.09.003>.

<sup>6</sup> Giuliano Garavini, ‘From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics: Algeria, OPEC, and the International Struggle for Economic Equality’ *Humanity An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism and Development* 6 no.1 (2015): 80. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2015.0004>; Terry Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-states* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

supposed ‘failed decolonisation’ and successful nationalisation, exploring how the oil sector shaped and was shaped by the end of empire and the early years of Algerian independence. It does this through a socio-technical analysis focused on a network of oil actors and, within this network, sets the colonial continuities of the oil sector into a wider context that acknowledges these continuities but also accounts for the agency of non-colonial (Algerian and international) actors in shaping the legacies of colonialism.<sup>7</sup> The thesis thus underlines the methodological importance of social-technical approaches, which enable the re-writing of the history of decolonisation through a focus on infrastructural and human forces together.<sup>8</sup> The result is to revise our understanding of decolonisation in this context: illuminating the logics and ‘material entanglements’ which drove how and where colonial political and economic structures across both France and Algeria were being entrenched, falling away, or being reshaped.<sup>9</sup>

Algeria was a French colony between 1830 and 1962. Political independence was hard won in a bloody eight-year war, which killed between 350,000 and 1,500,000

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<sup>7</sup> Natalya Vince, *The Algerian War, The Algerian Revolution* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 189-190.

<sup>8</sup> For these approaches in other contexts, see, for example, Katayoun Shafiee, *Machineries of Oil: An Infrastructural History of BP in Iran* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018) and, on electricity see Elizabeth Chatterjee, “A Climate of Scarcity: Electricity in India, 1899–2016,” in *Scarcity in the Modern World: History, Politics, Society and Sustainability, 1800–2075* eds John Brewer, Neil Fromer, Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, and Frank Trentmann (eds.), (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Smith and Chris Jeppesen, “Conclusion: the conditional as a category,” in *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?*, eds Andrew Smith and Chris Jeppesen (London: UCL Press, 2017), 172-176, 172-4; Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson, “Rethinking Decolonization: A New Research Agenda for the Twenty-First Century”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire, Oxford Handbooks*, eds Martin Thomas, and Andrew S. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21-22.

Algerians, 25,600 French soldiers, and 3,000-4,500 European civilians.<sup>10</sup> Algeria's extensive oil and gas reserves were discovered by French prospectors in the midst of the war in 1956, concentrated in the north-east quadrant of Algeria's desert south. The oil discoveries were deeply enmeshed in the escalating violence of the late colonial years, as the French state sought to hold onto the immense strategic and economic value of a 'domestic' hydrocarbon supply.<sup>11</sup> The colonial regime hailed this natural wealth as a miraculous panacea to France's economic woes and waning global political standing.<sup>12</sup> French political and economic interests were so vested in Saharan resources that the discovery hardened anti-independence factions in France and even sparked an attempt to divide Algeria into two states along its Saharan border, retaining only the oil-rich south under French hegemony.<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 336-7; Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006; London: Macmillan, 1977), 358; Vince, *Algerian War*, 2. See also Guy Pervillé, "La guerre d'Algérie: Combien de morts?" in *La guerre d'Algérie, 1954–2004: La fin de l'amnésie?*, ed. Mohammed Harbi and Gilbert Meynier (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004); Benjamin Stora, *Les mots de la guerre d'Algérie* (Toulouse: Presse universitaires du Mirail, 2005), 23-5; Claire Eldridge, "We've never had a voice': Memory Construction and the Children of the Harkis (1962–1991)," *French History* 23, no. 1 (2009): 92. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crn062>.

<sup>11</sup> See particularly Marta Musso, "'Oil Will Set Us Free': The Hydrocarbon Industry and the Algerian Decolonization Process," in *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?*, eds Andrew Smith and Chris Jeppesen (London: UCL Press, 2017), particularly 62-63; Hocine Malti, *Histoire secrète du pétrole algérien* (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 2012), 9. On evolving state support to this critical industry see Alain Beltran, "Les stratégies des entreprises pétrolières françaises dans le monde francophone (de l'entre-deux-guerres aux années 1970)," 49-50 and Dominique Barjot, "La SN Repal: un acteur original de la politique pétrolière française (1946-1972)," 63 in *Économie et Développement Durable: Héritage Historiques et Défis Actuels au sein du Monde Francophone* eds. Dominique Barjot and Thi Hoai Trang Phan (Paris: Société française d'histoire des outre-mers, 2016). Nuclear testing was also crucial to these claims, see, particularly Roxanne Panchasi, "'No Hiroshima in Africa': The Algerian War and the Question of French Nuclear Tests in the Sahara." *History of the Present* 9, no. 1 (2019): 84–112. <https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.9.1.0084>.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Peyret, *Le Sahara espoirs et réalités, L'économie supplément*, no. 596. (1957), in F60 6004, ANF ; Muriam Haleh Davis, "Algeria's Colonial Geography: Shifting Visions of Mediterranean Space," *New Geographies* 5 (2013), 323 ; Maurice Brogni, "L'exploitation des hydrocarbures en Algérie de 1956 à 1971. Etude de géographie économique," (PhD Diss., Université Nice, 1973), 152-3.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of a Saharan divide had long been in circulation, but was re-invigorated as a result of the oil discoveries. For previous debates in the French government regarding the Saharan distinction see Kelsey Suggitt "Impossible Endings? Reimagining the end of the French empire in the Sahara, 1951-1962" (PhD Diss, University of Portsmouth, 2018), 68-9.

disagreements over Saharan sovereignty and natural resources are estimated by some historians to have lengthened the war by up to two years.<sup>14</sup>

Independence was finally agreed at Evian in 1962. Algeria, now a recognised nation-state, broadly retained its established territorial shape, including the Sahara and its precious natural resources. But, under the terms of these accords, French interests retained a stranglehold over the hydrocarbon industry. French oil companies benefitted from mandated pricing structures that kept production costs low and profits high. As a result, Algerian oil was still being produced by French companies and sold to French refineries. Indeed, in 1965, French participation in Algerian production amounted to over 82% and Algerian oil accounted for over one third of French oil production.<sup>15</sup> In the years following Evian, the Algerian government decried this control as an ongoing form of economic neo-colonialism. It was on this basis that the terms of oil production were re-negotiated in 1965 in the Algiers Accords, which gave the Algerian state a more direct role in the sector but retained French influence through, for instance, privileged price structures.<sup>16</sup>

In the late 1960s, the Algerian government launched a famous ‘battle for oil,’ attempting to wrest control of the industry from France and finally achieve ‘true

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<sup>14</sup> Musso, “Oil Will Set Us Free,” 62-63; Malti, *Histoire secrète*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Garavini, “From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics,” 84; Phillip Naylor, *France and Algeria: A History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2000), 91.

<sup>16</sup> Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella later described the Evian Accords as a ‘stranglehold,’ Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 55; 35; See also Phillip Naylor, “A Post-Colonial Decolonization: French-Algerian Hydrocarbon Relations, 1962-71,” *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 8 (1985): 182. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42952142>; See also chapter 3 for a full discussion of these price structures.

independence.’<sup>17</sup> In February 1971, this ‘true independence’ seemed to have finally been achieved. The Algerian government successfully nationalised its oil industry. The nationalisation redirected Algerian trade away from France and vastly increased state revenues.<sup>18</sup> The Algerian government ploughed its new revenue into what it described as ‘socialist nation building,’ particularly into ambitious schemes to increase heavy industry.<sup>19</sup> In France, although the economic effects seemed less profound and immediate, the 1971 nationalisation sparked a wave of social protest and influenced the re-direction of energy policy towards nuclear power, with long-term social, environmental, and geopolitical consequences.<sup>20</sup> In the decades that followed, the idea of the ‘oil victory’ as representing the true or ‘second’ independence of Algeria has been frequently reinforced by political voices as well as political and diplomatic historiography.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Belaïd Abdesselam, *Le pétrole et le gaz naturel en Algérie : Comment les Algériens ont gagné la bataille de la récupération du pétrole et du gaz* (Algiers : Edition ANEP, 2012) ; Malti, *Histoire secrète*, 157-173; 175-195.

<sup>18</sup> Between 1968 and 1972, government revenue increased by 70%, mostly due to income from hydrocarbons: with oil revenue doubling between 1971 and 1972 and oil taxes accounting for some 40% of government revenue. This share of total revenue rose to 96% by 1977. Karen Farsoun, “State Capitalism in Algeria,” *MERIP Reports* 35 (1975): 10. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3011457>; Jamshid Heidarian and Rodney D. Green, “The impact of oil-export dependency on a developing country: The case of Algeria,” *Energy Economics* 11, no.4 (1989): 252. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-9883\(89\)90041-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-9883(89)90041-8). Meanwhile between 1970 and 1972, French exports to Algeria fell from an annual total of 3124 to 2383 million francs and French imports from Algeria fell from 3,539 to 1,702 million francs Naylor, *France and Algeria* 81, 107.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 4 for a full discussion of these policies; Chérif Begga and Abdelhamid Merghit, “Attempts to Industrial Reforms in Algeria: Do they fit the Logic of Globalization?” *Topics in Middle Eastern and African Economies* 16, no. 1, (2014): 97. <https://mee.sites.luc.edu/volume16/pdfs/Begga-Merghit.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> On the relationship between the Marseille protests and oil nationalisation see Mark J. Miller, “Reluctant Partnership: Foreign Workers in Franco-Algerian Relations, 1962- 1979.” *Journal of International Affairs* 33, no. 2 (1979): 225. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24356282>; Duccio Basosi and Giuliano Garavini, “The Oil Revolution: The myths and realities of the oil price shock of 1973,” 17 October 2023, <https://www.phenomenalworld.org/analysis/the-oil-revolution/> For a more nuanced account drawing out the interrelationship between oil and nuclear energies in France during this period see Joseph Bohling, “Energy and Power,” The French History Podcast, 3 August 2019. <https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwi6zKPFkemDAXWTQEEAHQscDgUQFnoECBEQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thefrenchhistorypodcast.com%2Fenergy-and-power-with-dr-joseph-bohling%2F&usq=AOvVaw1dxN2mg4ioloC1hHNoAlct&opi=89978449>

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, “Il était une fois le 24 février. La seconde indépendance.” *Revue El Djazair* 23, (2010) cited in Luis Martinez, “Algérie : les illusions de la richesse pétrolière,” *Les Études du CERI* 168 (2010): 4.

It is clear, then, that oil is deeply interwoven into the both the processes and understandings of the end of empire and decolonisation across France and Algeria. A somewhat static and narrow presentation of colonial continuities connects the industry of the late 1950s to the present-day. At the same time, political ‘moments,’ particularly the nationalisation of 1971, are used to create narratives around the past that centre on Algerian state actors by emphasising a distinction between economic and political independence. I turn now to explore how evolving historical analyses have approached the relationship between oil and decolonisation in this context.

#### Literature review

This thesis is situated within a growing field of literature exploring the end of empire across both Algeria and France. As I will show below, this work has re-framed decolonisation by drawing attention to the ways in which the political transition was shaped and navigated by a broad range of actors, as well as situating the ‘moment’ of political decolonisation within a longer-term context. The same approaches have also informed recent research into the history of resources. Whilst older political historiographies of decolonisation tended to take the relationship between oil and decolonisation for granted (that is to say, operating under the assumption that evolutions in the sector simply reflected political change), newer scholarship has instead considered how oil inspired alternative ideological visions for the end of

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<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-01023906> Marcel discusses the evolutions of this narrative within Sonatrach in Valérie Marcel, *Oil Titans National Oil Companies in the Middle East* (London: Chatham House, 2006), 50.

empire, and how it was deployed by Algerian nationalists to influence the process of decolonisation.<sup>22</sup>

As this thesis seeks to show, our understanding of this history can be significantly developed by shifting the scales of analysis and introducing an emphasis on materiality.<sup>23</sup> In broad terms, the existing literature has remained primarily focused at state level, exploring how central political actors, most notably the French colonial and Algerian governments, deployed oil revenue and designed energy policy. By contrast, this thesis seeks to integrate the materiality of oil and its physical infrastructures to explore how the technical structures through which Algerian oil was extracted and consumed influenced political, economic, and social outcomes.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the dissertation integrates the critical perspectives provided by actors outside the elite political circuit (such as labour forces, unions, and local communities) into the story. It argues that these extended material and social networks shaped the decolonisation process. These actors and networks leveraged and mediated colonial structures and legacies, opening, shaping, and closing political possibilities.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, discussions of the Algiers Accords and its role in pursuing French state objectives around co-operation in Inga Brandell, *Les rapports franco-algériens depuis 1962: Du pétrole et des hommes* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1981) and Pascal Valberg, "Cinq ans après. Bilan des accords franco-algériens de coopération industrielle et pétrolière du 29 juillet 1965," *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, 8 (1970) and discussion in Jad Kabbanji "La stratégie pétrolière de la France en Algérie, 1962-1971," (PhD Diss., Université de Montréal, 2016), 12.

<sup>23</sup> This builds particularly on the work of Bruno Latour in *Reassembling the Social an Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. For similar approaches, see also Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy, Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011); Andrew Barry, *Material Politics Disputes Along the Pipeline* (Sussex; Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and Shafiee, *Machineries of Oil*.

<sup>25</sup> Shafiee, *Machineries of Oil*, 6.

The approach of this thesis responds to a broader re-conceptualisation of decolonisation on a global scale. Historians have increasingly started from a more flexible understanding of 'decolonisation,' a view that recognises that this term has very open conceptual and chronological boundaries. Recent studies have approached it as a process by asking what 'decolonisation' itself was or even is, including whether it may well still be ongoing.<sup>26</sup> This field is rooted in early approaches that criticised the view of decolonisation as a political 'moment,' specifically those treaties and accords that recognised the independence of formerly colonised nations, in this case, the Evian Accords. Such approaches have in turn generated questions about why, when, and how decolonisation occurs, and have strongly opposed the view that the end of empires and the transition to nation-states were inevitable, neat, or bounded processes.<sup>27</sup> This turn has reinvigorated economic and social histories of the end of empire, within which resource histories have started to emerge as critical.<sup>28</sup>

This basic methodological framework has already been applied in the French and Algerian contexts, where scholars have long questioned how Algeria transitioned from a colony to nation-state. Initially hampered by official reluctance to acknowledge the extent of the violence that was involved and the resultant limitations on access to

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson, "Rethinking Decolonization: A New Research Agenda for the Twenty-First Century", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire, Oxford Handbooks*, eds Martin Thomas, and Andrew S. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21-22; Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 12-13, 176-181.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas and Thompson, "Rethinking Decolonization," 21-22.

<sup>28</sup> Ljubica Spaskovska, "'Crude' Alliance – Economic Decolonisation and Oil Power in the Non-Aligned World." *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 4 (2021). Doi: [10.1017/S0960777321000321](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000321).  
Kietie Sluyterman, "Decolonisation and the organisation of the international workforce: Dutch multinationals in Indonesia, 1945–1967," *Business History* 62, no.7 (2020). DOI: [10.1080/00076791.2017.1350170](https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2017.1350170).

archival records studies of Algeria began to proliferate in the early 2000s.<sup>29</sup> Research initially focused on the violence and forms of colonial coercion and control through the 1950s and 60s, moving to interrogate whether the escalating violence was ‘inevitable’ or whether there were ‘missed opportunities’ for peaceful solutions.<sup>30</sup> More recent research, however, has questioned how rigid these categorisations and particularly whether these paths inevitably led to a nation-state.<sup>31</sup> As well exploring how Algerian nationalists challenged, accommodated, and navigated elements of the colonial system, these histories have decentred the decolonisation story beyond Algiers and Paris by highlighting alternative approaches to the end of formal colonialism, particularly in the Saharan region, as well as more international and global approaches.<sup>32</sup> Such work has contributed toward the unravelling of the flattened and linear stories of the decolonisation process, complicating how the Algerian ‘state’ emerged as a physical, political, and cultural entity.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Benjamin Stora, who published some of the most germinal works in this field in the 1990s, thirty years on from the war, described French attitudes towards the war of independence into the 1990 as ‘an amnesia of silence, of repression of memory. Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l’Oubli: la Mémoire de la Guerre d’Algérie*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 318-320.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Cooper’s works, particularly, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), has formed the basis of much of this work. Andrew W. Smith and Chris Jeppesen’s *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?* (London: UCL Press, 2017) is a key exemplar of these approaches. Vince, *Algerian War*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> For a critique of the missed opportunities model see Sylvie Thénault, *Histoire de la guerre d’indépendance algérienne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005, reprint 2012), 21-22 and Vince, *Algerian War*, 13-14. On the possibility of a reimagined Franco- Algeria relationship see Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization. The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. (London: Cornell University Press, 2006) and Fredrick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945- 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> See for example, Malika Rahal, *L’UDMA et les UDMISTES: Contribution à l’histoire du nationalisme algérien* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2018), Suggitt, “Impossible Endings,” 1; Berny Sèbe, “In the shadow of the Algerian war: the United States and the Common Organisation of Saharan Regions/ Organisation Commune des régions sahariennes (O CRS), 1957-1962,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 38, no.2 (2010). Doi:[10.1080/03086531003743999](https://doi.org/10.1080/03086531003743999); Berny Sèbe, “A fragmented and forgotten decolonization: the end of European empires in the Sahara and their legacy”, in *Francophone Africa at Fifty*, eds Tony Chafer and Alexander Keese. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.; Vince, *Algerian War*, 15-16.

The study of the end of colonial rule as contingent and uneven has highlighted how both the colonial state and Algerian nationalists deployed natural resources to make territorial and sovereignty claims throughout the war of independence. Berny Sèbe and Kelsey Suggitt, for example, have both studied the organisation commune des régions sahariennes (OCRS), a late colonial-era political unit, which sought to redraw political and state boundaries across Algeria and surrounding Saharan states, bringing the desert territories into a collective unit with close links to France. As the OCRS' primary mission was to manage the oil sector and to deploy oil revenues to raise standards of living in the Sahara, such work has tangentially highlighted the critical role played by natural resources in decolonisation, from the perspective, primarily, of French state actors. Suggitt's work, for example, argues that the French attempts to 'reimagine colonial rule' were ultimately thwarted 'because of the weight of history and the increased importance of sovereignty and self-determination in this period,' thereby presenting the oil resources as a short term, and ultimately ineffective, imperial tool.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Sèbe's work has shown the different international and domestic interests that were vested in this alternative French vision of the Sahara and has placed the OCRS in a longer-term context, considering its impacts on subsequent anti-Algiers feeling in the Saharan region.<sup>35</sup>

An alternative branch of scholarship, rooted in political science and particularly rentier state theory, meanwhile, has argued that the structures and ideologies of

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<sup>34</sup> Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid; Sèbe, "Shadow of the Algerian War"; Sèbe, "A fragmented and forgotten decolonization."

French oil-based economic planning and development forced the post-independence government into a rentierist inertia that rendered it unable to challenge these structures or the identity paradigms, that became bound within them.<sup>36</sup> In essence, the FLN was 'imprisoned' between the colonial formulation of Algeria's social issues as inherently and exclusively issues of economic development and the concentration of wealth at state level without institutional frameworks which occurred through independence, thus leading to rentierist policies.<sup>37</sup> Such studies employ the perspective of 'oil imperialism,' a classification frequently invoked by scholars attempting to understand the role of oil both during and after formal colonial rule. Yet the theoretical and conceptual boundaries of oil imperialism remain blurred, since it is often employed across a range of historical episodes spanning formal colonial rule and its aftermath, as well as more indirect forms of economic influence, predominantly focusing on British and US interests.<sup>38</sup> In a similar vein, a growing critique amongst studies of US energy policy and oil has argued that real foreign policy drivers have been obscured by 'oilcraft,' that is to say a 'modern-day form of magical realism,' which significantly overstates the powers and influence of oil supplies on the world stage.<sup>39</sup> As a result, such studies provide limited insight into the mechanics of the relationship between states and oil. As Meierding's work has

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<sup>36</sup> Samia Boucetta, "Identity and Hydrocarbons in Algeria," in *Algeria Modern: From Opacity to Complexity* eds Luis Martinez and Rasmus Alenius Boserup (London: Hurst Publishers, 2016), 35-7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Victor McFarland, "Concluding Remarks," Oil Imperialism? Energy and Political Power from a Global Perspective, Paris-Sorbonne, 5 November 2016; Marta Musso and Guillemette Crouzet, "Energy Imperialism? Introduction to the special issue," *Journal of Energy History* 3, (July 2020). [energyhistory.eu/en/node/205](https://energyhistory.eu/en/node/205)

<sup>39</sup> Robert Vitalis, *Oilcraft: The Myths of Scarcity and Security That Haunt U.S. Energy Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 6.

pointed out, the primordial role of oil in motivating state action has often been either assumed or inflated: my approach here aims to avoid both pitfalls.<sup>40</sup>

Diplomatic histories have focused instead on the deployment of oil on an international stage by Algerian nationalists. Whereas scholars such as Cantoni have concentrated mainly on the late colonial period, others such as Ghetta, Dietrich and Garavini (and to a lesser extent McDougall and Byrne) have placed nationalist oil diplomacy in a longer-term context.<sup>41</sup> This work has particularly focused on the 1970s, since it was closely connected to historiography on the rise of the New International Economic Order as a means of recasting Third World countries, in all their breadth and reality, as drivers in the global economic and political shifts of this decade.<sup>42</sup> Collectively, these studies have highlighted that the active political deployment of resource sovereignty decisively shaped the process and conceptualisation of decolonisation.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, these lines of enquiry have

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<sup>40</sup> Meierding describes this as an “unmerited cognitive leap.” Emily Meierding, *The Oil Wars Myth: Petroleum and the Causes of International Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 3.

<sup>41</sup> On oil diplomacy during the war see Roberto Cantoni, *Oil exploration, diplomacy, and security in the early Cold War: the enemy underground* (New York: Routledge, 2017) and Musso, “Oil Will Set us Free,” particularly 75-84. On Algerian diplomacy within OPEC and NIEO see Garavini, “From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics.” On oil diplomacy with the US in this period see Mohammed Lakhdar Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War: International Relations and the Struggle for Autonomy* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018), particularly 41-67 and 105, and on oil and international training partnerships see Marta Musso, “Taking Control: Sonatrach and the Algerian Decolonization Process” in *Entrepreneurship in Africa: A Historical Approach* ed. Moses Ochonu, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), 173-191. Online version, unpaginated.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=5317435>. James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and the Third World Order* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016); James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), particularly 64.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York; London: New Press, 2008); Nils Gilman, “The New International Economic Order: A Reintroduction,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 6, no. 1 (2015) <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2015.0008>.

<sup>43</sup> For the broader body of literature underpinning these approaches, see Christopher R. W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Garavini et al, “Introduction,” Matthew Shutzer, “Oil, Money and

started to explore how the FLN developed and deployed a form of oil diplomacy through the war of independence and its aftermath to obtain international partnerships ranging from OPEC to Italy to the US.<sup>44</sup> This research builds on an earlier literature exploring the evolution of Franco-Algeria diplomacy and treaties, notably the Algiers Accord of 1965, as instituting a greater Algerian control over the oil sector.<sup>45</sup>

These diplomatic accounts have converged particularly on the Algerian oil nationalisation of 1971, exploring how the FLN used oil diplomacy to achieve what it styled as 'final' or economic decolonisation from France, and further, to push the agenda of the NIEO in redrawing the postcolonial economic map more broadly.<sup>46</sup> Political science literature has reflected these chronologies from a domestic perspective, with Martinez, Henry and Entelis exploring how, after 1971, oil policy and oil wealth was deployed within Algeria to facilitate the post-independence nation-building of the FLN, to achieve either clientelist or economic coercion by buying political, popular, and military support.<sup>47</sup> Overall then, such work has shown that oil policy was critical to the efforts to achieve, conceptualise, and safeguard independence and sovereignty for both the imperial and Algerian administrations.

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Decolonization in South Asia," *Past & Present* 258, no. 1, (February 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/ptac001>; Spaskovska, "'Crude' Alliance"

<sup>44</sup> Cantoni, *Oil exploration, diplomacy, and security*; Musso, "Taking Control," Garavini, "From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics"; Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Nicole Grimaud « Le conflit pétrolier franco-algérien, » *Revue française de science politique*, 22, no. 6, (1972). <https://doi.org/10.3406/rfsp.1972.418929>; Brandell, *Les rapports franco-algériens depuis 1962*; Valberg, « Cinq ans après »

<sup>46</sup> Cantoni, *Oil exploration, diplomacy, and security*; Musso, "Taking Control"; Garavini, "From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics"; Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*.

<sup>47</sup> Luis Martinez, *The Violence of Petro-Dollar Regimes: Algeria, Iraq and Libya* (London: Hurst & Co., 2012); Clement Henry, "Algeria's agonies: oil rent effects in a bunker state," *The Journal of North African Studies* 9, no. 2 (2004). DOI: [10.1080/1362938042000323347](https://doi.org/10.1080/1362938042000323347) John Entelis, "Algeria: democracy denied, and revived?" *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, no.4 (2011). DOI: [10.1080/13629387.2011.630878](https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2011.630878)

In general terms, then, scholarship exploring oil in the Franco-Algerian decolonisation process has been limited to a focus on oil policy at an elite level. This approach has had two key impacts. First, these understandings draw on rhetoric and policy design rather than actions and outcomes. As has been demonstrated in a variety of studies globally, perhaps most notably in the context of Iran, however, this gap can be significant. Further, key actors, including companies, workers, and local communities, outside these elite circles, can be obscured.<sup>48</sup>

Further, focusing on oil as an elitist financial or political tool overlooks how oil as a substance and as a physical assemblage has definitively shaped socio-political and economic landscapes. Timothy Mitchell's influential *Carbon Democracy*, by drawing on actor-network theory particularly demonstrated how the rise of long-distance oil-based trading routes shaped and entrenched global political systems. Mitchell's work, which briefly considered how oil networks shaped late colonial economic 'developmentalism,' has been built on by Barry in the context of post-Soviet era Georgia and the Caucasus region.<sup>49</sup> Barry's work shows how the materials of an oil pipeline were bound up with transparency and production of knowledge, which in turn defined the political and apolitical, thus shaping the very foundations of dispute around sovereignty and land.<sup>50</sup> Focused, like Mitchell, on the oil-producing Middle East, Shafiee has applied a sociotechnical lens to the evolution of the Iranian oil

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<sup>48</sup> Kaveh Ehsani, "The social history of labor in the Iranian oil industry: *the Built Environment and the Making of the Industrial Working Class*" (PhD. Diss., Leiden University, 2014), 21 and Peyman Jafari, "Oil, labour and revolution in Iran: a social history of labour in the Iranian oil industry, 1973-83" (PhD Diss. Leiden University, 2018).

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*; Barry, *Material Politics*.

<sup>50</sup> Barry, *Material Politics*.

sector, arguing that these properties shaped both oil companies, notably BP, and the state itself.<sup>51</sup> Other scholars, such as Hein and Cuyler, have further developed this field by expanding into non-producing contexts, drawing out how the relationships between the material of oil itself and its physical networks shaped nation-building projects as well as urban landscapes.<sup>52</sup> As such works show, integrating the physical networks of oil is critical to understanding how political and economic policies were defined and applied.

These approaches have yet to be fully brought to bear on the Franco-Algerian context. There have been some insightful analyses exploring the material forces of oil at localised levels. A recent study on the oil port of Marseille-Fos, for example, has highlighted how the port and refining infrastructure shaped the region's ecology, architecture, and political structures, particularly the relationship between local and central powers.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Davis' important work on the imperial Algerian Sahara has drawn out how the working practices and urban designs of oil towns reflected questions about sovereignty and ethnicity within the Sahara.<sup>54</sup> However, this localised focus has failed to capture the extent and complexity of the transnational oil

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<sup>51</sup> Shafiee, *Machineries of Oil*, particularly, 7-10.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Carola Hein, "Oil Spaces: The Global Petroleumscape in the Rotterdam/The Hague Area," *Journal of Urban History* 44, no.5 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144217752460>; Zachary D. Cuyler, "A Predestined Country? Fossil-Fueled Infrastructure and the Assembly of the Lebanese Intermediary State, 1890-1970," (PhD Diss., New York, 2023); Bearisoa Rakotoniaina, 'Les enjeux énergétiques à Madagascar de 1958 à 1972 : l'exemple du pétrole,' in *Économie et Développement Durable: Héritage Historiques et Défis Actuels au sein du Monde Francophone* eds. Dominique Barjot and Thi Hoai Trang Phan (Paris: Société française d'histoire des outre-mers, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> Christelle Gramaglia, Fabien Bartolotti, Sophie Gebeil and Béatrice Mésini, Fos/Etang de Berre. 200 ans d'histories industrielle et environnementale, webdocumentary, accessed at [www.fos200ans.fr](http://www.fos200ans.fr) (accessed 18 January 2021).

<sup>54</sup> Muriam Haleh Davis "The Transformation of Man' in French Algeria: Economic Planning and the Postwar Social Sciences, 1958–62," *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 1 (2017). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26416513>; Davis, "Algeria's Colonial Geography"

network across Algeria and France.<sup>55</sup> For example, as I will show, the Marseille-Fos port was entrenched within, shaped, and was shaped by an imperial network based on Saharan crude, creating new and unique path dependencies but also new political and economic possibilities. Similarly, in a rare study of the transmediterranean hydrocarbon networks in the 1970s, Hayes has shown how a combination of political and material factors shaped the Algerian-European energy market, exploring particularly why early models of a transmediterranean gas line failed to emerge, due in part to the influence of the French market.<sup>56</sup> As Mitchell and Hein have based their work on oil in long-distance global networks, the integration of a colonial and Mediterranean framework may provide a useful comparative to or even development of this model.

The hydrocarbon flows across the Mediterranean were composed of more than just one material product; they also involved money and labour. As such, a multi stranded approach to the energy system is necessary and provides an insightful device through which to understand decolonisation as a 'two-way process.'<sup>57</sup> This approach sheds light on how the end of empire, and the actors (including material actors), cultures, and structures, emerging by and through this process, shaped both former colony and metropole.<sup>58</sup> For example, in France, scholarship has shown that the

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<sup>55</sup> Brogni, 'L'exploitation,' 236-8.

<sup>56</sup> Transportation of Algerian oil to France, for example, as liquefied natural gas, required a different infrastructure and labour force than transportation to Italy via the Trans-Mediterranean pipeline; Mark H. Hayes, 'The Transmed and Maghreb projects' in *Natural Gas and Geopolitics: From 1970 to 2040* eds, David G. Victor, Amy M. Jaffe and Mark H. Hayes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 77-8.

<sup>57</sup> Berny Sèbe, and Matthew G. Stanard, "Making sense of the end of empire: Fluxes and flows in *Decolonising Europe*," in *Decolonising Europe? : Popular Responses to the End of Empire* eds Berny Sèbe, and Matthew G. Stanard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 15.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

relationship between the consumption of colonial hydrocarbons and their reflection in road infrastructures shaped national connections and identities in France in the late colonial years and into the early 1960s.<sup>59</sup> However, there remain important unanswered questions about the specific role of Algerian crude and its materiality in shaping these changes, as well as the evolutions after the late colonial years. For example, an outbreak of localised and racial violence in Marseille at the nationalisation of Algerian oil in 1971 suggests a consumer identity still deeply entrenched in Algerian production.<sup>60</sup> A critical material approach to the technical aspects of oil extraction and refining has not yet been developed; historians have yet to explore fully how the technical demands of these sectors, which were shaped by the nature of Algerian oil (specifically, its deep deposits of light crude, situated far inland) shaped consumption, employment, and even social structures.<sup>61</sup> In short, whilst the oil sector is broadly recognised as a decisive actor in the end of empire across both Algeria and France, scholarly approaches focused on monetary flows and central policy have overlooked the critical material perspective and the transnational connections that characterised these processes.

The top-down, state-focused approach to Franco-Algerian oil and decolonisation has also tended to obscure other critical actors such as oil companies and workers, and

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<sup>59</sup> K. Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Morgan Le Dez, 'Normandy: A Centre for Oil Companies Setting up Shop (1919-1939)' in *A Comparative History of National Oil Companies* ed. Alain Beltran, (Brussels: Presses Interuniversitaires Européennes: 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Miller, "Reluctant Partnership," 225.

<sup>61</sup> There is evidence to suggest, for example, due to both their location, associated technical demands of extraction and working culture, offshore oil reserves have differentiated social impacts, particularly promoting alternative archetypes of masculinity, Robin J. Ely and Debra E Meyerson, "An organizational approach to undoing gender: The unlikely case of offshore oil platform," *Research in Organizational Behaviour* 30 (2010). DOI: [10.1016/j.riob.2010.09.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2010.09.002).

local governments and communities. Oil companies have perhaps been the most studied in an under-studied cast, with Davis' work, for example, focusing on racial capitalism. This has demonstrated how French oil companies upheld racial and politically defined divisions, in line with state values in the last years of colonial rule.<sup>62</sup> Mounecif, meanwhile, has considered how oil companies used the character of the 'black gold seeker' to attract workers in the last years of the war.<sup>63</sup> Beltran and Frémeaux have similarly drawn out how the oil policies of the French state shaped the strategic organisation of the oil industry in late colonial Algeria.<sup>64</sup> Musso, in contrast, has shown how the post-independence Algerian state used its national oil company, Sonatrach, to impose and achieve nationalisation as a form of economic decolonisation.<sup>65</sup> These analyses have been complicated by the fact that Sonatrach's records remain very difficult to access, particularly for the post-independence period. For an insight into Sonatrach's workings beyond high level strategy (for example, delving into company cultures or workers' activities), research has been highly reliant on interviews and personal accounts.<sup>66</sup> These have tended to focus on managerial experiences, which limits their representational value and wider applicability.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, the focus of scholars such as Musso, Davis, and Mounecif on the policy and corporate operations of oil companies has certainly added valuable perspectives

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<sup>62</sup> Davis, "The Transformation" and "Algeria's Colonial Geography."

<sup>63</sup> Radouan Andrea Mounecif, "Black Gold Seekers: French oil companies in colonial and postcolonial Algeria. Workforce policies, circulation of knowledge and social identities (1945-1973)," Paper presented at The Stories We Tell Seminar Series, The Arab and Muslim Worlds, Observatory of the Maison des Sciences Humaines of the Université libre de Bruxelles, 19 April 19, 2023.

<sup>64</sup> Beltran, "Les stratégies" ; Jacques Frémeaux, "Les enjeux du pétrole algérien," in *Économie et Développement Durable: Héritage Historiques et Défis Actuels au sein du Monde Francophone* eds. Dominique Barjot and Thi Hoai Trang Phan (Paris: Société française d'histoire des outre-mers, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Musso, "Taking Control"

<sup>66</sup> For example, Marcel and Mitchell's *Oil Titans*, a comparative analysis of Middle East and North African national oil companies as well as the personal accounts of former employees, notably Malti, *Histoire secrète*.

<sup>67</sup> The total sample size across all five countries in the Marcel and Mitchell study, for example, was 120 employees, Marcel and Mitchell, *Oil Titans*, 12.

by showing how decolonisation happened and was experienced via oil companies, including technical development, training programmes, and the programmes of socio-economic investment in local communities.

However, the insights provided from company histories can still be much further developed in this context. As shown above, accounts of company histories have been limited to high-level policy and have tracked commercial activity as extensions of a singular, central state policy. For example, Musso's work presents Sonatrach as simply applying the state's drive to nationalisation through developing international partnerships and technical knowledge.<sup>68</sup> This work made an important intervention by highlighting that oil labour was politically crucial in the Algerian state's efforts to achieve 'decolonisation,' in essence, the plan to nationalise the oil industry hinged on the ability to train skilled labour.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, the activities and experiences of these workers would provide critical insight into gaps between policy and reality in the Franco-Algerian context, and local understandings of, even influence on, decolonisation itself.<sup>70</sup> However, the actions and activism of oil workers have yet to be fully explored by scholars of this period. Oil companies, thus, are best conceived of, not as monolithic entities, but instead as arenas, shaped from the inside out and the ground up as well as from the top down or from the outside in.

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<sup>68</sup> Musso, "Taking Control."

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ehsani, "The social history," 21 and Jafari, "Oil, labour and revolution." See also Zachary Davis Cuyler, "Lebanon's fossil economy: How oil fueled a gilded age and shaped today's crisis," *Synaps*, 6 June 2022, <https://www.synaps.network/post/lebanon-oil-fossil-economy>

Similarly, there has been a tendency within diplomatic and state-led histories to interpret company strategy as a linear reflection of state policy. This means that antagonisms between state and company, individual politicians, managers, staff, and unions, have been largely overlooked. Given Mitchell's claims that the change from coal to oil (and particularly the latter's dependence on global trading networks) substantially curtailed the political leverage and activity of workers, the physical, political, and economic proximity of the French-Algerian trading network provides important new perspectives to these histories.<sup>71</sup> For example, Santiago's work has explored the political influence of oil workers in Mexico. Her work finds that as oil workers were able to contextualise and frame their labour and struggles as 'anti-imperial,' they were able to wield significant political influence, an influence that dramatically declined in the aftermath of the oil nationalisation.<sup>72</sup> I apply this line of enquiry to the Franco-Algerian context to understand more about how different actors leveraged and mediated colonial structures and legacies, and how their actions in turn shaped the wider political landscape.

The focus on state and company agency in the Franco-Algerian context has also tended to obscure the relationship between oil and other key actors, notably local communities. Studies across both the colonial and independence periods have highlighted how the state used oil money in an attempt to co-opt political support at a local level in Algeria, from the welfare and development programmes of the OCRS to the energy subsidies of the late 1960s. There is also some limited recent scholarship

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<sup>71</sup> Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 407-8.

<sup>72</sup> Myrna I. Santiago, "Oil Imperialism and Its Discontents," Paper presented at Oil Imperialism? Energy and Political Power from a Global Perspective, Paris-Sorbonne, 4 November 2016.

focusing on the Sahara, which has demonstrated how the uptake of and mediation of these policies by local communities, impacted local ecologies and economies, shifting, for example, employment patterns and agricultural practices in ways unanticipated and unplanned by the central state.<sup>73</sup> These patterns and practices, in turn, shaped the uneven experiences and application of decolonisation and independence. Outside of these exceptions, however, there is very little literature addressing how local communities experienced and navigated these programmes. In both the French and Algerian contexts, then, studies of the relationship between energy systems and decolonisation have failed to engage sufficiently with local perspectives and local source bases.

### Approaches and Argument

To contribute to the current state of the historiography this thesis explores the relationship between evolving energy systems and the progression and afterlives of political independence across France and Algeria. It aims to span the colonial and post-colonial periods, integrate materiality, and examine the interplay between central state policies, local dynamics, and the intermediary actors that linked these levels together. This approach will therefore centre on oil company records and diplomats as intermediary actors, thus challenging the top down/from below binary noted above, and

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<sup>73</sup> Meriem Farah Hamamouche, Marcel Kuper, Hichem Amichi, Caroline Lejars and Tarik Ghodbani, "New reading of Saharan agricultural transformation: Continuities of ancient oases and their extensions (Algeria)," *World Development* 107 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.02.026>; Abed Bendjelid, Jean-Claude Brûlé and Jacques Fontaine, *Aménageurs et aménagés en Algérie. Héritages des années Boumediène et Chadli* (Paris: éditions L'Harmattan, 2004); Benedetta Rossi, "Kinetocracy: The government of mobility at the desert's edge," *Mobility Makes States: Migration and Power in Africa* eds Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2015).

drawing out how the relationships between, and mediations across, these actors shaped the process of decolonisation.

The chronological focus is on the critical period between 1956, when oil was discovered in the Algerian Sahara desert under colonial auspices, and 1975. The early 1970s were a heady period of high demand and high prices for oil, when it seemed possible for newly independent nations to design the shape of the postcolonial world through their natural resources.<sup>74</sup> In the wake of its successful oil nationalisation in 1971, and operating at the forefront of OPEC, the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement, independent Algeria was at the heart of this movement.<sup>75</sup> My approach deliberately bridges the colonial and independence periods and extends beyond the 'moment' of nationalisation in Algeria in order to explore the relationship between oil and decolonisation and to question the conventional focus on a short pivotal rupture in 1971.

These chronological boundaries deliberately do not extend beyond the mid-1970s. As such, the thesis does not capture the rapid decline in oil prices nor the political and economic shifts of the 1980s that brought Third World countries to the forefront of escalating Cold War tensions. Instead, the analysis focuses on the manipulation and manoeuvrability of the 'possible,' the competing imaginaries of sovereignty as crystallised in the hydrocarbon system, in the late colonial and early postcolonial

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<sup>74</sup> Garavini, "From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics," 79-80; Giuliano Garavini, Federico Romero and Elisabetta Bini, "Introduction," in *Oil Shock: The 1973 crisis and its economic legacy* eds Giuliano Garavini, Federico Romero and Elisabetta Bini, (London: I.B. Taurus, 2016), 2-3.

<sup>75</sup> Garavini, "From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics," 86-88. For more on Algerian diplomacy at the 'heart of the moment' see Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*, 2-3, 286.

years. Limiting the focus to these two decades enables the analysis to explore these themes in greater depth and detail by integrating economic, environmental, and social perspectives. It is worth noting, however, that the insights that this approach provides suggest that similar work into later years, particularly through the 1970s and 80s, would be well worthwhile.

The thesis focuses on the relationship between oil and decolonisation from a material and regional, that is to say, transmediterranean perspective. The analysis therefore works to 'follow' the oil as much as possible from extraction to consumption, which enables it to track networks across Algeria and France. Whilst the primary focus is on the Algerian context, the transnational regional hydrocarbon network provides a single frame of analysis to integrate the flow of people, money, and resources between the two emergent national spaces. In this way, the thesis also compares and contrasts the experience of economic and political shifts from the perspective of both an oil-producing and an oil-consuming state.<sup>76</sup>

Thirdly, my approach is based on a view from the 'middle.' By focusing on the actors that mediated relations between states and citizens, the thesis seeks to capture the critical interventions of a variety of overlooked actors, including local governments, businesses, and physical environments. Indeed, the thesis identifies a crucial network of mid-level oil actors, constituting what I call a 'nexus,' a bureaucratic-corporate machine which framed and constrained political agency even at the highest

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<sup>76</sup> For further discussion of the insights of approaches drawing together producing and consuming contexts, see, for example, Garavini et al, "Introduction," 8.

levels. Through this approach the thesis shows the specific ways in which oil shaped how, when and where structures of colonial rule were entrenched, reshaped, or eroded, rather than turning decolonisation into a monolith or a rupture. This perspective also provides a unique insight into the ways in which state policies were shaped and enacted in practice. Focusing on the critical space between policy, perception, and realities on the ground, the thesis shows that the vast assemblage of financial, infrastructural, and commercial connections of the hydrocarbon industry created both neo-colonial links and anti-imperial levers. These levers operated with an uneven and unexpected dynamism beyond complete state control. By adopting this approach, the thesis emphasises the vital influence of non-state actors in shaping both the oil industry and the political and economic linkages within the sector. At the same time, it also recasts the chronologies of independence and uneven processes of decolonisation. Viewed in this light, the nationalisation of Algerian oil appears not as the state driven success of 'true' economic independence but rather as the result of company activity enfolded within static physical infrastructures that forced states down this path.

Inevitably, there are some limitations to this approach. Certainly, the extent to which these findings can be generalised beyond the Franco-Algerian context is limited: the structures of both colonial governance and the resulting oil nexus that bound the two countries together were perhaps more tightly intertwined than anywhere else. Not only was Algeria governed as an integral part of the French metropole, a part of the national imaging so central that the issue of self-government and independence toppled the French administration in a military coup, but after independence the two

remained locked together economically, with oil traded as if within one nation.<sup>77</sup>

Nonetheless, this specific context throws actors like physical infrastructures and their post-independence evolutions more clearly into the spotlight, thus opening up questions that can be explored in different contexts to give greater insight into the relationship between oil and the end of empire. Moreover, given the ongoing political, economic, and social importance of oil and its relationship to the ongoing process of decolonisation, these understudied stories are critical to both national histories.

In order to integrate social, spatial, and commercial histories with those of the state, the analysis draws on a variety of archival records. These include Algerian, French, and international oil companies, as well as central state and departmental records: for example, local consulates and financial ministries as well more localised records, such as those from local governments and unions. Over the course of this study, new records were released which added critical perspectives on the activities of organised labour and the relationship between Sonatrach and international oil companies. Some practical limitations, notably restricted access to local and Sonatrach records, did influence the study. However, international archives, particularly in the US, provided useful insight into the day-to-day realities of working with Sonatrach and the role of lower-ranking or local politicians and diplomats, the people of the nexus, in shaping the application of state and company policies. Comparing and contrasting

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<sup>77</sup> Megan Brown, *The Seventh Member State: Algeria, France, and the European Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022); Daniela Caruso and Joanna Geneve, "Trade and History: The Case of EU-Algeria Relations," *Public Law Research Paper, Boston University School of Law* (2014): 8. Accessed at [https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/faculty\\_scholarship/71](https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/faculty_scholarship/71) On the specificities of Algeria as a racialised settler colony within the French empire, see, for example, Fiona Barclay, Charlotte Ann Chopin and Martin Evans, "Introduction: settler colonialism and French Algeria," *Settler Colonial Studies*, 8, no. 2 (2018). DOI: [10.1080/2201473X.2016.1273862](https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2016.1273862).

across this source base highlighted particularly how state and company actors perceived the impacts and engagement with oil policy and physical infrastructures with local actors.

## Thesis Structure

Taken together, this thesis argues that oil, understood as an assemblage of physical infrastructures, commercial interests, labour, and local communities, as well as a revenue stream, profoundly shaped the decolonisation process and constructions of state and sovereignty in this period. Whilst state actors attempted to use and manipulate the oil assemblage to impose or challenge colonial structures or continuities, both the materiality of oil and interventions of oil actors shaped the outcomes of these state policies.<sup>78</sup>

Chapters one and two focus on the late years of colonial rule. The first chapter explores how oil shaped the imperial state's geopolitical visions of the French-

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<sup>78</sup> In my use of the term 'assemblage' I draw on the work of Roland Dannreuther, "Oil, materiality and International Relations," *International Relations* (2024) 1–23 advance copy available at <https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/item/w8364/oil-materiality-and-international-relations>. DOI: [10.1177/00471178241231726](https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178241231726). This approach builds on STS work that aims to rediscover the impacts of nonhuman agency which has been hidden from view, whilst still accounting for the impacts human social relations & human-environmental relations. See Bruno Latour *Reassembling the Social an Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Alf Hornberg, "Artifacts have consequences, not agency: Toward a critical theory of environmental history," *European Journal of Social Theory* 20, no.1 (2016). DOI: [10.1177/1368431016640536](https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431016640536). Michael J Watts in "Space, Scale, and the Global Oil Assemblage: Commodity Frontiers in Resource Peripheries," in *Resource Peripheries in the Global Economy. Economic Geography* eds Felipe Irarrázaval, Martín Arias-Loyola (New York: Springer International Publishing 2021), 145-182 and "Hyper Extractivism and the Global Oil Assemblage Visible an Invisible Networks in Frontier Spaces," in *Our Extractive Age Expressions of Violence and Resistance* eds Judith Shapiro and John-Andrew McNeish (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2021).

Algerian relationship, specifically the idea of Algeria as an integral part of the French nation, between 1956 and 1962. The chapter recasts the form and impacts of late colonial governance: no longer confined predominately to violence and control, but foundationally dependent on propaganda and economic planning which were shaped by, even mapped onto, the hydrocarbon system.<sup>79</sup> In this chapter, oil company managers emerge as key actors in defining colonial violence and control, and in defining how imperial developmental and racial logics were manifested on the oil sites and enmeshed into the Saharan economy and ecology.

Chapter two moves to a more regional focus. It tracks the evolution, in the years 1956 to 1962, of an alternative vision of the political and geographic future of southern Algeria as neither colony nor state. This late imperial policy sought to establish a border between the north and south of Algeria, a Saharan frontier. The chapter shows that the oil sector shaped how this border was conceptualised, legitimated, and ultimately implemented, with long-term consequences for the physical, political, and social shape of the region. The chapter draws particular attention to how this frontier was established and mediated in social interaction and social practice, drawing attention to the critical role of local Saharan consumers and communities. The analysis thereby explores how and where the Algerian nation, its governance and citizenship were defined, drawing attention to the very real and long-lasting impacts of the 'Saharan frontier,' a delineation that spliced together a

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<sup>79</sup> Davis, "The Transformation," 73-4.

commodity and a political frontier.<sup>80</sup> The chapter demonstrates that whilst longer-term impacts of the frontier have often been obscured by the ultimate failure to create a separate Saharan political entity, the political and ecological structures bound to the production and logics of the imperial commodity frontier far outlasted French rule in the Sahara.<sup>81</sup>

Chapter three follows the transition of the oil industry through the formal recognition of the Algerian nation-state in 1962 and the early years of independence into 1966. The chapter spans the signing and immediate aftermath of two major treaties between the French and Algerian states: the Evian Accords of 1962 and the Algiers Accords of 1965, exploring how the terms of oil production set by these bilateral treaties were navigated and applied in practice. The chapter argues that during these years the 'economic neo-colonialism' operated by France over the heavily oil dependent Algeria economy was neither centred on nor operated by states. Instead, it draws attention to the critical role of the nexus in shaping the evolving economic and political landscape. Further the chapter draws particular attention to the role and influence of oil workers to show how they leveraged the tensions between the struggles for strategic control of the oil sector, such as legislation and direct Algerian state control, and more operational concerns, notably around staffing of the oil

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<sup>80</sup> On commodity frontiers see Sven Beckert, Ulbe Bosma, Mindi Schneider and Eric Vanhaute, "Commodity frontiers and the transformation of the global countryside: A research agenda," *Journal of Global History* 16, no. 3, (2021). doi:[10.1017/S1740022820000455](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022820000455); Hanne Cottyn, "Commodity Frontiers: Capitalism and Contestation in the Countryside," 28 October 2019, accessed at <https://www.contested-territories.net/commodity-frontiers-capitalism-and-contestation-in-the-countryside/>; Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015).

<sup>81</sup> Beckert et al, "Commodity frontiers and the transformation of the global countryside," Cottyn, "Commodity Frontiers," Moore, *Capitalism*.

sector. I show that these interventions ultimately perpetuated the very structures which underwrote and cemented a mutual interdependence.

Chapters four and five cover the decade from 1965-1975. Having wrested control of its own oil industry by fully nationalising it in 1971, Algeria was at the forefront of efforts to redraw the global political economy in these years, pushing for a new world order of economic equity via the control of natural resources, above all, oil. These chapters challenge the prevalent historiographical approach to this period, which tend to treat 1965-1971 in a teleological manner: that is, as a linear, state-controlled drive to nationalisation, with nationalisation representing economic independence, followed, after 1971, by a distinct period of oil-funded state-building. Instead, by tracking oil policy and its application across the decade, the chapters problematise the relationship between colonial legacies, oil nationalisation and economic independence, recasting these as intertwined and complementary rather than chronologically sequential. Chapter four focuses on oil politics and diplomacy from the middle, exploring the interactions between oil companies and diplomats. It argues that nationalisation was the result of company agencies which ultimately forced both the French and Algerian governments down a 'rabbit hole' of nationalisation. I further draw attention to how the nationalisation process was facilitated and underwritten by the careful mediation of the colonial legacies bound within the oil sector. By contrast, chapter five examines the relationship between the oil industry, economic independence, and nation-building across this critical decade. Focusing particularly on how the state channelled its visions for the economy through the physical

infrastructures of oil, the chapter explores how these ambitions played out on the ground. The material logics of oil and interventions of oil actors emerge again as critical, as exemplified particularly in the case of the Marseille-Fos port, where local governments leveraged the specific shape of these infrastructures to fragment state ambitions for the political and economic shape of the region.

Overall, the thesis argues that oil shaped sovereignty across France and Algeria through the end of empire and process of decolonisation. Because the pace of evolutions in the oil assemblage did not match the pace of policy and treaties, political agency was reshaped, and, in places, constrained by a range of commercial and social mediations. The traditional chronologies, logics and spaces of decolonising 'moments,' such as the 1971 oil nationalisation, are thereby challenged.

## **Chapter One: An Oil Empire?**

In July 1959, R Risset, a teacher returning from a recent visit to the oil installations in the Algerian Sahara, wrote to the High Commissariat of Youth and Sport that his students were 'returning enchanted with the visit...it had made them aware of the trans-mediterranean work of France.... and demonstrated the futility of the arguments advanced by its detractors'<sup>1</sup>

The visit was organised by the famous explorer Maurice Hogg, with General De Gaulle's direct involvement. In the midst of the bloody and escalating war of independence, 1,000 French students were sent to the Algerian desert. Their brief was to report on the technical feat of mining oil in the desert, and, more critically, the social and economic benefits being wrought in Algeria by the new industry. The organisers ran a variety of generous cash prizes for the best written entries, aiming to have the student reports appear in as many French newspapers as possible.<sup>2</sup> Writing under the pen name 'L.H.,' one of the students who went on Hogg's expedition to Algeria published a full-page article in *l'Ami du Peuple*. L.H.'s 'On the roads of the future: Alsacien youth at Hassi Messaoud,' gives a detailed account of the visit to 'the New Eldorado,' bringing the article to life with photography emphasizing the size and scale of infrastructure that would transport oil across Algeria and France. Concluding with a reflection on the distance that the students covered and connections they saw, L.H. wrote that students made 'an incursion into the future, a future rich with promise...[that] will.... relieve miseries throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> R Risset, letter to the Haut-Commissaire à la Jeunesse et aux sports, 28 July 1959, 19860445/4, ANF.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Herzog, letter to M Goetz, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1958, 19860445/4, ANF.

vast world.’<sup>3</sup> Published just weeks before De Gaulle publicly recognised the Algerian right to self-determination, L.H. presented a vision of a simultaneously enduring and entirely new Franco-Algerian connectivity, a connectivity wrought along the physical networks of oil.<sup>4</sup>

This example shows how oil reshaped the relationship between France and Algeria in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Hydrocarbons created a range of newly direct links between the metropole and the Saharan region, where the oil reserves were located. This in turn reshaped the larger Franco-Algerian unit. Indeed, as the Sahara became more important due to oil, the once neglected region became the privileged bridgehead of the Franco-Algerian space, a role that had previously always been held by the Mediterranean coastal region of Algeria. In a sense, oil flipped late imperial Algeria upside down: Hassi Messaoud was now ‘closer’ to Paris than Algiers or Oran.

Algeria had been administered as a French *département* since 1848. In this chapter, I argue that this framework was fundamentally redefined by the oil discoveries. I show how the unique natures of hydrocarbon materials, networks, and connections, strategically critical and socially ubiquitous, shaped how abstract imaginings of imperial space were woven into lived realities, I focus particularly on the relationship between oil and the notion of ‘Eurafrica,’ a model dating back to the 1920s that conceived of Europe and Africa as a linked geopolitical and economic unit. As the

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<sup>3</sup> L.H., “Sur les routes de l’avenir : Des Jeunes Alsaciens à Hassi-Messaoud,” *L’Ami du Peuple*, 12 July 1959, 19860445/4, ANF.

<sup>4</sup> Saliha Belmessous, “Emancipation within Empire: An Algerian Alternative during the Era of Decolonization,” *History Workshop Journal*, 88 (Autumn 2019):169, 179, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbz030>.

French government struggled to maintain hegemony over the Algerian territory, the Eurafrica concept was revitalised.<sup>5</sup> It offered a fluid and manipulable framework for securing French interests in Algeria. This 'inherent' trans-Mediterranean unity fitted within the bounds of both a direct political mandate but also offered a foundation for more indirect entrenchment of French interests, such as political association or economic integration.<sup>6</sup>

The chapter argues that oil 'remade' French Eurafrica in three key ways. First, it stresses that oil was foundationally interwoven into the political and social projects that sought to reframe and re-legitimate late French imperial rule in Algeria. This focus demonstrates that late colonial rule in Algeria was fundamentally oil-powered in ways that have not been fully acknowledged and that force our attention beyond violence towards propaganda, diplomacy, and social and economic planning. Here I build particularly on Davis' work on economic policy more broadly, focusing this approach to show how the specific material factors of Algerian oil 'structur[ed]' rather than 'merely reflect[ed]' the operation of both 'social and political power.'<sup>7</sup> I show how the oil assemblage shaped the state's archetype of a Franco-Algerian 'nation' as inherent and indigenous, and how these ideals were translated into consumer realities crossing the Mediterranean.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Suggitt "Impossible Endings," 30-9; 68-9.

<sup>6</sup> Muriam Haleh Davis, "Producing Eurafrica: Development, Agriculture and Race in Algeria, 1958-1965," (PhD diss., New York University, 2015), 8-12. On the evolution of the Eurafrican notion within the European Economic Community, see Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: the untold history of European integration and colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Brown, *The Seventh Member State*.

<sup>7</sup> Davis, "Producing Eurafrica," 4.

<sup>8</sup> On the inherent and innate nature of French-Algeria as a Eurafrican entity, see Muriam Haleh Davis, "Restaging Mise en Valeur: "Postwar Imperialism" and The Plan de Constantine," *Review of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 178. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23057155>. Davis has demonstrated how the colonial government attempted to 'construct' a transmediterranean Franco-Algeria entity along three fronts: an

Secondly, the chapter argues that the course, experiences, and outcomes of the war of independence were shaped by the emerging oil sector, not only in its immense economic promise, a perspective that has dominated historical scholarship, but also in its material natures and physical infrastructures, which particularly shaped forms of political violence in the Sahara.<sup>9</sup>

My final section explores the ways in which oil workers and companies challenged the racialised underpinnings of imperial claims to sovereignty based on economic and technical development.<sup>10</sup> Here, I focus specifically on the oil towns, which were widely celebrated in the contemporary French press as evidence of Eurafrica in operation, tracing the tensions, collaborations, and ambiguities between oil company practices (notably attitudes towards inherent biological racial difference), political discourses around sovereignty, nationhood and race and the experiences of the oil workers themselves.

### French Eurafrica: An Oil-Powered Economy

The colonial state's efforts to establish an interconnected oil industry, as detailed in L.H.'s writing, were immense in their scope. Between 1956 and 1962, investment in

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integrated market economy, intertwined transport and communication networks and emphasising a 'commonality' of climatic and natural features. Davis, "Restaging Mise en Valeur," 178.

<sup>9</sup> On colonial greed as extending the war of independence, see particularly Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 62-63; Malti, *Histoire secrète*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Muriam Haleh Davis, "The Sahara as the "Cornerstone" of Eurafrica: European Integration and Technical Sovereignty seen from the Desert." *JEIH Journal of European Integration History* 23, no. 1 (2017): 111-2. <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/0947-9511-2017-1-97/the-sahara-as-the-cornerstone-of-Eurafrica-european-integration-and-technical-sovereignty-seen-from-the-desert-volume-23-2017-issue-1?page=1>

Algerian oil and connective infrastructures totalled over \$1.3 billion.<sup>11</sup> The connection was further underwritten by state policies which encouraged and protected French prospection, production, and refining of Algerian crude, which was channelled into the French market through tax codes, liberal amortisation schedules, high consumer prices, quota systems and protected exploration permits.<sup>12</sup> By 1962, Algeria was supplying around 40% of French oil imports and French interests controlled around 72% of Algeria's crude output.<sup>13</sup>

As L. H.'s writing demonstrates, however, the interconnection of the oil sector went beyond industrial frameworks, and had a critical role in the definition, production, and promotion of late imperial space. Initially obscured in scholarship that made little room for social and economic planning, and the real possibility of 'alternative endings' to French colonialism, in recent years, work here has proliferated.<sup>14</sup> This literature has shown how economic planning and oil revenue was used to promote and defend the status of French Algeria by recognising and legally, economically, and diplomatically codifying the existence of a unified Franco-Algerian 'nation,' a tangible Eurafrican entity.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps most striking, as Brown has shown, was the role of oil in Algeria's integration into the newly formed European Economic Community as a founding member, a structure which recognised Algeria as part of

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<sup>11</sup> CIA, Intelligence Memorandum Algeria: The Importance of the Oil Industry, October 1970, 4. Accessed on 19 September 2023 at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00875R001600030147-6.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.; Musso, "Oil Will Set us Free," 69-72.

<sup>13</sup> CIA, Intelligence Memorandum Algeria, 4.

<sup>14</sup> On these approaches, see particularly Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," 18-19; Megan Brown, "Drawing Algeria into Europe: shifting French policy and the Treaty of Rome (1951- 1964)," *Modern & Contemporary France* 25, no.2 (2017). doi:[10.1080/09639489.2017.1281899](https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2017.1281899) and Davis, "Restaging Mise en Valeur".

<sup>15</sup> Davis, "Restaging Mise en Valeur," 178; Brown, *The Seventh Member State*, 122, 169.

France and of Europe.<sup>16</sup> Other scholars have highlighted the importance of oil revenue and oil capital in reconstructing racialised ideologies of space and political legitimacy, particularly in reference to Algeria.<sup>17</sup>

This section focuses on the role of oil in the establishment of this interlinked Eurafrican economy. It takes Davis' model of the critical importance of the co-construction of a market economy in the defence and reformulation of a Eurafrican French Algeria at its centre. I expand and draw the analytical framework downward, incorporating oil as both an income stream but also a material. This approach highlights the important ways in which oil's material natures and physical infrastructures translated, structured, and in places undermined, imperial attempts to establish French-Algeria as a Eurafrican entity stretching across both France and Algeria.

### Fuel and Finance

Oil played a critical role in the late colonial defence and reconstruction of this interlinked, Eurafrican Franco-Algerian territory. This is often attributed primarily to the role of oil in revenue generation. In De Gaulle's own words, 'an economist will fix this [the Algerian war] for me.'<sup>18</sup> According to this stance, the integrity of the Franco-

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<sup>16</sup> Peo Hansen, and Stefan Jonsson. "Eurafrica Incognita: The Colonial Origins of the European Union." *History of the Present* 7, no. 1 (2017): 9. <https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.7.1.0001>. Megan Brown, "A Eurafrican Future: France, Algeria, and the Treaty of Rome (1951-1975)" (PhD Diss, City University of New York 2017), 26, 133; Brown, *The Seventh Member State*, 122, 169.

<sup>17</sup> Davis, "The Transformation," and "Algeria's Colonial Geography."

<sup>18</sup> Hervé Lemoine, "Paul Delouvrier et l'Algérie, comment servir et représenter l'État dans une guerre d'information ?" in *Paul Delouvrier un grand commis de l'État*, eds. Jean-Eudes Roullier and Sébastien Laurent (Paris: Presses Sciences po, 2005), 46 ; Davis, "Producing Eurafrica," 21.

Algerian territory would remain intact if the Algerian economy could be effectively 'developed,' which would create support amongst both the Algerian population and international observers. Thus, state policy was to deploy oil-generated revenue to bring Algerian standards of living in line with those of the metropole.<sup>19</sup> The famous Constantine Plan, announced in 1958, sought to increase Algerian national revenue, create 400,000 jobs, was inextricably linked to oil.<sup>20</sup> Not only was the plan announced on the same visit as a trip to the Saharan oilfields, publicly binding the viability of the Plan to the production of oil, but hydrocarbons underpinned wider industrial developments under the Plan, including the critical metallurgical and chemical complexes.<sup>21</sup> Other widely publicised programmes heavily invested oil revenues into social programmes and efforts to improve standards of living, included constructing housing and agricultural infrastructures, most notably the Organisation commune des régions sahariennes (O CRS).<sup>22</sup>

Oil revenue and the associated propaganda did not just shape urban and infrastructural developments in Algeria, but also in France. Through oil-based development programmes the state made revenue available to local governments for projects targeting the social and economic 'promotion' and 'modernisation' of Algerians in the metropole. In order to secure these funds, local politicians reframed social and building projects, presenting these as beneficial specifically to Algerians. Marseille, and the Bouches-du-Rhône region, were particularly effective in this

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<sup>19</sup> Sung-Eun Choi, *Decolonization and the French of Algeria: Bringing the Settler Colony Home* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 38-9.

<sup>20</sup> Davis, "The Transformation," 74; Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 71; Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 122.

<sup>21</sup> Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 71, Stein, *Saharan Jews*, 122.

<sup>22</sup> On the O CRS, see Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," and Sèbe, "Shadow of the Algerian War."

effort.<sup>23</sup> In the shorter term, such rhetoric nominally supported the social integration and cultural cohesion of the French and Algerian populations in support of French-Algeria, with new houses and schools in the metropole standing as a physical attestation to these ideals.<sup>24</sup> In the longer term, however, the association of social issues with the fact of being Algerian led to the emergence of 'Algerian' as a distinct racial category and as the root of the social problems.<sup>25</sup> Oil revenue, then, was used by the French state to encourage an integrated economic development in ways which shaped France as well as Algeria in the short and long term, interweaving Algerian oil into sovereignty claims, urban landscapes and racial discourses.

This role in revenue creation, although critical, was by no means the only way the French state attempted to deploy Algeria's black gold in support of its claims. In addition, oil constituted an important economic 'prize' and was thereby a critical element in the construction of a political and economic Europe that integrated Algeria. Here, the European Economic Community was persuaded, to a significant extent on the economic promise of Algerian oil, to accept a French proposal to incorporate Algeria as a fully-fledged member of the Community.<sup>26</sup> Politically, this shift was highly significant, simultaneously legitimating French sovereignty claims but also recognising Eurafrica as a tangible politico-economic entity.

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<sup>23</sup> Minayo Nasiali, *Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship, and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2016), 79-82; Melissa Byrnes, "French Like Us? Municipal Policies and North African Migrants in the Parisian Banlieues 1945-1975." (PhD Diss., Georgetown University, 2008) 139, 146.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Hansen and Jonsson. "Eurafrica Incognita," 9; Brown, "A Eurafrican Future," 26, 133; Brown, *The Seventh Member State*, 122, 169.

The French state also used oil to further reinforce its 'European' space by maligning and excluding the predatory 'Anglo-Saxon' oil cartel. State propaganda argued that energy prices in Algeria could only be held low under a uniquely Eurafrican arrangement, a protectionist nationalised structure which limited the interference and price manipulation of the internationals and benefitting from the low costs of a localised, supply chain.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, French media argued that any interference by international oil companies would disadvantage 'the poor Algerian,' who, left to the mercies of the international market would be charged 'the same price for [their] gasoline as if it came from Texas.'<sup>28</sup> Further, the material natures of Algerian crude were important here. Publicity around the planned Algiers refinery for example, explained how the specific natures of Algerian crude and gas would supply the needs of the Algerian market particularly well, and therefore removed the need for long distance, international supply route.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, as discussed in more detail in chapter two, the OCRS stressed how the material natures of Algerian crude, specially its high level of butane, was particularly well suited to the demands of a local marketplace.<sup>30</sup> Oil revenue then, was a critical diplomatic lever in making claims to a Eurafrican entity, with these claims supported by arguments rooted in the material factors of oil.

In addition, the oil discoveries had an important cultural impact, at the forefront of a propaganda campaign that attempted to attract popular support for the notion of an

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<sup>27</sup> Th Flory and H de Fontmichel, La SAF d'El-Oued, 31 March 1961, 16. 18V01807/191, TA.

<sup>28</sup> Harold J Heck, Press campaign against concession to Standard Oil, 28 January 1959, Box 4583, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>29</sup> La raffinerie d'Alger, leaflet, undated ; Constitution de la société de la raffinerie d'Alger, press conference notes, 13 December 1960, 18V01807/146, TA .

<sup>30</sup> Robert Lecourt, Letter to the Président Directeur Général, 7 June 1960, 18V01807/156, TA.

inherent unity between France and Algeria.<sup>31</sup> These claims were expressed in financial and territorial terms. Oil was presented as the foundation of an interlinked market economy and was deployed to popularise a notion of the ‘commonality’ of climatic and natural features across the Mediterranean.<sup>32</sup> In the latter case, the proliferating reporting on oil production had the secondary effect of increasingly naturalising the Saharan landscape into everyday French vernacular. Hogg and L.H. were part of the efforts to promote this messaging. The 1,000 students were deliberately selected from all across France to ‘widen the diffusion’ of these messages, and the organisers ran writing and photography competitions to increase the reporting in local and national news.<sup>33</sup>

The role of oil within this discourse went further than simply naturalising the Saharan environment, it also centralised the desert space as integral to the French national identity. This was, to some extent, an exacerbation of longer-term trends: media representations of the Sahara in the popular French press had been evolving throughout the 1950s and this space had increasingly emerged as a crucible of nationalist achievements, development and peaceful cooperation.<sup>34</sup> Oil companies, and particularly oil workers, underwrote how this rhetoric evolved in the late 1950s.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, in the same way that the atomic bomb was a ‘transcendental experience’ in

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<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Stein has described the oil discoveries and depth of political and cultural interest here as a “transcendental spectacle.” Stein, *Saharan Jews*, 121-2.

<sup>32</sup> Davis, “Restaging Mise en Valeur,” 178.

<sup>33</sup> Herzog, letter to M Goetz.

<sup>34</sup> Berny Sèbe, “Oases of imperial nostalgia: British and French desert memories after empire,” In *Decolonising Europe? : Popular Responses to the End of Empire* eds Berny Sèbe, and Matthew G. Standard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020) 160-164.

<sup>35</sup> Mounecif, “Black Gold Seekers.”

the defining of Frenchness, so too was the oil mission, embodied by these workers.<sup>36</sup> The 'black gold seeker,' was a fictionalised version of oil workers which personified the industrial and technological achievements of the Fifth Republic, its strength and modernity, and its investment in economic developmentalism and knowledge exchange.<sup>37</sup> For example, oil workers were repeatedly held up as personifying the 'thoughtful willingness and vitality of *our country*,' through the combination of intense physicality as well technical and moral grit of their work in the 'most hostile desert' on planet.<sup>38</sup> Accounts also stressed the cutting-edge nature of technological tools (including pneumatic tyres, air conditioning and seismic refraction) wielded by 'brave' French savants and technicians.<sup>39</sup> The sense of physical endurance and domination was further drawn out by the consistent equation of oilmen to soldiers and even early Christian monks in their behaviours and habits, the stress laid on the 'sacrifices' and 'courage' of these men.<sup>40</sup> The stress laid on the physical environment here shows how 'Frenchness' was being defined and formulated in the Algerian desert, in many ways a French frontier being 'conquered' through oil exploitation.

Oil, then, was key to colonial state attempts to reframe and legitimate claims to an interlinked Franco-Algerian territory. The administration used both the revenue flows emanating from oil, and the strategic value of this energy source to underpin economic plans and diplomatic manoeuvres to impose this space in new terms: as a

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<sup>36</sup> Gabrielle Hecht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II* (Cambridge: MA: MIT Press, 2009). See also Panchasi, ""No Hiroshima in Africa.""

<sup>37</sup> Mounecif, "Black Gold Seekers."

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Plessis, "Quel visage le Sahara d'hier et d'aujourd'hui aura-t-il demain?" in *Le Sahara en Questions* ed. Jean Amrouche (Paris: La NEF, 1960), 27 ; B. Rigoland, *Sahara* (Paris : Georges Lang, 1956), 33. F60 4004, ANF.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Rigoland, *Sahara*, 39.

market economy, a natural environment, and an internationally recognised geo-political boundary. At the same time, the geographies of oil brought the desert to the heart of French Eurafrica and archetypes of national identity, which were bound to and expressed by characterisations of oil workers.

### A Crude Reformulation

The interlinked Franco-Algerian market economy was particularly embodied by oil consumption. The growing ubiquity of oil and automobilism allowed Eurafrica to be directly connected to the populace as everyday, banal fact, shaping their (connected) lifestyles and consumption choices. In France, the discoveries in the Sahara were touted as heralding a significant reduction in the price of petrol, thereby increasing the public awareness and sense of dependency on the Algerian supply line. Similarly, individual fortunes were tied to the success of the industry, particularly by the vast increase in public share-holdings in the oil sector, and associated media reporting.<sup>41</sup> Celebrations and speeches were held at Marseille and Le Havre on the arrival of the first shipments of Algerian oil and gas in France for example, and pipeline openings linked to the Sahara were commemorated with memorial stamps and coins.<sup>42</sup>

The rhetorical engagement with the Algerian population as consumers of a modern energy sector was another critical means of establishing inherent trans-Mediterranean linkages. Media reporting stressed increased household electricity

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, "La production saharienne doit faire baisser l'essence," *Paris Presses L'intransigeant*, 17 May 1960 ; "La commercialisation du pétrole saharien" *Les échos*, 17 May 1960. Press cutting B-69890, CDEF.

<sup>42</sup> CFP A, Projet, 18 December 1959, 18V01807/156, TA. Minutes of the meeting between M Guitton and M Jeannessy, 18 September 1959, 18V01807/681, TA.

consumption as well as a growth in petrol fuelled transport, notably the use of cars and scooters.<sup>43</sup> This rhetoric was crucial: for colonial planners, the Algerian consumer encapsulated the material benefits of Franco-Algerian unity but also was understood as a means to insist on an inherent trans-Mediterranean identity as a shared lifestyle and culture.<sup>44</sup> Thus, in a context where economic behaviour was increasingly positioned as the real root of perceived racial differences, the shared consumption of modern products and energy was a key reference point for new models of the 'Mediterranean' man, the archetype of a shared Franco-Algerian identity.<sup>45</sup> The presentation of Algerians as oil consumers then, went beyond efforts to simply end the revolt in Algeria through the handing out of material benefits, but were fundamentally efforts to define an Algerian identity linked to a Eurafrican economic and political unity.

Consumer engagement in and experience of the Eurafrican market economy, however, was refracted by a combination of the material natures of Saharan crude and the specific protections designed to create the Franco-Algerian oil market in ways that undermined these claimed material benefits. These protections included an artificially high cost of international crude, high taxes on oil products (in order to offset high cost Saharan extraction) and a national supply chain which slowed the rate of production.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, the light nature of Algerian oil meant that the proliferating

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<sup>43</sup> Plessis, "Quel visage," 31, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Davis, "Algeria's Colonial Geography," 317-318, 324.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> DICA, Prix des carburants, 9 July 1960, 9, B-69890, CDEF; Samir Saul, "SN REPAL, CFP and "Oil-Paid-in-Francs," in *A Comparative History of National Oil Companies*, ed. Alain Beltran (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2010), 104-106.

French oil refineries reduced their concurrent cracking capabilities.<sup>47</sup> The net result was that handling heavier crudes became increasingly expensive, driving up costs, particularly in petrochemical processing.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, Algerian consumers were particularly disadvantaged by the government's refusal to grant developmental funding to the Algiers refinery. The refinery, as noted above, was in part framed as an expression of the benefits of the interlinked oil economy. However, the state refused funding specifically on the grounds that the refinery would be operating within this interlinked framework: it must be established on the same financial 'footing' as those within France itself to prevent undercutting of prices.<sup>49</sup> The result, for Algerian consumers, was an increase in energy prices, in both the short and long term.<sup>50</sup> Further, to the disappointment of the imperial administration, Algerian crude was comparatively poorly suited for use in diesel engines, for which there was a strong national demand.<sup>51</sup> Conversely, as discussed in chapter two, consumers in the Sahara, and particularly local to oil extraction increasingly benefitted from cheaper, local energy sources. These markets were in this way, actually less dependent on an interlinked energy market, at least in terms of their household and industrial energy supplies (in revenue terms, however, the picture is very different: income from the interlinked market was still critical). In all, particularly in the north, colonial gains in consumer access to hydrocarbon fuels

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Caisse d'Équipement, 13 April 1961, 3. B-69478 CDEF.

<sup>50</sup> See chapter three for a full discussion.

<sup>51</sup> Constitution de la société de la raffinerie d'Alger, press conference notes, 13 December 1960, 5-6 ; DICA letter to the Président de la CFP 5 April 1960, Crosnier, Installation d'un Topping-Plant à Hassi-Messaoud, 13 February 1957, Crosnier, Topping-Plant à Hassi-Messaoud, 13 February 1957. 18V01807/156, TA.

and power was limited.<sup>52</sup> The material natures of Algerian crude, therefore shaped how economic plans and particularly the evolution of an interlinked market economy was translated at the level of household consumers.

The evolution of the intertwined oil sector was also dependent on a network of pipelines and other infrastructures. To some extent, these networks gave abstract imaginings of the Eurafrikan space a physical shape. Perhaps most notable was the South European oil pipeline, inspired by efforts to secure the European market for Algerian oil.<sup>53</sup> It eventually became operational in 1962, taking Algerian and other crudes from Marseille into Germany and Switzerland.<sup>54</sup> The size and scale of these intertwined physical networks would have lasting impacts on the Franco-Algerian economic connections, discussed in chapter three. Furthermore, emerging oil hubs and infrastructures embodied the imperial notion of Eurafrika as fundamentally regionalised, produced along narrow 'point to point' economic networks.<sup>55</sup> The nature of the intertwined hydrocarbon networks particularly encouraged the emergence of regional poles of economic development, primarily in the Sahara as well as in the overwhelmingly 'European' cities along the north coast of Algeria. Thus, the main

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<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, these shortages enabled a new form of engagement with the rebellion as the lack of reliable householder electricity fuelled a growth in purchase of portable battery-run radio sets. These sets enabled a far wider access for FLN radio broadcasts and were difficult for colonial forces to track or control, and radio technology, hitherto a symbol of oppression was embraced by many Algerian nationalists and wider population. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (Paris: Éditions Francois Maspero, 1959, English translation, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965), 83.

<sup>53</sup> "Les transports à longue distance ont tendance à se développer," *La Correspondance Économique* (14 October 1968): 6 B-24855, CDEF. Marten Boon, "Oil Pipelines, Politics and International Business The Rotterdam Oil Port, Royal Dutch Shell and the German Hinterland, 1945-1975" (PhD Diss., Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 2014), 145.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.; Christian Verlaque, "Le transport et le raffinage du pétrole dans le bassin méditerranéen," *Méditerranée*, 7, no. 2 (1966): 101-105; <https://doi.org/10.3406/medit.1966.3421>. R. Mouchet, "Trafic du port de Marseille en 1963. Quelques aperçus," *L'information géographique* 29, no.3, (1965): 122-125. <https://doi.org/10.3406/ingeo.1965.5737>.

<sup>55</sup> Davis, "Producing Eurafrika," 93.

Algerian refineries, petrochemical and LNG plants were all situated across Oran, Bône (Annaba), Algiers and Arzew. This placement was dictated by the comparative proximity to European ports and port depth, which had to be sufficient for ever growing oil tankers.<sup>56</sup> In these areas, the presence of the oil networks contributed to some localised economic growth, fuelling construction projects, employment and industrial linkages, in iron, steel and phosphate.<sup>57</sup> Further, the prioritisation of oil within the interlinked structure overrode, sometimes very literally, other projects with higher employment potential beyond these hubs, in one example, an gas pipeline was routed through a large experimental farm.<sup>58</sup>

In contrast to the colonial embracing of a point-to-point economic and spatial model through oil, the FLN's rhetoric argued strongly against regionalised economic development. Indeed, as Davis has demonstrated, the FLN insisted on constituting economic plans within the framework of a nation-state, arguing that regional planning retained Algeria as an impoverished part of France. According to this stance, the economic development of Algeria was contingent on Algeria's constitution as a singular 'distinct economic entity'.<sup>59</sup> This spatial demarcation of economic development was deeply political, effectively defining the extent to which France's role in Algeria could be understood as 'colonial'.<sup>60</sup> The ability of the FLN to engage on these terms diplomatically was a key part of their ultimate victory.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, as discussed below, the FLN also used oil to express these geographic frameworks

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 89-90; Commission consultative de l'industrialisation, meeting minutes, 22 June 1961, B-69478, CDEF.

<sup>57</sup> Davis, "Producing Eurafrica," 94-5.

<sup>58</sup> R Mequillet, letter to the Directeur R.E., 14 August 1960, 18V01807/0156, TA.

<sup>59</sup> Davis, "Producing Eurafrica," 91-93.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

throughout the war, warning that oil exploitation could only be carried out within the context of a unified Algeria and regional alliances across North Africa.<sup>62</sup> As I will show, however, the exploitation of oil through the war and the contestation over deposits and physical infrastructure, complicated the framing of economic development within national scales and particularly fragmented the relationship between the FLN and the Saharan population.

Overall, oil was at the centre of late imperial economic planning and propaganda which sought to retain and reframe French hegemony in Algeria. In particular, the oil assemblage underwrote and exemplified key elements of the Eurafrican framework, specifically the intertwined market economy, which incorporated the Algerian energy consumer, and the commonality of the natural landscape, particularly as the Sahara evolved into a new French frontier under the tutelage of French oil workers. Further, these spatial and political models took physical forms in urban landscapes and the emergent pipeline and physical networks of oil across both France and Algeria. On the other hand, intertwined oil production, because of the natures of the oil assemblage was not a straightforward mechanism for making sovereignty claims, in particular, the evolution of regionalised economies, which were expressed by and mapped onto oil was leveraged highly effectively by Algerian nationalists through the war, to which I now turn.

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, "The Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic Repudiates Saharan Oil Pacts made with France by Foreign Concerns," *Free Algeria*, 28 January 1959. Press cutting, COLL00201, ISSH.

## A Resource War? Oil in the War of Independence

In September 1961, regional military and political leaders in the Sahara, together with the directors of invited oil companies reviewed the defence of the Saharan oil infrastructures. In particular, they discussed a new law which would introduce travel and working permits in the Sahara, specifically intended to protect oil sites against 'infiltration' from 'troubled elements' coming from the north. Oil companies were concerned about the potential impacts of the law on their French employees, but as Colonel Lefort explained, 'Muslims will be primarily impacted, but we cannot put that in the law as it could give the impression of racism.' At the same meeting, the companies argued that they required increased military presence and a greater supply of arms to assure their protection and the surveillance of their existing northern workforce.<sup>63</sup>

The incident is indicative of the three key themes to be explored in this section. First, it is clear that the evolving oil infrastructures were shaping the struggle over Algerian territory. The urgency in the oil company's request for support reflects their perception of the threat to the oil extraction sites as high. Indeed, not only were oil deposits isolated from colonial political and military centres, but they had also been assigned the special status of sites of 'national significance' by the imperial government.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, and relatedly, the active role of the oil companies in shaping military and political strategy is clear, in this case, their inputs into the new laws and

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<sup>63</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the état-major mixte of the Département des Oasis and representatives of the primary oil companies, 25 September 1961, 11-12, 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the état-major mixte of the Département des Oasis and representatives of the primary oil companies, 6 February 1961, 18V01807/297, TA.

the draw on military resources.<sup>65</sup> And thirdly, the distinction between northern and southern Algerians by the oil companies and military leaders is critical. I will argue here that the efforts to protect the oil infrastructures reflected but also actively imposed a broader colonial policy that sought to distinguish between the north and south of Algeria.<sup>66</sup>

In all, this section argues that the material natures and physical infrastructures of oil shaped the diplomatic and military conflict in the late years of imperial rule. The role of oil revenue in wartime diplomacy has attracted a more substantial historiography, which has particularly focused on imperial attempts to secure international partnerships and support for its role in Algeria.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, the mapping of colonial violence and control attached to oil sites and infrastructures specifically has been less explored, partly due to the lower levels of violence in the Sahara. Focusing on oil then, shifts historians' gaze toward often the ignored geographies of violence and warfare, far beyond the barricades of the Battle of Algiers, which has tended to dominate this historiography.<sup>68</sup>

### The Materiality of Oil in Diplomacy

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<sup>65</sup> The war would see a number of tussles between the companies and military commanders over the stocks of weapons provided to them and the extent of military support. In many cases, the companies' appeals saw these decisions overruled See discussion below and P Germes, Note pour le directeur général de la CFP (A), 3 July 1959, D Chevière, Compte-rendu sur les patrouilles de sécurité, 18 May 1961; Minutes of the meeting of the état-major mixte 25 September 1961, 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>66</sup> For more on this policy see chapter two.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Sèbe, "Shadow of the Algerian War," 314-6.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Martin Alexander & John F. V. Keiger, "France and the Algerian War: strategy, operations and diplomacy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 25:2 (2002). DOI: [10.1080/01402390412331302635](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390412331302635).

The role of diplomacy in the war and ultimately in securing Algerian independence has been a key focus of historians over the last twenty years. Particularly emblematic of this approach is Matthew Connolly's argument that located the FLN's struggles as a 'diplomatic revolution,' exploiting Cold War rivalries to isolate France on a world stage and ultimately secure victory.<sup>69</sup> More recently, there has been a proliferating interest in the French deployment of the Eurafrica ideal to secure international support, most emblematically, the EEC.<sup>70</sup> However, as Cantoni has illustrated, the role of oil, and particularly the geostrategic knowledge bound within the sector in defining the diplomatic front, has been widely ignored.<sup>71</sup> In this section, I will outline the specific role of oil in this diplomacy. I argue that Algerian hydrocarbons shaped both the operation and impacts of imperial and nationalist diplomacy throughout the war in the three ways: firstly, in its physical infrastructures, secondly in its natural geographies, and finally in its technical requirements.

Firstly, oil as an infrastructural network was a critical means through which French diplomacy sought to impose Eurafrica as an economic and geographic space in reality. Primarily, oil has been viewed simply as a motivational 'pull' factor in French diplomatic efforts. Indeed, the economic promise of a combined unit of oil production was a key point of leverage with potential allies and trading partners.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the oil sector provided a particularly pliable diplomatic model, a point on which numerous different positions could coalesce. International investment in oil did not explicitly

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<sup>69</sup> Matthew Connolly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> See particularly Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*.

<sup>71</sup> Cantoni, "The Enemy," 34-5.

<sup>72</sup> Hansen and Jonsson. "Eurafrica Incognita," 9.

equate to political support of a French Algeria, and instead could be couched in developmental terms.<sup>73</sup> However, such investment covertly but concretely entrenched a perpetuating link between the French and Algerian economies.

The relationship between the oil sector and the European Economic Community (EEC) is perhaps the clearest example of these mechanisms. First because, at French insistence, in 1957, Algeria had been included within the EEC as a *European* territory.<sup>74</sup> The Algerian status and colonial association within the Common Market treaty owed themselves to a significant extent to the oil discoveries and the potential EEC partners saw here. As the German Chancellor explained on why the 'colonial association' of Franco-Algeria should be integrated into the terms of the treaty, 'France possesses a latent wealth, just think of the Sahara with its oil and uranium deposits.'<sup>75</sup> The inclusion of Algeria within the EEC as part of France not only legitimated French claims to the Algerian territory, but also acknowledged that the boundaries and borders of 'Europe' stretched into Africa.<sup>76</sup>

The EEC went even further when it changed its policy on economic aid to Algerian ventures, specifically because of the oil discoveries. Because the discoveries shifted the picture of tariff regulations (possible reductions or exemptions on oil products now became key), the EEC held that excluding Algeria from developmental funding was no longer justified.<sup>77</sup> Up until this point, the EEC held a blanket ban on all

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<sup>73</sup> Brown, "A Eurafrikan Future," 153-4.

<sup>74</sup> Brown, *The Seventh Member State*.

<sup>75</sup> Kabinettsitzung, 15 February 1957, Die Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung, Volume 10, 1957 (2000), 144. Cited in Hansen and Jonsson. "Eurafrika Incognita," 9.

<sup>76</sup> Brown, "A Eurafrikan Future," 26, 133.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 153-4.

economic aid to any development project in Algeria because EEC allies feared that through such mechanisms they themselves could be directly funding the war.<sup>78</sup> In the short term, allowing monetary flows into Algeria through and because of this perceived emergent Eurafrican oil sector, this policy effectively acknowledged that the oil discoveries fundamentally shifted the basis of the French role in Algeria. This was a de facto acceptance of the primacy of economic developmentalism over the establishment of political sovereignty and tacitly accepted that a combined oil sector was in the best interests of France, Algeria, and the EEC itself.

The impacts of the integration of Algeria into the EEC were deeply significant in the longer term. Certainly, on a political level there is a strong argument that the impacts of the EEC boundaries were relatively limited, even that the Saharan oil industry failed to 'bring Europe closer to Africa' as had been the imperial hope.<sup>79</sup> Not only did a European energy policy ultimately fail to emerge, but Algerian oil did not benefit from tax free movements across the EEC as these were phased in over time.<sup>80</sup> However, these facts were not known when the Treaty of Rome was signed. On the contrary, there were strong expectations that Algeria (and France) would benefit from both.<sup>81</sup> And it was these expectations that drove the construction of the physical networks of oil. Infrastructures like the South European pipeline, as I show in chapter three, were grounded in these aspirations, and secured France, and particularly Marseille, as a European oil transit node in the longer term.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Caruso and Geneve, "Trade and History," 20; Marta Musso, "Petrolio e politica nella decolonizzazione algerina: verso un network energetico europeo?" *Cahiers d'études italiennes* 22 (2016): 155. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cei.2925>.

<sup>80</sup> Caruso and Geneve, "Trade and History," 20.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, the colonial regime made particularly effective use of oil infrastructures to destabilise Algerian partnerships and material support for the war effort from North African neighbours. For example, in 1958, the French government signed an agreement with the Tunisian administration to evacuate Algerian oil out through the eastern border of Algeria, through Tunisia and north to the Skhira port, and thence shipped to France. The impacts were hugely significant. Indeed, the FLN viewed the agreement as amounting to Tunisian military action against Algeria, because it so damaged efforts to sabotage French oil installations.<sup>82</sup> The pipeline prompted a diplomatic crisis, which included the FLN actively working against the Tunisian President Bourguiba, hitherto a nationalist ally, and Bourguiba arresting ALN troops and leaders on Tunisian territory and blocking the passage of military supplies.<sup>83</sup>

The effects of the pipeline construction were threefold. First, the French government was able to access, transport, and use Algerian oil in spite of the war.<sup>84</sup> Secondly, this success was a critical expression of French power, in the midst of negotiations on Saharan sovereignty. French domination was clearly expressed when Algerian nationalists ultimately accepted that Bourguiba was simply unable to stand against the French, whilst the control wielded by the French was used as an 'invitation' to international partners to collaborate in French-led exploitation of Saharan

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<sup>82</sup> Sarah Adjel-Debbich, "La crise de l'oléoduc Edjeleh-Gabès : Au cœur des enjeux de souveraineté du Maghreb (1954-1962)," *Varia* 18 (2018): 129-148, online version, unpaginated.  
<https://doi.org/10.4000/anneemaghreb.3647>.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.; Lamine, Telegram to all FLN foreign offices, 17 July 1959, DZ/AN/2G1/3/1/65, ANA.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

resources.<sup>85</sup> Finally, the pipeline nonetheless laid an important foundation in the use of oil infrastructures in the anti-imperialist struggle in North Africa. In July 1961, Bourguiba used the port and pipeline to take 'French oil hostage' as Tunisia and France battled over the Bizerte naval base.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Bourguiba's initial overtures to the FLN regarding the pipeline invoked an approach that would be at the foundation of the FLN's oil diplomacy in the 1970s: exploiting the comparatively slow evolution of oil networks against the faster transition of political agreements.<sup>87</sup> In this case, Bourguiba argued that the time required to build the pipeline would outlast the war itself, thereby attempting to disentangle Tunisia as military opponent.<sup>88</sup>

The geographies of oil also shaped the diplomatic front for the Algerian nationalists. For the FLN, these geographies of oil had a significant effect on its diplomatic mission and its presentation of a national political space and identity. On the one hand, the platform provided by this field of oil diplomacy was a critical means through which the FLN framed the notion of an independent Algerian *nation* on an international stage. For example, the oil discoveries gave the FLN a seat at the first Arab Petroleum Conference in 1959. This conference, critical for a number of reasons, not least the latter founding of OPEC, promoted oil as a diplomatic issue for producing countries and explicitly sought to address and form 'intra Arab' issues and ties.<sup>89</sup> At the conference, the FLN representatives made a forceful case for Algerian

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<sup>85</sup> Adjel-Debbich, "La crise"; Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*; Belaïd Abdesselam, *Chroniques et réflexions inédites*, (Boudouaou: Dar Khettab, 2017); Sid Ahmed Ghazali, *Question d'État*, (Algiers: éditions Casbah, 2009).

<sup>86</sup> Adjel-Debbich, "La crise."

<sup>87</sup> See chapter four for full discussion of this approach.

<sup>88</sup> Adjel-Debbich, "La crise."

<sup>89</sup> "L'Algérie au 3ème Congrès International de la Fédération des Travailleurs du Pétrole à Amsterdam, » *L'Ouvrier Algérien* 16, (May 1960): 7. COLL0328 63, ISSH. Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of the Algerian Government. speech to the first Arab Petroleum Conference, 7 May 1959, FO 371/138613, NA.

sovereignty over the Saharan territory. They succeeded in securing allies here as the group passed a resolution supporting Algerian independence.<sup>90</sup> The Algerian contingent expounded on the case for a north African alliance, making a speech which included a vigorous denial of French claims to Saharan sovereignty. Here, Algerian representatives argued strongly for the self-determination of the local people, who, for the imperial regime, were merely 'ghosts in the mirage of the desert.'<sup>91</sup> In this way, the FLN's approach to oil diplomacy expressed both the existence of an Algerian Arab nation and population but also interwove Algerian nationalism into pan-Arabism.<sup>92</sup>

As noted above, moreover, a central plank in the FLN's diplomacy broadly was to insist on economic development within a national framework.<sup>93</sup> This framing, was, to a certain extent, effectuated through oil in practice. For example, in their work with foreign oil companies, the FLN insisted that capital investment in Algerian oil could only happen 'within the framework of an independent Algeria and a *united north Africa*.'<sup>94</sup> At the same time, the FLN was forming active partnerships with these same companies in pursuit of national liberation. Numerous American companies, including Mobil, Sinclair as well as Aramco were also rumoured to be paying concession fees to the FLN.<sup>95</sup> Oil diplomacy thus created and solidified practical partnerships which

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<sup>90</sup> Representative of the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of the Algerian Government, speech.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>92</sup> On the role and meanings of pan-Arabism see Stewart Reiser, "Pan-Arabism Revisited," *Middle East Journal* 37, no. 2 (Spring, 1983): 218-233. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4326563>; William Winter, "Theory and Politics of African Decolonization," *The Trinity Papers* 69 (2018) <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1068&context=trinitypapers>; Dietrich, *Oil Revolution*.

<sup>93</sup> Davis, "Producing Eurafrica," 91-93.

<sup>94</sup> "The Provisional Government"

<sup>95</sup> Cantoni, "The Enemy," 48-9.

sought to bring about an Algerian nation. On this stage, starkly against imperial claims to Eurafrican unities, the FLN defined Algeria as a nation that was ethnically, economically, and geographically Arab and north African.

At the same time, however, the natural geographies of oil were a point on which the nationalist vision fractured. The integration of the oil issue into diplomatic efforts like the Petroleum Congress as an 'Arab' concern served to create a distance between those who did not identify with the Arab elements of FLN nationalism, particularly in the Sahara, and the control of national resources.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, as I will discuss in chapter two, some Saharan groups saw their economic and political future as better secured by an ongoing relationship with France, particularly because of the colonial deployment of oil revenue in the region.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, the oil discoveries sparked border disputes across the Saharan region, as ownership and transport of these resources were managed and contended. National boundaries with Tunisia and Libya were solidified as a result of the oil discoveries, a further removal of Saharan populations, who relied on porous borders, from the potential economic benefits of oil wealth.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Winter, "Theory and Politics," 4-5; Jonathan N.C. Hill, "Identity and instability in postcolonial Algeria," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 11:1(2016). DOI: [10.1080/13629380500409735](https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380500409735); International Crisis Group, "Algeria's South: Trouble's Bellweather," 21 November 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/algeria/algeria-s-south-trouble-s-bellwether>

<sup>97</sup> See full discussion in chapter two.

<sup>98</sup> Adjel-Debbich, "La crise"; Maria Romo-Navarrete, "Un face-à-face franco-libyen: du Fezzan français à la ratification du traité d'amitié (1951-1957)," *Outre-mers* 89, no. 336-337 (2002): 381 DOI: [10.3406/outre.2002.3997](https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.2002.3997); Hélène Claudot-Hawad, "A Nomadic Fight against Immobility : the Tuareg in the Modern State," in *Nomadic Societies in The Middle East and North Africa: Entering the 21st Century* ed. Dawn Chatty (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 664. Michel Camau and Vincent Geisser, *Habib Bourguiba: la trace et l'héritage* (Paris: Khartala. 2004), 458-9; Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, 278.

For the imperial regime, the geographies of oil inspired an infamous attempt to divide the north and south of Algeria. Whilst this project is fully discussed in chapter two, on the diplomatic front, it is important to note that the state was engaged in legitimising a continued French influence in the Sahara based on a strong level of local ‘support’ as well as the ‘achievements’ of French-led developmental ‘progress’ here.<sup>99</sup> Narratives around the wealth and modernity of the oil sector were critical. French propaganda and diplomatic reporting stressed the achievements of the OCRS and its success in raising both agricultural production and standards of living in the Sahara.<sup>100</sup> This rhetoric was so effective, that one US minister commented on his feeling of ‘sadness’ as political independence approached, fearing that the ‘really effective’ work of the OCRS in developing infrastructure and agriculture could be ‘lost.’<sup>101</sup>

Furthermore, whilst the region was widely depicted as removed from active military conflict, tropes of military victory and conquest were widely used, but limited instead to a technological ‘battle’ against the ‘elements,’ a battle carried specifically by the oil industry.<sup>102</sup> Here, as noted above, the arrival of the oil sector as cutting edge, industrial production, constituted a ‘victory’ over the unforgiving desert terrain and social and economic challenges of the region.<sup>103</sup> Crucially, this conflict had no human or state ‘enemy.’ Instead, the conflict was rhetorically limited to the natural world and challenging physical environment of the desert itself.<sup>104</sup> This then further legitimised

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<sup>99</sup> This was particularly the case in the US, see, Sèbe, “Shadow of the Algerian War,” 314.

<sup>100</sup> Sèbe, “Shadow of the Algerian War,” 315.

<sup>101</sup> Lyon, US embassy in Paris to Department of State, 27 February 1962, Box 2571, RG 84, NARA, cited in Sèbe, “Shadow of the Algerian War,” 315.

<sup>102</sup> Sèbe, “Shadow of the Algerian War,” 315-6 ; Daniel Strasser, *Réalités et promesses sahariennes* (Paris: Encyclopédie d’Outre Mer, 1956), 67; Plessis, “Quel visage,” 26-7.

<sup>103</sup> Strasser, *Réalités*, 67; Plessis, “Quel visage,” 26-7.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

the Saharan border as an inherent climatic boundary between north and south whilst continuing to localise the Saharan region as more closely enveloped with the 'national' space of French-Algeria.

Finally, the political influence of technical knowledge, specifically relating to oil, shaped the war, introducing new actors and diplomatic channels. These were particularly well exploited by the FLN as well as international oil companies looking to secure their own interests in the Sahara. To a significant extent, the ability to leverage technical knowledge was rooted in the material natures and natural geographies of Saharan crude. Prospecting in the desert was technically complex, expensive, and, critically, reliant on international suppliers for equipment, expertise, and training. This was primarily because Saharan deposits were located comparatively deep underground. Accurate prospecting was therefore reliant on a new technique: seismic refraction.<sup>105</sup> For much of the necessary equipment, including magnetic recording for seismograms, analogue computers to process seismic data, small transport planes and portable recording equipment, French oil companies were dependent on US companies, both for training and supply.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, the US monopoly on this market was so significant that the US bank, Chase, strongly believed that the threat of blocking prospecting and drilling material would force the French government to cede to their demands to allow Standard Oil group an interest in the Sahara.<sup>107</sup> Further, the dependence on US technological knowledge and equipment was so significant that it was underwritten by a 'concession for training'

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<sup>105</sup> Cantoni, "The Enemy," 37.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 45.

scheme (albeit the concessions granted were in mainland France rather than Algeria).<sup>108</sup>

As the expense and technical requirements of Algerian production opened the door to international companies, the FLN was able to make very effective use of these actors to establish its own political legitimacy and, allegedly, to gain material support. This was despite initial concerns that France would be able to attract powerful support, both political and tactical, for its claims to the Sahara from the oil cartel.<sup>109</sup> However, in an effort to protect their interests in the Sahara in the long term, many internationals negotiated terms for oil concessions and paid concession fees to the FLN, thereby providing indirect financial support to their cause.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, these partnerships enabled the FLN to operate a form of political and economic authority: to a certain extent, in recognising and supporting their claims to national natural resources, oil companies recognised the FLN as a state level actor with a sovereign control of resources and territory.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, these partnerships illustrated the successful operation of mutually beneficial, and potentially long term business partnerships with the FLN. This was a particularly important as French diplomats sought to attract US support by attempting to frame the war as a communist/capitalism battleground.<sup>112</sup> As actors in place 'on the ground,' moreover, international oil companies added weight to the FLN's diplomatic appeal and political

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>109</sup> Note spéciale concernant l'accord passé entre le gouvernement Française et compagnies internationales du pétrole pour l'exploitation du Sahara Algerian, 22 May 1961, DN/AN/2GQ/7/2/17, ANA.

<sup>110</sup> Cantoni, "The Enemy," 35, 48-9.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States and the Algerian War* (London: University of California Press, 2001), William D. Irvine. "Review of Wall, Irwin M., *France, the United States and the Algerian War*." H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. May 2002. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6292>

claims by reporting to home governments on media blackouts and war atrocities, thereby delegitimising France's claims to the apolitical and developmental Sahara.<sup>113</sup>

The impacts of the oil companies' technical knowledge most clearly comes to fore in the case of ENI, the Italian oil company. ENI recognised that an Algerian supply line could be critical to its own interests and deliberately set out to manoeuvre itself as an FLN ally in the long term.<sup>114</sup> ENI's efforts included arranging for the training and education of Algerian oil technicians in Italy, funding anti French-Algeria publications, providing direct financial support to the FLN and pressing the Italian government to also provide financial support.<sup>115</sup> In fact, ENI went so far as to have its own 'quasi diplomatic' structure including an ENI 'ambassador' working with the GPRA on Algeria's energy future.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps most critically, ENI provided information and knowledge about the Saharan oil reserves that would prove definitive to the terms of the Evian Accords. The extensive and unanticipated knowledge of Algerian delegates about the oil sector gave the Algerian negotiators a crucial advantage.<sup>117</sup> This evidence seems to have been gathered on a 1960 visit to the Algerian oil and gas fields, the result of technical links and partnerships between French and Italian geophysical companies.<sup>118</sup> And it was at ENI's suggestion that a Franco-Algerian agency was formed to manage the hydrocarbon sector after independence. This agency, the *Organisme Technique*, was an effort to safeguard Algerian interests in the short term: I discuss below how this evolved and influenced the oil sector in

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<sup>113</sup> Cootes, telegram 204 to Matt Loram, 10 January 1958. Box 13, RG 84, NARA.

<sup>114</sup> Cantoni, "The Enemy," 51.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 51-2, Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 80-1.

<sup>118</sup> Cantoni, "The Enemy," 51-2.

practice. The central point here, however, is that through these international partnerships the FLN was able to impose itself, at least to some extent, on the terms of the accords.<sup>119</sup>

In all, the material natures and physical networks of the Algerian oil reserves powerfully shaped the diplomatic field during the war of independence. International and particularly European demand for oil was deployed as a highly effective motivational lever in attracting diplomatic support for French claims to the Algerian territory. Equally important, and often overlooked, however, were the emergent physical networks of oil. The notion of a Franco-Algerian oil market was translated into pipelines and shipping routes which expressed and entrenched ongoing French economic influence in Algeria. Further, oil infrastructures were effectively deployed to undermine the material and diplomatic support provided to the FLN. The technical requirements of oil extraction in the desert meanwhile, enabled the FLN to operate new channels of diplomacy through international oil companies, gaining recognition of its political legitimacy, as well as providing important leverage at the Evian negotiations.

### The Geographies of Violence and Control: Pipelines and Oil Towns

The discovery of oil and the rapid construction of industry and infrastructure around these deposits also reshaped the experience and strategising of the military conflict and forms of political violence. Scholarship has clearly demonstrated how the oil

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 53-4; Musso, “Oil Will Set Us Free,” 80-1. On the longer-term impacts of this joint structure see discussion in chapters three and four.

discoveries inspired, albeit indirectly, critical shifts in tactics by both the colonial government and the FLN. This includes, most emblematically, the FLN's opening of the 'Saharan front' in 1956. The new front was a response to the oil-inspired efforts to recognise a distinct hegemony in the south and claim the region's resources.<sup>120</sup> On the French side, as oil greed motivated attempts to retain the Saharan territories, peace negotiations stalled and failed, extending the demands on military combatants.<sup>121</sup> In both areas of historiography, the practical role of oil remains relatively abstract and indirect, obscured by the comparatively lower level of violence experienced in the south.<sup>122</sup>

In this section, however, I show more precisely how oil shaped the violent struggle for sovereignty in Algeria. I explore in particular the evolution of the Sahara, as well as smaller towns and rural areas intersecting with oil infrastructures in the north, as a theatres of conflict. Instead of overlooking these spaces as comparatively unimportant and effectively subdued due to the challenges of guerrilla warfare over large distances and effective coercion, I show how the material logics of oil shaped and enabled other forms of social, economic, and political violence.<sup>123</sup> In addition, I highlight the ways in which the defence of the oil installation were critical in the recognition of the Saharan 'border.'

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<sup>120</sup> Jacques Frémeaux, "The Sahara and the Algerian War," in *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954–62* eds Martin S Alexander, Martin, Evans, John F.V. Keiger (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 80–1; Jacques Frémeaux, *Le Sahara et la France* (Paris: Editions Soteca 2010), 243; Cantoni, "The Enemy," 46.

<sup>121</sup> Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 62-63; Malti, *Histoire secrète*, 9.

<sup>122</sup> Frémeaux, "The Sahara," 76-77.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. For a longer term history of colonial violence in the Sahara see Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). On material logics, see Dannreuther, "Oil, materiality and International Relations."

In the Sahara and across to the coast, oil networks, because of both their location (concentrated in the desert or rural areas) and fixed network requirements (notably pipelines), resituated the war effort. They imposed a crucial weakness in an otherwise overwhelming French advantage in these areas: that of aerial surveillance over wide areas.<sup>124</sup> Oil installations, however, offered valuable targets vulnerable to attack by small groups covering short distances, and the French administration was deeply concerned that the FLN would capitalise.<sup>125</sup> And indeed, the FLN did target the oil centres and networks. These efforts included attacks against road convoys and trains carrying oil, and a successful attack on a pipeline.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, oil sites and workers were directly targeted by the FLN in efforts to raise funds for its campaign. Undercover FLN agents and their affiliates managed to successfully infiltrate the camps on several occasions and extorted money from both French and local employees working on the sites.<sup>127</sup>

This strategic exposure and targeting of the oil installations dictated a new approach for the French administration: enhanced ground defence of oil installations. This had two key impacts on the war.

First, the targeted approach to military defence, shaped the ways in which local populations interacted with the imperial authorities and local spaces, an approach shaped in turn by the material logics and natural geographies of oil, as these were

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<sup>124</sup> Short minutes of the meeting of the Etat-Major de la Défense Nationale, 21 September 1959, 2. 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Cantoni, "The Enemy," 46.

<sup>127</sup> Note pour Monsieur le directeur général de CFP A, 26 May 1959 and P Crosnier, letter to the directeur général, 28 November 1957, 18V01807/297, TA.

routed from the Saharan deposits to the oil ports of the north.<sup>128</sup> In the first instance, this meant the construction of a rigid military cordon. The so-called Bougie pipeline, for example, was defended up to a distance of 20km away on either side, and was assigned its own specialist units, including nine infantry battalions for its construction, specialist observation planes and reserve units.<sup>129</sup> During its construction phase, material deliveries by trucks required military escorts, indeed, the new roads constructed for this travel themselves needed assigned engineering battalions.<sup>130</sup>

This routing of the Bougie pipeline, moreover, is further indicative of how oil infrastructures directly shaped forms of social and political violence. The pipeline's routing passed through several populated areas. Colonel Buis, the commander in charge of the area, argued forcefully for the maximum protection of pipeline, invoking its "national" and even "international" importance and the "disproportionate propaganda value" of potential FLN destruction.<sup>131</sup> In practice, this protection meant the enforced relocation of 'poorer, smaller' populations, like El Hamra and Djedida. Whether Buis himself was entirely persuaded of this argument, given his prior conviction that a relocation of the area was required, and that relocation more broadly was key means for to achieve French victory, the pipeline construction was clearly decisive in the approval and enactment of the relocation.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> P Germes, Tracé du Pipe Hassi-Messaoud-Bougie, 26 February 1958. 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>129</sup> Presidents of CFP A and SN REPAL, letter to the Délégué Général, 20 March 1959; Minutes of the meeting of Secretariat Permanent de la Défense Nationale, 16 January 1959; Minutes of the meeting of Secretariat Permanent de la Défense Nationale, 2 September 1958. 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Dorothée Myriam Kellou, "A Microhistory of the Forced Resettlement of the Algerian Muslim Population During the Algerian War of Independence" (1954-1962): Mansourah, Kabylia," (Masters Diss., Georgetown University, 2012), 45-47.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 46.

For these populations these tactics, shaped by the oil networks, imposed the conflict into their lives through social upheaval and economic loss. Their resettlement was swift, unexpected and violent, described by those who went through it as an ‘attack’ as they were loaded in French army trucks or walked under military escort, whilst houses and crops were burnt behind them.<sup>133</sup> Residents of Ouled Abbas, a neighbouring hamlet, were informed that they could choose: opt for resettlement or otherwise became part of a new harki defence unit, which would have set them in opposition to the FLN.<sup>134</sup> The resettlement, moreover, did not extend to the provision of new houses, evacuated groups struggled to find some form of temporary accommodation. Many had to rely on support from the FLN to secure places to stay: deeply ironic given that the resettlement had nominally been in the name of protection from the FLN.<sup>135</sup>

‘Rich and populous’ areas, such as Djebel Mansourrah did not escape new forms of imperial violence and control shaped by the oil networks. Whilst they were not resettled, these villages were instead targeted for co-option in order to assure the pipeline’s protection, with new harkas and sections administratives spécialisées (SAS) set up here.<sup>136</sup> The SAS conducted a census of the population, photographed everyone living in the area and issued identity cards. Other controls included a requirement for SAS approval on travel as well as permits for the purchase of some

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 52-3.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>136</sup> Colonel Buis, note to M. Jordan, February 1959, 3-5, 18V01807/297, TA. Martin Evans, “Reprisal Violence and the *Harkis* in French Algeria, 1962,” *The International History Review* 39, no.1 (2017): 104. DOI: [10.1080/07075332.2016.1141307](https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2016.1141307).

consumer items, including radio parts.<sup>137</sup> These measures were accompanied by new schools, medical centres, and cultural activities, like cinemas, deemed 'beneficial' to the imposition of 'modernity.'<sup>138</sup> As such, colonial control and coercion over these areas, reaching into everyday lives, was vastly expanded. In these ways, the presence and layout of oil networks shaped direct interactions with sovereignty claims in Algeria and highlights how wartime experiences were stratified according to locality, population density and socio-economic class.

Secondly, the directed focus on oil installations gave both oil companies and oil workers an active role in the conflict. This was critical in imposing an uneven 'Saharan frontier' mapped onto the oil reserves. As sites of national interest, oil camps were given significant military defence, and oil companies were given an important tactical role in this defence, in liaison with civilian and military authorities. This included a regular seat at military leaders' meetings, indeed, military authorities explored creating an office of national defense specifically charged with the liaison between the army and oil companies.<sup>139</sup> Companies also provided funding directly to regional military efforts.<sup>140</sup> On the main residential and extracting sites, oil companies invested highly in their defence: These protections therefore included the employ of defensive technologies to defend infrastructures as well as frequently running defensive drills, including mock FLN infiltrations.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Kellou, "A Microhistory," 77, 97.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid 107, 112-3, 116.

<sup>139</sup> Compte-Rendu of conference held at BRP Algiers, between General Mirambeau, General Commandant Interarmées au Sahara to representatives of the oil companies on the conditions of security in the Sahara, 22 May 1959, 4, 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>140</sup> Paul Delouvrier, letter to the directeur général of SOPEG, 27 June 1959, 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>141</sup> P. Germes, note pour monsieur le directeur général, 29 December, 1959, 18V01807/297, TA.

In these roles, oil companies were integral to the imposition of the Saharan border as a military and political reality. As noted above, this included their role in the drafting and passing of new border control laws which limited the access of northern Algerians to the Sahara.<sup>142</sup> The law was a state initiative, as the administration was so concerned about the vulnerability of oil sites to the 'dangerous' and 'extremist' northern Algerians that they sought to entirely 'cut off' access to the Saharan region.<sup>143</sup> However, companies were consulted on these laws and provided critical amendments, including adding new clauses to minimise the impacts and restrictions on French staff.<sup>144</sup> Further, oil companies were vocal advocates for additional controls in order to impose these laws. This included putting pressure on military authorities for more weaponry as well as new forms of identification for their employees, and the establishment of local employment offices with expanded powers to monitor and authorise the entry of new arrivals.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, travel authorisation was contingent on an individual holding a contract of employment, and oil companies, the major employer in the region, actively limited their employment of northern Algerians.<sup>146</sup> Thus, the Saharan 'border' was justified and imposed by the oil sector, its controls and monitoring tied specifically to the material particularities of the oil nodes.

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<sup>142</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the état-major mixte of the Département des Oasis and representatives of the primary oil companies, 25 September 1961; F Delavesne to the Minister of the Sahara, Sécurité des pétroliers au Sahara, 5 December 1957. 18V01807/297, TA; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 12; Gemma Jennings, "A New Frontier? Oil, Labour and Contested Sovereignty in the Algerian Sahara, 1956-62," 2-3, presented at Midlands 4 Cities Digital Research Festival, online, 13 July 2020.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

Oil companies and their employees further represented and imposed the north-south division in their constitution in defensive military units. Oil companies were again actively involved in the drafting of the 1956 law and its 1958 amendments which established these units. Initially limited specifically the Sahara south of the oil production line, the units were drawn from French oil sector employees on all oil camps of over 30 inhabitants, who were drilled, trained and armed.<sup>147</sup> These units defended not only the oil settlements, but also as the director of one company recalled, were to 'contribute with our weapons to the French territorial defence.'<sup>148</sup> In this way, oil company employees operated as a de facto infantry with a specifically Saharan territorial scope.<sup>149</sup>

For Saharan oil workers, living on these sites and contributing in these ways to the war effort, the sense of present and dangerous conflict was pervasive and paramount to their daily working experiences. They were alternatively victims of violence, extortion, and labour control as well as de facto soldiers. Indeed, diplomatic reporting stresses the deep sense of uncertainty and fear through the camps, particularly as independence approached, citing a belief that there would be an 'effusion of blood' on the camps.<sup>150</sup> Elements of the FLN and OAS capitalised on the unease, spreading

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<sup>147</sup> Modifications qu'il conviendrait d'apporter à l'instruction sécurité no.580.053/EM.10/1/MOB du 17.1.56; Note 8/836 EM/10/1 de la 10ème Région Militaire, 17 September 1956, 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>148</sup> Procès-Verbal de la réunion tenue à Ouargla, entre les représentants des principales compagnies pétrolières et l'état-major mixte de la Z.E.S., 19 June 1962, 18V01807/297, TA ; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 13.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> L Carcassés, Préfet des oasis synthèse mensuelle des renseignements, 13 March 1962; Marcel Turon, Synthèse mensuelle des renseignements, 1 December 1961. AG/5(1)/1824, ANF. Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 13; Préfecture of the Oasis, Synthèse Mensuelle des Renseignements, 13 March 1962. AG/5(1)/1824, ANF.

rumours of job losses and upcoming violence, and stoking racial tensions in the camps.<sup>151</sup> That is not to say that oil sector workers should be conceived of only as passive victims to the political and military machinations of states and companies. French oil workers particularly leveraged their own strategic position to shape how they themselves experienced and impacted on the conflict. For example, Saharan oil sites saw the emergence of localised union chapters from 1961 onwards to proactively engage with the uncertainty over their own futures and violence, campaigning for the relocation of families on the oil sites (see discussion below) as well as for protections of French jobs on the sites and job security with their own employers.<sup>152</sup> These workers then, are emblematic of the targeted and tangible forms that the violence of war took in the Sahara, mapped onto and shaped by the oil assemblage.

Whilst the Saharan border emerged through and was justified by oil, the uneven patterns of colonial controls and military operations in the region, shaped around oil deposits and infrastructures, undermined the defence of the Saharan region beyond the oil nodes. This is particularly illustrated in the ability of oil company leaders to successfully oppose redistribution of military resources away from their sites. This included the contests around the reduction in flyovers over oil towns, which companies insisted was a crucial deterrent against potential FLN attack.<sup>153</sup> In other incidents, oil companies successfully appealed for greater supplies of arms and

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Motion to the direction of CFP A from the committee of the personnel of the south, 19 February 1962. 18V01807/297, TA; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 11.

<sup>153</sup> Germes, Note; Chevrère, Compte-rendu; Minutes of the état-major mixte 25 September 1961.

military presence on their sites.<sup>154</sup> It is of note that the company's argument for additional support was comparatively weak, hinging on a potential but inactive threat.<sup>155</sup> Thus, whilst physical threat was perhaps minimal, the political influence of oil companies, combined with the political and psychological importance of damage to the oil infrastructures directly shaped military operations around the oil map, These patterns were repeated and even leveraged by military actors themselves in some cases, as noted above around the Bougie pipeline.

Overall, the emergence of the oil sector shaped both imperial and nationalist attempts to define and impose sovereignty over the Algerian nation militarily and diplomatically. This section has shown that oil was constituent within the war not simply as a motivational factor, as is widely represented in the historiography, but instead, in its material natures and physical networks, which shaped the scale and scope of the military and political violence. This approach has drawn out particularly how significantly the war impacted rural and southern populations, a violence often overlooked. Indeed, the oil assemblage here enforced the partition of north and south Algeria, a colonial policy often seen as existing merely in rhetoric, in very tangible ways.

#### A Project of Shared Economic Production? Life on the Oil Towns

In May 1959, André Malraux, celebrated author, and renowned adventurer, now De Gaulle's Minister for Cultural Affairs, visited Hassi Messaoud, Algeria's largest and

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<sup>154</sup> Minutes of the état-major mixte, 25 September 1961 and 6 February 1961.

<sup>155</sup> Germes, Note ; Chevière, Compte-rendu; Minutes of the état-major mixte 25 September 1961.

most profitable oil well. Here, he met with the front-line oil workers, likening their work to the monastic missions in the first ages of Christianity, evoking a sense of physicality, sacrifice and moral conscience.<sup>156</sup> After touring the site, he sat down with the oilmen for lunch, an imported seven-course affair flown in from Algiers, consisting of caviar, salmon, guinea fowl, legumes, dessert, cheese and fruit. de Laboulaye, a liaison between CFP A and the OCSR, present at the lunch was appalled by the menu choice, writing that the food was entirely incompatible with the image of a self-sacrificing, hard working labour force, and worrying that the Minister would now associate the enterprise, not with monastic discipline but with the very abandonment of 'these primitive disciplines,' invoking the infamous Order of Malta to illustrate his point.<sup>157</sup>

The incident is a good example of the often-antithetical ways in which the oil towns, and the lives and labour on the sites, were understood, lived, and publicly constructed. The imported hospitality and stress on masculine network and identities shed light on the key themes of race, nationhood and gender on the oil sites which are explored here. In the new oil powered Franco-Algeria of the 1950s, places like Hassi Messaoud were newly central, closely linked to the metropole (and Paris particularly) along proliferating road, aerial and communications networks, enabling the access of visitors like Malraux as well the availability of luxury amenities like caviar. But this privileged closeness, and the oil towns' role in the larger reconfiguration of Franco-Algeria, was achieved through highly unequal and highly

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<sup>156</sup> F de Laboulaye, Note pour Monsieur Benezit, 30 April 1959, 18V01807/680, TA.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

racialised social practices, even as they were claimed as an exemplary progressive frontier. Adding to the complexity of these questions was the concentration of oil sites in the Sahara desert. Here, existing biological classifications were challenged as Europeans grappled with the physical labour in an extreme natural environment 'ill suited' to their inherent physical and intellectual capabilities.<sup>158</sup> This section explores these contradictions from a local and social perspective, drawing on but going beyond the ideologies and rhetoric of social scientists and state officials, which has been the focus of existing scholarship.<sup>159</sup>

Here, I turn to focus on these sites, exploring how they interacted with and mediated conceptualisations of race and gender. First, I consider the ethnic and racial classifications of oil workers in Algeria. I explore how 'inherent' racial differences between French and Algerians were challenged, reinforced, and remade on the oil camps. I argue that the application of racial theory and climatology by oil companies entrenched biological binaries of race within the oil towns but also beyond, shaping the physical and economic networks of French Eurafrica.<sup>160</sup> Secondly, I focus on constructs of gender and sexuality on the oil camps, and explore how these models shaped and were shaped by the intersection between economic developmentalism and the re-construction of racial and national categories. I show how critical gender archetypes were in the construction of racial identities on the oil camps, and further, how oil companies undermined state policy and upheld notions of rigid biological racial difference through their approaches to gender. In all, I show that whilst political

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<sup>158</sup> Davis, "The Transformation," 89-91.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 91.

actors attempted to deploy the Eurafrican ideal as an exemplar of more fluid racial logics linked specifically to the desert and economic environment, the reality was that these classifications were defined and imposed on the frontlines, by oil companies, in ways that entrenched racial divisions in new ways. Further, these divisions were built into the local landscape and economy: the reliance of expensive imported foods, like Malraux's feast, is one such example.

### Race and Nationhood

At the heart of the new colonial project of collective belonging through an interconnected economy, oil towns are central to studying how the new models of race and nationhood were conceptualised and enacted. I focus here on two key questions: first, how oil companies' interpretations of racialised biologies of 'European' bodies and minds shaped the towns themselves as well as their regional and national connections; and secondly, how physical and social architectures undermined narratives of progressive racial integration and development. In this way I demonstrate that companies were key actors in entrenching biological binaries of race within the oil towns and across the Sahara.

Categories of race and nationhood were critical to the structures of life on oil towns for three reasons. First, as noted above and in chapter two, in their physical, political and economic structuring oil towns were a critical expression of French sovereignty over the disputed territory. Technical sovereignty, which framed French claims as legitimated by the provision of 'services,' or development to its citizens, as well as

joint economic production, was key here.<sup>161</sup> Secondly, Saharan oil sites were understood and presented as key sites of racial integration in a literature celebrating the informal daily and social connections between French and Algerian staff they facilitated.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, oil companies were active participants in the framing and dispersion of these messages, choreographing events and photos for example, to visibly include European and local personnel as evidence of these ‘fraternities’ in action.<sup>163</sup> Finally, moreover, the presence and behaviours of (French) oilmen themselves was critical because, as noted above, these actors had been closely and purposefully woven into the colonial narrative of French identity and Saharan sovereignty as both representatives and facilitators of the twin colonial missions in the region, both military/political sovereignty as well as social/economic development. Unlike in other contexts or even frontier industries, where workers are typically conceptualised as ‘outcasts’ or ‘rebels’ therefore, late imperial French oilmen, and their physical environments, were publicly lauded as emblems and markers of colonial social and political norms.<sup>164</sup>

At the same time, colonial planners and academics were deeply interested in the application of racial theory to labour practices in the oil sector, particularly because

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<sup>161</sup> Davis, "The Sahara," 111-2.

<sup>162</sup> See for example, "Le Sahara," *Pétrole progrès*, 27 December 1957, F/12/11810, ANF, cited in Davis, "Algeria's Colonial Geography," 324; J. Cl. Laubel, "Le Coq gaulois gratte le sable: Voyage au Sahara," undated, 1961, press cutting, 18V01807/191, TA.

<sup>163</sup> "Tour d'horizon à cheval sur 58-59, *CFP Actualités*, March 1959, 20. 18V01807/236, TA ; Herzog, letter to the directeur général, 27 April 19459, 18V01807/181, TA.

<sup>164</sup> See, for example, Gloria E Miller, "Frontier Masculinity in the Oil Industry: The Experience of Women Engineers," *Gender, Work & Organization* 11 (2004): <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2004.00220.x> Kassandra Landry & Robin D. Willey, "'Camp syndrome': exploring frontier masculinity in Alberta's oil production culture," *NORMA* 18, no.3 (2023) DOI: [10.1080/18902138.2022.2139513](https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2022.2139513); Kerry Carrington, Alison McIntosh and John Scott, "Globalization, Frontier Masculinities and Violence: Booze, Blokes and Brawls," *The British Journal of Criminology* 50, no.3, (May 2010) <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azq003>.

the deposits were located in the desert. Most held the view that Europeans were unable to acclimatise to this environment, and that prolonged exposure would cause physical and mental health problems.<sup>165</sup> Planners and oil companies were deeply concerned about how to mitigate the risks of depression, loneliness and ‘Saharanite,’ a specific form of mania experienced by some Europeans in the Sahara.<sup>166</sup> In order to manage these difficulties, organisations like The Centre for the Study and Information on Human Problems in Arid Zones (PROHUZA), part of the African Industrial Bureau, recommended that Europeans should be limited to work only in certain sectors, and should receive high quality accommodation, mandatory vacations every six weeks and special health measures.<sup>167</sup>

At the level of politicians and also colonial planners, the racial, ethnic and national classifications applied to Algerians were also being redefined through both the oil economy and oil labour itself. As noted above, archetypes like the ‘Mediterranean Man’ promoted a shared Franco-Algerian identity as waged employment and other financial indicators, like property ownership ‘transformed’ the Algerian race.<sup>168</sup> Work in the oil sector was held up as an exemplar here, as the Algerian population was not just integrated in the production and consumption of goods but in a shared project of industrialisation and progress.<sup>169</sup> At the same time, as discussed in more detail in chapter two, the oil economy was bound to the consolidation of a legal and racial

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<sup>165</sup> Davis, “The Transformation,” 91.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. Docteur Vigan, “Nouvelles considérations sur les problèmes humains du travail au Sahara,” 10 October 1961, 6-7. 18V01807/615, TA.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Davis, “Algeria’s Colonial Geography,” 319-320.

<sup>169</sup> Davis, “Algeria’s Colonial Geography,” 324.

divisions between 'European' and 'non European' Algerians as well as an ethnic division between northern and southern populations.<sup>170</sup>

Oil companies applied these directives to both the recruitment of their workforce and to the physical and built environments of oil towns. European candidates were medically and socially profiled to achieve recruitment of the best 'fit' to the specific local challenges of the desert. In a striking example these logics, and how they fed into the divisions between north and south Algeria bound to oil labour, CFP A's Hassi Messaoud doctor, Claude Vigan, went so far as to describe this group as 'neo-Saharan'.<sup>171</sup> In practice, this meant that oil companies sought physically fit, young men who were middle class and professional 'above all else'.<sup>172</sup> Companies thus imposed classed racialisation, defining whiteness as fundamentally middle class. These qualities were perceived as critical in enabling staff to face the particular mental and physical challenges of the oil towns, in particular the loneliness and isolation. In practice, these concerns were perhaps most clearly translated in age demographics, most employees were noticeably young even for the oil sector, the majority were in their twenties.<sup>173</sup>

As well as the focus on young and fit men, oil companies also aimed to mitigate the health risks, believed to be brought on by the stark unfamiliarity of the desert by

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<sup>170</sup> Davis, "Algeria's Colonial Geography," 324.

<sup>171</sup> Vigan, *Nouvelles considérations*, 7, 10; Bernard Metz, Georges Lambert, Michel Hasselmann and Robert von Hove, *Conclusions de l'étude éditée par prozha sur le métabolisme hydro-minérale et bilan calorique du travailleur de force en zone saharienne*; Vigan, *L'aptitude médicale des travailleurs au Sahara*, October 1961, 18V01807/615, TA.

<sup>172</sup> Vigan, *Nouvelles considérations*, 6.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

replicating a defined 'French' culture and environment. Physical space was adapted to 'French' familiarity in urban planning, with a reliance on French or 'Parisian' building styles for housing and restaurants.<sup>174</sup> In addition, companies provided extensive greenery and 'European' style parks, which featured heavily in promotional materials.<sup>175</sup> The significant cost of these measures is particularly indicative of the importance attached to them. The oil sector was already a significant consumer of water in an arid environment and yet, a high proportion of Hassi Messaoud's water consumption went on its gardens.<sup>176</sup> The same prerogatives shaped interior design, entertainment and food consumption. A directive from as early as 1956 set out that images and films should focus on presenting a variety of physical environments, and further, that these should be in colour to heighten their impact.<sup>177</sup>

These measures strongly shaped infrastructural planning beyond the immediate vicinity of the oil towns. The drive to cater to French tastes and culinary specialties particularly drove a reliance on imports from the metropole. Indeed, administrative records show that these concerns necessitated investment into refrigerated lorries, and roads capable of supporting them, increased air traffic, and even the suggested reshaping local agricultural production, specifically to cater to French dietary preferences.<sup>178</sup> Oil towns were thus designed to impose a designated 'French'

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<sup>174</sup> d'Herbes, *Maison Verte-Amélioration* ; Jennings, "A Land," 27.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. ; Cutting from "L'habitat du Sahara des caravanes à celui des pétroliers," *Journal d'Entreprise*, (September 1961). 18V01807/236, TA ; J d'Herbes, *Maison Verte-Amélioration*, 21 March 1961, 18V01807/165, TA ; Jennings, "A Land," 27.

<sup>176</sup> Edwin Richmond, letter to Durand de Bousingen, 29 June 1960, 18V01807/144, TA.

<sup>177</sup> Cutting from "L'habitat," CPA, *Projet de cité à Hassi Messaoud*, Notes diverses, 21 August 1956, 17. 18V01807/615, TA.

<sup>178</sup> Jennings, "A Land," 27; Commission Générale, Notes, May 1960, 6. F60 4004, ANF.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.; Organisation Commun des Régions Sahariennes (1959), *Etude des Transports au Sahara*, Dossier 5, appendix 7.

culture, drawing on tropes of an urban, and particularly Parisian, middle class. This necessitated a significant financial outlay and imposed a colonial ecology and transport network which continued to draw the oil nodes ever closer to Paris, and ever more distant from their surrounding areas.

Similarly, oil sites were increasingly isolated from Saharan space and society, demarcated by a cordon sanitaire. This was a critical clash with state and OCRS rhetoric, which sought to present the oil nodes, and their staff, as embedded within, and complimentary to local economic and social hubs. This policy is discussed in further detail in chapter two but centred on the idea that local oil workers moved freely between the oil sites and ‘traditional’ Saharan industries and home settlements, bringing with them crucial injections of revenue.<sup>179</sup> And yet, oil companies were deeply concerned with immunisation and managing ‘unclean’ local bodies. Local staff were viewed as vectors of typhus and other diseases. Unlike European staff, who received a vaccination, local staff were assumed to have natural immunity from a previous infection. But to prevent any outbreaks on the camps, these workers were subjected to a ‘delousing’ twice a month. And if there were any active outbreaks in the vicinity, these workers were isolated and shaved, with hair cuttings and clothing burnt.<sup>180</sup> Medical care, then, was not only segregated, but also replicated and reinforced colonial prejudices around ‘dirty’ and ‘backward’ locals. The system imposed by company actors thus not only insisted on biological and social differences between French and Algerian staff but also drew the oil nodes

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<sup>179</sup> Victor de Metz, letter to Jacques Benezit, undated, 1960; de Laboulaye, letter to Paul Crosnier, 10 January 1962; 18V01807/192, TA; Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 6.

<sup>180</sup> Claude Vigan, *Le Secours Radio-Médical Saharien*, 1 April 1959, 78-80, 18V01807/615, TA.

themselves closer together, whilst further isolating and segregating these nodes from the wider Saharan context.<sup>181</sup>

Furthermore, oil company management purposefully implemented racial segregation and hierarchies into the physical environment of the camps right up until 1962, and beyond. Internal company memos, for example, illustrate the perceived connection between company towns and political power, as company officials stressed that Europeans in the Sahara required living conditions that reflected their status as ‘chef de grande tent,’ to inspire ‘following’ and ‘respect’ among the local population.<sup>182</sup> At the same time, companies assigned set local ‘quarters’ on the outskirts of the settlements, populated with either tents or basic shared cabins and designated ‘local’ kitchens and leisure facilities. Accommodation was designed according to a ‘European’ or ‘local’ style, the latter frequently with bunk beds rather than individual room equipped with inadequate shower and toilet facilities.<sup>183</sup> These physical structures of separation, moreover, continued to be fuelled and reinforced even as the egalitarianist narrative reached its crescendo in 1960-1.<sup>184</sup> Critically, as discussed below, this was justified by framing living quarters for Algerian staff merely as basic housing for a transient, and single, male workforce.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> In this respect, they bear some hallmarks of a resource archipelago. Jackson, “The phosphate archipelago.”

<sup>182</sup> Cutting from “L’habitat”

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., CFP, Maison Verte et sa base industrielle, undated, 18V01807/165, TA; SEHF, Exploitation d’Hassi R’Mel, 1 February 1961, 18V01807/156, TA; Vigan, L’aptitude.

<sup>184</sup> Maison Verte et sa base industrielle ; J d’Herbes, Maison Verte-Amélioration, 21 March 1961, 18V01807/165, TA

<sup>185</sup> d’Herbes, Maison Verte-Amélioration ; CFP A, Projet de cité à Hassi-Messaoud : Etude Préparatoire, 16 July 1958, 18V01807/170, TA.

Oil companies were, in these ways, key actors in applying how late imperial politico-economic models intersected with existing racialised hierarchies and practices. Company management continued to impose rigid binaries rooted in 'innate' biological differences. These practices were deeply at odds with the rhetoric of the state, as imperial planners sought to legitimate an inherent Franco-Algerian entity through a form of joint economic production and technical sovereignty. Instead, the practices of the companies entrenched racial binaries into the physical and social environments of the oil towns and beyond.

#### Practices Against Nature: Gender and Sexuality

In 1962, government representatives were disgusted when oil companies diverted funding intended for the building of a primary school at Hassi Messaoud to the extension of the camp's swimming pool. The incident is indicative of ongoing tensions between state and company actors over how family units should integrate into the oil towns. Initially built to house an entirely male workforce, the state was pressing to remodel the camps into family settlements.<sup>186</sup>

As I will show here, for both state and company actors, the presentation of the masculinity formed and lived on oil sites was a high priority, an identity interwoven in the promised social and political futures of Eurafrica. A crucial tenet of this masculinity was its anchoring in heterosexual and familial relationships. The gender archetypes evolving in the late imperial oil towns, based on married men, thus

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<sup>186</sup> L Mangou, Note pour Monsieur Le Therisien, 9 February 1962; le Therisien, minutes of the meeting of the conseil d'administration de la SAHAM, 7 February 1962, 18V01807/168, TA.

provide an important new perspective to two historiographical stances. The first are narratives which accept that late colonial settler masculinity was increasingly under fire for prevalent sexual 'deviance,' and secondly, accounts which centre resource masculinity as encapsulated by heroised single men.<sup>187</sup> The analysis follows how this state model was remade on the frontlines, as oil companies, repeatedly blocked efforts to integrate family units on the camps, maintaining a strict physical gender segregation, justified in explicitly racial terms. Indeed, one of the ways that the European/Algerian division was imposed here was by treating Algerian masculinity and oilmen as devoid of these critical familial connections.

State actors sought to frame the oil towns, in both rhetorical and pragmatic terms, as family settlements. This policy was rooted in three themes. First, this would establish a wider and more stable French settlement in the region and facilitate recruitment to this critical sector.<sup>188</sup> Secondly, oil camps were framed by the state as sites of racial and social transformation. Part of a wider campaign to highlight the progressive, developmental, and integrational benefits of a French-led oil economy, state actors sought to illustrate these changes in practice, through family and settlement policies on the oil towns. Here colonial planners could draw inspiration from other extractive industries. For example, mining along the Copperbelt had promoted a nuclear family structure as a social foundation, shaping its housing provision, wage structure and

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<sup>187</sup> See, for example, Miller, "Frontier Masculinity"; Landry and Willey, "'Camp syndrome'"; Carrington et al "Globalization."

<sup>188</sup> Mangou, Note; Duquennois, *Projet de cité à Hassi-Messaoud Notes Préliminaires pour l'étude préparatoire*, 19 June 1958, 4. 18V01807/170, TA. On recruitment difficulties in the Sahara, see Mounecif, "Black Gold Seekers".

even insurance policies according to these standards.<sup>189</sup> In the Algerian Sahara, state actors were keen to promote oil towns in a similar light, and particularly as places where French and Algerian families lived and worked cohesively together.<sup>190</sup> As such, the state was pressing for family housing for both French and local staff on the sites.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the familial relationships of French oilmen on these camps were a key part of the state's presentation of Eurafrican social and political structures. As noted above, oilmen were widely depicted as a paradigm of masculinity in fluid political times. This was particularly critical given the 'crisis' of settler masculinity and sexuality in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was a prevalent belief that sexual deviance was at root of the French troubles in Algeria, particularly among right wing groups. Indeed, some, like Andre Figeraus went so far as to blame 'vice' for the ultimate loss of French Algeria.<sup>191</sup> In contrast, the OAS was seen as the product of early settlers' 'hypermasculinity': delegitimised as an emotive and irrational and singularly male community.<sup>192</sup>

In contrast, oilmen as the new 'settlers' were characterised as 'rational', 'disciplined' and 'scientific'.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, sexual preferences and romantic relationships were a

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<sup>189</sup> James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 81-2.

<sup>190</sup> Davis, "Algeria's Colonial Geography," 324.

<sup>191</sup> André Figueras, *Les origines étranges de la Ve République* (Paris: Les presses du Mail, 1962), 166, cited in Todd Shepard, *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962-1979* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 19.

<sup>192</sup> Martin Evans, "Towards an emotional history of settler decolonisation: De Gaulle, political masculinity and the end of French Algeria 1958–1962," *Settler Colonial Studies*, 8, no.2, (2018): 215  
DOI: [10.1080/2201473X.2016.1273872](https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2016.1273872).

<sup>193</sup> See particularly Plessis, "Quel visage," on the military discipline, 'physical vigour and moral health,' of the oilmen, 27. See also, Laboulaye, Note pour Benezit.

defining feature of both the masculinity and French identities they espoused. This is exemplified by the priority placed by the state on press coverage featuring oilmen networked within family units. For example, in 1959, the television broadcast on RTF sought to present a documentary style coverage of Christmas at Hassi Messaoud. State actors wanted to fly in and heavily feature female relatives in the filming. This, they suggested, was critical to framing their coverage of the event and to demonstrate particularly the 'human' character of the oil project in the Sahara.<sup>194</sup> Even further, however, state policy sought to translate this vision into a reality, providing funding for schools and other family infrastructures.<sup>195</sup> In these ways, the racial ideals and political vision of Eurafrica were tightly bound to gender relations on the oil camps, which the state sought embrace through creating integrated family settlements here.

Both state and company actors, however, were acutely aware that the short- or long-term reality of male-only camps undermined models of normative gender and sexuality, as well as the political ideals bound to these models. Indicative of the importance attached to these questions, promotional and internal materials went to some lengths to situate their employees in heterosexual relationships. Companies reported on the sexual desire of their workers as both 'virile' and 'healthy' without engaging in [homosexual] 'practices against nature.'<sup>196</sup> Sexual mores were monitored and reported on by the camp's doctors, which stressed particularly the lack of

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<sup>194</sup> Mémorandum Emission télévisée R.T.F: Noel à Hassi Messaoud (Projet Nohain) 28 October 1959; Jean Mohain, Note au sujet d'une émission télévisée de la R.T.F. "Conte de Noel à Hassi-Messaoud," 26 October 1959; 18V01807/255, TA.

<sup>195</sup> Vigan, *Nouvelles considérations*, 7.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

homosexual relationships on the camps and argued that the ‘short term abstinence... never harmed anyone.’<sup>197</sup> And documentary style promotional films which stressed the prevalence of sexual desire [for women] among male staff, and carefully drew attention particularly to the plethora of sexualised images of women throughout the camps, as shown in figure one.<sup>198</sup>

Figure One



Still from a CFP A promotional film

Oil companies, however, were strongly opposed to the state’s stance on family settlement. In practice and in policy, company management vehemently sought to prevent a female presence on the oil camps.<sup>199</sup> This prerogative was applied to both Algerian and French workers, but in starkly different terms. For European staff,

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid. On militarised sexual economies in late colonial North Africa see Catherine Phipps, “Between metropole and colony: *Bordels militaires de campagne* in colonial Morocco and France in the twentieth century,” *French History*, 37, no. 3 (September 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crad016>.

<sup>198</sup> Louis-Emile Galey and Alain Pol, *Sahara Parallèle 32*, Cinématographique no. 19 622, Video records, TA.

<sup>199</sup> *Mémoire Emission télévisée*; Mangou, Note pour Le Therisien.

gendered segregation was justified by adherence to rigid racialised biology: that the inherent mental and physical ‘weakness’ of European women was entirely unsuited to the rigours of Saharan heat and social isolation.<sup>200</sup> As such, women must be excluded from life on the camps, either as employees or as residents. Instead, the companies housed the wives, children and other dependents of the French oil workers in the cooler coastal regions in the north, well away from the camps themselves.<sup>201</sup> In addition, as in the case of the pool/school debate, company management navigated edicts from the state which would have imposed greater family-based infrastructures, and potentially, representation.

On the rare occasions that women did physically occupy the camps, oil companies continued to underscore foundational social and physical differences between the sexes and imposed spatial segregation. For example, a team of female dancers arriving on the camp for the 1961 Christmas celebration, were described as bringing the ‘feminine instability’ onto the camps in a ‘flurry’ of high heels, perfume, and skirts.<sup>202</sup> The women and their ‘prodigious needs of trinkets and...vanity’ were deliberately housed away from the male ‘citizens,’ stretching the physical capacity of the Hassi Messaoud camp.<sup>203</sup>

However, company produced magazines and propaganda did deliberately make space to acknowledge nuclear family units as an integral part of the oil workers’ identity. In this way, they integrated family units within company culture and identity

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<sup>200</sup> CFP A, *Projet de cité*; Duquenois, *Projet de cité*.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*; *Mémoire Emission télévisée*.

<sup>202</sup> Extract from *Réveillon aux Hydrocarbures*, *Kepi Blanc* 178 (February 1962), 18V01807/236, TA.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

but retained the physical space of Saharan oil camps as male only settlements. For the 1959 Christmas at Hassi Messaoud filming, companies were forced to reluctantly cede to government demands to feature wives and female relations attending the celebrations.<sup>204</sup> Management did manage to substantially limit the number of female visitors present whilst capitalising on the image making. They attempted to present a range of male-female attachments, thereby nestling oil workers into family networks by allowing one widowed 'elderly' mother of an unmarried worker, one new fiancée and one married mother to attend, and extensively documenting their presence.<sup>205</sup> In addition, company magazines listed marriages and births among employees and aimed articles such as 'for you madame' with advice on family nutrition for example, at the married female audience living in the north.<sup>206</sup>

Oil companies were not entirely successful in retaining the oil camps as exclusively masculine environments. In 1962, the wives and families of a select group of French workers, come to live at Hassi Messaoud.<sup>207</sup> Their arrival highlights the crucial role of oil workers, and the women themselves, in the creation and contestations of gendered and racial archetypes under the Eurafica framework. As I will show, in this case, companies were forced to accommodate women on the camps under the framework of 'traditional' European gender models, stressing feminine domesticity and dependency, which was leveraged by workers themselves. However, the ways in

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<sup>204</sup> Mémorandum Emission télévisée; Mohain, Note au sujet; 18V01807/255, TA ; Minutes of the meetings of the Commission mixte qui s'est tenue à l'Etat-Major de la 10<sup>ème</sup> Région Militaire, 22 April 1958, 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> See, for example, 'Pour vous Madame: Ecole et Alimentation' in *CFP Actualités Journal de liaison et d'information du personnel* 3 (1959), 27. 18V01807/236, TA.

<sup>207</sup> J. d'Herbes, Implantation d'une cité d'urgence pour famille, 30 April 1962, 18V01807/165, TA.

which oil companies attempted to manage these arrivals within the strictures of a European race biologically 'unsuited' to the desert ultimately underwrote a growing female labour force on the camps themselves.

Firstly, the arrival of these women and families was the direct result of a campaign by oil workers themselves. Specifically, the campaign had fought to move their families out of the increasingly violent northern regions to the relative calm of the Saharan camps. The tactic was to leverage both their own gendered status as familial 'protectors' against their role as the cornerstone of the Eurafrica mission. Thus, they described themselves as 'protectors' and 'providers' to insist on the urgency and legitimacy of their demands, pointing explicitly to their narratives of their own exemplary roles here, citing the 'natural' nature of the concerns for men in their position.<sup>208</sup> At the same time, workers drew attention to their own strategic role as 'critical' to the 'nation,' threatening the dire consequences to the French economy and role in the Sahara if they were forced to abandon the sites to ensure adequate protection for their families.<sup>209</sup> French oil workers were thus very successful in leveraging their employers, playing on traditional gendered archetypes alongside the political and economic importance of their own labour.

To manage concerns about the adaptability of European women to desert life, oil company management was keen to appease the feminine 'sensibilities' of the new arrivals, seemingly reinforcing these values.<sup>210</sup> For example, to avoid the 'brutal

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<sup>208</sup> Le Comité de Sécurité du Personnel Sud, Motion à Direction C.F.P. (A), 19 February 1962, 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> André Conquet 'Le C.F.P. (A.) De Paris à Alger et Hassi-Messaoud en 1962' 18V01807/236, TA. d'Herbes, Implantation.

dislocation,' of desert living perceived to be more acute among mentally 'fragile' women, companies invested extensively in the expansion of green spaces on the camps.<sup>211</sup>

Conversely, once these women were ensconced on the camps, gender structures and particularly economic roles became somewhat more fluid. This is a relatively unusual pattern: oil labour more generally tends to be closely associated with a marked increase in households with a single male wage-earner.<sup>212</sup> In a deep irony, the deconstruction of these values was rooted in the attempt to manage these ascribed racial and gendered behaviours, specifically in the Saharan context. In an attempt to stave off the feared dislocation, isolation and loneliness, oil companies encouraged their female residents to take up work as administrative and retail work or voluntary roles.<sup>213</sup> The 'neo-Saharan,' category, those Europeans 'evolving' to the local desert context then, extended to women as well as men. And, partly due to the nature of the Saharan workforce, these professional opportunities were well received. Most were younger couples seeking to capitalise on the higher wages offered by their Saharan deployment, to gather funds for the purchase of a first home (in France). A short-term secondary income was therefore highly valued.<sup>214</sup>

For company management, the support of female employment was not an altruistic attempt to assure the wellbeing of its female residents, but instead, was seen as a

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> See, for example, Michael L. Ross, "Oil, Islam, and Women," *American Political Science Review* 102, no.1 (February 2008): 109-110; 113. Doi:[10.1017/S0003055408080040](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055408080040).

<sup>213</sup> Conquet, « Le C.F.P. (A.) », 3-4 ; Duquennois Projet de cité.

<sup>214</sup> Duquennois Projet de cité.

means to retain its valuable male workforce. Company officials were deeply concerned that unoccupied female partners would rapidly succumb to unhappiness in the desert environment, frustration that would then be taken out on their husbands, who were themselves fragile and uncertain as they grappled with the desert environment.<sup>215</sup>

Campaigns to house the families of Algerian workers on the camps, in contrast, met with resolutely no success. These efforts, as noted above, were pushed primarily by the French state, as part of their efforts to demonstrate both the adaptability and evolution of racial categories under the Eurafrican banner as well as the attainment of 'modern' economic development in Algeria. Oil companies, however, resolutely refused to allow local Algerian families access to the site.<sup>216</sup> Instead, companies reinforced the physical distance of local families by providing family accommodation at a distance, building these around local towns such as Ouargla.<sup>217</sup> And unlike the spotlighting of European sexual and familial relationships, where local staff appeared in company newsletters and images, Algerian staff were pictured primarily in all male working environments and training rooms.<sup>218</sup> In this way, they remained divorced from any female or familial relationships. This was in stark contrast to French workers whose masculinity, as we have seen, was stressed as intimately bound up with

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 7-10.

<sup>216</sup> Meriama Chaouche-Bencherif, "La Micro-urbanisation et la ville-oasis ; une alternative à l'équilibre des zones arides pour une ville saharienne durable Cas du Bas-Sahara," (PhD Diss, Université Mentouri, 2007), 114-5; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 6; CFP A, Projet de cité, 11-12 ; P Crosnier, Projet de protocole, 24 July 1961, 2-4, P Crosnier, Décision, 16 May 1961. 18V01807/170, TA.

<sup>217</sup> CFP A, Projet de cité, 4.

<sup>218</sup> See for example, "Training," 1963, 1961. 18V01807/170, TA; *CFP Actualités* 13 (1963), unpaginated, 18V01807/236, TA.

‘normalised’ domestic relationships, and marked Algerian masculinity as distinct, Other.<sup>219</sup>

This expression of racial difference through gender norms was reflected in and further entrenched by the physical environment and architecture of the oil towns and was compounded by the arrival of French women on the camps. The comparative paucity of these living conditions was justified by companies by claiming basic housing was suitable for this [Algerian] workforce, specifically because these workers were highly temporary and single.<sup>220</sup> Companies even went so far as to divert funds intended for the improvement of these wholly inadequate ‘local’ residential quarters to the remodelling of the restaurants of European workers, specifically on these terms.<sup>221</sup>

Overall, then, it is clear that late imperial diplomatic and press approaches had pushed the lived experiences and daily interaction of oil workers with sexuality, gender and race to the forefront of how oil companies’ operations were understood and perceived by a French readership. These same interactions were often carefully constructed and then deployed to defend narratives of progress, racial equality, and territorial claims. However, these ideologies were contested, challenged, and mediated on the site themselves, from the highest levels of management through to labour organisations and individual workers. These responses, fragmented and inconsistent, tended to reinforce racial divisions legitimated through biological

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<sup>219</sup> On “Othering,” see particularly Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>220</sup> CFP A, *Projet de cité*, 11-12.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*; d’Herres, *Maison Verte-Amélioration*.

essentialism. In all, people 'on the spot' and grass-roots dynamics shaped the oil towns and local ecologies in ways ran counter to imperial claims of 'development'. Furthermore, the positioning of colonial oilmen as a masculine identity grounded in their relationships to women challenges how we approach natural resources and gender more broadly. It becomes clear that approaches that centralise resource 'masculinity' as an independent, self-sufficient, or self-reinforcing category are limited in what they can tell us about the lives of oil workers, in particular the processes and relationships through which men and women in these contexts lived gendered lives.

### Conclusion

Oil was at the forefront of late imperial claims to sovereignty in Algeria. The financial and strategic value of the newly discovered reserves were deployed in economic policies and diplomatic campaigns which sought to impose and legitimate claims to the existence of a unified Franco-Algerian 'nation.' This chapter has shown the important, but often overlooked, ways in which oil structured, rather than simply imposed, these claims. Thus, colonial planners sought to insist on political and territorial unity through an integrated economy, an economy both produced and 'consumed' interactively and interdependently, in rhetoric and policies which were shaped by the material natures of Algerian crude and gas. At the same time, military and diplomatic contentions were shaped by technical requirements of hydrocarbons and even mapped onto the physical networks of oil, resituating and reshaping the war and creating new spaces and patterns of violence and control, particularly in the Saharan region. Further, this account has highlighted that the emergent oil assemblage did not operate simply as mechanism through which the state could

impose its claims: a history often overlooked by a focus on revenue and planners. For example, even as the Saharan oil towns emerged as the locus and engine of technical sovereignty claims, company actors shaped these nodes in ways that undermined the state's attempts to entrench itself within these spaces.

## **Chapter Two: Saharan Frontiers: Oil in the Construction of Regionalised Space**

The Saharan frontier was a late imperial effort to establish a political border between the north and south of Algeria. The project, although infamous, remains underexplored. Existing historiography has tended to treat the frontier as a brief abstract or rhetorical experience: a political aim which ultimately failed to materialise. Such accounts have focused on discursive attempts to legitimate a hypothetical frontier. In brief, oil and other mineral reserves are explored as motivational factors in cynical endeavour to retain these natural resources as the imperial influence in the north crumbled.<sup>1</sup> These approaches are reflective of two wider trends in historiography. First, chronological approaches to the late colonial era, seen in a linear progression to the 'moment' of decolonisation, posit a rupture leading inexorably to the establishment of independent nation-states. Secondly, the central role of oil in this case is understood within wider frameworks of 'oil greed', through which political actions are motivated by hydrocarbon resources as a financial or strategic 'prize.'<sup>2</sup>

More recent work has started to draw on and develop these ideas, exploring how such a frontier came to exist as a political reality. This work has focused on the establishment and ideologies expressed by the Organisation commune des régions

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, 254; Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN, 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 628 and Arthur Asseraf, "'A New Israel': Colonial Comparisons and the Algerian Partition That Never Happened", *French Historical Studies* 41, no. 1 (2018) <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-4254631> who describes partition plans as 'intellectual tools', 117.

<sup>2</sup> On oil as motivating state actors through greed, particularly in violence civil conflict see, for example, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56, no.4, (October 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpf064>; for a critique of the scholarly assumptions regarding the casual role of oil in motivating conflict see Meierding, *The Oil Wars Myth*.

sahariennes (O CRS). The O CRS operated with a wide political scope within the Sahara, underwritten by hydrocarbon wealth and overseeing oil extraction. Such work has raised important questions about temporal and spatial approaches to Algerian decolonisation, in particular the ‘inevitability’ of the emergence of a unified nation state of Algeria.<sup>3</sup> These studies draw attention to the significance of these alternative ideals of territorial or political organisation in the Algerian Sahara, including a trans-Saharan (and possibly French affiliated) federal or economic union.<sup>4</sup> In the focus on ideological conceptualisations of the Sahara and high level political rhetoric, however, such work tends to omit the insights of a social history approach. This leaves open important questions about how these high-level structures, and the ideologies and aims underpinning them, tangibly impacted the people, space, and economy of the Saharan region.

This chapter takes as its focus the relationship between oil and the Saharan frontier. At the intersection of an archetypal ‘commodity frontier,’ that is to say, a distinct site where commodities were cultivated, and a ‘political frontier,’ the attempt to legitimate a national boundary, the late imperial Sahara provides a unique insight into the construction and ideologies of frontiers, and the interplays between political, commercial, and material actors such as the O CRS, oil companies, and the physical networks of oil.<sup>5</sup> The chapter shows that the late imperial Saharan frontier was established through social interaction and social practice, in ways which were surely

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Suggitt, “Impossible Endings”; Sèbe, “Shadow of the Algerian War”; Cantoni, *Oil exploration, diplomacy, and security*; Davis, “The Transformation”

<sup>4</sup> Davis, “The Transformation”; Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*.

<sup>5</sup> Beckert et al, “Commodity frontiers and the transformation of the global countryside”; Cottyn, “Commodity Frontiers”; Moore, *Capitalism*.

inspired, underwritten, and shaped by oil extraction, but not simply determined by top down visions or policies. In other words, to understand how the ideological and conceptual ideals of a Saharan frontier were transposed into a complex, layered 'national' political and economic space, we need to track tangible social interplays between key actors. In this way, the analysis draws attention to how oil shaped both the production of the north-south frontier but also uneven political and economic geographies within the Saharan region.

The chapter opens with a discussion of conceptual ideals in formation at multiple levels: examining the relationship between oil and legislative expressions of the frontier. I argue that these frameworks not only expressed the foundational 'frontier' ideal in practice but did so by rewriting ideas of sovereignty, territoriality, and citizenship in the desert region. These emergent archetypes became increasingly based on and expressed through resource wealth. In effect, legislators and officials wrote hydrocarbons into national, regional, and localised political spaces, establishing oil production as a form of political designation and identity.<sup>6</sup>

The second section focuses on the evolution of Saharan ecologies and economic patterns, tracing how these were shaped by the physical assemblages of oil extraction and refining: transport networks, oil towns and refineries. This provides new insights into the social histories of the Saharan region, as the analysis explores how these changes were absorbed, navigated, and mediated by local communities.

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<sup>6</sup> On layered political space and sovereignties under colonial rule see Lauren A. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 31-2.

Moreover, following how the physical structures of oil evolved and were entrenched, shaped by a range of actors and technical and material prerogatives, illuminates new graduations and chronologies in forms of political power in this period. For example, I show how the provision of public infrastructures were shaped and paced by commercial as well as political actors and increasingly stratified, mapped onto the oil nodes.

Finally, the chapter focuses on the social programmes, infrastructures, and services developed by key oil actors, both state and corporate. ‘Oil actors’ here refers to the broad range of actors whose operations and influence were bound up in the oil sector. This included oil companies, oil workers, broadly defined, and state entities whose missions were fundamentally defined by oil extraction, such as the OCSR or the French direction des carburants (DICA), an office in the Ministry of Industry which drove oil policy.<sup>7</sup> In this section I place emphasis on two key issues. First, how a unique ‘Saharan’ ethnicity was promoted under these schemes and even expressed in the built landscape; and second, what these infrastructures and programmes tell us about the actual performance and recognition of sovereignty and governance in the Sahara, interrogating and testing the model of corporate colonial sovereignty, particularly companies acting like states, in this context.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Armand Desprairies, “La constitution historique d’une industrie pétrolière publique en France: un État dans l’État?”, *Revue du droit public et de la science politique en France et à l’étranger*, 2 (2022): 396, <https://hal.science/hal-03639199>

<sup>8</sup> On corporate colonial sovereignty, see Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

In all, the chapter shows how the colonial Saharan frontier emerged as a political, economic, and lived reality. This border was underwritten but also, to a significant extent, shaped and transposed by local and commercial oil actors in ways that are often overlooked by a focus on state rhetoric and policy.

### The Political Frontier

‘This immense desert is totally French. It is a case precisely of a peaceful possession, a creation ex nihilo. All that exists is the work of France, and of France only’- Député Jean Laborbe’s advocacy of segregated French Sahara, for the Party Paysan, to the National Assembly (24<sup>th</sup> April 1956).<sup>9</sup>

Laborbe’s argument formed part of a wider discussion about the potentially unique political status of the Sahara in French parliament which was gathering pace through 1956. After a series of bills proposing differing forms of political designation for the Sahara, Guy Mollet’s government put forward a bill for a new communal Saharan authority, the OCSR.<sup>10</sup> Such an authority would be responsible for the *mise en valeur* of Saharan resources but also the ‘economic expansion and social promotion’ of local populations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Laborbe et les membres du groupe paysan, Proposition de loi tendant à proclamer le Sahara “territoire national” 24 April 1956, F60 4004, ANF; see also Suggitt, “Impossible Endings,” 68-69. On the early colonial imaginings of the desert and the colonial role there, notably, the *pénétration pacifique* and the “Sahara sublime” trope see Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France’s Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), particularly 54, 199, 221.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of how the proposal for the OCSR brought together a compromise over previous debates of Saharan distinction see Suggitt, “Impossible Endings,” 68-9.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Mise en valeur’ can be translated to ‘developing’ or ‘bringing into value,’ but had overtones of a specific shape of economic development, in essence, exploitation of natural resources in the colonies to the primary benefit of the metropole, as per Albert Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* (Paris: Peyert & Cie 1923). For a discussion of the ways that the *mise en valeur* concept shaped how OCSR was presented and

Whilst the OCRS is often read primarily as a vehicle of resource management, it was justified to Parliament in ethnic nationalistic terms which emphasised the ‘similitudes’ and ‘communal imperatives’ of the Saharan people.<sup>12</sup> In a further attempt to legitimate the proposal, the National Assembly was presented with a history of earlier legal projects seeking a Saharan political distinction dating back to 1952, rooted in ‘innate’ social, territorial and ethnic divisions.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the legislative passage of resource management frameworks were deeply intertwined with debates about the contours of space, sovereignty and ethnicity in Algeria. The OCRS passed into law on 10th January 1957.

I argue here that the legislative mechanisms of resource governance in the Sahara represented far more than a project of oil extraction, retrospective myth-making or ideological discussion. I demonstrate that these instruments, and the ways in which they were shaped and enacted through oil, imposed a very real legislative partition between north and south. In particular, I show how the structures of resource governance wrote hydrocarbons into models of sovereignty and citizenship specific to the Sahara, establishing oil production as a form of political designation and identity.

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conceived of through these debates, see Suggitt, “Impossible Endings,” 77-85 and Félix Houphouët-Boigny, *Projet de loi créant une organisation commune des régions sahariennes*, 1 August 1956, 4, F60 4004, ANF.

<sup>12</sup> On the OCRS as a vehicle for the management of hydrocarbon extraction see for example, Cantoni, *Oil exploration, diplomacy, and security*. Houphouët-Boigny, *Projet de loi*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Hénault, *Rapport fait au nom des territoires d’outre-mer*, assemblée nationale, annexe au procès-verbal, 19 December 1956, F60 4004, ANF.

I focus first on the O CRS, which commenced operations in 1957, and the Saharan Oil Code to illustrate how oil reshaped the definition and territory of the Sahara and this how this newly defined ‘Sahara’ was governed. In this section, I explore rhetoric alongside actual legislative powers, geographic reach, and financial operations. Secondly, in keeping with the chapter’s mainly social history approach, I focus closely on the emergence of new forms and mechanisms of local governance bound to hydrocarbons, exploring the creation of new channels and citizen identities through which Saharan peoples could access and influence the imperial political space.

### Regional Hydrocarbon Governance

#### The Political Resource Frontier

When the O CRS was formed in 1957 it had the twin missions of overseeing resource extraction and driving up the standards of living of the Saharan population. Its sphere of operation was across the ‘Sahara,’ which was defined across an Algerian-Saharan border line running from east to west at around 400km south of the coast. Whilst I focus here on operations in the Algerian Sahara, the O CRS’ scope also extended across into the desert regions of Niger, Chad and then French-Sudan.<sup>14</sup> Between 1957 and 1959, the O CRS had quasi sovereign responsibilities, that is to say ‘arrangements of shared or limited sovereignty,’ including over the distribution of taxes, specifically the oil redevance, a type of royalty.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the O CRS had responsibilities in law-making (albeit limited to modifying existing laws) and the

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<sup>14</sup> Suggitt, “Impossible Endings,” 11; Note au sujet de la limite entre les départements algériens et les territoires du Sud, undated, between August and October 1961, SEAA 115, CDAC.

<sup>15</sup> Benton, *A Search*, 226.

maintenance of order and security as well as oversight of a wide range of public works and infrastructures, including roads and schools.<sup>16</sup> These were spatially and publicly linked to oil revenue, as shown, for example, by the map in appendix one.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the OCRS clearly both expressed and iterated the Saharan frontier as a political reality but also encoded hydrocarbon revenue into the expression and legitimization of rule here.

At the same time as imposing a governance frontier between north and south, the OCRS reinforced political and economic connections between the Saharan regions and France. At a discursive level, promotional material repeatedly linked Saharan development to a technical dependency: improvements in quality of living were possible only via the French technocrats who could profitably exploit subterranean resources.<sup>18</sup> More practically, a few short months after the OCRS came into being, the Ministry of the Sahara was legally created. The two entities were deeply intertwined, with Max Lejeune, an anti-independence French député shortly taking charge of both.<sup>19</sup> The Sahara was no longer under the administration of the Ministry of Algerian Affairs and its administrative seat moved from Algiers to Paris.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, 60% of the OCRS budget came from the central government funds, whilst oil companies' operating profit tax was paid to the central French

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<sup>16</sup> Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," 97-8, 108-9, 141-44.

<sup>17</sup> OCRS, *Etudes de transport au Sahara*, 1959, F60 4004, ANF. See also, Plessis, "Quel visage," 28. Bossard described these networks as increasingly having "followed [ed] the path of oil and gas exploration." Laurent Bossard *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economies and Security*, (OECD Publishing: Paris, 2014), 113-4.

<sup>18</sup> See chapter one for full details.

<sup>19</sup> For Lejeune's position on independence see Alain Herbeth, "La gauche "Algérie française," *La Nouvelle Revue d'histoire* 85 (July 2016) : 27-29, <https://www.la-nrh.fr/2016/07/editorial-et-sommaire-du-n85-juillet-aout-2016/mmaire-du-n85-juillet-août-2016>; Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," 87.

<sup>20</sup> Sèbe, "Shadow of the Algerian War," 309.

government.<sup>21</sup> Resource extraction thus created a revenue loop between the metropole and the Saharan region, an economy functioning increasingly independently of the north of Algeria. In these ways, a political and economic Saharan frontier was solidified, dividing north and south Algeria and creating specific Franco-Saharan ties. At the same time, the structure and scope of the OCRS' operations imposed a style of governance and model of sovereignty inextricably tied to oil resources and rents in the Sahara.

Similarly, in 1958, the signing of the new Saharan Oil Code deepened the legislative division between the Algerian and Saharan 'nations.'<sup>22</sup> The Code provided an alternative mechanism through which French sovereignty could be defended and claimed, here through territorial and knowledge control, as well as reinforcing economic linkages. The Code was based on existing French mining codes but designed to fit 'the specific context and climate of Saharan oil extraction.'<sup>23</sup> In this way, it simultaneously differentiated the Algerian desert from the north, anchoring these claims to natural geographies, and drew the Sahara ever closer to the metropole in legal structures.

The Code reinforced the OCRS' role as a regional leader, facilitating its operations, particularly in giving it oversight over the use and deployment of oil revenue.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the Code set out a solution to the thorny issue of foreign investment, sorely needed due to high costs and cutting-edge technical requirements of oil

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<sup>21</sup> OCRS, report, undated, 4. SEAA 208, CADC.

<sup>22</sup> Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," 105-9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 105-6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 109.

prospecting in a desert region, but long resisted over fears of foreign influence and oil monopolies. The Code allowed for both foreign investment and prospecting but maintained substantial French advantages and control, including over the origin of capital invested, preference for joint ventures and enforced technology transfers.<sup>25</sup> This would have significant, long-term consequences as French oil companies continued to benefit from the legacies of their richer concessions and more competitive pricing structure far beyond independence in 1962.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, the Code enforced mandatory data collection through the Bureau de recherches de pétrole (BRP).<sup>27</sup> The BRP was a publicly funded office, which supported the state-backed oil quest by identifying and investing in oil projects.<sup>28</sup> This data collection gave the French government a hegemony over information about Saharan oil prospects.<sup>29</sup> In this way then, the legislative frameworks of oil reinforced operational and commercial French authority and control and simultaneously inscribed the Sahara as a distinct region, but also laid longer term frameworks for continued French influence there.<sup>30</sup>

### An African Petrol Community? The Economic 'Shift'

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<sup>25</sup> Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 74-5.

<sup>26</sup> See chapters 3 and 4 for full discussion on this.

<sup>27</sup> Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," 108.

<sup>28</sup> Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 67.

<sup>29</sup> This gave the state control over areas through their ability to 'see' particularly through mechanisms such as statistical knowledge and data collection, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> This would have important impacts on the Evian accords, see chapter 3 for full discussion.

In 1959, the OCRS underwent a widely publicised shift in scope and function, losing its responsibilities over law and order and becoming dislocated from the Ministry of the Sahara. This, the organisation claimed, would enable it to focus on its economic goals, resource extraction and social advancement.<sup>31</sup> In and of itself demonstrative of the extent of the OCRS' political role hitherto, it seemingly allowed the organisation to pursue the establishment of an economic Saharan unit. One former OCRS representative later argued that this model had been an attempt to create an 'African petrol community of the Sahara,' a 'free gift' from France that had ultimately been 'sabotaged' by nationalism.<sup>32</sup> Suggitt has suggested that this mission, taken alongside the ongoing membership of the post-independence states of Niger and Chad within the OCRS, demonstrates that the OCRS represented a clear attempt to recognise alternative forms of territorial unity and sovereignty in practise. The OCRS could be envisaged as a nascent form of economic community, perhaps similar to the emerging European model. Such a community could outlive colonialism and even avoid the linear progression to the nation-state.<sup>33</sup>

The extent to which the 1959 changes actually represented a clean break from overtly colonialist aims to sovereignty in the Sahara can, of course, be viewed with cynicism. What is clear, however, is that despite, or even precisely because of, the nominal depoliticisation, this model continued to entrench resources within the politics of colonial resource extraction in the Sahara. This is perhaps most evident in

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<sup>31</sup> Ordonnance et décret modifiant et complétant la loi no 57-27 du 10 janvier 1957 créant une organisation commune des régions sahariennes, 2 February 1959, AG/5(1)/182, ANF.

<sup>32</sup> M Lecerf, Note relative à l'entretien avec M Louis Armand, 17 July 1961, 1. SEAA 115, CADC.

<sup>33</sup> On the OCRS' 'depoliticization' and economic focus see Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," 120; Davis, "The Transformation," 111-2.

the ever-growing importance of oil revenue. From 1961, the OCRS was increasingly forced to reduce its dependence on financial support provided by the French state and was tasked with funding its functioning on income from oil taxes.<sup>34</sup> The ongoing debates surrounding Saharan sovereignty and later negotiations over the future status of the OCRS at Evian, suggest that such shifts were not rooted entirely in cynical attempts to minimise expenditure on a project that would soon be pulled from French hands.<sup>35</sup> The OCRS then, promoted, and to some extent, operated, alternative forms of territorial organisation within the Sahara, nominally distancing both itself and the Saharan region from direct colonial rule or a defined nation-state via the framework of an economic regional space. In either case, it is clear that hydrocarbons remained central to both the legitimation and attempted imposition of this ideal.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, taking the OCRS in its longer-term context reveals the extent and influence of these oil based political formations on Saharan governance. As late as 1961, the French government, preparing for negotiations on the question of Algerian independence with the Algerian provisional government (GPRA), was proposing to retain Saharan segregation. In 1961 this argument was pinned to and legitimated by the history of separate governance structures. There were, however three different potential models, which collectively reflected the poorly defined limits of the Sahara in French governance to date. Officials were keen to discount the 1951 model which defined the Saharan border at over 600km south of the coast, because it was too far

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<sup>34</sup> OCRS, notes of the commission général May 1960, 1-2, F60 4004, ANF.

<sup>35</sup> See chapter 3 for further details of the OCRS and the status of the Sahara at and after Evian.

<sup>36</sup> For an exploration of similar trends in Venezuela, see Fernando Coronil *The Magical State: Nature, Money and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

south to incorporate the newly discovered Hassi R'Mel gas reserves. Instead, negotiators based their case and definition of the segregated Sahara on the scope of O CRS operations, around 400km south of the coast, for operational legitimacy, clearly illustrating the significance of oil reserves to drawing of and defining the Saharan region.<sup>37</sup>

The eventual transformation of the O CRS into the Organisme technique draws out the scope and increasing entrenchment of resource governance in the late colonial years perhaps even more clearly. The Organisme was created at independence, written into the Evian Accords, as a bilateral, Franco-Algerian organisation which held similar responsibilities over resource extraction and infrastructures, including the approval of concessions, building of transport and services to support this mission and the provision of funding for oil exploitation. The Organisme, however, held a more 'technical' and limited role, explicitly to facilitate the extraction of hydrocarbons. However, the ongoing confusion over how this exactly translated on the ground, which infrastructures, for example, were specifically 'hydrocarbon', demonstrates the difficulties in extracting an economic entity from the existing structures, which had so tightly bound resource management with political operation.<sup>38</sup> Added to this uncertainty was the translation of the quasi sovereign roles held by the O CRS in its 'social' mission: particularly the provision of public services and political spaces. Particularly telling is the overtly political role the O CRS continued to play in the oil locales, discussed below, even after 1961.

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<sup>37</sup> Note au sujet de la limite, undated.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of the fourth meeting of the conseil d'administration of the Organisme Technique, 14 November 1962, 15-16, 19771403/11, ANF. On the role and responsibilities of the Organisme Technique, see, particularly, Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 81-2 and discussion in chapter 3.

Overall, it is clear that through its management of oil resources and particularly distribution of oil rents, the OCRS promoted, legitimated and, to some extent, imposed the Sahara as a distinct territorial unit, both politically, and, later, economically defined. In both cases, the colonial state attempted, through the OCRS, to define and enact a form of bordering and regionality that fundamentally wove hydrocarbons into claims to sovereignty, the exercise of political power and spatial designation. This espoused and imposed a form of territoriality and citizenship based on and expressed through resource wealth.

### Oil and Saharan Political Space

I turn now to focus on more local and social changes engendered by oil extraction. The analysis here focuses first on Saharan governance structures, before turning to local political engagement. I demonstrate that local government was shaped by and impacted on oil extraction in important ways and argue that local government was a critical site through which the imperial oil polity was translated and experienced, particularly by Saharan populations and oil workers.

### Local Governance Structures

First, the emergence of oil extraction led to the founding and growth of important economic and demographic centres in the northeast of the Sahara, particularly Hassi Messaoud and Edjeleh. The emergence of these new centres shifted the scope and operations of local and imperial government. As noted in chapter one, for example,

the need to control and track the influx of oil sector employees and new arrivals to these nodes led to a need to establish local services, such as the labour office, within the vicinity of the centres. Similarly, increased movement into and across the Sahara, as well as the vast flows of oil revenue, prompted the colonial government to establish a Saharan customs office at Hassi Messaoud in 1959.<sup>39</sup>

These installations are indicative of three key trends. First, the direct impact of the oil industry on governance mechanisms. Oil nodes created a need for such establishments, and thereby inspired and underwrote a more tangible operation of colonial government and sovereignty claims within the Southern territories. This is particularly significant given that customs offices were charged with both fiscal and national security. In effect, these offices had responsibility for assuring the security and 'integrity' of the national colonial territory, guarding the frontier and managing the financial means of state functioning.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, in its regional oversight. As this office operated only within the zone of the OCRS it was another means through which the oil frontier was actualised, here in economic and administrative terms. And finally, in their placement. The customs and employment offices contributed to the establishment of localised geographies of oil. Through such installations, Hassi Messaoud increasingly emerged as a political, as well as commercial and demographic, centre in the Sahara.

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<sup>39</sup> Le Directeur de la comptabilité publique, note à la direction du trésor, 20 May 1960, B-248838, CDEF.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

The emergence of the oil nodes also shaped the geographies of other administrative seats, most notably the *préfecture*. Part of the interior governance system, the responsibilities of *préfets* have varied over time, but broadly, they represented the central government as the 'pivot' of territorial administration, operating key controls at departmental level, such as maintaining public order. They were traditionally based at the geographic centre of a *département*.<sup>41</sup> In this case, however, location was instead dictated by the need to facilitate a close logistical relationship with the oil companies, as well as proximity to the 'core' of the French colony in the Sahara, that is to say, predominately oil company employees.<sup>42</sup> As such Ouargla, the closest major city to Hassi Messaoud, was designated the *préfecture* of the *département*, a nomination that owed itself almost entirely to its proximity to the oil centres.<sup>43</sup>

The proposal of the new Algerian government in 1963 to move the *préfecture* to Laghouat significantly concerned local French diplomats and, according to them, the local *préfet* himself. They attributed the ongoing peace and stability of the region to the close logistical links between the *préfecture* and the oil companies.<sup>44</sup> This association was certainly very close, the *préfecture* was under fire from local militias and the local police force who specifically cited the closeness of the relationship with

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<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the size of *départements* were initially fixed around the *préfet* in the centre so that the *préfet* could travel to any point in the department on horseback within a day. Paul J. Stephenson, "Napoleon, Nostalgia and Number Plates: An Analysis of the Reactions to the Attali Commission's Proposal to Abolish the French *Département*" *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 20, no.4 (2012): 480. DOI: [10.1080/14782804.2012.737664](https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2012.737664); Alistair Cole, "Prefects in Search of a Role in a Europeanised France." *Journal of Public Policy* 31, no. 3 (2011): 397. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41302621>.

<sup>42</sup> J.L. Mandereau letter to the French Ambassador to Algeria, 17 January 1963, Ouargla Consulat Série A, MDAE, CDAN.

<sup>43</sup> Chaouche-Bencherif, "La Micro-urbanisation," 236-8.

<sup>44</sup> F Delavesne to the Minister of the Sahara, Sécurité des pétroliers au Sahara, 5 December 1957, 18V01807/297, TA. Mandereau letter to the French Ambassador.

the oil companies as the critical issue.<sup>45</sup> It is clear therefore, that the emergence of a physical oil assemblage and particularly demographic and economic nodes inspired and underwrote shifts in local government in the late colonial Sahara. These evolutions reinforced the Saharan border but also created a physical political centre based around the physical and economic networks of oil.

Oil nodes, moreover, were increasingly connected to each other, simultaneously de- and re- localised within Saharan political space, in an archipelagic geography of shared political experience.<sup>46</sup> This is most evident in the establishment of 'zones of development' at Edjeleh and Hassi Messaoud in 1961. The explicit aim of colonial government was to legally establish across these two areas a singular 'collectivity' under a communal law. This was nominally to facilitate the infrastructural and urban development of these rapidly growing areas, areas separated by over 400 miles. The new political designation of these territories placed them both together, and under the direct control of the OCRS. And within development zones, the OCRS held further expanded powers over the finances, public services, and urban development. Generous budget allocations, alongside the specific pattern of architectural and urban development pursued by the OCRS (discussed below), further marked these areas as economically, socially, and politically interconnected, and markedly distinct from their surroundings.<sup>47</sup> Set against the wider backdrop of the OCRS' retreat from

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<sup>45</sup> Consulat générale of Ouargla, letter to French Ambassador, 22 December 1962, Ouargla Consulat Série A, MDAE, CDAN.

<sup>46</sup> On the concept of natural resources archipelagos, see Simon Jackson, "The phosphate archipelago: Imperial mining and global agriculture in French North Africa" *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte / Economic History Yearbook* 57, no. 1 (2016) <https://doi.org/10.1515/jbwg-2016-0009>.

<sup>47</sup> OCRS, Note, Projets de décrets portant création des zones de développement d'Hassi Messaoud et d'In Amenas, 16 March 1961, B-24972, CDEF.

overtly 'political' functions elsewhere in the Sahara, the stratification of local political structures, and their basis relative to resource wealth, becomes all the more stark.

As the OCRS evolved into the Organisme Technique after independence, French interests sought to retain this layered political framework, continuing to define hydrocarbon production as a political designation. Even in 1963, debates continued about the lines of political authority in the former zones of special development around Edjeleh and Hassi Messaoud. French representatives were unwilling to allow these areas to fold into 'normal' local administrative structures, arguing that, due to their direct connection to resource extraction, infrastructural development here should continue to fall under the authority of the body for resource management, that is to say, the Organisme itself.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the delegates posited that without the Organisme's involvement, responsibility would fall exclusively to oil companies, who, they suggested would provide generous public infrastructures only for their employees, and exclude local residents.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, the committee resolved to undertake further discussions with the Algerian state on the limits and extent of its own role here, but the discussion and questions it generated demonstrate how politically compartmentalised these areas had become, even as the public interest remained a common rhetorical focus.

Oil thus engendered dramatic shifts in local governance in the Sahara, as these institutions became increasingly reflective of and intertwined within the material and

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<sup>48</sup> Minutes of the fourth meeting of the conseil d'administration de l'organisme technique, 15-16.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

economic networks of natural resources. Taken together, the localisation of the préfecture, customs office and zones of special development are demonstrative of how geographies of oil shaped representation and application of colonial government in a localised and more granular way. These local political structures simultaneously reproduced the Saharan frontier and imposed new local geographies of political space and institutions. In particular, the overtly political role of the OCRS over the producing nodes effectively removed these spaces from 'ordinary' political functioning, creating a complex, layered political geography that tied these areas ever closer to their oil reserves, establishing oil production as a form of political designation, space, and identity.

## Political Space

In another evolution limited to the Sahara, and concentrated predominantly in the oil extracting locales, the oil industry imposed on and changed political spaces such as voting patterns, citizenship, and organised labour. These political spaces can be understood as 'the avenues, opportunities, and entry points' through which 'citizens [could] express their voice and influence political outcomes.'<sup>50</sup> This section explores how the demographics, physical infrastructures, and economic weight of the new oil centres impacted voting patterns and citizenship, how this status was defined and enacted, and finally, broader forms of civil engagement, specifically, organised labour

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<sup>50</sup> For this conceptualisation of political space, see particularly Lars Engberg-Pedersen and Neil Webster, eds, *In the Name of the Poor: Contesting Political Space for Poverty* (London: Zed Books, 2002) and National Democratic Institute, "A Matter of Political Space", Civic Update, 50 (April 2016), 1.  
<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Issue%2050%20A%20Matter%20of%20Political%20Space.pdf> (ndi.org)

groups. This again shows in action the social embedding of top-down ideas of the Saharan frontier.

First, the demographic and economic constitution of the oil locales significantly shaped voter behaviour and outcomes. As one example, in the 1961 referendum on Algerian independence, Hassi Messaoud, its population around 8,500, registered a strikingly low proportion of 'yes' votes. 'Yes' registered a mere 54% against a departmental average of 80%.<sup>51</sup> Equally striking was the relative apathy to the vote itself, Hassi Messaoud registered a mere 41% turnout against a departmental turnout of 61%, in most regional centres this was as high as 80%.<sup>52</sup>

Local authorities attributed these anomalies to the town's unique demography, stressing particularly the strong proportion of French voters in the area.<sup>53</sup> This demography, it should be underlined, was the direct result of imperial and commercial policies that favoured a high proportion of French specialists in the workforce.<sup>54</sup> Further, imperial policy had consciously limited the access of politically 'extreme' north Algerians to the oil sites, and the workforce, fearing their potential political influence.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, French authorities posited that voting behaviour reflected vested economic interests of many locals, prioritising sustained

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<sup>51</sup> Résultat du referendum dans les départements des Oasis et de La Saoura, 11 January 1961, AG/5(1)/1824, ANF. Nationally this figure was around 69% but affected by FLN boycott affecting particularly behaviours in the north; Konrad Schliephake, *Oil and Regional Development Examples from Algeria and Tunisia* (New York: Praeger, 1977), 97.

<sup>52</sup> Résultat du referendum ; Premier jour de scrutin dans les départements des Oasis et de La Saoura, 7 January 1961, AG/5(1)/1824, ANF.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> On the lack of trained Algerian personnel and technicians, see Musso, "Taking Control," 181-4.

<sup>55</sup> Minutes the état-major mixte, 25 September 1961

and profitable oil extraction, and particularly securing local influence and access to oil revenue.<sup>56</sup> Whilst there is no specific discussion of why French citizens here were more strongly wedded to a French Algeria than in the metropole (where the yes vote stood around 75%) in these documents, reporting from both American diplomats and British oil companies cite a strong adherence to these ideals, and later to the OAS, amongst French oilmen.<sup>57</sup> The emerging political demography of oil towns then, was shaped by a purposeful narrowing of access and influence by state and commercial interests alongside localised interests. In conjunction with the shift in local governance noted above, this further contributed to the political distinctiveness, or even separation, of the oil nodes, both ideologically and in real terms.

Secondly, the oil industry shaped the ways in which citizenship for Algerian Saharan populations was defined and enacted. Oil extraction defined the ways in which national citizens were designated and the ways in which the rights and privileges associated with this citizenship were unequally claimed, in places acting an accelerant to wider trends, and in places imposing new logics. Defining citizenship, the link between political and territorial membership, was particularly complex in the context of the Sahara, whose boundaries and borders remained porous and ill-defined.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the questions and tensions bound up in these developments

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<sup>56</sup> Cabinet of the Préfecture des Oasis, Synthèse mensuelle de renseignements May 1961, 6. AG/5(1)/1824, ANF.

<sup>57</sup> T. E. Evans, letter to R.M Hadow, 9 May 1962. FCO 165671, NA.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Collyer, "A geography of extra-territorial citizenship: Explanations of external voting" , *Migration Studies*, 2, no.1 (March 2014): 55-57, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mns008>; Sèbe, "A fragmented and forgotten decolonization," 211; Alf Andrew Heggoy, "Colonial Origins of the Algerian-Moroccan Border Conflict of October 1963," *African Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (1970). [doi:10.2307/523680](https://doi.org/10.2307/523680).

were foundationally about physical and political space, particularly access and rights to place and space, mobility, and territory.

Oil extraction had a profound influence on the definition and recognition of national citizenship due to its entwinement with wider trends of border setting and regulation, as well as rates of sedentarisation (discussed below). Specific to oil particularly, the vast new road networks destroyed much of the economic foundations of Tuareg trade and mobility, exacerbated by the border tensions and loss of transnational movement in the Edjeleh region, associated with rival claims to the oil reserves.<sup>59</sup> Tensions over claims to borders, and particularly oil in these areas boiled over into 'claiming' or settling of citizens themselves. For example, in March 1959, oil company activity in the El Oued region near the border with Tunisia was proliferating as the extent of the reserves, which stretched across both national territories, were becoming clearer. Oil companies, as well as civilian and military authorities, were increasingly wary of how these activities would be perceived in a deeply contested territory. In one sign of the gathering tensions, a group of the nomadic tribe of the Rebais were abducted by a unit of Tunisian soldiers, forced to sign a document recognising themselves as Tunisian citizens and issued with an identity card to this effect. This was justified to them by their abductors on the grounds that the region would soon be recognised as Tunisian territory.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Adjel-Debbich, "La crise"; Romo-Navarrete, "Un face-à-face franco-libyen," 381; Claudot-Hawad, "A Nomadic Fight," 664; Camau and Geisser, *Habib Bourguiba*, 458-9; Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, 278.

<sup>60</sup> Léon Bourgois, letter to Admiral Lamorte and M. le Therisien, 9 March 1959, 18V01807/297, TA.

Furthermore, in the longer term, the sense of social and economic rupture experienced by many nomadic groups, and particularly the Tuaregs, as a result of these processes was significant. Many experienced poverty, famine, and the loss of heritage, lifestyle, and identity.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the oil nodes saw a far higher rate of sedentarisation than elsewhere in the Sahara due particularly to the economic possibilities and social infrastructures they offered.<sup>62</sup> As one example, a contemporary study of the social changes in the region argued that the Hassi Messaoud discovery had ‘strongly contributed’ to the sedentarisation of the Mekdama tribe around Ouargla, who had virtually ‘no unemployment’ and a ‘much better quality of life’ as a result of work on the oil sites.<sup>63</sup> Added to this was the upswing in established private land in these areas which disrupted access to space and, in some cases, migratory routes. The problem was so acute that an indemnity was later considered.<sup>64</sup>

As a result of this deprivation of community resources and territory, the relationship between nomadic peoples and the state underwent significant evolution. These communities became increasingly reliant on state provided infrastructures, such as plumbing, sanitation systems and transport networks, as well as through the

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<sup>61</sup> Petra C. Besenhard and Nikolai G. Wenzel, “Circumventing the predatory state: Lessons and futures for the Tuareg from the new development economics”, *International Journal of Development Issues* 16, no.3\_ (2017) DOI:10.1108/IJDI-03-2017-0032; Andrew Alesbury, “A Society in Motion: The Tuareg from the pre-colonial era to today”, *Nomadic Peoples* 17, no. 1 (2013) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43123923>; Anja Fischer and Ines Kohl, “Tuareg Moving Global: An Introduction” in *Tuareg Society within a Globalized World* eds Anja Fischer and Ines Kohl (Thomson Press: New York, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> Keira Bachar, “La vallée du M’Zab : mutations urbaines et préoccupations socio-environnementales”, *Insaniyat* 91 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.4000/insaniyat.24692>.

<sup>63</sup> Operation Mekhdama, Enquête Pilote Psychotechnique, sociologique et médicale sur l’adoption au travail industriel de la main d’œuvre saharienne, April 1958, 14.18V01807/615, TA.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Conseil d’Administration de la SAHM, 31 January-1 February 1962, 18V01807/168, TA.

emerging relationship with an industrial workforce. Research has shown, for example, how by the early 1960s, many formerly nomadic groups were becoming progressive voices in Algerian socialism, particularly in their insistence on the role of the state to provide them, as citizens, with opportunities for paid work.<sup>65</sup> These shifting archetypes of citizenship and of place within the wider political space were however, deeply complicated by the forms of resource governance in the Sahara. The OCSR for many Tuaregs had, at the time, been taken as the foundation of and ultimately a promise towards a Tuareg Saharan state. Indeed, these tensions ultimately contributed to the eruption of a rebellion in neighbouring Mali.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, as discussed in further detail below, the semi-sovereign role and status of the oil companies themselves created new layers and limitations within the citizen-state relationship. In particular, across their concessions, oil companies were direct providers of much of the public infrastructures that represented the direct connection between 'state' and citizens, including water supplies, and actively engaged in broad social policies, including direct negotiation with representatives of nomadic groups. In this way, both the structures of oil governance and the changes wrought by the extractive industries to mobility, territorial access, and local economies across the Sahara, shaped and layered the definitions of and claims upon citizen status and rights.

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<sup>65</sup> Richard W. Franke, "Tuareg of West Africa: Five Experiments in Fourth World Development," *Antipode* 6, 2 (September 1984), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.1984.tb00662.x> 49-51; Alesbury, "A Society," 118.

<sup>66</sup> Pierre Boilley, "Géopolitique africaine et rebellions touarègues. Approches locales, approches globales (1960-2011)", *L'Année du Maghreb* 7 (2011) <https://doi.org/10.4000/anneemaghreb.1182>; Andre Salifou, *La question touareg au Niger*, (Paris: Karthala, 1993), 37; Delphine Perrin, "Tuaregs and Citizenship: 'The Last Camp of Nomadism,'" *Middle East Law and Governance* 6, no.3 (2014), DOI : [303-4. ffhal-01395167](https://doi.org/10.1017/ffhal-01395167) ; Sèbe, "A fragmented and forgotten decolonization," 212-213.

The third mechanism through which oil extraction became written into the political fabric of Saharan citizenship was through the provision of paid industrial labour. In its creation of an industrial workforce, significant in both its regional singularity and the high wages it paid, if not in numerical weight, the oil industry provided a new form of citizenship and political influence and engagement: industrial citizenship.<sup>67</sup> This concept broadly refers to a belonging rooted in the workplace and the role of employment within civic engagement, incorporating individual company cultures which seek to establish and acknowledge a type of employment-based citizenship as well as the claiming and exercise of rights by trade unions.<sup>68</sup> Here I show first how the emergence of an oil-based workforce underwrote colonial politico-economic designations of the Saharan space in rhetorical and tangible ways, before turning to consider industrial citizenship as a form of political engagement.

As noted above, the late colonial government was engaged in a process, on a rhetorical level at least, of representing and/or establishing the Sahara as a depoliticised technical and economic unit.<sup>69</sup> As Davis has demonstrated, this required a redefinition of Saharan identity and ethnicity, classifying how these populations, and particularly how different ethnic and tribal groups, 'fitted' within the economic

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<sup>67</sup> F de Laboulaye, *Problèmes humains au Sahara*, 30 December 1958 ; Internal CFP A memo, 1959. 18V01807/192, TA. Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Sophie Bérout, "Perspectives critiques sur la participation dans le monde du travail : éléments de repérage et de discussion," *Participations* 5, no. 1 (2013) <https://doi.org/10.3917/parti.005.0005> ; Tim Strangleman, "Rethinking industrial citizenship: the role and meaning of work in an age of austerity," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol 66, no. 4 (December 2015), pp.673-90. DOI: [10.1111/1468-4446.12135](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12135); Paul Bagguley, "Industrial citizenship: a re-conceptualisation and case study of the UK", *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 33, no. 5/6 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-07-2012-0061>.

<sup>69</sup> Davis, "The Transformation," 111-2.

Sahara, and how they would interact with the new colonial and industrial systems in place.<sup>70</sup> Oil companies, therefore, were again critical as the foundation of and tangible expression of these ideals, providing, as they did, the economic foundation to the project whilst also employing an important French and Saharan industrial workforce. Further, particularly striking in the rhetoric of both the OCRS and oil companies is a consistent emphasis on both novelty but also scope of impact of such employment, positing hydrocarbons as ‘the first industrial contact’ in the region (despite pre-existing industries, particularly mining) and emphasising how their work in Sahara was contributing to ‘global’ economic and social development.<sup>71</sup>

These concerns led to a proliferating form of ‘academic’ study of local peoples, which aimed to develop a ‘profound’ understanding of indigenous Saharan people, in order to both ‘protect’ them and facilitate their adaptation to a ‘new’ life.<sup>72</sup> A vast number of studies were undertaken with the financial and practical support of oil companies, often conducted on their bases and studying oil company staff. This work ranged from observations of the personal hygiene and eating habits of Saharan staff (including how often they showered to how much and which food they ate) to large-scale psychometric, intelligence and sociological testing which sought to identify those ‘categories’ of Saharans most adaptable to industrial work.<sup>73</sup> These studies,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid; Davis, “The Transformation,” 88-91.

<sup>71</sup> Prozuha, *Compte-rendu des activités 1957-1958*, 10, 18V01807/615, TA. Francis Borrey and Georges Lambert, “Quels problèmes humains se posent dans le Sahara moderne?” in *Le Sahara en Questions* ed. Louis Armand, (Paris: La NEF, 1960), 41, F60 40004, ANF; Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 7.

<sup>72</sup> Prohuza untitled and undated report, 18V01807/615, TA. Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 8.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid; M. Faure, “Considération sur la main-d’œuvre locale au Sahara”, *Algérie Médicale* 65, no.10 (October 1961), 18V01807/615, TA; Davis, “The Transformation,” 88-91. For more on colonial ethnography and categories of identity see particularly, Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam* (California: University of California Press 2014).

which were subsequently published in academic literature, internal business documentation and the oil companies' staff magazines, argued, for example, that the Harratine tribe were far better suited to industrial work than the Tuaregs. More broadly, they also claimed that sedentary peoples were better suited to the industrial roles than nomadic communities.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the changing roles of the Harratine, many of whom had been previously enslaved with little to no political rights or status, and their ascension to both political and economic 'freedom' through the oil industry was often invoked in defence of the French role in the Sahara. This further intertwined the oil industry with the status and rights of citizenship in the region.<sup>75</sup>

Taken together, these studies and proliferating literatures therefore represent an important element in the evolving socio-political status and presentation of the Sahara and its population. These works further reinforced the Saharan-Algerian distinction but also, crucially, conceived of Saharan populations as active participants in the Franco-Saharan industrial economic unit.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, oil companies were critical actors in the application as well as production of such 'knowledge,' using the findings to shape their recruitment and induction processes for local staff, including amending the selection processes for nomads to a system 'better adapted to their level of comprehension' and wider training schemes.<sup>77</sup> Again, a pattern of geographic disparity in both knowledge production and application can be mapped, given the

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<sup>74</sup> Davis "Algeria's Colonial Geography," 324; Prohuza, Preliminary report 'Operation Mekhadma', 1958. 18V01807/615, TA.

<sup>75</sup> For more on the relationship between evolving forms labour and the end of slavery in the Saharan regions see Benedetta Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid: politics, labour, and ecology in the Nigerien Sahel, 1800–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2015).

<sup>76</sup> Davis, "Algeria's Colonial Geography," 324.

<sup>77</sup> Prohuza, untitled and undated report.

concentration of these programmes in the north of the Algerian Sahara, and explicitly linked, again, to the oil reserves. The M'zabite peoples of the south, for example, are conspicuously absent. In these ways, the oil industry inspired and operated a range of mechanisms which reinforced the politico-economic designations of the Sahara overall but also integrated, rhetorically and practically, local people in the application of these principles.

Secondly, in the creation of a new industrial workforce, the oil industry opened the way to new forms of political engagement, belonging and rights through industrial citizenship. These new avenues of political influence and action represented a clear shift in the Franco-Algerian political space. Further, as will be demonstrated below, the highly regionalistic ways in which these mechanisms were formed and operated reinforced the colonial Saharan frontier at the level of workers themselves.

The first element of industrial citizenship that can be traced across the Saharan oil nodes were ideas connecting industry and even company specific cultures to the formation and expression of a citizenry inextricably linked to the workplace. The rich literature surrounding the experiences of CFP A and SN REPAL employees in the Sahara makes frequent references to a number of the key elements of this form of citizenry.<sup>78</sup> A familial sense of belonging is perceptible through the company magazines, which published notices of engagements, marriages and births as well descriptions of the organisations in terms of 'family' or brotherhood'.<sup>79</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>78</sup> Strangleman, "Rethinking industrial citizenship," 682.

<sup>79</sup> *CFP Actualités* 3 (1959), 17, 27, 18V01807/236, TA.

employees' labour was explicitly connected to wider political issues, notably Saharan development and even of the role of the company in 'creating' 'good' citizens was evident.<sup>80</sup>

Crucially, these narratives of belonging were not limited exclusively to French employees, but nominally extended to Saharan employees. These workers were included in these narratives primarily as partners in the 'fraternity of labour' but are clearly marked out as distinct from their compatriots because of their employment status. Stress is laid on the physical and social metamorphosis of these individuals as they become 'modern' citizens of the French empire, as represented through their clothes, means of transport, social activities, and physical appearance.<sup>81</sup> Further, oil companies linked training and employment to the development and promotion of key values of Saharan citizenship: a Franco-Algerian community, or, 'team spirit,' joint technical and developmental production and a 'professional conscience' through employment.<sup>82</sup> In this way then, oil companies were active participants in the elaboration and attempted recognition of a specific type of industrial citizenship in the Sahara. These company actors promoted not only a sense of industrial belonging but also played an active role in the fashioning of model citizens through their employment, particularly significant in the context of the modelling of an economic Saharan unit.

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<sup>80</sup> Strangleman, "Rethinking industrial citizenship," 682-685; See, for example, M Delpont, "Editorial" and Le Comité de Rédaction, "Le numero que voici," *CFP Actualités* 2 (1959) (unpaginated); J Benezit, "Editorial" *CFP Actualités* 1 (1959) (unpaginated), 18V01807/236, TA.

<sup>81</sup> Davis, "Algeria's Colonial Geography," 324; Plessis, "Quel visage"; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 6.

<sup>82</sup> OCRS, Bulletin no. 4, 4-7.

The second aspect of this evolving industrial citizenship was the emergence of new, and influential, trade unions across the oil companies in the Sahara. Trade unionism was significant for the changing political space particularly because the rights exercised by trade unions are not encapsulated under broad conceptions of citizenship or political rights, but rather are unique as collective social actors that bear rights, powers, and even legal obligations.<sup>83</sup> Their emergence in the Sahara represented both a new political actor as well an expression of the existence of industrial citizens, linked specifically to oil labour.

As well as their links to national movements, and particularly the question of Algerian sovereignty, these union chapters also demonstrate the salience of regionalistic concerns and identities. As discussed in chapter three, Algerian unions reflected a clear regional division, electing leaders on tickets that promoted union devolution, rejecting leaders appointed by the union's *centrale* as 'puppets of Algiers' and demanding that local representatives focus on local needs.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, as noted above, in the build up to independence, French workers at SN REPAL and CFP A created local chapters that sought specifically to protect their employment in the event of independence.<sup>85</sup> These chapters were distinct from the wider industry movement, which nominally sought employment protection for workers in the sector more generally, and which exerted pressure to secure expanded benefits, nominally

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<sup>83</sup> Bagguley, "Industrial citizenship", 269-71; Thomas Humphrey Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1992).

<sup>84</sup> Troubles of Oil Workers, 21 October 1965, Box 1378, RG 59, NARA; J. R. Mandereau, Problèmes syndicaux aux Sahara-Réélection du Secrétaire Général de l'U.G.T.A., 13 April 1964. PO ALG V 730, MDAE, CDAN; André Pautard, "Un Syndicalisme mal adapté", *Le Monde*, 13 January 1965, SEAA 30, CDAC; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 13-14; 21.

<sup>85</sup> See full discussion in chapter one.

in a unilateral manner, across French and Algerian employees. Structural inequalities and racial hierarchies certainly persisted within this broader activism, but the prism of the Sahara environment emerges as a critical division within both national and transnational unionism here.<sup>86</sup> Not only did the presence of oil companies therefore facilitate the emergence of powerful labour movements within the Sahara, these movements demonstrated again the emergence of regionalised identities and concerns shaped and expressed specifically through hydrocarbons.

Overall, therefore, the local political space of the Sahara was impacted significantly by the emergence of the oil industry here as a mechanism of political influence. Voting, industrial action, and the deployment of citizenship categories as means of claiming rights and privileges were shaped by the hydrocarbon networks (physical infrastructures as well as staffing), alongside oil company cultures and policies. Through these processes, there is again clear evidence of the tangible emergence of the Saharan frontier, particularly in terms of identity, as well as localised geographies of resource extraction.

It is clear therefore, that at both a regional and localised level the oil discoveries inspired, shaped, and underwrote significant changes to political structures, mechanisms, and engagement in the Sahara. In these ways, oil shaped and imposed legislative expressions of the frontier: its resources and rents were used by state

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<sup>86</sup> See Margaret Andersen, "Race, Migration, and Fears of Communism in 1948 Morocco," *Journal of Contemporary History* 55, no.1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200941877876> for a discussion of how intra-Saharan identities and tensions were reflected in unions in the late colonial period.

actors to promote and legitimate the Saharan frontier in law and economic frameworks whilst the frontier itself was shaped by the natural geographies of oil. In this way, hydrocarbons were increasingly intertwined with the legitimization of sovereignty and shaped the exercise, influence over, and access to, political power and designation, particularly acute in the areas local to oil extraction.

### The Refining and Extractive Network: Infrastructure and Social Practice

While the previous section showed how the legislation of the Saharan frontier encoded oil into the local social politics of sovereignty and citizenship, this section develops the overall argument by turning to another aspect of the Saharan frontier, infrastructural assemblages.

This section examines the assemblage of physical networks and wider infrastructures such as water, wells, and roads associated with oil extraction in the Saharan context. I argue that these physical networks had significant impacts on the evolution and translation of the frontier into lived experiences at the level of local economies and ecologies. In particular, I show that whilst these infrastructures were imposed from ‘above,’ by state and company actors and helped ‘make’ or impose the Saharan frontier, we cannot understand the shape or impacts of infrastructures, or the frontier, without incorporating a local lens, integrating the adaption and use of this assemblage by local actors. In this way, the framework of the assemblage provides new insights into the social histories of the Saharan region.<sup>87</sup> Secondly, and

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<sup>87</sup> For a distinct use of assemblages, incorporating empirical, methodological and ontological ones, see Neil Brenner, David J. Madden and David Wachsmuth, “Assemblage urbanism and the challenges of critical urban

relatedly, this focus on infrastructural iterations of oil, and how these became written into the physical and social landscape of the region, highlights the variance and distinct chronologies of late colonial political power in the Saharan region. In particular, I show that political and commercial actors deployed oil infrastructures, first emerging in the early 1950s, to iterate a homogenised regionalisation of the Algerian Sahara, before this model was replaced by a concentration on the oil enclaves. However, these discarded infrastructures shaped the economy and regional connections in much longer term, particularly because of the ways in which they were used and appropriated by local actors.

The first section focuses specifically on the evolution of the wider, supportive networks underpinning hydrocarbon extraction, first water provision and then transport networks. The analysis explores how these networks, shifting over time and place, were shaped and appropriated by the local community, and how, in turn, these systems changed the Saharan frontier. Whilst I do focus predominately on state and company records, with a more limited draw on local voices themselves, these records do provide useful insights into the ways in which this infrastructure was socially embedded and operated day to day.

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theory", *City Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action* 15 (2011).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2011.568717> The account draws on Santiago's model of the oil ecology, an industrial reshaping of land tenure, land use and social structures as well as approaches developed by Heim, Vitalis and Barry, which focus on the interplay between the physical structure of oil and urban forms and experiences. These socio-infrastructural histories are interwoven into the layered political geographies and uneven chronologies of colonial rule, drawing on approaches that link energy infrastructure to the production of political and economic power. Myrna .I. Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor and the Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2006); Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, (London, Verso, 2009); Hein, *Oil Spaces*; Gavin Bridge, Begüm Özkaynak and Ethemcan Turhan, "Energy infrastructure and the fate of the nation: Introduction to special issue," *Energy Research and Social Science* 41 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2018.04.029>.

The second section turns to focus on the infrastructures directly engaged in the extraction and refining of oil, the new oil towns in the northeast of the Sahara as well as the Hassi Messaoud refinery and processing plants. This highlights the material and financial infrastructure of the resource frontier in everyday life, notably in relation to energy consumption, the grassroots reach of imperial governance, and the social practices that helped (in part) to configure the impact of the new infrastructure assemblages.

### Exploratory Networks

Histories of Algerian oil in the colonial era typically open in 1956, when oil was famously discovered at Edjeleh and France became an oil power 'overnight.' The historiography then shifts to focus on the years from 1960 to 1962, as oil became a central economic force and strategic political concern at Evian.<sup>88</sup>

As I will show here, however, the infrastructures of oil have a far longer, more socially embedded and geographically broader history. In fact, oil exploration in Algeria was initially concentrated in the north, before shifting focus to the desert in 1951. The first traces of oil and gas were discovered at a deep drilling as early as 1952 in Ghardaïa.<sup>89</sup> These steps constituted part of an important wider search which

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<sup>88</sup> Saul, "SN REPAL," 102; Wheeler, "The Avant-Garde in Petroleum."

<sup>89</sup> John I. Clarke, *Economic and Political Changes in the Sahara Geography* 46, no. 2 (April 1961), 102-119. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40565229>; 109.

necessitated vast physical and staffing infrastructures, which, in turn, had important implications for local communities.

First, the oil search both constituted and inspired a rapidly proliferating cartographic human geography and above all geological exploration of the region.<sup>90</sup> This vastly expanded knowledge of the Sahara's subsoil, alongside exploratory drilling and establishment of water wells to support exploration sites, led to the increased understanding and exploitation of the region's subterranean water reservoirs. In this way, oil companies were critical in the discovery and establishment of important water resources. It was oil companies, for example, who discovered the crucial Albian stratum in Ouargla, which was producing 15,000m<sup>3</sup> a day by 1959.<sup>91</sup> Other, smaller discoveries were made across the Algerian Sahara, either as incidental discoveries in drilling for oil, or wells were deliberately established to support these sites of interest.<sup>92</sup>

The water discoveries were of great significance to both local populations and the colonial government. For example, a well at Hassi Gubaiet was left as an accessible water source for migratory groups. Some groups, such as the Chaamba, actually changed their routes to incorporate the well, clearly demonstrating the active exploitation and repurposing of the wider oil infrastructure by local people.<sup>93</sup> At some

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<sup>90</sup> Christian Verlaque, "Les recherches pétrolières dans le Sahara français," *Travaux de l'Institut des recherches Sahariennes de l'Université d'Alger* 14 (1955), 174. For an account of the importance of maps within the colonising process and defining of the Algerian space and its borders see Hélène Blais, *Mirages de la carte: L'invention de l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: Fayard, 2014).

<sup>91</sup> Vincent Monteil, "The Evolution and settling of the nomads of the Sahara," *International Social Science Journal* 11, no.4 (1959), 576-8, Unesco Digital Library <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000017066>

<sup>93</sup> Verlaque, "Les recherches," 174.

600 miles west of Hassi Messaoud, this site is further indicative of the geographical extent of the industry's social implications and exemplifies why a wider temporal and geography framework is so critical to developing a coherent analysis of the industry's history. Other sites, like Ohanet and Hassi Bouzid, were sold to state authorities; still others were simply passed over to the colonial hydraulic services. Such wells were appropriated to serve wider regional development plans, such as the establishment of a local sector of livestock farming at Ohanet.<sup>94</sup> These cases highlight that the layering of the political and economic geographies of oil, whilst predominately confined to the Hassi Messaoud and Edjeleh areas of the Sahara, was a dynamic and shifting process. More broadly these instances point to the significance of the afterlives of oil installations: the social and economic repercussions that far outlive their 'active' use and the transient attention paid to them in historiography narrowly focused on oil as a 'prize.'

Nonetheless, employment in the early stages of oil exploration had a shorter-term economic impact. The staffing infrastructure of early drilling consisted predominately of French technical specialists with a small support staff of local men, around 1,500 in total, by 1955.<sup>95</sup> Available jobs were limited to drilling aides or derrick hands, with very little upward mobility. Most contracts ran for only one month, or in a minority of cases, up to six months, before drilling teams moved on to the next potential site.<sup>96</sup> Very few of their existing local workforce moved with them, most were left

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<sup>94</sup> Note de présentation du Programme OCSR, 29 September 1959, appendix 2, B-24890 CDEF.

<sup>95</sup> Verlaque, "Les recherches," 176.

<sup>96</sup> Christian Verlaque, "Evolution de la recherche pétrolière dans le Sahara français," *Travaux de l'Institut de Recherches Sahariennes* 16 (1957), 162.

‘disillusioned’ by the insecurity of the work.<sup>97</sup> Indicative of the transitory nature and failed expectations of the industry even its earliest stage, such trends are also reflective of the non-linear process of the establishment and integration of ‘modern’ industry.<sup>98</sup> Such temporal and spatial variation is further evident in the wide array of physical iterations as well as staffing networks, that were inspired, shaped, and underwritten by the early phases of Saharan oil exploitation. The analysis turns now to these networks, focusing on roads primarily as the critical link between industrial requirements and local communities.

Road networks proliferated from the earliest stages of the oil quest. Following a significant development of un-tarred roads by the colonial administration in the interwar period, the years 1952 to 1958 saw a rapid expansion of roads.<sup>99</sup> These were built by oil companies themselves as well as the OCRS. These roads grew inter-Saharan connections as well as joining the mineral nodes up to the major trans-Saharan routes.<sup>100</sup> The research phase of oil extraction requires the largest quantity of product delivery: basic equipment, explosives, boreholes and drilling rigs, and so

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>98</sup> Ferguson, *Expectations*, 81-2. On local expectations around oil sector employment, and particularly how these evolve from the planning and construction phases onwards, see Asaah Sumaila Mohammed, Emmanuel Graham and Stanley K. Dary, “Rising expectations and dying hopes: Local perceptions of oil and gas extraction in Ghana,” *Energy Research & Social Science* 88 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2022.102529> and Tom Ogwang and Frank Vanclay, “Cut-off and forgotten? Livelihood disruption, social impacts and food insecurity arising from the East African Crude Oil Pipeline,” *Energy Research & Social Science* 74 (2021): 7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.101970>.

<sup>99</sup> Clarke, *Economic and Political Changes*, 112. On colonial road development, materials and conditions in the interwar years see Benjamin Thomas, “Transport in the Algerian Sahara,” *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers* 13 (1951): 19–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24042176> and Libbie Freed, “Networks of (colonial) power: roads in French Central Africa after World War I,” *History and Technology*, 26, no.3 (2010), 207-210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07341512.2010.498637>

<sup>100</sup> Bossard *An Atlas*, 113-4; Brogni, “L’exploitation,” 151-2, Plessis, “Quel visage,” 28; Suggitt, “Impossible Endings,” 86-7, 99-102; Jennings “A Land,” 29-30.

this process is dependent on, and engenders, a vast transport network.<sup>101</sup> In the Sahara, these requirements were accelerated by the technological and material characteristics of the oil itself and location-specific industry technical strategies. The use of seismic refraction, for example, required greater infrastructural support. This was an important methodology in the Sahara due to the specific local geological conditions.<sup>102</sup>

In these earlier phases, the wide spread of new roads across the Sahara, connected to military requirements as well as the oil industry, had vast impacts on local land ecologies. First, proliferating vehicle-based travel replaced transport caravans vastly reduced the power and wealth of many nomadic groups who had relied on this income.<sup>103</sup> At the same time, the road networks allowed the circulation of manufactured goods from the north which undercut local artisanal products.<sup>104</sup> This further contributed to increased rates of sedentarisation, fuelling the growing poverty, social dislocations and identity crisis discussed above. Some groups, however, were able to capitalise on the new infrastructures and integrate these in evolving agricultural practices. This was particularly the case for those with existing wealth, perhaps most clear in the cases of groups who were able to purchase vehicles to transport herds across the desert to chase rainfall and grazing areas.<sup>105</sup> For others,

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<sup>101</sup> Brogni, "L 'exploitation," 152-3.

<sup>102</sup> Maurice Kamen-Kaye, "Petroleum Development in Algeria," *Geographical Review* 48, no. 4 (1958): 468 <https://doi.org/10.2307/211669>; Roberto Cantoni and Leucha Veneer, "Underground and Underwater: Oil Security in France and Britain during the Cold War," in *The Surveillance Imperative. Geosciences during the Cold War and Beyond* eds Simone Turchetti and Peder Roberts (New York: Palgrave: 2014), 55-56; Alain Beltran and Sophie Chauveau, *Elf Aquitaine, des origines à 1989* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 59.

<sup>103</sup> Alesbury, "A Society", 107, 111-112; OCSR, Etudes, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Borrey and Lambert, "Quels problèmes," 41.

<sup>105</sup> Judith Scheele and James. McDougall, 'Introduction Time and Space in the Sahara,' in *Saharan Frontiers Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa*, eds James McDougall and Judith Scheele (Bloomington: Indiana

however, the building of roads offered new forms of employment and opportunities for economic gain. Colonial services considered nomadic peoples a highly valuable source of local knowledge and employed them as ‘road finders.’<sup>106</sup> These individuals guided the colonial authorities through the local landscape and shaped the emerging oil infrastructure in the most direct sense.<sup>107</sup>

Furthermore, the vast infrastructural dependencies of the oil networks with a huge demand for imported exploratory materials as well as food (see chapter one) fuelled a huge increase in traffic and as result, a large demand for local drivers.<sup>108</sup> On the existing Fort Flatters-Ohanet road, for example, which in the early 1950s had hosted only 2-3 military convoys per year, traffic rose to about 10 lorries a day, needed to supply the Compagnie de recherches et d'exploitation des pétroles du Sahara (CREPS) concession. Both the OCRS and oil companies themselves established courses in driving and mechanics at specialist training centres in the oil and mineral regions (notably, El Golea, Ouargla and Colomb-Béchar).<sup>109</sup> By the end of the decade, small local transport businesses were booming.<sup>110</sup> The transport networks developed by, for, and through the oil industry therefore, imposed vast geographic and social changes across the Algerian Sahara desert from the earliest days of oil exploration. The networks were shaped by a combination of material, technological

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University Press, 2012), 8; Mehdi Sakatni, “From Camel to Truck?: Automobiles and the Pastoralist Nomadism of Syrian Tribes during the French Mandate (1920–46),” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 39, no.1 (2019): 166–169. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-7493865>; Dawn Chatty, *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouin in the Modern World* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 1986, reissued 2014).

<sup>106</sup> Plessis, “Quel visage,” 29.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> M. Bouche, Rapport d’Information sur les conditions de la recherche de pétrole au Sahara, 3 June 1958, 28 19771403/11, ANF.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

and commercial needs, with important, mediated but uneven, implications for local communities and lifestyles.

In addition, in their physical natures, the road and transport networks remade the Sahara in three important ways which had important implications for its territorial/national status. Firstly, as discussed in chapter one, the transport as well as communication networks of oil directly connected the Sahara, through the flow of its resources, materially and economically, to France. Perhaps most explicit in the pipelines and ports which shipped Algerian crude across to the metropole for refining, with few local service lines in the north, similar patterns are also clear in transport, radio and phone networks linking Hassi Messaoud, Marseille, and Paris.<sup>111</sup> These connections were further exacerbated by the reliance on French imports in the oil nodes: the result of the economic structuring noted above and company cultures (notably food deliveries discussed in chapter one).

Secondly, infrastructure emanating from the oil industry reinforced intra and trans-Saharan connections: a further expression of the Sahara as distinct from the northern territories. As discussed above, the O CRS' effort to establish a joint exploitation of Saharan resources across the desert regions of Algeria, Niger, Chad, and then-French Sudan, sought new territorial organisation of the region, a singular, transnational and specifically Saharan economic unit. Oil infrastructure both imposed and shaped such economic connections. A proliferation of pipelines, rail, and

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<sup>111</sup>J Charpentier, Liaison téléphonique et télégraphique par câble Alger/Hassi Messaoud, 10 September 1956, 3. 18V01807/144, TA.

roadways were built and planned, funded by oil revenue and increasingly “follow[ing] the path of oil and gas exploration.”<sup>112</sup> For example, in January 1962, the OCRS worked on the road networks connecting Algeria, Niger and Chad, trans-Saharan communications as well as wider access to Algerian gas.<sup>113</sup> Oil also fuelled hopes for the successful completion of the trans-Saharan railroad, and the OCRS was active in attempting to seek markets for crude, and later refined, Algerian oil across the region.<sup>114</sup>

Finally, these infrastructural connections further compounded the uneven localisation of economic and political centres in the Sahara. In particular, in the northeast region, where Hassi Messaoud, Hassi R'Mel and Edjeleh were located. The earlier period of oil exploration required and imposed a rapid development of roads across much of the Algerian Sahara, given the broader scope of exploration. This also had widely publicised social benefits, which drew particular attention to the ways in which the new north-south roads distributed wealth and ‘prosperity’ and particularly were integrated in agricultural practice, including raising camels and reducing prices.<sup>115</sup> Some roads were also built by the companies themselves on their concessions, particularly where the existing infrastructure were weak. New roads connected, for example, Ain Sefra and Sidi Cheiki, towards the south-west of the desert, and areas around In Salah.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Bossard, *An Atlas*, 113-4; Suggitt, “Impossible Endings,” 86-87, 99-102; Jennings, “A Land,” 29-30.

<sup>113</sup> Suggitt, “Impossible Endings,” 178.

<sup>114</sup> Clarke, *Economic and Political Changes*, 107; OCRS. Rapport d’activité, 26.

<sup>115</sup> Borrey and Lambert, “Quels problèmes,” 41.

<sup>116</sup> Brogni, “L’Exploitation,” 152-3.

There was, however, a noticeable shift from 1960 onward, as infrastructural networks increasingly concentrated in the north-eastern quadrant. This was fuelled both by private commercial and material concerns, with the evolution of the established oil wells as well as the shifting policy of state actors. Roads in these areas, funded by the OCRS as well as the oil companies, proliferated rapidly, most notably with new roads established between Hassi Messaoud and Ouargla as well as further eastward. In contrast, roads to the south were increasingly sparse in comparison.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, the very materials of the roads reflected these trends, moving from tarmac to track outside the oil zones, reflective of the circulation of heavier traffic in these areas.<sup>118</sup>

Politically, these changes were the result of the diminishing state support for the OCRS budget, discussed above. At the same time, somewhat paradoxically, the OCRS was protecting and even increasing spending on projects which materially established the Saharan petrol community, with new, but isolated, projects in Niger and Chad.<sup>119</sup> The organisation decided to focus its efforts on the direct requirements of the mining and oil industries, although still favouring those that had military considerations, further indicative of wide socio-political role initially operated by the organisation.<sup>120</sup> As such, as earlier models of a more homogenised regionalisation of the Algerian Saharan space fell away, the political focus on the richest oil enclaves increasingly imposed and reflected the natural geographies of oil into the physical, social and economic landscapes of the Sahara. This was further compounded by

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid; OCRS, notes of the commission général, 6.

<sup>118</sup> OCRS, notes of the commission général, 6; Plessis, "Quel visage," 26-8.

<sup>119</sup> Suggitt, "Impossible Endings," 178.

<sup>120</sup> Notes by the commission general, 4-6.

other proliferating infrastructural connections in these areas. Not only did international transport nodes and communications networks concentrate in these areas, but they were also prioritised in programmes of electrification, demonstrative of the wider social implications and reach of the oil network.<sup>121</sup> As Chaouche-Bencherif has shown in Algerian Sahara more broadly, and in the longer term, the development of housing with these amenities fuelled a growing desire among wealthier landowners as well as oil workers, to purchase and live in individual and nuclear family houses, as well as an agricultural 'revival' with growing export across Saharan consumption centres as well as to the north.<sup>122</sup>

Taken together, the evolution of the water and road infrastructures connected to oil reflected and refracted the colonial notions of Saharan frontiers, both between north and south and across the Saharan regions, manifesting these abstract notions as physical and economic networks and connections. At the same time, the political and economic representations of the imperial regime, bound up in development projects spanning agricultural nodes and provision of public infrastructures, were increasingly stratified, mapped onto oil locales. These networks were not simply imposed on local populations and spaces but were instead shaped and mediated by a combination of material, commercial and local actors. In some places, these mediations resisted, reframed, or outlasted the growing political focus on the oil enclaves.

### Infrastructures of Oil

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<sup>121</sup> OCRS, Rapport d'activité 1 juillet 1960-30 juin 1961, October 1961, 47-8, 53. F60 4004, ANF.

<sup>122</sup> Chaouche-Bencherif, "La Micro-urbanisation," 133.

The oil industry also wrought huge changes to the Saharan urban, economic, and social landscape through the emergence of the new company bases that grew rapidly into towns, refining sites, and processing centres. These constituted vital elements of the physical, financial, and infrastructural network of oil, shaping how, when and where hydrocarbon products could be used and accessed. The relationship between these infrastructures and political space is critical, because, as I will demonstrate here, these localised elements of the oil infrastructures shaped the production and expression of state power, perceptions of the state's role, and the direct interactions between local communities and the industry. Moreover, this focus further draws out the social embedding and mediation of the frontier by local actors, particularly through consumption. This section opens with a discussion of the emergence of oil towns, demonstrating particularly how they shaped demographic and economic geographies and expressions of state governance. I then turn to the refining and processing plants to consider how these both reflected and imposed the Saharan frontier alongside new geographies of consumption.

The earliest permanent and semi-permanent hydrocarbon-linked 'villages' emerged from 1955, across Edjeleh, Ouargla and In Salah. These housed anywhere between 45 and several hundred occupants and were precipitated to a significant extent by 'residential' technological innovation: the introduction of air-conditioned housing. This was a significant development which now facilitated year-round activity.<sup>123</sup> In terms of the physical infrastructures, these earlier settlements consisted of basic huts for their

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<sup>123</sup> Clarke, *Economic and Political Changes*. On the impacts of air conditioning on demography, population, and political parties, see, for example, Nelson W. Polsby, *How Congress Evolves: Social Bases of Institutional Change* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004); Stan Cox, *Losing our cool: Uncomfortable truths about our air-conditioned world (and finding new ways to get through the summer)*. (New York: The New Press, 2010).

French employees and tents for local staff, alongside water and electricity networks. As the towns consolidated in the northeastern quadrant of the Algerian Sahara with established discoveries, they evolved into the more luxurious setting recognisable in chapter one, complete with gardens, pools, and movie theatres by 1959.<sup>124</sup>

The growth of these new settlements was important for several reasons. Firstly, they represented, in most cases, an entirely new placement of residential centres. These new centres were dictated by material and technological forces, oil and infrastructural geographies, and unconnected to the prevailing urban logics in the Sahara.<sup>125</sup>

Edjeleh and In Salah, CREPS concessions, but also particularly important infrastructural and transport nodes, were two significant examples of this. These towns were both far removed from other local residential settings and trade routes and had minimal pre-existing populations. Colonial accounts describe the regions as 'deprived' of human presence.<sup>126</sup> Both were therefore established from the ground up to house a population almost entirely employed directly by CREPS. By 1957 this population amounted to over 1,500 people.<sup>127</sup> These settlements then started to develop rapidly from company bases into larger urban sites as both the OCRS and CREPS developed infrastructural plans to provide roads, water, electricity as well as administrative centres, post offices, and for the future, hospitals, and schools.<sup>128</sup>

In both Edjeleh and In Salah, demographic growth was significantly shaped by the physical distance from existing urban centres. The lack of a local staffing pool

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<sup>124</sup> Lerat, "Hassi Messaoud," 29.

<sup>125</sup> Jennings, "A Land," 26-7

<sup>126</sup> Verlaque, "Evolution de la recherche," 156.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>128</sup> Notes sur l'urbanisation d'In Amenas, undated, B-24890, CDEF.

required recruitment which drew from right across the Sahara. Edjeleh, for example, inspired a veritable regional migration, drawing staff from as far north as Touggourt. This stands in stark contrast to Hassi Messaoud, which was closely connected with other urban settlements, including Ouargla and Touggourt. Hassi Messaoud therefore drew staff overridingly from its locality, with around 92.5% of its Saharan employees coming from the surrounding areas.<sup>129</sup>

Secondly, whilst both In Salah and Edjeleh were dwarfed by Hassi Messaoud in terms of demographic and economic significance (see discussion below for details), the socio-political importance of these nodes was significant. These sites were particularly important in the early days of oil exploration and exploitation, between 1955 and 1959.<sup>130</sup> As well as inspiring a regional ‘petro-migration’ and linked to important employment shifts (see below), Edjeleh specifically played an important role in reshaping and dictating the evolving application and mechanisms of colonial governance. As one example, the town’s rapid growth directly led to the installation of a Section administrative spécialisée (SAS) office within it. As discussed in chapter one, SAS were a part of the imperial war strategy, both seeking to expand forms of political control and to ‘win hearts and minds’ through administrative, social, and economic programmes.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, a designated zone of special development, as noted above, Edjeleh became both an important residential urban site and output of OCRS influence. Hydrocarbons then, strongly influenced and changed Saharan

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<sup>129</sup> Verlaque, “Evolution de la recherche,” 157-8.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 154-158.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 155-6; Christian Tripodi, *The Unknown Enemy: Counterinsurgency and the Illusion of Control* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 89-111.

demographic, urban and political geographies, which evolved and were shaped according to the techno-material dictates of these resources.

Finally, beyond their physical, demographic, and political presence, the new oil towns resulted in huge economic and ecological changes, particularly as they imposed new spatial and place-based limitations. The ways in which such changes both impacted and were understood to impact local people were again subject to temporal variations, political and commercial decision making, and active engagement by other local actors. However, in general terms, a clear growth in industrial employment and sedentarisation took place. As noted above, the earliest form of oil settlements offered only temporary and insecure contracts. It wasn't until around 1957, as oil sites were established and growing, that employment structures for local staff shifted to reflect the more permanent nature and operation of these areas as residential centres. Longer term contracts emerged, and, as well as drilling aides and derrick hands, employment was available in construction, as barmen, gardeners, and servers.<sup>132</sup>

The availability of comparatively well paid and secure work led to important changes in the relationship between local residents and land, fuelling increasing settlement and sedentarisation in these areas. Whilst some employees were housed by the companies, other settlers, attempting to capitalise on the wider infrastructural and economic possibilities here, built their own lodgings around the outskirts of the towns. From here, employment either with oil companies or service enterprises was

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<sup>132</sup> Verlaque, "Evolution de la recherche," 159, 162.

pursued, or otherwise trade in the town centres provided income. Such trade was underwritten by the high levels of disposable income of oil sector employees.<sup>133</sup> The Hassi Messaoud shantytown, shown in figures two and three, in a documentary photographic project undertaken by CFP A, is perhaps the most dramatic example. Here, local populations and tribes settling in the area capitalised on the water infrastructures provided by oil companies as well as oil sector equipment, in this case, empty oil drums which were re-appropriated into enclosures for herds in order to raise livestock.<sup>134</sup>

Figure Two



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<sup>133</sup> Serge Lerat, "Hassi Messaoud," *Cahiers d'outre-mer*, 93 (1971), 30-1; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 5.

<sup>134</sup> Reportage photographique, November 1959, 18V01807/170, Jennings, "A New Frontier?" For comparative studies of the presentation of shantytowns housing Algerians in France see Melissa K Byrnes, "Liberating the Land or Absorbing a Community: Managing North African Migration and the 'Bidonvilles' in Paris's 'Banlieues.'" *French Politics, Culture & Society* 31, no. 3 (2013). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24517998> and Amelia Lyons, *The Civilizing Mission in the Metropole: Algerian Families and the French Welfare State during Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

Figure Three



Colonial commentators, particularly in state and OCRS literature, were careful to frame these developments as fluid, impermanent and operating in harmony with traditional Saharan industries. As noted above, the ‘traditionalist’ framework of the imperial Saharan project consistently stressed a ‘respect’ of ‘local traditions.’ For the imperial government, of course, these appeals to a distinct Saharan identity were means to legitimate sovereignty claims here, an almost archetypal deployment of the ‘tradition in the service of modernity’ model.<sup>135</sup> In this context, literature emphasised, for example, the re-investment of oil sector salaries by ‘returning’ local workers into

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<sup>135</sup> Gwendolyn Wright, "Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy, 1900-1930," In *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, eds Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

date plantations and existing community structures. Even the emerging 'oil tourism,' of wealthy French businessmen, was presented as unique opportunity to support local artisanal trade, as well as luxury hotels.<sup>136</sup>

These preoccupations extended beyond mere rhetoric. As noted in chapter one, oil companies remained unwilling to cede to state pressure to implement family settlements for local workers. Their accepted justification (whatever the reality may have been) was that such a shift would be too great rupture within local social and economic patterns.<sup>137</sup> Wider academic and company literature went somewhat further in its accounts of 'touches of modernity' at the oil sites, emphasising the personal transformations of local staff who, at these sites, evolved into blue jean wearing, scooter riding, healthy *modern* men.<sup>138</sup> Such accounts, however, remained predominately wedded to the fluid passage between the 'modern' and traditional lifestyles of these staff, and emphasised their 'return' to home villages, oases and undisturbed traditional lifestyles.<sup>139</sup> In all, imperial rhetoric and even, to some extent, urban form, did reflect the political prerogative seeking to nest oil towns in local urban and economic space as a means to legitimate the Saharan frontier. In reality, however, economic, ecological, and lifestyle changes disrupted these same claims to legitimacy and appropriated, without dominating, the material and commercial geographies of oil.

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<sup>136</sup> OCRS, Rapport du groupe de travail no. 4, February 1961, 68 4A 2440, CDEF.

<sup>137</sup> Chaouche-Bencherif, "La Micro-urbanisation," 114-5; CFP A, Projet de cité à Hassi-Messaoud : Etude Préparatoire, 17 July 1958, 11. 18V01807/170, TA; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 6.

<sup>138</sup> See chapter one for a discussion of the construction of masculinity on the oil sites; Plessis, "Quel visage," 31 Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 6.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

The emerging refining nodes and networks in the Sahara, concentrated at Hassi Messaoud, were similarly reflective of the interplays of commercial and technical realities alongside an attempted political re-design of the region. I show here how the material natures and resource flows of Saharan crude shaped the state's attempt to impose a regional refining network as a reflection of the Saharan frontier at the level of the household consumer, an operational regional petro-market.

In 1961, both a gas processing plant and oil refinery were established at Hassi Messaoud. The projects emanated from the OCRS with the support of the Ministry of the Sahara, which had started pressing CFP A particularly to look into local processing capabilities in the summer of 1960. The idea was rooted in the material basis of Hassi Messaoud crude, which contained significant quantities of both butane and propane, initially simply being burnt off as waste products. The OCRS however, argued that there was a high regional demand specifically for these products, currently supplied from the metropole and bottled in Algiers, particularly for use as lamp oil.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, the organisation was persuaded to look into the issue as a direct result of a tour by the Minister of the Sahara, Robert Lecourt, who wrote that putting these products into the local market was an issue 'to which the Saharan population has attached a strong interest'.<sup>141</sup> The OCRS held that it was imperative to deliver the hydrocarbon products required by the local market across the OCRS' sphere of

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<sup>140</sup> Lecourt, Letter to the directeur général; Gemma Jennings, "Environmental Colonialism and Hydrocarbon Waste in Historical Perspective: The Case of Algeria and France," *Commodity Frontiers* 4 (2022): 15-16 <https://doi.org/10.26300/28pm-t559>.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

influence at affordable prices, and thereby improve the lives of ‘people in the Sahara.’<sup>142</sup>

The major oil companies, however, were reticent, arguing that prices were already low in the region, that consumption would not be high enough to amortise the projects, and that personnel costs would be too high for the profitable running of such refineries.<sup>143</sup> State invention was required to push the project through, with the OCSR forced to refer to the *caisse de solidarité* for the financing required, an appeal based specifically on the social good this represented for local Saharan populations.<sup>144</sup>

These interchanges are significant therefore, because they illustrate how the formation of the Saharan oil networks simultaneously reflected an existing, specifically regional demand, and the material natures of the local oil reserves, thereby reinforcing and replicating the logics of the Saharan border. At the same time, as the tensions between commercial and political prerogatives underline, hydrocarbon availability and networks were being actively interwoven into the daily political legitimisation of this regional entity, underpinned by a distributive logic that combined social and capitalist motives.

The eventual opening of the plant had three significant impacts. First, it meant the creation of a regional Saharan supply network and market. This constituted a tangible infrastructure that separated the Sahara from the north, as the region was no

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Charles Dullieux, letter to Paul Crosnier, 29 July 1960, 18V01807/156, TA: Production et coûtage de butanes dans les départements sahariens, 16 November 1961, 9, 107 19771403/11, ANF.

<sup>144</sup> Production et coûtage, 3-5. OCSR, meeting notes, 5 December 1961, SEAA 209, Collection CDAC.

longer reliant on the bottled butane, or petrol or diesel shipped via Algiers.<sup>145</sup> Instead, these products were exclusively or predominately supplied to the Saharan locales by regional plants and proliferating regional distribution networks that responded directly to local needs.<sup>146</sup> The resource frontier was even present in the very nature of the products consumed in the region: the 'light' nature of Saharan products had to be balanced with a distinct blend of fuel additives.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, aviation fuel, specifically for the new Hassi Messaoud-Marseille-Paris route of Air France, was produced by the refinery from the spring of 1962, reinforcing the direct infrastructure and material links between the metropole and the Saharan region.<sup>148</sup>

Secondly, and to some extent linked to the first point, prices for Saharan consumers were reduced dramatically. Prices fell by up to 33% in some areas by localising and restricting transport requirements.<sup>149</sup> Such price reductions were reinforced by low taxation rates on petroleum products in the Sahara, incentives introduced to drive consumption up in the region, in part to amortise the refinery itself.<sup>150</sup> Another mechanism through which the OCRS attempted to generate a sense of regional 'ownership' of oil resources, such policies further and more explicitly positioned the state role and legitimacy in benefit distribution, specifically hydrocarbons. The same logic would reappear in a reversed direction after independence. Whilst the late colonial period saw taxation structures for local residents linked to and underwriting a

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<sup>145</sup> R. Pessayre, letter to the chef de la circonscription, 7 December 1961, 107 19771403/11, ANF.

<sup>146</sup> Note sur l'approvisionnement du Sahara des produits raffinés, undated, 1961, and Production et coûtage, 107 19771403/11, ANF; Note sur la ligne de transport à haute tension, undated, B-4890, CDEF.

<sup>147</sup> Pessayre, letter to the chef de la circonscription.

<sup>148</sup> Pessayre, letter to the président de la chambre syndicale des importeurs de produits pétroliers en Algérie, 9 January 1962, 107 19771403/11, CDAN.

<sup>149</sup> Pessayre, letter to the chef de la circonscription ; Production et coûtage, 9.

<sup>150</sup> Annual Report on the Petroleum Industry in Algeria, 4 September 1963, Box 5678, RG 59, NARA.

produced regional market and infrastructural network, in 1963 the new Algerian government reversed the Saharan taxation exemptions and introduced a nationally homogenous approach to pricing. The aim was specifically to create an integrated *national* oil network, incorporating both the Algiers and Hassi Messaoud refineries. The policy sent Saharan consumption and the refinery itself into steep decline.<sup>151</sup>

Finally, by placing the plants at Hassi Messaoud, and remodelling price structures based on relative transport costs and distance from here, Hassi Messaoud was reinforced as a regional material, infrastructural, and financial epicentre. The Hassi Messaoud and Ouargla regions were amongst those that benefitted from the highest price cuts (33%). In contrast, areas to south saw their prices reduce by only 4% and other oil centres, like Edjeleh achieved more limited reductions, at around 16%.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, local transportation networks for refined products increasingly reflected this new regional geography.<sup>153</sup> The emerging regional refining network, then, shaped new geographies of distribution, reinforcing intra-Saharan networks centring on Hassi Messaoud, whilst increasingly imposing political, infrastructural, and consumptive differentiation between the north of Algeria and the Saharan region.

Overall, the physical infrastructures and networks shaped and underwritten by Saharan oil extraction imposed huge changes to the urban, political, and social landscapes of the region. Initially covering a wider geographic expanse, these networks increasingly concentrated across the northeastern nodes, reflecting an

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Note sur l'approvisionnement.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

interplay between natural geography, contemporary political prerogatives, and market forces. The growth of these oil sites precipitated important social changes in the region, as Hassi Messaoud particularly emerged as an economic, demographic, and industrial centre, fuelling localised sedentarisation and new ecologies and economies of oil.

At the same time the role, the mechanisms and scope of governance and sovereignty in the region was increasingly defined by hydrocarbons. In other words, political authority was increasingly reflective of and intertwined with oil resources and legitimated through powers and structures of distribution. And yet, whilst oil infrastructures were imposed by corporations and state agencies, social mediations on and around oil towns, from actors such as the new settlers, through to the new transport business and household lamplight consumers shaped the ways oil infrastructure was socially embedded and operated day to day.

### A Saharan Identity

In July 1961, a Chaamba tribe requested a meeting with oil company representatives at Hassi Messaoud to discuss how, as a local community, they could more fully ‘participate’ in the region’s oil wealth. At the meeting, the companies and tribe agreed to a number of terms, including the provision, by the companies, of critical public infrastructures, like water access, as well as priority access to employment on the oil sites.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Préfecture des Oasis, Synthèse mensuelle de renseignements, 10 July 1961, 4, AG/5(1)/1824, ANF.

Such meetings highlight the evolving relationships between oil actors and local social programmes, public services, and infrastructures, to which I now turn. I argue that these programmes and infrastructures transposed the abstract notion of a political frontier between north and south into an ethno-national classification of the Saharan people and built this classification into the physical and political space of the region.<sup>155</sup> I draw particular attention to the connections between the oil nodes and centres of agricultural production, and the local emergence of corporate colonial sovereignty.

These public and social programmes are critical because they offer an important insight into the operational mechanics of sovereignty, constituting the tangible link between a state and its people. Public services are a means through which a state's control, presence, and authority are established as well as a means to diffuse a common culture and encourage political loyalty.<sup>156</sup> In the case of the colonial Sahara, where oil occupied a uniquely overt and central place within formal and informal political structures, and in the context of deeply contested ideas of space and statehood, these institutions therefore provide a critical perspective on the expression and meditation of sovereignty. Close analysis of these structures further demonstrates the complex interactions between commercial, material, and political

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<sup>155</sup> On ethno-national classifications, see, for example, Jerry Z Muller, "Us and Them: The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism." *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (2008): 20-21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20032578>.

<sup>156</sup> Steven Van de Walle and Zoe Scott, "The Role of Public Services in State- and Nation-building: Exploring Lessons from European History for Fragile States," 9. Research Paper, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham 2009, [https://repub.eur.nl/pub/17084/GSDRC\\_paper.pdf](https://repub.eur.nl/pub/17084/GSDRC_paper.pdf) doc (eur.nl).

prerogatives in this context and is a critical means through which to understand the ways in which oil impacted on local communities.

This section demonstrates first how social programmes in the Sahara, shaped and enacted by oil actors attempted to define and recognise the Saharan population and space as 'non-Algerian,' rooting and solidifying these defined identities into the geographic and built environment. The analysis then traces the ways in which public service provision raised fundamental questions about the operation and extent of the state and its sovereign responsibilities, drawing attention to how oil companies operated as 'surrogate' or 'corporate' sovereigns. In this section then, I focus on the mediation and contestation of the Saharan frontier *between* state and company level actors, demonstrating that the emergence of these multiple forms of sovereignties operated as a further reflection of these new frontiers.

### Social Programmes and the Saharan identity

As noted above, the rhetoric of the colonial government's 'social responsibility' to the Sahara and its population was commonplace by the late 1950s, and the OCRS was the primary mechanism through which these ideals were administered. The organisation's founding principals explicitly articulated that it would operate across the whole of the Sahara, which these principals described as 'a geographically original and homogenous entity.' Further, the OCRS would operate through and alongside resource exploitation to improve the standard of living of Saharan populations 'in accordance with local traditions.' This wrote a geographic but also ethnic and ethnographic constitution of the region, albeit in vague terms, into the

central resource governance structure and its deploy of oil revenue.<sup>157</sup> Left to negotiate and apply these principles within the broad scope of its work, the OCRS engaged heavily in 'developmental' infrastructural projects which sought to raise standards of living, primarily through driving up agricultural output and earnings, but which also underlined the 'Saharan' nature of these industries.

As one example, the OCRS and oil companies strongly supported palm grove date production through financial investment, training, and irrigation projects. This work was particularly important because it was conceived of and promoted within the framework of the influential imperial geographer Robert Capot-Rey's model that it was the date palm groves that marked the border between the desert regions and the north. Capot-Rey argued that within the Sahara (only), dates provided the basis of survival, agriculture and trade, defining residential settlement and population centres, and constituting the backbone of the unique local system of social organisation.<sup>158</sup> Oil companies and the OCRS built on these ideas, consistently stressing that the support of small scale oasis agricultural centres was the only way to ensure the survival of 'Saharan culture.'<sup>159</sup> Vast infrastructural work was carried out to support these settings, particularly through irrigation programs.<sup>160</sup> In this way, oil actors defined and imposed social, ethnic, and political meaning to these specific places, which concretised the imperial 'Saharan frontier' via an ethnic identity rooted in the

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<sup>157</sup> Author's translation. See, Decree number 58-398 of the French Republic 12 April 1958 and Ordonnance 58-1111 of the French Republic, 22 November 1958, F60 4004, ANF; Jennings, "A Land," 28-9; Burke III, *The Ethnographic State*.

<sup>158</sup> Chaouche-Bencherif, "La Micro-urbanisation," 79, 238; Jennings, "A Land," 28-29.

<sup>159</sup> Jacques Benezit letter to Paul Crosnier, 19 January 1962, 18V01807/192, TA.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.; OCRS, Rapport d'activités, 33.

physical space, agro-nutritional practices and geography of the desert itself, an identity secured by its performance in these assigned social spaces.

Similarly, in the context of a rapidly growing population, the OCRS was engaged in a vast programme of housing construction, based on and shaped by 'traditional Saharan housing.' The organisation funded and organised large scale research programmes into Saharan architectural heritage, identifying and promoting a 'Saharan,' architecture and seeking 'architectural solutions' to the 'specific challenges of Saharan life.'<sup>161</sup> In 1960, OCRS had a budget of 725 million francs to improve traditional housing. The organisation built large numbers of its 'traditional' model of housing across its region of operation, with most concentrated in new suburbs of Ouargla and Colomb-Béchar, where the mineral industries were fuelling a particularly high rate of demographic growth.<sup>162</sup> Further, given the wider commitment to supporting 'traditional' Saharan lifestyles, housing and electrification programmes were designed to support smaller oases and villages.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, the organisation claimed that in subsidising electricity to small, 'diverse' oases towns, it had doubled electricity consumption between 1957 and 1961.<sup>164</sup>

Moreover, the OCRS not only attempted to safeguard and extend the existing oases settings and date palm groves, but also, with the active participation of French oil companies, planted and built new 'traditional' agricultural centres, particularly date groves, artisanal agricultural training schools, and experimental farms. These were

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<sup>161</sup> OCRS, Rapport, 54-6; OCRS, Bulletin no.4, April 1961, 4-7, 25 F60 4004, ANF.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid; Notes by the commission general, 8.

<sup>163</sup> OCRS, Rapport d'activités, 54.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 49-52.

predominately created in the vicinity of the key oil extraction nodes in the northeast of the Algerian Sahara.<sup>165</sup> These locations were selected not only to facilitate the access of French engineers and managers based in these regions but also to capitalise on the technical and infrastructural possibilities of oil exploitation, including readily available water supplies.<sup>166</sup> A similar logic also shaped health provision, including the establishment of a specialist eye hospital at Ouargla, funded and run entirely by CFP A.<sup>167</sup> In this way, both the natural geographies of oil and the technical processes around its exploitation were built into the colonial reconstruction of the Sahara, far beyond the emblematic transportation networks and oil towns. Over time, they became increasingly enmeshed in the physical, agricultural, and social fabric of the region, and the frontier intended to enclose it.

Further, oil companies specifically sought to integrate their sites and oil sector employment seamlessly into traditional economic sectors (see above). Their programmes, explicitly designed to ‘tightly associate oil site, palm grove and herd,’ included the eventual transfer of the agricultural centres and farms built on concessionary territories, at Haoud El Hamra as one example, to local populations, prioritising the local employees of CFP A itself.<sup>168</sup> Similar policy ideas included

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>166</sup> de Laboulaye, letter Crosnier, 10 January 1962; Benezit letter to Crosnier, de Laboulaye, *Problèmes humains dans le Sahara*, report, 12 January 1959, 5, 18V01807/192, TA; Procès-verbal de la réunion du sujet de l’aménagement d’Haoud-el-Hamra, 23 May 1958, 3, 18V01807/254, TA ; Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 6 ; Jennings, “A New Frontier?” 5.

<sup>167</sup> Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 6; Jennings, “A New Frontier?”

<sup>168</sup> Metz, letter to Benezit; de Laboulaye, letter to Paul Crosnier, 10 January 1962; 18V01807/192, TA; Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 6.

deducting a proportion of local employees' pay to invest directly invested into their villages of origin.<sup>169</sup>

These policies had a number of important implications for sovereignty claims in these areas. First, these were another iteration of the 'tradition in service of modernity' model: in this case rhetorically and practically promoting the interdependency of the 'modern' and 'traditional' economies.<sup>170</sup> This specific framing of these programmes, moreover, take them beyond the scope of an operational tactic seeking simply to manage a workforce with divided priorities between their agricultural responsibilities and paid employment by the companies, but instead were deliberately linked to sovereignty claims. As this money would be used to support continued agricultural production in the absence of local *men* specifically, a corollary impact was to secure a patriarchal order in agricultural centres.<sup>171</sup>

Secondly, such money was designated to simultaneously cover for the absent men but also for the amelioration of the public facilities and services in their home towns and villages.<sup>172</sup> This would both drive up local standards of living broadly and cushion the impacts of the 'social rupture' that workers would experience on their return.<sup>173</sup> This further exacerbated uneven regional geographies of political space as public

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<sup>169</sup> De Metz to Benezit; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 6.

<sup>170</sup> Wright, "Tradition"

<sup>171</sup> de Metz to Benezit; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 5.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. see, for example, Judith Surkis, *Sex, Law, and Sovereignty in French Algeria, 1830–1930* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019)

<sup>173</sup> de Laboulaye, *Problèmes humains*; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 5.

services were concentrated in oil-producing regions and contingent on non-state actors.<sup>174</sup>

Overall, the role and policies of both the OCRS and oil companies in social investment and the physical remaking of Saharan space, seemed to reinforce the key elements of the state's politically and ethnically defined Saharan frontier, as well as marrying Saharan identity to specific social spaces. At the same time, however, the forms of social investment, increasingly tied public infrastructure, and thereby sovereignty, to oil, both economically, but very literally, geographically.

In some cases, however, tensions between the political and commercial goals of oil-backed social programmes emerged. These clashes shaped how the on the ground implementation of the wider vision for Saharan society was understood and reflected. Education and training centres are a key example here, an important means through which both the OCRS and oil companies effectuated their local social programmes. Over the late colonial period, a number of centres were set up, both privately run by oil companies within their concessions as well as through the missionary organisation, the Pères Blancs.

The Pères Blancs were funded by both the companies and the OCRS to run training centres across the Sahara, and particularly around the northern mineral centres, including Colomb-Béchar and El Oued. As well as adding another layer to the emerging regional imbalances in public services and provisions, the Pères Blancs

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<sup>174</sup> Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 5.

schools were explicitly designed to recall the 'oasis of origin' of their attendees. This ethos was applied down to the details of catering provision and even bedroom design, another means through which to reinforce an identified 'Saharan' culture.<sup>175</sup> Courses were varied and included agricultural as well as industrial and oil sector specific jobs.

For the OCSR, these centres were foundational, a lever to ultimately facilitate 'full employment' in the Sahara, enable oil companies to recruit their entire staff locally, and to promote the key values of Saharan citizenship noted above: community, joint technical production and a 'professional conscience.'<sup>176</sup> Oil companies, on the other hand, complained that the centres gave local students an inflated sense of their qualifications and capabilities. Interestingly, company management cited the students' ambitions to replace French managerial staff as a particular concern.<sup>177</sup> Whilst these companies did continue to provide funding to the Pères Blancs, not only did they request that the training centres give their students a 'more exact sense of their qualification,' but also that the agricultural training programmes, instead of the industrial courses, be increased.<sup>178</sup> CFP A went so far as to threaten to withdraw funding for industrial training if this directive was not followed.<sup>179</sup> In this case, despite the clash with wider colonial policies wedded to politico-economic designation of the region, industrial and commercial agendas shaped the delivery of social programmes in their own image.

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<sup>175</sup> de Laboulaye, letter to Pierre Germes, 12 January 1959, 18V01807/192, TA.

<sup>176</sup> OCSR, Bulletin no.4, 4-7.

<sup>177</sup> de Laboulaye, *Problèmes humains*

<sup>178</sup> de Laboulaye, *Problèmes humains*, 5; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 7.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

Overall, therefore, it is clear that the OCRS, working with other key local actors, particularly oil companies, did, to some extent, effectively impose and recognise the Saharan frontier in ethno-national terms, expressed primarily through its provision of public infrastructures and services, in a programme explicitly underwritten and shaped by oil resources. Although in this way oil was further enmeshed in a regionally distinct representation and expression of sovereignty, the contestation shaping the delivery of such programmes highlights the important role played here by non-state actors, particularly oil companies and oil workers.

### Corporate Colonial Sovereignty

I move now to focus on the wider socio-political role and public infrastructures provided by oil companies specifically. By taking such infrastructures as the tangible mechanisms and operations of colonial rule and sovereignty, I argue here that the oil producing regions of the Sahara, were governed under a form of colonial corporate or 'surrogate' sovereignty.<sup>180</sup> As Stern argues in the case of the East India Company, this model manifested itself when companies acted like, with, or for states, claiming jurisdiction or responsibility over people and places. This resulted in a composite, incomplete, and hybrid form of sovereignty, here specific to the Saharan region and its status as an oil frontier.

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<sup>180</sup> On colonial corporate sovereignty, see, particularly Stern, *The Company-State*

The literature considering oil companies as state-like actors through their corporate social projects is comparatively broad, but the Sahara case is particularly arresting, because, as I will demonstrate below, there is evidence not only of companies 'ruling' or 'governing' in these terms, but also because, in the Saharan modelling and scope of their programmes, they reflected and entrenched the Saharan-Algerian frontier. Moreover, in their programmes, company cultures and identities, French oil companies in this context operated explicitly to underwrite and promote a form of nation building, operating distinctly to impose and 'oversee governable territorial spaces and identities,' precisely because of the region's oil status.<sup>181</sup>

CFP A, for example, the predominately private French oil interest in Algeria, explicitly perceived of its own mission as far beyond profitable extraction of oil, but instead saw itself as a politico-industrial actor deeply embedded in the social and economic fabric of the Saharan region. In practical terms, the enterprise considered, for example, the proportion of the Saharan population it could employ (and thus benefit) as well as how these salaries impacted the Saharan economy, which it viewed in 'national' terms. For example, one 1959 document listed that their local recruits earned in total over 50% of the *national* Saharan revenue, and worried about a potential social 'rupture' that would be endured by these employees, having experienced life on the oil towns, returning back to home settings.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, as noted above, the company considered taking deductions from local workers' pay for wider public

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John M. Kline, "MNCs and Surrogate Sovereignty," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2006) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24590648>; Michael Watts, "Resource curse? governmentality, oil and power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Geopolitics* 9, no.1 (2004): 54-55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040412331307832>; Nicholas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>182</sup> de Laboulaye, *Problèmes humains*; Internal CFP A memo, undated, 1959. 18V01807/192, TA, Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 5-6; Jennings, "A New Frontier?"

infrastructures in their workers' home towns, well beyond the concessions themselves.

This is significant for three reasons. First, because it shows a conscious aspiration to an explicitly and overtly political role in the Saharan context specifically. Elsewhere, including the metropole itself, CFP's 'social' concerns were limited to provision of fair wages and working conditions.<sup>183</sup> Secondly, in its language and scope, the project situated the company as a state level actor. This is particularly overt in the framing of these deductions as 'taxes,' which the company would deduct and distribute to provide public infrastructure.<sup>184</sup> And finally, because these mechanisms of distributing oil revenue would operate through staff specifically. In effect, taxes were not only applied directly to local workers, but public investment and infrastructures were then shaped around these workers. As such, this group operated not merely passive recipients of oil revenue but were important actors in the creation and development of public revenue, services, and infrastructure.<sup>185</sup> In areas like Hassi Messaoud, which drew staff predominately from areas local to extraction sites, such models are demonstrative of the range of ways in which oil wealth was localised and concentrated.<sup>186</sup> In all, the mediation and direction of financial flows of oil by company actors reinforced 'traditional' Saharan identities, although the available sources tell us little about these workers adapted or resisted these imposed

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<sup>183</sup> Jean-Baptiste Noé, "Total. Ou l'histoire des hommes qui ont bâti une référence mondiale 1946-2006," (PhD Diss, Université Paris Sorbonne, 2010), 51, 72-77.

<sup>184</sup> de Metz, to Jacques Benezit; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 5.

<sup>185</sup> Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 10.

<sup>186</sup> Verlaque, "Evolution de la recherche," 157.

identities. Further these financial flows simultaneously created layered local geographies.

A somewhat more explicit iteration of corporate sovereignty over localised territories and populations is evident in the formal judicial authority wielded by oil companies on concessionary territories. One of the central functions of the state, the mechanisms and application of law and order and security has, in many oil producing locales globally, been privatised. Local laws have been applied in fragmentated and uneven ways.<sup>187</sup> The privatisation and delegation of law and order is a deeply complex and contested subject, dependent on time and place.<sup>188</sup> In the colonial Saharan context, these privatisation currents were less prevalent and company rights under the Saharan Oil Code were extensive.<sup>189</sup> Private companies nominated employees appointed as 'guards' of the concessions. These staff provided not only generic corporate security but also enforced national laws, with explicit powers over policing road traffic, hunting and fishing activities, contraband, and public order. They held the power to arrest, carry out preliminary investigations as well as make official complaints<sup>190</sup> In this way, both domestic and foreign private interests acted 'for' the colonial state, a lever through which laws could be monitored and applied, but were

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<sup>187</sup> See, for example, Deborah Avant "Private security companies," *New Political Economy* 10, no.1, (2005), 123, 129 and Fred Schreier and Marina Caparini, "Privatising Security: Law, Practice and Governance of Private Military and Security Companies," *Research Paper Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)* (March 2005) 23, 30-2, 64, 76-76 [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/14077/occasional\\_6.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/14077/occasional_6.pdf)

<sup>188</sup> For debates on the subject in the contemporary UK, see, for example, Adam White, "What is the Privatization of Policing?," *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 14, no.3, (September 2020) <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pay085> and White, "The politics of police 'privatization': A multiple streams approach," *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 15, no.3, A. (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895814549643>

<sup>189</sup> Massimiliano Mulone, «Privatisation de la police ou « publicisation » de l'industrie de la sécurité privée ? » in *Questions de criminologie* eds Jean Poupart, Denis Lafortune and Samuel Tanner (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2010).

<sup>190</sup> R Gourguillon, note à l'attention de monsieur le directeur général adjoint, 3 October 1959; Germes, note à l'attention de monsieur le directeur général, 15 October 1959, 18V01807/297, TA.

tied to wider state institutions and mechanisms. For example, arrested individuals were quickly transferred to local *préfectures*.<sup>191</sup> On the other hand, as visible local actors with a clear legal role beyond commercial interests, oil companies were acting in some ways like states, their authority delimited by the territorial scope of their operations. Indeed, as discussed in chapter one, in the context of the war, oil companies themselves policed and expelled both unauthorised and ‘suspect’ individuals from their concessionary areas, including the emerging towns and residential settlements here.<sup>192</sup>

Finally, within their concessions and particularly in the vicinity of the oil towns, oil companies played an active role in designing and implementing social infrastructures to meet local needs in quasi state role. Colonial reports on the interactions between oil companies and local nomadic tribes are particularly telling. The July 1961 meeting at Hassi Messaoud between SN REPAL, CFPA and Chaamba tribe, at the latter’s request is exemplary. The reasoning given was that the tribe, having become ‘conscious’ of the critical role of oil for ‘their future’ were looking to ‘participate’ in its wealth.<sup>193</sup> Not only does this reinforce the idea of an operational Saharan petro-nation, with hydrocarbon ownership at the centre of economic and political identity, but also clearly illustrates the perception that it was through oil companies that citizens could participate in this nation, and particularly in its wealth distribution.

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<sup>191</sup> Letter from the consulate general of Ouargla to the French ambassador in Algeria, 22 December 1962, Ouargla Consulat Série A, MDAE, CDAN.

<sup>192</sup> Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 12; F Delavesne, letter to the Minister of the Sahara, 5 December 1957. 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>193</sup> *Préfecture des Oasis, Synthèse mensuelle*, 4.

Even more revealing, not only did the companies accept the meeting on these terms but having gained a better insight into their 'reciprocal problems' and 'precarity of existence' of these groups through the discussion, the companies responded to the expressed community needs. They installed public infrastructures, specifically drinking troughs for herds, and promised to reserve upcoming job vacancies they had for these groups.<sup>194</sup> In both perception and reality, then, with clear power to make social change, oil companies created and occupied new political spaces and forms of agency, with an influence and role far beyond simply applying pressure, advising, or lobbying state entities. In this way, oil concessions can be conceived of as a specific sovereign geography consisting of a complex hybridity between companies acting both like and for the state, in a fluid process of delegation, contestation, and application.

Overall, therefore, it is clear that oil played an essential role in the both the design and implementation of a broad range of social programmes and public infrastructures. Taken as a whole, these policies tended to reflect the overall political designation of the Saharan 'nation' or 'unit,' particularly through recognising and promoting a defined 'Saharan ethnicity' and political identity, reproducing this model through infrastructural development and social investments, and reinforcing a representation of statehood interlinked with hydrocarbons. At the same time, however, these programmes, and the ways in which they were ultimately implemented, were shaped and remade by the natural geographies, commercial prerogatives and company cultures of the oil sector. Particularly in the areas

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

surrounding oil extraction nodes, expressions of sovereignty and political influence were so closely bound in these ways to oil resources that oil companies were perceived of, and acted, as both like and for the state.

## Conclusion

The 'Saharan frontier' demonstrates the critical role of oil in the construction of imperial space. The division of north and south Algeria went far beyond an imperial rhetoric inspired by the oil discoveries, but was a political and lived reality, a border shaped and imposed by oil. A combination of the frameworks of oil governance alongside the activities of oil companies reflected the idea of a 'frontier' in practice, notably a transition into regionalised government, law codes and social services. Furthermore, these same frameworks and oil actors rewrote ideas of sovereignty, citizenship, and identity in the desert region. Oil production was established as a form of political designation, and shaped an uneven political space, setting gradations of state and company power according to the logics and geographies of oil production.

In all, placing oil at the centre of the account demonstrates that the 'messiness' of decolonisation and uneven progression from colony to nation-state were important, tangible, and lived experiences. In particular, the role of oil and oil actors in the shaping of the Saharan frontier demonstrates the critical importance of social mediation in the production of imperial space and sovereignty claims. Further, by focusing on these actors, the legal, physical, and financial structures of Saharan frontier, and their impacts, can be effectively situated into a chronology spanning the

pre- and post-independence periods. This approach then, goes beyond the traditional turns of 1956, 1960 and 1962, in ways that take account of the agency of local actors without losing sight of the very real continuances of colonial power structures, through 1962 and beyond.

## **Chapter Three: Where the Past Ends and the Future Begins: Oil Infrastructures and Independence**

### Introduction

In March 1962, France and Algeria finally signed the Evian Accords, bringing the eight-year long war to a close. The accords were ratified on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1962, and Algeria was recognised as an independent nation-state. The Sahara, and its precious natural resources, was accepted as an integral part of the Algerian territory. The accords also, however, included a new, highly contentious framework for the exploitation of oil. This chapter explores how these terms, (and later, those of the Algiers Accords) were applied in practice. It analyses how the interconnected Franco-Algerian oil sector shaped the processes of political and economic independence, at the level of state, company, and worker.

The terms agreed at Evian perpetuated privileged French access to Algerian oil, protecting the legal status of French oil companies operating in Algeria and retained Algerian oil within the French economy as ‘franc oil,’ an oil sector trading exclusively in French francs.<sup>1</sup> Despite the efforts of future President Ben Bella to separate the oil deal, which he called the ‘selling off of Algerian oil,’ from the rest of the agreement, French negotiators flatly refused to ratify any independence agreement that didn’t include a deal over oil exploitation.<sup>2</sup> With an overwhelming dependency on France for

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<sup>1</sup> Cantoni, “The Enemy,” 53-4. On the global picture, of oil traded in US dollars, see Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 111; 120-123.

<sup>2</sup> Musso, “Taking Control,” 6.

aid, trade, and the technical capacity for oil exploration, Ben Bella had little room for leverage. He allegedly signed off on the agreement 'without even reading' the terms.<sup>3</sup>

The structures of oil exploitation agreed at Evian have been critical in the construction of historians' interpretations of Algerian decolonisation. Whilst political independence had finally been recognised, France continued to directly underwrite some 63% of the Algerian budget.<sup>4</sup> Oil provided the vast majority of the remaining income a sector where, under the terms of Evian, France continued to wield vast influence.<sup>5</sup> Franc oil made up about 68% of Algerian oil exports, whilst French interests controlled around 70% of Algerian production through joint ventures.<sup>6</sup> Scholars have argued the extent to which this access to and control over the Algerian economy and resources constituted de facto economic control, increasingly problematising the distinction between political and economic independence.<sup>7</sup>

These accounts shift crucial attention to the economic aspects of the postcolonial years, casting new light on the breadth of efforts by the French and Algerian states to wield and contest economic and political control via the oil sector. This research, has, for example, demonstrated the important role of bilateral and international diplomacy and the role of state oil companies.<sup>8</sup> These accounts have, however, centred on a deliberate political and human agency. This agency appears autonomous from, or

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<sup>3</sup> Abdelatif Rebah, *Sonatrach: une entreprise pas comme les autres* (Paris: Casbah éditions, 2006), 34; Musso, "Taking Control," 6.

<sup>4</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Naylor, "A Post-Colonial Decolonization."

<sup>8</sup> On diplomatic manoeuvring see, notably, Cantoni "The Enemy," and Naylor, "A Post-Colonial Decolonization". On national oil companies see Musso, "Taking Control".

directive of, the oil infrastructures, crude, pipelines, and staff, which underwrote it. As such, these histories continue to replicate the chronologies and actors at the heart of 'political' accounts. They focus particularly on state machinations at key political 'moments,' most notably at Evian and the 1965 Algiers Accords, which set out new terms of Franco-Algerian industrial cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

In this chapter I extend the framework of these economic histories of post-colonial France and Algeria. By centring oil as a physical material with a significant spatial impact, the chapter shows how a network of oil actors, operating far below the top-level of state-to-state treaties and accords at Evian and Accords, evolved and in turn shaped the process of decolonisation across France and Algeria.<sup>10</sup> These interests entrenched an ongoing, but variegated economic connection, wedded to oil, in ways that actually opposed and constrained political agency.

The argument first centres the Evian and Algiers Accords, exploring the role of oil actors in how these treaties were agreed, enacted, and challenged. Here I introduce the 'nexus.'<sup>11</sup> The nexus is a mid-level bureaucratic-corporate machine, emerging from and embedded within an intertwined Franco-Algerian oil sector. The nexus emerges from the oil actors introduced in chapters one and two, through the process

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<sup>9</sup> Naylor, "A Post-Colonial Decolonization"; Musso, "Taking Control".

<sup>10</sup> Here I draw particularly on Carola Hein, "Space, Time and Oil The Global Petroleumscape," in *Oil Spaces: The Global Petroleumscape* ed. Carola Hein (Routledge: New York, 2021); 4 and Vanessa Ogle, "'Funk Money': The End of Empires, The Expansion of Tax Havens, and Decolonization as an Economic and Financial Event," *Past & Present* 249, no. 1 (November 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtaa001>.

<sup>11</sup> The concept of the nexus draws on a wider body of literature which seek to understand the 'multiple implications...in the body and mind of modern societies, in their international relations and in their multifaceted interconnections.' Bini, "Introduction," 3-4: Indeed, Bini refers to this as an 'oil nexus'. See also Jay Hakes, "Introduction: A Decidedly Valuable and Dangerous Fuel", *Journal of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 2012) <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jas066>.

of political independence. It operates to implement the terms of Evian in ways that constrain state agency, across both France and Algeria, and embed oil revenue within sovereignty. This nexus, or web of interwoven and interdependent mid-level oil actors, continues to bind France and Algeria together. It is dependent on but exceeds the nation-state system. The nexus shapes the agency of a range of actors, from the highest levels of the central state through to unions and workers, in ways that cannot be captured by a purely political history. This first section focuses on how the nexus defined and constrained state agency through the Evian and Algiers Accords. I draw particular attention the ways in which the nexus corralled the French state into ceding to key Algerian demands at Algiers.

I then turn to focus on the physical flows of oil and gas across the supranational space of the postcolonial oil network, tracing these raw materials through ports, pipelines and refineries. I explore how the physical, economic, and commercial legacies of colonial export translated into a new political context still underwritten by extensive economic dependency. Indeed, it was Olivier Wormser, then Director of Economic and Financial Affairs, who described the pipelines as spaces ‘where the past ends and the future begins.’<sup>12</sup> I stress particularly how the physical networks of an intertwined oil sector shaped social, urban, and economic geographies across France and Algeria. I thereby demonstrate a slow, fragmented, and geographically divided experience of decolonisation processes, mediated by these hydrocarbon connections.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the physical shape of the oil network was a crucial factor

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<sup>12</sup> Department of State, Trapl, 4 February 1964, Box 1379, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>13</sup> On urban and economic geographies linked by oil see Hein, “Space, Time and Oil” Hein, “Oil Spaces”.

in the perpetuation of economic links: pipelines particularly remained a significant check on Algerian state efforts to drive state income and attain greater operative control over natural resource exploitation. At the same time, however, I show how the role of these infrastructures go beyond a typical neo-colonial influence, constraining not only Algerian but also French actors.

Finally, the chapter explores the Franco-Algerian oil nexus from the perspective of its closest and most integral participants, stressing their significant role as actors in the decolonisation process: the oil sector workers. Moving away from a view that has generally perceived workers as politically “quiet” and unproblematic levers through which state policy was applied, I draw attention to the important political role and influence of this group.<sup>14</sup> I demonstrate particularly the ways in which oil workers both challenged and leveraged the intertwined oil system, ultimately entrenching the structures of the nexus.

### A Postcolonial Oil Empire? From Evian to Algiers

Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella later described the Evian Accords as a ‘stranglehold,’ whilst De Gaulle claimed that the accords ‘contained everything we wanted them to contain.’<sup>15</sup> These terms shaped oil as a foundationally interlinked economy operating across two states. Broadly, oil was paid for in French francs, with the transactions passing through French banks. As a net importer of oil, this enabled

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<sup>14</sup> Gianni Del Panta, “Weathering the storm: why was there no Arab uprising in Algeria?” *Democratization*, 24, no. 6 (2017): 1091. DOI: [10.1080/13510347.2016.1275575](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1275575) For a critique of such accounts of oil workers’ history and the ways in which scholars have overlooked the powerful but covert activism among oil workers see Ehsani “Disappearing the Workers”.

<sup>15</sup> Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 55; 35.

to state to avoid the dollar system which underwrote the global oil market, thereby driving a better balance of payments and economic security.<sup>16</sup> Three years later, in a new agreement signed at Algiers, the terms of oil production were renegotiated. Algerian oil remained in the franc zone, more French funding to Algerian industry was released and French concessions remained intact. A comparatively detailed historiography has plotted these negotiations, following the twists and turns of the diplomatic negotiations.<sup>17</sup>

In this section, however, I explore the Algiers and Evian Accords beyond the corridors of central state political power. I demonstrate the important role the nexus had, overlaying both French and Algerian state agency and shaping the terms and impacts of the accords. I open with a focus on the terms agreed at Evian, exploring how institutions of oil governance, particularly the *Organisme Technique*, and oil companies, imposed these in practice. In effect, the enduring economic connections, often seen to be product of top-level, state-to-state political negotiations were in fact the product of a bureaucratic and corporate power operating at this 'middle' level of companies and institutions. I draw out how the nexus embedded oil revenue as constitutive within sovereignty and its representation in the Sahara and limited the scope of Algerian state hegemony over its economy. I then turn to focus on the interplays between the oil nexus and political agency at Algiers, illustrating the specific ways in which the nexus impacted on and corralled the political actors who

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 66; Saul, "SN REPAL," 110; Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy* 111; 120-123; Sonatrach, "24 Février au temps présent," 4, 55.00\_SON.02, CED.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Grimaud "Le conflit pétrolier," Brandell, *Les rapports franco-algériens depuis 1962*; Valberg, "Cinq ans après."

were nominally in control, according to existing scholarship, taking as a case study the reduction of the French share in the key oil interest, SN REPAL.

#### At Evian and its Aftermath

The terms of oil production set down at Evian have been widely perceived as a victory for the French government. The negotiating position of the Algerian contingent was weak, and they had little alternative but to accept the wide scope of French controls and profits baked into the accords.<sup>18</sup> Here, I move beyond the written terms of Evian, first briefly outlining how the pricing structures developed here defined the strategies and operations of oil companies. I then move to consider how the terms set by the emergent nexus after Evian entrenched corporate power and oil infrastructure into the fabric of Algerian and Saharan sovereignty, through oil companies and especially through the bilateral structure of resource governance, the *Organisme Technique*, a core part of the nexus. I draw particular attention to the entrenchment of resource governance in oil producing locales and the forms of corporate sovereignty operated to shape the Sahara against Algerian state agency.

For oil companies, the structures agreed at Evian meant that profitable operations hinged on a trans-Mediterranean supply line. This was the result of the guaranteed high prices for Algerian oil in France, and the French state protection of franc oil (crude produced in the franc zone). French refineries had to refine and sell a minimum quota of franc oil, which, in practice, was primarily Algerian crude.<sup>19</sup> If

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<sup>18</sup> Rebah *Sonatrach*, 34; Musso, "Taking Control," 6.

<sup>19</sup> Saul, "SN REPAL," 109.

companies were unable to procure their own supply, they had to buy their franc oil from the General Petroleum Union (UGP), at punitively high prices.<sup>20</sup> A direct franc oil supply line was therefore critical.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, because of the high prices, oil companies extracting oil in Algeria could expect significantly increased profits, better cash flow and faster amortisation by selling in France.<sup>22</sup> The net result was that the best profit margins for oil companies could be obtained remaining within this interlinked structure: supplying their French refineries with crude they extracted from Algeria. Indeed, in some cases, as will be discussed in more detail below, companies who would otherwise have withdrawn from Algerian production retained their concessions here simply to ensure they continued to meet the franc oil quota required for their French refining and sales operations.<sup>23</sup>

Critically for this system, oil was the only industry which remained exempt from Algerian remittance laws introduced in 1963. These laws stipulated that all export earnings must be remitted through the Bank of Algeria.<sup>24</sup> This unique status of oil, however, was not legislated. Instead, this remained a covert and informal arrangement between the government and the companies.<sup>25</sup> This then, is demonstrative of the multi-faceted ways in which the nexus operated in practice,

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<sup>20</sup> Oil Department, Algerian Oil and the French Oil Systems, Memorandum, 9 December 1966, FCO/371 125662, NA.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.; W. R. Tomkya letter to S. Y. Dawbarn, 14 October 1966, FO 371/187638, NA.; Algiers telegram number 1479 to State Department, 13 January 1966; "Algerian Petroleum," 10 January 1966, Bohlen, Telegram 1479 to Department of State. Box 1378, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>22</sup> American Embassy Telegram A-3047 to Department of State, 26 December 1968, Box 1618, RG 59, NARA; Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Tomkya letter to Dawbarn.

<sup>24</sup> Foreign Office, Telegram 3181, 10 December 1963, FO 371/173172, NA.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

dictating economic interconnections at a level far below state policy and treaties, but at the level of state-company relationships.

Meanwhile, Evian also set down that existing oil concessions in Algeria would remain under the imperial oil code.<sup>26</sup> This was a legislative confirmation of its inherent transnational nature: as imperial laws and business structures continued to operate on sovereign soil, indeed constitutive of the practices of that new sovereignty.<sup>27</sup> The imperial code, moreover, recognised significant company powers, including over the setting of transport fees. In fact, the terms of the code had been rewritten mere weeks before Evian was agreed, and significantly increased the powers oil companies held over fixing prices. These changes were so significant that Algerian control of these pre-existing concessions was 'more nominal than actual.'<sup>28</sup> Moreover, due to imperial protectionism these existing concessions were overridingly French.

As well as perpetuating an interlinked oil economy, the terms of Evian, and the ways in which oil companies entrenched themselves within and beyond these terms, fractured Algerian sovereignty and governance, binding them to resource wealth, a foreign state and private interests, particularly in the Sahara. The creation and operation of the *Organisme Technique* is particularly illustrative of these tensions. The *Organisme* was a bilateral Franco-Algerian governance structure with oversight

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<sup>26</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 4.

<sup>27</sup> Marta Musso, "Oil Companies as Agents of Post-Colonial Relations: France, Algeria, and Italy in the Sahara," in *The Business of Development in Post-Colonial Africa* eds Véronique Dimier, and Sarah Stockwell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 140.

<sup>28</sup> Rachid Bendib, "Hydrocarbons, Rent and the Algerian Growth Strategy: A Critical Appraisal of the Process of Building an Independent and National Economy" (PhD. Diss., University of Glasgow, 1988): 161-2.

of the oil sector, with a purview similar to its colonial forerunner, the Organisation commune des régions sahariennes (OCRS). The Organisme was jointly funded and managed, with the power to approve concessions, fund oil exploitation, and write new laws.<sup>29</sup> It owed its existence at least in part to the influence of oil actors, specifically the Italian company ENI, within the Evian negotiations. ENI had recognised that a bilateral agency would help Algeria maintain its oil sales after the war, by, in the short term at least, protecting its access to the most critical of its narrow existing markets.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the Organisme Technique was a key part of the nexus, forming its institutional cornerstone.<sup>31</sup>

The structure of the Organisme assured an active role for the French state in oil and state governance in Algeria far beyond the wider economic structures of franc oil. This had two key impacts. First, this structure underpinned and exacerbated existing dependencies and privileges at the level of infrastructural and operational controls of the oil sector. For example, the French contingent of the Organisme voted unanimously to adopt the controversial TRAPAL pipeline proposal, which would take Algerian crude from Hassi Messaoud to Arzew. Critically, this included no direct role for the Algerian government in the transport of these hydrocarbons, despite this being a central priority of the Algerian state.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, the Organisme continued to block Algerian efforts to take more operational control of the oil sector, particularly through staffing and training. By

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<sup>29</sup> Hocine Malti, *On l'appelé le pétrole rouge* (Algiers: Éditions Marinoor, 1997), 68-9.

<sup>30</sup> Musso, "'Oil Will Set Us Free,'" 80-1.

<sup>31</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 5.

<sup>32</sup> Board of Trade Algeria, Telegram 1531/23 to Marc Lanchin, 27 November 1963, FO 371/173172, NA.

continuing to minimise the funding for training, the Organisme perpetuated the chronic shortage of qualified Algerian oil workers.<sup>33</sup> This, in turn, continued to force an expensive reliance on French specialist labour.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the Organisme itself was exemplary of this difficulty, as French agents continued to operate the crucial roles of direct liaison within the oil companies and overseeing the payment of the *redevance* taxes. Algerian critics argued that not only did these structures limit the development of critical working relationships for Algerian state representatives, but actually enabled oil companies to minimise their *redevance* payments.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, the Organisme Technique held a critical role in the provision of public services around resource extraction. This simultaneously introduced a foreign government into the exercise of Saharan sovereignty and, moreover, intertwined everyday social dynamics of state sovereignty ever more closely with resource exaction. In the first instance, the Organisme held a wide scope of powers over road and urban infrastructures and was thereby publicly acknowledged as providing public services.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the Organisme Technique, like the OCRS, constituted a direct liaison and representation of the state to its citizens. Thus, a bilateral, supra-sovereign governance structure had direct and significant powers over local development. This contradiction exacerbated the already contested sovereignty claims in the Sahara. Indeed, the Organisme itself struggled to differentiate between its own and state level responsibilities over public infrastructures. As noted in chapter

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<sup>33</sup> Report of conseil de l'organisme technique, 16 May 1963; Minutes of the seventh and fifth meetings of the conseil d'administration of the organisme technique, 1 March 1963 and 5 December 1962. 19771403/11, ANF.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid; Malti, *Le pétrole rouge*, 68-9; 73.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of the fourth meeting of the conseil d'administration de l'organisme technique, 5 November 1962, 16. 19771403/11, ANF.

two, these confusions are most clearly exemplified in the case of responsibilities over zones of special development. In one case, presented with a proposal for a crucial road development, the Organisme ruled itself unable to proceed because it was not sure if it had the power to make the decision or not.<sup>37</sup> This then, is a clear example of the nexus' broad influence and blurred boundaries.

Moreover, because the scope of the Organisme was focused on resource exploitation, local infrastructures continued to express a specific, localised form of resource governance.<sup>38</sup> The Organisme, for example, funded road construction on two key criteria: their importance to the oil sector, according to the Organisme's priorities (rather than those of the Algerian state - as noted above these were not always aligned), and the proximity of these oil sites to local population centres.<sup>39</sup> Thus as well shaping local infrastructures, oil profits continued to be woven directly into the provision of public services and governance in areas close to oil extraction.

Adding to these complexities and fragmentations of Saharan governance was the role oil companies themselves. First because oil companies deliberately capitalised on their wide scope of colonial-era planning powers to entrench their own position throughout the comparatively slow processes of negotiation and ratification of the accords. In this way, oil companies were critical actors in the entrenchment of their own legal and physical representations in the Sahara, able to retain a wider scope of public responsibilities and power in the areas local to oil extraction. This included, for

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<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the fourth meeting of the conseil d'administration de l'organisme technique.

<sup>38</sup> See chapter two for details of earlier impacts here.

<sup>39</sup> Minutes of the fourth meeting of the conseil d'administration de l'organisme technique.

example, the taking out of residential concessions and taking over the provision of energy supplies in these areas. Such agreements, permissible but in practice, hitherto generally opposed under the colonial regime, were rushed through in this critical window, with company applications supported by OCRS to protect these interests in the longer term.<sup>40</sup> Against a wider backdrop of the shifting colonial policies of citizenship, which used this same window, albeit dating back to 1958 to define identities of people of Algeria in ways that made them French, this shows an alternative of way of rethinking citizenship, as linked corporate colonial sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> The extension and entrenchment of the powers of private, foreign interests over planning powers and public services represents a clear check on the scope and representation of sovereign authority in these regions, and further perpetuated the colonial era structures of variegated resource and corporate sovereignty in the Sahara.<sup>42</sup>

In some cases, oil companies used these powers in ways unapproved by the colonial powers, to continue to shape Saharan communities around their commercial priorities. One clear prerogative for companies remained entrenching oil towns as luxury, temporary accommodation for a single, male, and primarily foreign workforce. This policy was controversial and had been a point of deep contention with the colonial government, which had been driving towards family settlement. As noted in chapter one, a mere month before Evian was finally signed, CFP A and SN REPAL

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<sup>40</sup> P.J. Dableu, Logement cité Hassi-Messaoud, 7 May 1962 and G Juif, Occupation des terrains à Hassi Messaoud, 18 May 1962; 18V01807/170, TA.

<sup>41</sup> Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 50-52.

<sup>42</sup> On corporate colonial sovereignty, see Stern, *The Company-State* and a full discussion of this evolution in chapter 2.

blocked the use of ringfenced funding for a new school at Hassi Messaoud, instead diverting the funds to the construction of swimming pool.<sup>43</sup> Such decisions demonstrate how the direct voting powers of oil companies in housing and planning authorities right up to the ‘moment’ of political independence allowed them to continue to shape Saharan communities around commercial priorities.

This physical and legal entrenchment of oil companies on concessionary settlements enabled racial segregation on the sites to continue, and be translated into urban landscapes and local economic development. With company towns already divided between ‘traditional’ housing, restaurants and specified quarters for Algerian staff and ‘European’ areas, oil companies simply continued to expand these urban forms, even on their new constructions.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, companies continued to apply biological racism in assumptions of ‘European’ tastes and sensibilities. To prevent these staff from ‘going crazy’ in the desert, companies relied on expensive imported food, a high standard of ‘European’ style accommodation and extensive leisure facilities to maintain staff wellbeing and health.<sup>45</sup> As discussed in chapters one and two, such choices had very real impacts on local trading routes and economies.

Secondly, these private interests remained a critical partner for the state in the provision of public services in the Saharan region even beyond the limits of the oil towns. The wide scope of company involvement in the provision of public services

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<sup>43</sup> Mangou, Note.

<sup>44</sup> M Piotin, Minutes of the meeting at Hassi Messaoud, 18 December 1962, and CFP A Avant-Projet modification et amélioration de la distribution d’Energie Electrique du camp de Hassi Messaoud, 28 September 1962, 18V01807/165, TA.

<sup>45</sup> Algiers Correspondent, “The Saharan Scene: Pipelines Bursting at the Seams, *Financial Times*, 13 February 1964, press cutting, ARC18159, BPA.

across education, healthcare, and urban planning prior to 1962 had been to such an extent that it constituted a form of colonial corporate sovereignty. After Evian, many of these programmes, including the Ouargla Eye hospital, continued. In 1963, for example, both CFP A and SN REPAL agree to provide substantial funding for the opening of a training school opening at Ouargla.<sup>46</sup> This was a critical project for the Algerian state, the cornerstone of its economic relaunch of the Sahara. This aimed to provide vocational training for the critical local employment sectors: oil and agriculture. Given the consistent concern over their extensive public responsibilities and power, the Algerian state was deeply unwilling to work with the oil companies on the project but was unable to find alternative partners. Eventually, the government agreed to accept the funding on the condition the oil company role was not made public.<sup>47</sup> Such cases highlight the coercive yet discreet influence of the nexus in everyday life and operations and move beyond Paris and Algiers as the focal points of the ongoing struggles over economic decolonisation.

### 'Holding back the Algerians': States, Companies, and the Algiers Accords

The evolution of the Franco-Algerian relationship into the mid 1960s is often framed in terms of the tensions between two competing political and economic ideologies.<sup>48</sup> Or, as de Broglie, the French Foreign Minister, fretted, a fundamental test of the

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<sup>46</sup> J Benezit, note for Gransir de Lilliac, 30 May 1963; D Cheviere, summaries of meetings with M Laur and M Mercier, 6 May 1963, 18V01807/192, TA.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 77; Nicole Grimaud, "Algeria and Socialist France," *Middle East Journal* 40, no.2 (Spring, 1986): 253-4. DOI: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4327309>.

‘viability of cooperation between a socialist country and a capitalist country.’<sup>49</sup>

Certainly, the onward march of Algeria’s ‘special brand of socialism,’ with its economic restructuring, and seizure of pied-noir land, placed increasing pressure on the relationship.<sup>50</sup> In response, French funding for Algerian development projects was postponed or substantially cut.<sup>51</sup>

The Algiers accords, signed on 29 July 1965, renegotiated the terms of oil extraction which had been set at Evian. The accords have often been viewed from this perspective: a state-to state mechanism to shore up the Algerian socialist economic vision in resource control and earning power, whilst diplomatically assuaging the French ‘third way,’ and protecting critical resource access.<sup>52</sup> Here, however, I invert this approach, placing the oil nexus at the centre of the account. I consider first how the terms of Algiers were framed by both states as an ideological and political victory, driven by wider foreign policy aims. I then argue that a focus on state aims fails to fully account for the terms agreed at Algiers. I show how and why French negotiators ceded their controlling stake in SN REPAL here to explain how two mechanisms (the specific nature of the existing, intertwined oil structures, plus the leveraging of these structures by oil companies) operated in practice to corral and constrain state actors. The case is indicative of how and why structures of empire were simultaneously falling away and being entrenched, according to a logic and at a tempo set by the nexus.

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<sup>49</sup> Minutes of meetings in the embassy in Algiers, May 1963, SEAA 125, cited in Jeffrey James Byrne, “Our Own Special Brand of Socialism: Algeria and the Contest of Modernities in the 1960s,” *Diplomatic History* 33 (June 2009): 433-4. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44214020>.

<sup>50</sup> Byrne, “Our Own Special Brand of Socialism,” 433-4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 436-7.

<sup>52</sup> Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 76-8.

The Algiers accords were the eventual result of difficult, protracted negotiations between the two states to define the next stage in oil exploitation. The negotiations were personally overseen by De Gaulle and Ben Bella (and later Boumediene).<sup>53</sup> The direct involvement of the two heads of states, and De Gaulle's optimistic vision of Ben Bella's acceptance of the oil terms as emblematic of the future relationship between the two is exemplary of the extent to which oil directly defined the political relationship between the two.<sup>54</sup>

The deal ultimately retained and even extended the interlinked nature of the oil sector. Not only did Algerian oil remain a 'franc' oil, but the high prices agreed reinforced the dependency on the Algerian-France exploitation-market framework at company level. For international companies like Shell, having direct access to franc crude from an Algerian source, was even more critical to profitable operations in France.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, despite a lack of business interest in its CPA holdings, Shell refused to sell its shares here because this would have resulted in the company failing to meet its franc oil quotas. However, the company limited its exploration and active exploitation on the concession: meeting minimal standards for its operations in France but thereby depressing potential Algerian state income.<sup>56</sup> The agreement on preferential treatment for Algerian crude also impacted the efforts to reach an integrated energy policy with European Economic Community (EEC), who simply

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<sup>53</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 10-11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 76-8.

<sup>55</sup> Tomkya letter to Dawbarn.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

refused to accept this status at the level of the community.<sup>57</sup> In all, the terms of the accords further walled off the existing Franco-Algerian system, seemingly in a political victory for France, protecting a privileged access to oil away from the international majors, albeit at the cost of further distancing France from the possibility of communal energy policy within the EEC.

Furthermore, in a repeat of the position at Evian, French negotiators tied aid provision directly to the completion of an oil deal, thus continuing to place hydrocarbons at the centre of the wider economic relationship between the two.<sup>58</sup> This aid was set at one billion francs to fund Algerian industrialisation, paid out over five years.<sup>59</sup> Even more starkly, this same financial aid was both justified and funded by the oil nexus itself. This is because the aid that linked the two together was financed directly from the economic benefits of the intertwined oil structure.<sup>60</sup> In macroeconomic terms, franc oil protected the value of franc, but more critically, franc oil and French protectionism combined to hold prices, and taxes, in France high.<sup>61</sup> French and international media reported widely on this structure, highlighting how this policy effectively passed the 'burden' of French aid to Algeria onto everyday

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<sup>57</sup> Armelle Demagney, "France and the Project for a Community Oil Policy, from the Signature of the Treaty of Rome to the First Oil Shock," in *A Comparative History of National Oil Companies* ed. Alain Beltran (Presses Interuniversitaires Européennes: Brussels, 2010): 322.

<sup>58</sup> Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 79.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Giuseppe Pennisi and Gerald Würker, "The Franco-Algerian Agreement on Oil and Industrial Development: A Special Partnership," *Africa: Rivista Trimestrale Di Studi e Documentazione Dell'Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 22, no. 4 (1967): 4801. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41852509> 386-7.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 66; Saul, "SN REPAL," 110; SONATRACH, "24 Février," 4.

consumers.<sup>62</sup> The ubiquitous nature of oil then, translated the postcolonial economic and political frameworks into everyday, lived realities.

Both the French and Algerian states presented the deal at Algiers as a deliberate and successful reinforcement of their wider foreign policy aims. In France, for example, De Gaulle claimed that the deal both secured economic security through the franc oil supply line, and enhanced its own status as a political 'champion' of the Third World.<sup>63</sup> Algiers was a plank in the French 'third way,' a French-led schism of non-aligned, and particularly, Third World countries, situated between the global communist and capitalist blocs.<sup>64</sup> Historians have been more critical of the results of the Accords, which constituted for some, the 'height of French neo-colonial influence in Algeria,' but have nevertheless tended to agree that Accords were carefully designed to serve France's multilateral ends.<sup>65</sup> Such work has also held that the accords were a victory for the French state, which secured political control of the Sahara.

Perhaps more surprisingly given how the narrow dependency on French oil interests was reinforced at Algiers, the FLN claimed the accords were a great victory for Algerian socialism. In both the run up and aftermath of the agreement the Algerian government for example, made great political capital out of their success in securing of new finances for the state, increased control of the economy and oil sector and as

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<sup>62</sup> Helen Avati, "What Non-French Companies Seek in Algeria," *Petroleum Intelligence Weekly*, 18 October 1965, Press Cutting. ARC18159, BPA; Pennisi and Würker, "The Franco-Algerian Agreement," 373.

<sup>63</sup> Financial Times correspondent, "France Algerian Oil Pact Privileged Position for France," 14 July 1965, *Financial Times*, FO 371/182962, NA.

<sup>64</sup> Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 77.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

a strong victory against the international companies. This, the administration claimed, was a strike against the 'bitter enemies of Algerian socialism.'<sup>66</sup> This was particularly the case because the deal recognised an inherent value of natural resources, away from market fluctuations, a key tenant of the state's economic policy.<sup>67</sup> As such, the treaty was presented as a victory not against France, but against the Anglo-Saxon oil cartel, the private companies who constituted an 'oil empire, which makes and unmakes governments.'<sup>68</sup> The use of the word 'empire,' in this context is particularly striking.

Certainly, some more recent historiography has suggested that Algiers was a great victory for the Algerians. Musso particularly has argued that this agreement instituted a progressive move towards greater Algerian control of the oil sector.<sup>69</sup> Thus, although short term French dependencies were reinforced, Algeria gained support for key projects, most notably the development of Algerian oil expertise through training and employment. Indeed, such accounts have drawn a direct line from Algiers to the success of the 1971 nationalisation.<sup>70</sup> As discussed in chapter four, this was a key line of the Algerian state in the aftermath of the nationalisation.

Here I want to consider the terms of the Algiers accords as shaped not just by political interests but by the nexus itself, through a case study of SN REPAL. This approach shows that, counter to the arguments of accounts such as Musso's, the

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<sup>66</sup> Financial Times correspondent, "Ben Bella Hits Out At French Oil Groups," *Financial Times*, 7 June 1964, press cutting in ARC18159, BPA.

<sup>67</sup> "Algerian Oil Philosophy," *Petroleum Press Service*, June 1964, press cutting in ARC18159, BPA.

<sup>68</sup> Bachir Boumaza, Press Conference in Algeria, 30 July 1965, press cutting in ARC18159, BPA.

<sup>69</sup> Musso, "Oil Companies," 146-7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

terms agreed at Algiers were not the result of state actors imposing their ambitions for control or revenue, but instead were shaped, to a significant extent, by existing oil infrastructures and the oil companies themselves. A 50% stake in SN REPAL was ceded to the Algerians at Algiers and certainly seems to illustrate the ascendancy of planned state control of the sector by the Algerian state. Indeed, as far back as the Evian Accords, the Algerian government had been seeking an increased stake in SN REPAL. SN REPAL was important to the Algerian state as it had a huge role in Algerian oil production, holding 49% of the Hassi Messaoud field and 51% of Hassi R'Mel.<sup>71</sup> A greater stake here would both increase financial revenues from and active management of the nation's hydrocarbon industry, thus constituting an important part of its wider policy of increasing Algerian operative and strategic control of its industry.

These early Algerian efforts to gain control of SN REPAL at Evian and in its immediate aftermath were effectively rebuffed by the combined efforts of French state and private interests, who drew on unique structures of early colonial exploitation to entrench themselves. Through the Evian negotiations, French negotiators had been able to counter that because SN REPAL constituted private as well as public interests any such transfer of shares could not be agreed as part of a state-to-state negotiation. Instead, they suggested that the Algerian state mediate with the private stakeholders after independence was agreed.<sup>72</sup> This stance was rooted in the unique character of SN REPAL: initially a public project, the French

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<sup>71</sup> Marie-Bénédicte Desjuzeur, "Les intérêts pétroliers en Algérie : La Compagnie Française des Pétroles (1953-1965)," in *Les Accords d'Evian : en conjoncture et en longue durée* ed. René Gallissot, (Éditions Katharla : Paris, 1997): 61; Beltran, "Les stratégies," 54-5.

<sup>72</sup> Vaillaurd, Note-Structure de la REPAL, 20 October 1964, B-69479, CDEF ; Jean Majorelle, Louis Eyssautier, C Flory and Jean Picard, Mémorandum to the ministre de l'Industrie, 25 August 1965, B-69478, CDEF.

state had been forced to call for private capital to help fund the incredible expenses of early Saharan exploitation, further complicated by the decision to limit this call to national interests.<sup>73</sup> No progress had been made in persuading these companies to sell their shares since: indeed, by 1965 they remained deeply opposed to the idea because this would actually represent a financial loss. The French state had little leverage or desire to force the issue in the interim, unwilling to undermine the wider status of state guarantees to private interests.<sup>74</sup>

In the intervening years, SN REPAL leadership continued to argue against any increase in Algerian interest by drawing on the interlinked structures of the nexus. Most critical, company leaders who argued that any significant Algerian presence in the company at leadership or strategic level would put French energy stability at huge risk. This was particularly because SN REPAL was a central interest at the heart of the General Petroleum Union (UGP). Formed in 1960, the UGP was at the heart of French distribution and refining, integrating a number of national interests, as well taking up a significant role in the distribution of Algerian crude.<sup>75</sup> As such, an Algerian stake in UGP via SN REPAL could fragment and divide the UGP but could also enable the Algerian state to exert direct pressure on the French refining, petrochemical and distribution network.<sup>76</sup> SN REPAL's leadership continued to be an

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Samir Salut, "Politique nationale du pétrole, sociétés nationales et 'pétrole franc'," *Revue historique* 2, no 638 (2006): 371. DOI: [10.3917 / rhis.062.0355](https://doi.org/10.3917/rhis.062.0355); See also Éric Kocher-Marbœuf "La création de l'Union générale des pétroles," in *État et énergie XIXe-XXe siècle* eds Alain Beltran, Christophe Bouneau, Yves Bouvier, Denis Varaschin and Jean-Pierre Williot. (Vincennes: Institut de la gestion publique et du développement économique, 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Réflexions sur les négociations algériennes dans la perspective UGP, undated, B-69479, CDEF; Salut, "Politique nationale du pétrole."

active voice in stoking these fears, underlining in letters to the state departments and negotiators that the Algerian pressure here was simply the result of the country's 'socialist doctrine,' thus purposefully shifting the debate from economic structures to political ideology.<sup>77</sup>

Within the company, SN REPAL purposefully consistently blocked attempts to gain any meaningful leadership roles throughout the period 1962-5.<sup>78</sup> A 1964 memo from President Goetz, for example, detailed that any Algerian leadership of the company would cause such uncertainty among the private interests and French agents and would 'gravely compromise' the ability of the company to function.<sup>79</sup> Under significant pressure for greater Algerian leadership from the Algerian state, the company had been forced to undergo a small restructuring, but had simply created nominal roles such a 'president of the council,' to 'hold the Algerians off.'<sup>80</sup>

At the Algiers negotiations, the French team were faced with the antagonistic company interests and huge and mounting pressure for influence from the Algerian team to cede greater control of SN REPAL. The most attractive alternative was to sidestep the issue by simply shutting down SN REPAL. This was, however, regarded as completely impossible due to the deep entrenchment of Franco-Algerian oil links. The value of the vast quantities of national oil the company provided to France was intimately bound to the interlinked structures and maintenance of the inherited rights to Algerian oil. Most critical was maintenance of existing concessions under the vast

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<sup>77</sup> Note sur la direction de SN REPAL, 3, 1 June 1964, B-69479, CDEF.

<sup>78</sup> Note sur la direction.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

scope of concessionaires' powers of the French petroleum code agreed at Evian. If SN REPAL was to fold, its concessions, which included some of the most profitable fields at Hassi Messaoud, Edjeleh, and Hassi R'Mel, could be reassigned and moreover, would fall under Algerian law. Even if the concessions went to alternative French interests, therefore, they would still be restricted in their ability to set prices, particularly over oil transport.<sup>81</sup> Even worse, because of the interlinked nature of French protected interests in Algeria and the complex sharing agreements in place between SN REPAL and CFP A, without SN REPAL the entire Hassi Messaoud concession could come under threat.<sup>82</sup> The issue was further complicated by SN REPAL's operation of a guarantor for additional oil interests, including SOPEG, CAMEL and BIRD.<sup>83</sup>

In all, French negotiators' hands were tied. They had to concede to an expanded Algerian interest to ensure SN REPAL remained in place. To protect domestic interests, SN REPAL was immediately removed from UGP.<sup>84</sup> In the accords, Algeria brought 50% of the company's share.<sup>85</sup> President Goetz's farewell address in the company magazine underlines the company mood. He described SN REPAL as 'bequeathed' to the Algerians by its French 'guides,' who should always be made to feel 'at home in the company, after all, they created it'.<sup>86</sup> This episode highlights the

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<sup>81</sup> Vaillaud, Note-Structure.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.; Jean Prada, Roger Goetze and Jean Aubert, Note pour Monsieur le Président de l'ERAP au sujet de l'éventuelle suppression des moyens d'explorations de la SN REPAL, 16 February 1965, B-69479, CDEF.

<sup>83</sup> Vaillaud, Note-Structure ; Majorelle et al, Letter to the Premier ministre.

<sup>84</sup> Demagny, "France," 113; Majorelle et al, Letter to the Premier ministre.

<sup>85</sup> Musso, "Oil Companies," 145.

<sup>86</sup> Roger Goetz, "Adresse aux Repaliennes et Repaliens," Repaliens (26 July 1966), B-69479, CDEF.

specific mechanisms of nexus at work, through the various levels of company management and working cultures, not just at the level of state-to-state negotiations.

In all, the terms and application of both the Evian and Algiers Accords were not simply products of a deliberate diplomacy or the policies of a political elite, but were shaped by a bureaucratic and corporate power, operating well below the top state level: the nexus. This nexus constrained political agency at and through the Accords, shaping not only the economic and material links across the Mediterranean but also the power and authority to rule, in the Sahara particularly. It is clear, however, that oil was not simply a neo-colonial tool of French influence in these years, instead, within the broader of Franco-Algerian decolonisation these mid-level actors shaped political and economic agency on both sides of the Mediterranean. The case of SN REPAL at the Algiers Accords is perhaps most clearly indicative of how the interactions between the logics and momentum of the nexus, including the leverage and interests of oil companies, operated to narrow political agency and corral state actors down set paths. At the same time, evolutions of oil concessions in residential areas, energy control, and public service provisions in the Sahara demonstrate these same tensions at a more localised level.

#### The Infrastructures of Decolonisation? The Postcolonial Petroleumscape

In June 1965, President Ahmed Ben Bella opened a new oil pipeline. This ran from Hassi Messaoud to Arzew and would finally allow a substantial increase in oil production, as all existing pipelines were saturated. Most critically, the pipeline was to

be British built and Algerian operated.<sup>87</sup> When he opened the pipeline Ben Bella spoke of oil companies' determination to 'perpetuate segregation [in Algeria]...their arrogance is reminiscent of that of the colons' He went on to say that oilmen believed that Arab minds were incapable of grasping 'the mysteries of oil technologies and the subtleties of economic science'<sup>88</sup> Ben Bella's speech, then, simultaneously framed oil companies as agents of neo-colonialism, and positioned oil infrastructures as a key means of obtaining more independent economic control. Indeed, scholars have often read these infrastructural controls as a cornerstone of the later oil nationalisation.<sup>89</sup> And yet, even as Ben Bella was speaking, work was in progress to increase the capacity of the South European pipeline, which carried Algerian oil via France into Europe.<sup>90</sup> This pipeline would lock France and Algeria further into an intertwined economic system, within which Marseille would emerge as an economic enclave. Moving away from accounts that situate these networks as state tools, either of neo-colonialism or economic independence, I will show here how this pipeline demonstrates the nexus at work, as its infrastructural momentum created economic interconnections independently of either French or Algerian policymakers.

In this section I follow the momentum of the physical infrastructures of oil and gas, particularly pipelines and refineries, within and across the Franco-Algerian nexus. I highlight how, where, and why these physical elements entrenched, perpetuated or

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<sup>87</sup> Musso, "Oil Companies," 142-3.

<sup>88</sup> "Ben Bella Clarifies Algerian Oil Policy," *Middle East Economic Survey* 7, no.49, (9 October 1964). ARC18159, BPA/

<sup>89</sup> Musso, "Oil Companies," 142-3.

<sup>90</sup> "Les transports à longue distance ont tendance à se développer," *La Correspondance Économique* (14 October 1968): 6 B-24855, CDEF; Marten Boon, "Oil Pipelines, Politics and International Business The Rotterdam Oil Port, Royal Dutch Shell and the German Hinterland, 1945-1975" (PhD Diss., Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 2014), 145.

challenged the interlinked system and the expression and operation of sovereignty. Opening with a discussion of the pipelines and refineries before moving to a focus on transport nodes, I demonstrate how the interconnected oil infrastructures, operating according to a pace and logic independent of, and often in conflict with, state policy, shaped consumption, employment, and urban form.

### Pipelines and Refineries

From the Saharan extraction nodes, crude hydrocarbons were transported on for processing and sale through a network of northward pipelines, to existing and evolving terminals across Algiers, Arzew, Bougie (Béjaïa), and Skhira in Tunisia. The bulk of the crude then crossed the Mediterranean in ships bound for France, where around 75% of it was sold.<sup>91</sup> At independence, Algeria had two major oil pipelines and one natural gas line in operation. The oil lines ran from Hassi Messaoud in the Sahara to Bougie (Béjaïa) in the north and from Edjeleh in the eastern Sahara to Skhira in northern Tunisia. Both lines were saturated by 1962.<sup>92</sup> Gas ran from Hassi-R'Mel to Arzew to be processed into Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and shipped to Marseille and the UK.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Naylor, "A Post-Colonial Decolonization," 61, 67.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Indeed, Algerian production rose from 27 million to 37 million tonnes when the pipeline opened in 1966. Financial Times Correspondent, "Third Algerian Pipeline in Service this Month," *Financial Times*, 7 January 1966, press cutting in FCO 55/1166, NA.

<sup>93</sup> Alain Beltran, «Gaz de France et le secteur gazier depuis 1940 » *Flux* 8, (1992): 35  
<https://doi.org/10.3406/flux.1992.924> "Liquid methane from Sahara," *Financial Times*, 27 October 1961, T 317/143, NA.

In this section, I follow the momentum of these pipelines and processing plants to illustrate the specific ways in which the nexus developed, and how these physical infrastructures framed and constrained political agency. I focus particularly on their impacts on state revenue, consumption, and employment, showing how these infrastructures worked counter to state policies in these areas. I open with a comparative exploration of colonial era pipelines and refineries and how they operated in the post-independence context. I show how the physical and commercial legacies bound into these infrastructures entrenched company rights as well as the bilateral dependencies of the oil sector (in essence, reinforcing the nexus itself). Further, these infrastructures worked independently of and counter to state direction on both sides of the Mediterranean, although the resultant impacts on state revenue were felt primarily in Algeria. I then case study the Hassi Messaoud- Arzew pipeline, which opened in 1965, seemingly exemplary of the ascent of Algerian state agency over infrastructure and economic independence. I demonstrate, however, that the political manoeuvrings around the pipeline offered no foundational challenge to the nexus, and conversely, even entrenched it more deeply. The analysis thus uses the nexus to explore the fundamental continuities at work amidst various transformations happening through these years.

The TRAPSA pipeline was a colonial era build, and clearly demonstrates the ways in which the infrastructural legacies entrenched French economic control far beyond independence, in both strategic and operational terms. The pipeline, its military applications discussed in chapter one, opened in 1959 and routed from Edjeleh, one of Algeria's eastern-most oil reserves, across the desert border with Tunisia and from

there north to the Tunisian coast. The colonial government had selected this route, with most of the oil transported *outside* Algerian borders over an alternative proposal that ran domestically, connecting Edjeleh directly to Algiers. This decision was taken due to both the cost and security considerations.<sup>94</sup> In this case, then, Tunisian independence actually helped secure the intertwined and enclave nature of Franco-Algerian economic structures, reproducing the uneven-ness of the colonial era approaches to the Tunisian Protectorate and departmentalised Algeria.

The impacts of this externalised route after independence were significant, driving down Algerian state income and significantly weakening operative control over the oil sector. For state revenue, the direction of the pipeline out eastwards ran the pipeline away from domestic supply lines as well as the newly discovered oil fields, leaving them vastly underexploited.<sup>95</sup> The Tunisian government applied heavy restrictions on the amount of Algerian crude which could be evacuated through the pipeline, and applied significant fees.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, as part of 1971 legal case against the pipeline operators the Algerian government estimated that these losses amounted to some 700 million francs.<sup>97</sup> Indicative of the French state attempts to disentangle itself from the continued influences of its very recent colonial past, the French Ambassador argued that such Algerian compensation claim, were equivalent to the French government now demanding compensation from the Greek government 'on the

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<sup>94</sup> Adjel-Debbich, « La crise, »

<sup>95</sup> Directeur du Trésor, Construction d'in troisième pipe-line au Sahara, 15 November 1960, B-1417, CDEF.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid; R A Burroughs letter to Alec Douglas-Home, 12 July 1971 and Archie Makenzie letter to R C Hope-Jones, 26 April 1971, FCO 39/792, NA.

<sup>97</sup> Burroughs letter to Douglas-Home, 12 July 1971.

grounds that in ancient times the Greeks had established Marseilles in an unfavourable situation.’<sup>98</sup>

The TRAPSA pipeline accounted for the transport of some 20% of Algerian production.<sup>99</sup> Its foreign status, however, ensured the Algerian government could operate no direct operational control over the pipeline and the physical flows of its oil, even as it sought to extend its reach over marketing and transport operations. Secondly, the contractual terms agreed between the French and Tunisian governments specified that employment along the pipeline, for construction workers and pipeline operators, would draw from Tunisians only.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, at a time when the Algerian government was struggling with both chronic unemployment broadly, and was driving to increase Algerian employment in the oil sector as a key way to gain economic control, the employment and training potential was entirely lost.

The South European pipeline, which became operational in 1962, demonstrates instead how the infrastructural momentum of colonial era projects entrenched and extended the economic connection, despite faster moving political currents. The pipeline, operated by a consortium of French oil companies, had been planned as early as 1958, designed to carry Algerian as well as national interest Middle Eastern crude from the Marseille port to refineries across France, Germany and Switzerland.<sup>101</sup> Early plans for a Marseille based pipeline were extremely ambitious

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Makenzie letter to Hope-Jones.

<sup>100</sup> Convention pour la construction et l’exploitation d’un pipeline en Tunisie, 30 July 1958, 13, 18V01087/192 TA.

<sup>101</sup> Verlaque, « Le transport » Mouchet, « Trafic,» 124.

and aimed to link Marseille to Rotterdam.<sup>102</sup> At this time, the possibility of an agreed European trade with low tariff barriers on 'domestic' oil, which incorporated Algerian crude, seemed a real possibility.<sup>103</sup>

However, by the time the pipeline was actually in construction, the economic and political context had shift drastically. Not only was it clear that the required co-ordination within EEC was not forthcoming, global maritime shipping technology had drastically shifted.<sup>104</sup> It was now cheaper for the profitable Rhine-Ruhr and other northern markets to be supplied with Middle Eastern oil via Rotterdam, rather than continuing to extend the South European pipeline.<sup>105</sup> Algeria and France were, then, locked further into an exclusive, intertwined system, rooted in the transition from colonial past into present. The pipeline then, is a clear example of path dependency or 'lock in' created specifically by the infrastructural momentum of the nexus, imposing economic connections independently of policymakers.

Turning to oil and gas processing plants, we can see how this infrastructural momentum, fuelled and shaped by the enduring power of company actors, defined consumer access to Algerian energy, driving prices up and accessibility down. Perhaps most strikingly, refined oil cost \$7.50 per barrel in Algeria, compared to a European average of \$4.50.<sup>106</sup> The Algiers refinery had opened in 1963. Like TRAPSA and the South European pipeline, this was, however, a colonial government

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<sup>102</sup> Boon, "Oil Pipelines, Politics and International Business," 146.

<sup>103</sup> Brown, *The Seventh Member State*, 169.

<sup>104</sup> Boon, "Oil Pipelines, Politics and International Business," 163.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Roscoe Hoffecker, Algiers Refinery, 30 September 1966, 2. Box 1379, RG 59, NARA.

project. It was run by a consortium of French and international companies. When it eventually opened, the consortium's return on the refinery was comparatively low. This was the result of poor financial planning, overestimated domestic market growth, and the underestimation of construction costs.<sup>107</sup>

Under the terms of Evian, these companies were well within their protected legal rights to vary their costing structures to redress their profits margins. The resultant price hikes were so unaffordable for Algerian consumers that the Algerian state first requested, then ordered, the consortium to reduce their prices. Strikingly reflective of the financial powers held by oil companies in Algeria, the consortium flatly refused. By September 1966, the Algerian government claimed the consortium owed some 10 million dinars in compensation for failing to adhere to the mandated price reductions.<sup>108</sup> Here, then, the influence of the nexus emerges strongly: as company actors fed on nation-state systems but also exceeded them, and highlighting the huge social impacts of the system.

The case of the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plant at Arzew is an interesting comparison to the Algiers refinery. From a state perspective, Arzew demonstrates how the interplay between the legacies of ongoing colonial era contracts and operational controls over day-to-day management and staffing combined to entrench foreign interests and reduce Algerian state profits. In this case, in contrast to the Algiers refinery which serviced a *domestic* market, the LNG had a foreign customer-

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<sup>107</sup> Simon W Dawbarn, letter to John Fearnley, 3 October 1966, FO 371/187638, NA.

<sup>108</sup> Hoffecker, Algiers Refinery.

base, and price modifications were barred. These were the terms of the colonial era contracts between the British and French states who had instituted the plant in 1961. In essence, in return for their financial backing of the project, these two states, the only buyers of the LNG, were locked into low prices for the gas.<sup>109</sup> The plant, however, was expensive to run, the result of technical problems, early mismanagement, and critically, the ongoing extortionate staffing costs resulting from the reliance on foreign staff.<sup>110</sup> The net result was that whilst the Algerian state won a 20% stake in the plant at Evian, it made minimal profit from the processing and export of its gas.<sup>111</sup> In contrast, foreign buyers continued to benefit from substantial cost reductions, regardless of profit margins. Further exacerbating the issue were the non-competitiveness pricing clauses and that the LNG ships and technology remained in the hands of the purchases.<sup>112</sup>

Arzew's placement within the nexus also had important implications for the Algerian consumer. The most direct shipping route to France, Arzew was the sole port for gas export and therefore the only terminal for the singular gas line built under the colonial regime. This left the east of Algeria unconnected to existing gas networks until as late as 1965. This included major cities like Constantine, Setif and Annaba. The underdeveloped gas networks forced a dependence on bottled gas and in some rural areas, wood was burnt for fuel.<sup>113</sup> In 1965, a new gas processing plant in the north-

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<sup>109</sup> Vader, Memorandum of Conversation, 15 October 1966, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid

<sup>111</sup> Frederic K Lundy to Department of State, Arzew Industrial Site, 7 March 1966. Box 1379, RG 59, NARA; "CAMEL The First LNG Export Terminal," *LNG Shipping at 50* SIGTTO/GIIGNL (2014): 18-19. <https://www.sigtto.org/media/2905/lng-shipping-at-50compressed.pdf>; Gas Council Press and Information Office, Liquid Natural Gas for Britain, 3 November 1961, T 317/143, NA.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Malti, *Le pétrole rouge*, 924.

eastern city of Skikda was opened. Another Franco-Algerian venture, this would ship LNG across to Marseille and finally enabled the construction of a critical domestic gas network in the east.<sup>114</sup> As such, domestic gas access within Algeria was dependent on the supply of LNG to France, demonstrating the social depth of the nexus' impact.

Two months after the linking artery represented by South European Pipeline was opened, the Algerian government awarded the contract for its critical third oil pipeline from Hassi Messaoud to Arzew. The pipeline, however, was to be built by a British contractor and crucially, would be operated by the *Algerian* government. This was in contrast to the existing pipelines which were managed, under the inherited petroleum code, as concessionary rights of oil companies and consortiums.<sup>115</sup> The contract therefore represented an important step in Algerian state control of its infrastructure, and has tended to be viewed as a major victory for the Algerian state in extricating itself from the French dependency at state level.<sup>116</sup> I show here, however, that the pipeline cannot be viewed as part of a linear drive to a state-led nationalisation. Instead, the contention over the pipeline was shaped and carried out at the level of mid-level oil actors, primarily the oil companies, whilst the legal frameworks and overarching state powers remained static.

With existing networks saturated, plans for the critical pipeline had initially been proposed by a consortium of French oil companies. Their plans were approved by

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Musso, "Oil Companies," 142-3.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

the bilateral Organisme Technique. The consortium, however, refused to allow the Algerian state a controlling share of the pipeline. As a result, the Algerian state stalled, and ultimately repudiated the plan in favour of the John Brown contract.<sup>117</sup>

The resultant legal disputes between the Algerian government and the French consortium over the pipeline highlight the increasing tensions in the operational application of the duality of Algerian oil law codes. In effect, the fundamental disagreement centred on whether the pipeline should be conceived of as an 'existing' concession, part of the exploratory concessions already granted, in which case it was governed under the French Petroleum Code.<sup>118</sup> This included control over setting transport fees. The Algerian government, however, argued that the pipeline would constitute a 'new' concession, therefore allowing the Algerian state to set its own terms, and specifically, in this case, a greater Algerian stake in the project.<sup>119</sup> The contention here is important because it highlights the ways in which judicial and financial structures of the postcolonial years were grappled with. The dispute clearly marks the distinction between written lawcodes, built into the very terms of Algerian sovereignty at Evian, and the application of these laws. The ways laws were interpreted and applied was a critical space within which the Algerian state attempted to shape the oil sector on its own terms and highlights a greater level of malleability in the 'neo-colonial' legal structures than is evident in the terms of the laws themselves. Interestingly, in this case, the Algerian stance actually offered no foundational challenge to the legal or political terms of oil production, instead

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Memorandum of Conversation about Trapal, René Lavant, Stanley Cleveland and Arthur Allen, 4 February 1964, Box 1379, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.; Musso, "'Oil Will Set Us Free,'" 142-3.

acknowledging the validity of the dual law codes. Indeed, rather than attacking the terms of Evian, the state focused on legitimating the move according to the *existing* terms and conditions.

As such, the state's framing of the pipeline as a victory against 'neo-colonialism' clearly highlights, as with the later discourse around the 1965 accords, that it was the oil companies rather than the French state, that were presented as neo-colonial actors. It is illustrative of this acceptance of the French state role that oil companies continued to pay their transport fees, as with other oil costs, in francs.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, it was not until 1966 that the Algerian state started to navigate the issue in more 'sovereign' terms, secretly requesting that the international companies pay their fees in dollars, through US banks.<sup>121</sup> These manoeuvres highlight the role of oil companies as actors again, an alternative, covert diplomatic circuit.

On the French side, however, the issue was explicitly framed as a state level concern. The state's response to the pipeline dispute simultaneously acknowledged the new pipeline as a decisive break within the political system but also demonstrated how deeply entrenched the nexus was within the construction and operation of Algerian sovereignty. Thus, in an overt and public acknowledgement of the vast reach and ongoing perpetuation of French state structures at the heart of Algerian oil, the government argued that the powers over fee setting had been guaranteed by the French state to oil companies at Evian. As such, ceding to

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<sup>120</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bynum Hinton and Rene Tron, Algerian Plan to open dollar account in New York, 11 August 1966, Box 1379, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

Algerian demands would represent a repudiation of its own, legally binding responsibilities.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, illustrative of the still ongoing centrality of Algerian crude to the French energy system, state officials denounced the new pipeline as a 'direct attack' on French energy security. In an attempt to put an end to the project, the government lobbied the financial backers of the pipeline, the British government, to refuse the funding.<sup>123</sup>

Though the British government ultimately refused their request, their careful consideration of the issue is particularly demonstrative of the power and insidiousness of the nexus. British state officials saw the issue as a potential lever for their own interests, arguing that if they withheld the funding as requested, British oil companies would gain better operating terms in the profitable French market.<sup>124</sup> In essence, this pitted the security of the franc oil supply line against the economic basis of the franc oil system, a protected, highly priced 'domestic' French market. Furthermore, the incident clearly highlights that the Franco-Algerian nexus was part of a larger international system which used oil as a mid-level diplomatic and economic tool.

### Crossing the Mediterranean: Processing and Refining

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<sup>122</sup> P L Gregson, Note of a meeting held at the Board of Trade to discuss the new Algerian pipeline, 26 November 1963; M Evans, telegram to Foreign Office, 4 December 1963, F C Mason. Algerian Pipeline Project, 3 December 1963, P W H Roffey, TRAPAL pipeline: Reported Deal Between the Algerian Government, Kuwait Government and a consortium of steel firms, 21 November 1963, R S Scrivener, Algerian Oil Pipelines, 5 December 1963, FO 371/173172, NA.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> P L Gregson, Note of a meeting held at the Board of Trade to discuss the new Algerian pipeline, 26 November 1963, FO 371/173172, NA.

Even as political and economic structures framed Algerian oil and gas moving into France as domestic products, they still physically had to cross national borders. From the ports at Algiers, Skhira, and Arzew, ships crossed the Mediterranean, bound for Marseille, or circumvented the coast up to Le Havre.<sup>125</sup> Because of their status as nodes of international transit within a 'domestic' trading route, these ports are particularly emblematic of the unique status, and specific repercussions, of the Franco-Algerian oil connection. Here I show how these nodes were economically and ecologically shaped by the physical infrastructure of the nexus, using Marseille as a case study.

The interlinked Franco-Algerian oil economy and its infrastructures shaped the economic landscape of Marseille. The city was otherwise poorly placed in the emerging international hydrocarbon networks. French and European supply networks predominately filtered through the east (from the USSR), the north of Europe (from Holland, the North Sea, and the Middle East) or from the south, up through Italian ports (from the Middle East).<sup>126</sup> The close proximity to the Algerian ports to Marseille, however, was an invaluable opportunity. Mayor Gaston Defferre and his administration seized on the opportunity, with rhetoric and infrastructural policies which centred oil as the city's economic future, as a 'great industrial city' thanks to its status as 'the first oil refinery port of France, maybe even of Europe'<sup>127</sup> As early as

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<sup>125</sup> Alain Beltran, "The French gas network and new technologies since 1946," *History and Technology, An International Journal*, 8, no.3-4 (1992): 268. DOI: [10.1080/07341519208581811](https://doi.org/10.1080/07341519208581811).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.; Olaf Merk and Claude Comtois, "Competitiveness of port-cities: The case of Marseille-Fos – France," *OECD Regional Development Working Papers* 11 (2012):67 <https://doi.org/10.1787/5k8x9b92cnnv-en>.

<sup>127</sup> Gaston Defferre at the *Séance Conseil Municipal*, October 12, 1959, Marseille Municipal Archives 599 W 179, cited in Minayo Nasiali, "Native to the Republic: Negotiating Citizenship and Social Welfare in Marseille 'Immigrant' Neighborhoods Since 1945," (PhD Diss., University of Michigan 2010), 149.

1959, both the local and national administration were projecting that Algerian crude would replace much of the Middle Eastern supplies to France and refineries and networks in the Marseille region were being adapted to this purpose.<sup>128</sup> This prerogative, alongside the techno-geographic requirements of the industry, shaped the expansion of the deep-sea port at Lavera, to enable reception of ever-larger oil tankers, a new refinery at Lavera, built by Esso, and plans for another deep-sea port also to the west of city, in Fos, which opened in 1969.<sup>129</sup>

These connected infrastructures in turn shaped and perpetuated local economic nodes. First, in crude transport. The consortium building the South European Pipeline built the terminal to the west of Marseille primarily because of the Lavera port expansion.<sup>130</sup> Close proximity between the two enabled greater crude transportation with lower start-up costs.<sup>131</sup> The emergence of this transport hub in turn fuel a concentration of hydrocarbon refining and processing in this same area, as companies sought to drive down costs by minimising transport.<sup>132</sup> The evolution of a western Marseillais hydrocarbon node, then, was rooted in an assumed perpetuity of

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<sup>128</sup> Brian S. Hoyle, "Oil-refineries and oil-pipelines in France some recent developments and projects," *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 75, no.3 (1959): 172-174; DOI: [10.1080/00369225908735763172-174](https://doi.org/10.1080/00369225908735763172-174); Julien Brault, "Before Your Fountains' - Import Substitution, Oil Quotas and Rent Seeking in France (1920's-1970's)" (March 1, 2013): 20. Accessed at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2361496>; Julien Brault, "Oil Roads and Oil Rent in France from the 1920's to the 1970's" Conference presentation, Paris, November 2013.

<sup>129</sup> Note sur la capacité de réception du port pétrolier de Lavera et des disponibilités pour le pipe-line su-européen, 15 December 1958, 1937 W 627, MAM.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Xavier Daumalin, Christelle Gramaglia, "Neither leave here, nor die here, but really live here". Milestones for a social history of anti-pollution movements in the Berre/Fos-sur-Mer industrial port zone," *Rives méditerranéennes* 61 (2020): 20-45. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rives.7725>; Robert N. Gwynne and Brian D. Giles, "The concept of Fos. An interim assessment," *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift* 34, no.1, (1980): 39. DOI: [10.1080/00291958008545337](https://doi.org/10.1080/00291958008545337); Marten Boon, "Coal to oil and the post-war expansion of port and hinterland, 1945–1973" in *Transnational Regions in Historical Perspective* eds Marten Boon, Hein A.M. Klemann and Ben Wubs (Routledge, Abingdon 2020), 121; Boon, "Oil Pipelines, Politics and International Business," 109.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Franco-Algerian links, encouraged by local government, but fuelled and shaped by the natural geographies of oil and a self-sustaining infrastructural momentum.

This highly concentrated petro-geography shaped the political and physical space of Marseille. As discussed in chapter five, the placement of the oil infrastructures towards Lavera and Fos drove the city's so-called 'conquest of the west': an expansion of Marseillais influence over its peripheries, and a proliferation of economic, political and physical connections across these areas.<sup>133</sup> Whilst these changes were anticipated to draw the region into a cohesive economic pole, I demonstrate in chapter five how the combination of oil geographies and the leveraging of these networks by local governments actually fractured the region's political and economic shape. Moreover, encircled by the growing refineries, pollution in Lavera's Berre lagoon, dramatically increased.<sup>134</sup> The local fishing industry suffered. Meanwhile, the resultant smog spilling into the home of local residents raised deeply political questions about the balance between citizen health and wellbeing and economic growth.<sup>135</sup>

At the same time, however, the specific financial status of Algerian oil limited the local economic benefits from the oil infrastructures. As such, Marseille exhibited the

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<sup>133</sup> Georges Ricard, *Marseille-sur-Fos ou la conquête de l'Ouest* (Marseille : Marseille-Provence Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1989) ; Fabien Bartolotti, « Les autorités portuaires face aux pollutions pétrolières dans l'étang de Berre et le golfe de Fos (1945-1979) » *Rives Méditerranée* 61 (2020) : 47-68. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rives.7771>.

<sup>134</sup> Daumalin and Gramaglia, "Neither leave here."

<sup>135</sup> Nasiali, "Native to the Republic," 149.

characteristics of an economic enclave.<sup>136</sup> Even as no agreement with the EEC on preferential treatment of Algerian oil had been agreed, to facilitate this anticipated trade, DICA introduced a law exonerating long distance transit hydrocarbon items from local *droit de quai* taxes.<sup>137</sup> The effect was a significant limitation of the potential financial benefits to the local Marseille area. Indeed, the local Chamber of Commerce actually argued that Germany, as a purchaser of the oil, should contribute to the 200-million-franc cost of joining the existing port to the new pipeline infrastructure, specifically because the local benefits were so limited.<sup>138</sup>

Similar tensions between the transnational nature of nexus infrastructures and their localised impacts shaped the environment and economy. This can be tracked across Marseille and the north African port cities and is demonstrated most notably in employment. For example, in Skhira and Bejaia, port and plant jobs, and particularly the highest paid roles, were predominately held by the French employees. As a result, employment benefits for local residents were severely limited.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, because the oil shipments were bound for France and therefore short haul, there was little to no interaction with the city more broadly. In effect, the town was not required in any function to staff or supply the ships. Indeed, the Skhira port did not have a

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<sup>136</sup> Nicholas A. Phelps, Miguel Atienza & Martin Arias, "Encore for the Enclave: The Changing Nature of the Industry Enclave with Illustrations from the Mining Industry in Chile," *Economic Geography* 91, no.2, (2015). DOI: [10.1111/ecge.12086](https://doi.org/10.1111/ecge.12086).

<sup>137</sup> Max Lejeune letter to P Crosnier, 28 November 1957 ; Compte-rendu de la visite des compagnies de la société des pipe-lines sud-européennes, 29 December 1958, M Barrillon, Projet de doublement du pipeline sud-européen, 27 August 1964 ; C Barrillon, letter to M Metier, 23 July 1964, 1937 W 627, MAM.

<sup>138</sup> Compte-rendu de la visite ; Barrillon, Projet.

<sup>139</sup> Schliephake, *Oil and Regional Development*, 134-5, 141-2; Indeed, even in the 1960s, the oil sector employed more people in France than in Algeria, International Labour Organisation, "Petroleum Committee Eighth session," Geneva, 1972, ILO.

single road connection to the local town.<sup>140</sup> Marseille suffered similarly from the concentration on oil infrastructure against its comparatively low staffing needs, driving down employment returns.<sup>141</sup> Further, as the South-European pipeline transformed Marseille into a long-distance supply node, environmental concerns proliferated, including the dumping of industrial waste and several fires in the growing population of oil depots.<sup>142</sup> Crucially, however, given the wider networks of oil, the local government remained almost powerless to combat the issue: it had no legal standing to force the closure or even re-location of the depots.<sup>143</sup>

In all, pipelines, processing plants and ports transitioned through Algerian independence according to a logic and momentum autonomous from the political process. The evolutions in these physical infrastructures were bound to but also perpetuated the bilateral dependencies of the oil sector, as evidenced particularly by the South European pipeline. These localised nodes of connection were deeply marked by the specific shape of the nexus, which, as a short-haul, international and highly protected transit route, had unique impacts on local ecologies and economies. The physical shape of the oil network was a crucial factor in the perpetuation of economic dependencies as pipelines and refineries particularly remained a significant check on Algerian state efforts to drive state income, greater operative

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 133; 138.

<sup>141</sup> Merk and Comtois, "Competitiveness of port-cities," 67; Gwynne and Giles, "The concept," 40-41

<sup>142</sup> Gemma Jennings, "The Marseille Petroscape: Identity, Space and the Infrastructures of Oil, 1958-1975," IHR Seminar, 18 November 2020, 2; G Lacroix, note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général à l'Expansion, 7 June 1972 and Extract of the registres des deliberations of the Conseil Municipal, meeting of 21 June 1965, 753 W, MAM; Merk and Comtois, "Competitiveness of port-cities," 33; Anne Cadoret and Xavier Daumalin, "Environmental conflictuality in the Marseille-Cassis Calanques: background, challenges and resolution," *Urban Nature(s)* 16 (2017) <https://doi.org/10.4000/articulo.3244>.

<sup>143</sup> Lacroix, note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire Général à l'Expansion; Cadoret and Daumalin, "Environmental conflictuality," Jennings, "The Marseille Petroscape," 2.

control over natural resource exploitation and even distribute oil wealth to its domestic consumers. At the same time, local nodes in France, notably Marseille, were also increasingly entrenched within the nexus structures, evolving into economic enclaves.

### Nothing but Trouble: Oil Workers, Unions, and Independence

On 27 January 1965 15 threatening letters addressed to French employees of CAMEL, the LNG company at Arzew, were intercepted. Written on company paper, the letters proclaimed, 'CAMEL to the Algerians,' and offered French staff the choice of 'a coffin or a suitcase.' Suspicion rapidly fell on the Algerian oil unions and employees, who had been applying significant pressure for the Algerianisation, or translation to Algerian nationals, of oil sector jobs. This campaign had included mass strike action.<sup>144</sup> Ultimately, however, it was a French CAMEL employee named Domer, who was proved to have written the letters. He confessed that he had intended the letters to incite widespread panic amongst his French colleagues and precipitate a mass departure as a result.<sup>145</sup> This, he believed, would have caused such chaos in the Algerian oil industry and wider economy that the demands for Algerianisation of the sector would be abandoned.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Jean-Félix Chavret letters to the French Ambassador, 11 February 1965, 2 February 1965, SEAA 208, CDAC. In the context of the oil sector "Algerianisation" referred primarily to the replacement of foreign staff with Algerian nationals. See particularly Radouan Mounecif, "Prudence and decision making: The Compagnie Française des Pétroles (Algérie) and the algerianization of its personnel (1962-1971)", *Entreprises et histoire* 92, no.3 (2018). <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-entreprises-et-histoire-2018-3-page-43.htm> and Musso, "Taking Control". Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 17-8.

<sup>145</sup> Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 18

<sup>146</sup> Chavret, letter to Ambassador. Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 18.

The incident is indicative of a number of key trends to be explored here. Most critically, the letters highlight that sections of French oil workers, like Domer, perceived the importance of both the oil nexus, and the French workers within it, to be so critical to the Algerian economy that they could leverage their departure as a threat.<sup>147</sup> The incident is further indicative of the constant work of the categorisation of oil sector workers into French/Algerian binaries, and their related racialisation.

In this section then, I focus on the oil labour force as a key part of the decolonisation process in Algeria. As the operatives of this critical economic sector, their knowledge and skills were key. Moreover, the Algerian state viewed the growth in the number and experience of Algerian oil workers as a key index of obtaining economic independence: the means to actively operate the industry without reliance on external actors.<sup>148</sup> This was key to ground level decolonisation: constituting the literal handover of physical labour, rather than simply economic or legislative oversight as a critical facet of control. Indeed, historians have subsequently argued that the development of Algerian oil workers over this period was the primary reason for the successful nationalisation of the Algerian oil industry in 1971.<sup>149</sup>

Certainly, throughout the 1960s, the 'Algerianisation' of oil sector jobs, that is to say, the replacing of foreign, primarily French, oil workers with Algerian nationals, was a central policy of the Algerian state. Indeed, these terms were written into the Algiers Accords in 1965, which particularly drove at the training of Algerian nationals, and

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<sup>147</sup> Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 18.

<sup>148</sup> Musso, "Taking Control"

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

saw the opening of the first Algerian hydrocarbon school.<sup>150</sup> Less widely studied, but equally contentious was the introduction of works councils into the sector.<sup>151</sup> Works councils had a broadly similar mission to their counterparts in France, that is to say, to develop the relationships between labour and management. In France this was a primarily consultative role focused on personnel and safety matters.<sup>152</sup> The specific scope of the Algerian councils in this period remained fluid and uncertain, but state and union powers backed a wider sweep of powers, particularly over training and recruitment.<sup>153</sup> By focusing on these policies, historians have increasingly drawn attention to the ways in which economic decolonisation unfolded, and the depth and breadth of state efforts to secure resource control.

Here, however, I explore independence, or economic decolonisation, at the level of oil workers themselves, focusing on organised labour. I argue that these groups played a key role in shaping the process of economic decolonisation from the ground up, the result of both their place within the nexus, but also their deliberate and active exploitation of the nexus' interlinked structures. I open with a brief exploration of French oil sector workers employed in Algeria, demonstrating how their perceptions of the importance of both the oil nexus, and the place of French workers within it, enabled them to influence the oil politics of both French and Algerian states. I then

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 185; J Basdevant, "Abdesselam interview with M Joxé," 4 June 1970, B-248838, CDEF.

<sup>151</sup> Rusk, telegram to Algiers Embassy, Esso Officials concerns about activities of Algerian works committees, 23 January 1965, Box 1378, RG 59, NARA: Musso, "Taking Control," 8; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 19.

<sup>152</sup> David Fairris and Philippe Askenazy, "Works Councils and Firm Productivity in France," *Springer US. Journal of Labor Research*, 31, no.3 (2010): 210 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12122-010-9088>; Wolfgang Streeck, "Works Councils in Western Europe: From Consultation to Participation" in *Works Councils: Consultation, Representation, and Cooperation in Industrial Relations* eds Joel Rogers and Wolfgang Streeck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>153</sup> Rusk, telegram; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 19.

turn to explore Algerian oil workers' unions and councils to demonstrate the often-antagonistic relationship between the state-level visions of economic independence and lived realities. These stories highlight the often-overlooked tussle between operative and strategic controls of the oil sector, as ground level activism undermined wider state oil policies concerned with economic control and even perpetuated the very structures that held French dependency in place.<sup>154</sup>

For French oil workers, an assumed perpetuity and stability of the nexus at and after independence underpinned their working conditions and legal rights. A small proportion were transported to France by their employers in the run up to and aftermath of the Evian Accords, they were lodged in the south, notably Marseille.<sup>155</sup> The location was chosen for its proximity to Algeria and the assumed need to continue working across the two territories.<sup>156</sup> Many of these workers experienced significant financial hardship as company accommodation payments, based on Algerian prices, failed to cover the higher costs of living in the metropole.<sup>157</sup> This was further exacerbated by the increasingly rapid abandonment of Algerian homes, left either unsold or unlet. Staff were forced to stay at hotels and take out short-term loans at high interest rates to cover their immediate expenses, while their families

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<sup>154</sup> Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 20.

<sup>155</sup> P Crosnier, note for M. de Cidrac, 13 October 1962 and R de Cidrac, note mutation à Paris des Services Géologiques, de la CFP A, 25 October 1961 ; P Crosnier, note pour M Benezit, 2 May 1962, 18V01087/613 TA ; E Evans letter to R M Hadow, 9 May 1962, FO 371/165671, NA.

<sup>156</sup> Crosnier, note pour M Benezit.

<sup>157</sup> T E Evans letter to R M Hadow, 9 May 1962, FO 371/165671, NA. ; P Crosnier, note for M Benezit, 22 March 1962, J Noyé, Ligement du personnel Non-Cadre CFP A, 1 March 1962, Ch Bauchet, Problème du logement des non-cadres, 26 January 1962, 1-2, 18V01087/613, TA.

were caught up in the vicious cycle of no fixed address, impacting, among issues, school enrolment.<sup>158</sup>

Meanwhile, as most French citizens living in Algeria were rapidly evacuating to France, the number of French oil workers employed and working in the Algerian extraction nodes actually expanded.<sup>159</sup> These workers held a unique legislative status, a status reflective of the operational realities of a deeply intertwined industry, grounded in the movement of goods, capital, and people across two national territories. They were granted industry-specific travel authorisations, allowing them to move freely, without other formality, between the French and Algerian national territories over a period of 6 months.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, these staff continued to operate under 'domestic' French employment: paid in French francs and receiving social security contributions in the French system from the Algerian government.<sup>161</sup>

These structures had important political implications as they were increasingly framed as expressions of French sovereignty over oil and thus over Algerian affairs, that is to say, neo-colonial transgressions of Algerian state sovereignty. By 1964 the Algerian state was seeking new national laws to mandate the payment of all oil sector staff in dinars, limit repatriations of salaries, and cap contributions to the

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<sup>158</sup> J Noyé, Memorandum: Logement du personnel Non-Cadre C.F.P. (A.), 1 March 1962 ; P Crosnier, Note pour M. Benezit, 22 March 1962 ; Ch. Bauchet, Problèmes du logement des Non-Cadres 26 January 1962; 18V01087/613 TA.

<sup>159</sup> J. L. Mandereau, telegram 931/CONS/AL to the French Ambassador in Algeria, 20 November 1963, Ouargla Consulat Série A, MDAE, CDAN.

<sup>160</sup> M Tuech to the Préfet, 11 March 1964 ; D Dommel to les Consuls Généraux et Consuls de France en Algérie, 7 July 1964, Ouargla Consulat Série A, MDAE, CDAN, Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 11.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

French social security system.<sup>162</sup> These had little impact, with both French and international companies continuing to pay staff in home currencies into the late 1960s.<sup>163</sup> In other cases, however, the ‘inescapable liabilities,’ state responsibilities for workers accrued through the colonial, and post-colonial oil system, escalated to the point of a company’s withdrawal from Algeria entirely.<sup>164</sup>

This was the case for the British-Dutch company Shell in a dispute over demands for pension repatriations to their French employees, now living in France. The repatriations amounted to around 2 million dinars annually.<sup>165</sup> By 1968, the dispute was still ongoing, and the company, to the horror of the British government, but with the backing of the French state, continued to take a hard line on the issue. They linked pensions into the debate over compensation in convertible currency, a defining factor in deciding their potential continued operations in Algeria.<sup>166</sup> The company was nationalised a month later. Given the backdrop of building tensions towards nationalisation, discussed in chapter four, it is perhaps an overreach to attribute the cause exclusively the dispute over compensation. Nevertheless, the reticence of the British Government to engage in a debate on these terms certainly suggests that they were hopeful of a more positive resolution. In this case, Algerian state efforts to

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<sup>162</sup> See for example, Ben Bella’s speech to Congress of the Oil Workers Union, 4 October 1964, cited in *Perspective Mondiale, Un service de presse ouvrier* 2, no. 35 (October 16, 1964); Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 11.

<sup>163</sup> Memo-CAMEL, undated, 2 B-69478, CDEF, Boot, memorandum of conversation with Bush, 15 June 1967, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>164</sup> On the transposition of responsibility for colonial-era workers rights in Algeria after independence, see Megan Brown ‘Inescapable Liabilities’: Locating Algeria in European Integration’s History,” JMEUCE Lecture Series, European Studies Centre, University of Pittsburgh, 11 February 2021.

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<sup>165</sup> Simon Dawbarn, letter to John Fearnley, 8 August 1966, FO 371/187638, NA.

<sup>166</sup> N M Fenn, letter to R H Ellingworth, 7 August 1968, FCO 54/28, NA.

dismantle colonial-era legacies entrenched within the oil sector, and its staffing, actually undermined its relationships with crucial international interests.

The response of French workers to these debates over their pay and position was deeply telling. In a move seemingly entirely contradictory to the direction of political travel, in early 1965, representatives of the workers from all the French oil interests in Algeria jointly campaigned to the French government for salary increases.<sup>167</sup> Such increases were not to be industry wide, but specifically for French oil workers working in Algeria. They explicitly justified their claims as the result of Algerian policies around economic sovereignty, blaming import control and *autogestion* for an increase in the cost of living. Their leverage for the increases, according to their campaign, was their own centrality to the political 'co-operation' of France and Algeria.<sup>168</sup>

The threatening letters sent to French oil workers at CAMEL by Domer demonstrates a similar leveraging of the nexus. It is particularly striking that he believed that the departure of French oil sector staff would be significantly damaging to the Algerian economy and that, therefore, the French workers had strong political leverage.<sup>169</sup> In both cases, then, as late as 1965 French oil workers remained so firmly assured of their own importance, nested within French international diplomacy and the Algerian economy, that they attempted to leverage their labour against the wider, high profile, state-led march towards economic independence.

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<sup>167</sup> Louis Dauge to Secrétaire de'Etat, 29 February 1965, SEAA 208, CDAC. Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 18.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Chavret letter to the Ambassador.

In contrast, activism amongst Algerian workers has, generally speaking, been perceived as an arm of the economic policy of the Algerian state.<sup>170</sup> Certainly, there were numerous large-scale strikes and industrial action between 1962 and 1965 pushing for pay increases, Algerianisation and works councils.<sup>171</sup> The unions' central leadership moreover, were explicit in framing these efforts as a move towards both economic independence and Algerian socialism in practice, that is to say, a greater influence in the hands of the workers and diverted away from private companies.<sup>172</sup>

Framed at this unique juncture between operative, day-to-day working conditions and sovereign power and independence, oil sector union activity had important impacts on economic policy, particularly the relationship with international companies. In particular, such companies feared that the agitation for works councils was simply a means for the Algerian state to achieve a *de facto* nationalisation.<sup>173</sup> Companies, including Esso and Sinclair, frequently raised concerns with their foreign offices that the labour unrest was intended to make life so difficult for oil companies that they simply waived their existing rights and abandoned their Algerian installations.<sup>174</sup> As discussed in chapter four, these interchanges had important effects on American foreign policy in Algeria, as the future of American economic interests in Algeria was increasingly called in question. In the immediate term, however, the response of the international oil companies to this activism actually entrenched and legitimated the

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<sup>170</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 8.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> American Embassy Algiers to Department of State, The future of Petroleum Products Marketing Companies in Algeria, 3 August 1964, Box 1379, RG 59, NARA.; Musso, "Taking Control," 9

<sup>173</sup> Esso Officials Concerns about activities of Algerian works councils," 23 January 1965, PET 6; US Oil Company Interests in Algeria, 23 November 1965); American Embassy Algiers "The future"; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 12.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

*French* role in the Algerian oil sector. The Algerian government was generally apathetic to calls to end the strikes but did issue a public rebuke of ‘unauthorised’ union activity in February 1965. International companies read this a direct response to the stance of the French state on the works councils.<sup>175</sup> Such interpretations therefore continued to cement the status of the French state as the critical operator and authority for international oil companies operating in Algeria.

The intertwining of oil workers’ labour and the Franco-Algerian relationship more broadly had important implications for the effectiveness of union activity. In some cases, they won important victories. For example, French companies repeatedly had to delay planned redundancies even at defunct extraction points around union meetings, such as the national UGTA congress in 1964, as well as the state-to-state negotiations of 1965.<sup>176</sup> In this case, as the UGTA had so closely wedded job losses with state sovereignty and the future relationship between the two states, that French negotiators could not risk transgressing these boundaries.<sup>177</sup> In other cases, conversely, the framing of workers’ disputes as constitutional to sovereign rights resulted in job losses. One employee at the French oil company CREPS was fired for refusing to transmit messages between the Algerian office and Parisian headquarters during a strike over leave allowances for union activities. The company stated that there was an irreconcilable ‘incompatibility’ between the needs of the company and the ‘sovereign duty’ of the employee.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Rusk, United States Oil Company Problem with the Government of Algeria, 7 January 1965, Box 1379, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>176</sup> State Department, Sinclair Labor Dispute, 31 December 1966. Box 1378, RG 59, NARA.; Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 13.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Note d’information- offensive syndical dans les compagnies pétrolières, 26 October 1964. SEAA 208, CDAC.

Despite these commonalities on some broad themes within economic policy, the relationship between the FLN and oil workers' unions was deeply complex.<sup>179</sup> In particular, the ground level prerogatives of the unions were often antagonistic to, and ultimately undermined, in very concrete terms, overarching state policy. The state's approach to economic independence through oil combined both operative and strategic controls of the industry.<sup>180</sup> Operative controls included staffing and the stake of the Algerian state in joint interests, whilst strategic control constituted state revenue, diversification of markets, and legal and legislative power over the sector.

Union activity in support of Algerianisation and works councils, however, had negative impacts on both the strategic and other operative goals of the state. Perhaps most acutely, the labour unrest delayed the completion of the critical John Brown pipeline. As noted above, this was the only pipeline outside of direct French influence, built and controlled exclusively by the Algerian state.<sup>181</sup> Similarly, the critical transfer of shares in the Algiers refinery from Esso to Sonatrach was held up as Esso was so overrun by labour difficulties.<sup>182</sup> Key infrastructures, which represented very real gains for the Algerian state in terms of income and control, were thus delayed and undermined as a result of the activity of the unions, activity which sought to impose Algerian control of the sector at a more operational level.

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<sup>179</sup> Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 13-14.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>181</sup> Jeanne Favret, "Le syndicat, les travailleurs et le pouvoir en Algérie," *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* 3 (1964): 58 <https://doi.org/10.4000/anneemaghreb.7432>.

<sup>182</sup> State Department, Algerian Petroleum, 2 December 1964. Box 1378, RG 59, NARA; PET 6, NARA. Labor Troubles, 6 November 1964. Box 1379, RG 59, NARA; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 13.

Such tensions also affected efforts to diversify trading partnerships and move away from that crucial dependency on the French protected market. Labour troubles were so deeply troubling to interests including BP, Esso, and Mobil, that all three directly cited the labour movement as reasons for the withdrawal from or limitation of their Algerian interests respectively.<sup>183</sup> This then, clearly demonstrates the tensions between union central leadership and the Algerian state. Even as Algerianisation represented a mutual goal, the pace and scope of imposing these changes at union level undermined other state policies in pursuit of greater economic independence. Further, union activity here was deeply troubling to international oil companies precisely because the goals of these unions were so perceived as entirely interlinked with and representative of Algerian state policy.

However, union activity was not just defined and operated by the central leadership. In a deep irony, even as activism emanating from this top level was obstructing state efforts to operate the oil sector more independently of France, precisely because of the perceived interchangeability between oil workers activism and state policy, swathes of organised labour were actually attempting to disassociate worker's efforts from the broader agenda of economic independence. These divisions, falling between grassroots unionists and along regional lines simultaneously drew chapters and sections into closer partnership with the international companies whilst placing themselves in opposition to the Algerian state and the central leadership.

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<sup>183</sup> Oil Company Interests; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 13.

For example, in 1965, the workers' committee at BP published warnings to their workers that workers' interests were best served by 'profitable running' of BP, rather than by supporting the economic goals of the UGTA or FLN.<sup>184</sup> On this basis, they exhorted members not engage in a series of centrally sponsored strikes. In this case, the widely understood political 'apathy' or even financial self-interest of oil workers can be understood as deeply political. This is because, as noted above, works councils themselves had been a critical plank in the evolution of Algerian socialism and economic independence in practice. Indeed, the BP committee had been comparatively successful in actually achieving real, tangible progress in Algerianisation within its workforce.<sup>185</sup>

Therefore, remarkably, the council, as the ground level apparatus of state economic policy unequivocally distanced itself from these state goals. Instead, it framed its effort as in line with workers' needs, not with either broader economic aims or ideologies. Thus, even as the workers' committee brokered key strides in imposing Algerian operational control of the oil industry, it became a hub of resistance to the use of the oil workers to impose state-sponsored economic structures. The committee was quickly dissolved by the UGTA's leadership, because of its implacability, a fate shared by the committees of the compagnie de géophysique générale and Shell.<sup>186</sup> The new leaders of the committees were then rejected by their

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<sup>184</sup> C Gelvaris to G. C. Butcher, Algeria-Organisation, 12 February 1965. ARC53458, BPA; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 13, 20.

<sup>185</sup> Gelvaris to Butcher, Algeria-Organisation

<sup>186</sup> Note d'information.

respective chapters as ‘puppets of Algiers.’<sup>187</sup> Such incidents are clearly indicative of the limits of the central union leadership’s power.

The tensions around the scope of union activity and its place in state economic policy entrenched and fragmented geographic tensions. In the south, leadership directives were denounced as ‘unrepresentative’ of local demands.<sup>188</sup> In these areas, regional leaders ran on campaigns which focused on a highly localised relationship to oil extraction. This centred primarily on employment, as well as pushing for more devolved, regional union structures.<sup>189</sup> Oil companies engaged in and exacerbated these divisions, attempting to limit the contact between local staff from the ‘extreme’ northern labour leaders.<sup>190</sup> Meanwhile, ground level strikes continued into 1965 without the approval of the union leadership, who responded by denouncing such strikes as counterrevolutionary, and even, allegedly, subjecting intransigent workers to threats, violence and elaborate revolutionary ‘tribunals.’<sup>191</sup>

In all, oil workers were key actors in shaping state economic policy. French oil workers perceived the oil connection, and their own role within it, as indispensable enough to push back against Algerian state attempts to impose key measures of

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.; Gelvaris, Algeria-Settlement of Strike, 17 May 1966. ARC41865, BPA; Gelvaris, BP Algeria-Organisation, 2 September 1965, ARC 53458, BPA; Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 14.

<sup>188</sup> Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 14.

<sup>189</sup> Troubles of Oil Workers, 21 October 1965, Record Group 1378, NARA; J. R. Mandereau, Problèmes syndicaux aux Sahara-Réélection du Secrétaire Général de l’U.G.T.A., 13 April 1964. PO ALG V 730, CDAN; André Pautard, “Un Syndicalisme mal adapté”, *Le Monde*, 13 January 1965, SEAA 30, CDAC; Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 13-14; 21.

<sup>190</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the représentants des principales compagnies pétrolières et la ZES, 25 September 1961: 4, 6, 18V01807/297, TA.

<sup>191</sup> Gelvaris, Algeria-Settlement; Gelvaris, BP Algeria; Note d’information; Jennings, “Contested Sovereignities,” 14.

economic sovereignty, within and beyond the oil sector itself. At the same time, the central leadership of Algerian oil workers' unions adopted an aggressive mandate driving for greater control and independence of the economy, picking up and driving the Algerianisation thread of state policy. However, the pace and scope of these efforts, and the extent to which they perceived to be directed by and reflected of the state stance, and thus resisted by local union branches, had the net result of entrenching Franco-Algerian dependencies by undermining market diversification and infrastructural control. These tensions and fractures between state and union actors highlight the complex, contending and multifaceted natures of economic decolonisation, and most notably the often-antithetical relationship between operative and strategic economic control.

The oil labour force had an important role in the process of Franco-Algerian decolonisation. This group shaped how state policies around economic control were designed, but perhaps most significantly, what their impacts were. This is most evident in the antagonism between the oil unions and international oil companies, which destabilised state efforts to secure global partnerships in oil production and sale as well as weakening the transportation and distribution controls and profits bound up in the Algiers refinery and John Brown pipeline. These stories, then, demonstrate the critical tension between operative and strategic controls of the oil sector. The pursuit of the former, even in the name of economic independence and freedom actually maintained the dependency on French companies and markets.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Jennings, "Contested Sovereignities," 13-14 ; 21.

## Conclusion

In the early years of Algerian political independence, oil played a significant role in state efforts to define the economic relationship between the two nation-states. For the Algerian government, control over the oil sector represented nothing less than 'true' independence, whilst the French government sought a way to protect its privileged access to these raw materials still iterative of its 'third way.' However, viewing these evolutions from the perspective of the oil sector illuminates a less teleological, slower, and more contested history, with physical infrastructures, workers and companies emerging as crucial actors in defining the economic connection.

Interweaving the oil nexus and oil actors into these stories recasts the process of economic decolonisation. The evolutions in these years emerge as the product of bureaucratic and corporate power, operating well below the level of state-state political negotiation. Hydrocarbons were not just a plank in economic policy but instead shaped the relationship both from middle and from the ground up. That is to say, at the level of bureaucrats and companies as well as workers, companies' local activities and physical infrastructures. Critically, the physical and human flows underpinning oil extraction reshaped the bilateral connection, according to logics and a momentum that clashed with the political processes. Whilst some infrastructural continuances seem to align with a familiar neo-colonial account of this years, operating a check on Algerian economic independence, it is clear that this infrastructural pace was not entirely to the benefit of French interests. As evident in

cases like SN REPAL at Algiers as well as the South European pipeline, the logics and momentum of the nexus, corralled state actors down set paths, in this case forcing the state to acquiesce to Algerian demands and control over the oil sector.

#### **Chapter Four: A Fluid Postcoloniality: The Franco-Algerian Oil Connection in Transition, 1965-1975**

‘The period of transition has now finished.’ This is how the Algerian Minister for Energy, Belaïd Abdesselam, described the nationalisation of French oil interests in Algeria in 1971. According to Abdesselam, the Algiers Accords, signed with the

French government in July 1965, had instituted a mutually beneficial phase of industry realignment. This period, he argued, had been set to facilitate the gradual unwinding of the two nations' oil industries.<sup>1</sup> The Algiers Accords, then had been intended to bring the interlinked nature of the Franco-Algerian oil sector arrangement slowly to a close. The French oil companies used this period to amortise their initial investments whilst Algeria built up the skills and resources necessary for independent control of the sector. When they finally reached this point on 24 February 1971, Algeria closed the loop and nationalised its hydrocarbon assets. For the Algerian administration, the hydrocarbon nationalisation represented economic independence, the true end of colonial rule.<sup>2</sup>

Abdesselam's bracketing of the 1965-1971 years as transitory gives a sense of a neat, linear process, building inexorably towards a definitive rupture. Many Algerians would view the oil nationalisation in these same terms even decades later. In 2002 for example, the management at Sonatrach, Algeria's national oil company, was still actively promoting nationalisation of 1971 as 'the logical result of [political] independence.'<sup>3</sup> Both Abdesselam and the then President Houari Boumediene explicitly framed oil independence as a watershed, the end of Algeria as an impoverished colony and its emergence as a powerful socialist state. For example, in his speech announcing the nationalisation, Boumediene declared this step would

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<sup>1</sup> J Basdevant, "Abdesselam interview with M Joxé," 4 June 1970, B-248838, CDEF.

<sup>2</sup> On the differences between economic and political decolonisation see Michael Collins, "Nation, state and agency: evolving historiographies of African decolonization", in *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?* eds Andrew W. M. Smith and Chris Jeppesen, (London: UCL Press, 2017), 17-42.

<sup>3</sup> Sonatrach manager, cited in Valérie Marcel, *Oil Titans National Oil Companies in the Middle East* (London: Chatham House, 2006), 50.

finally carry the Algerian socialist revolution to the countryside and the rural masses.<sup>4</sup> And in many respects, the oil revenue released by the nationalisation was transformative. Nationalised hydrocarbons were a huge boost to government income, with oil soon accounting for about 60% of government revenue. These income streams funded a comprehensive welfare system, with free education and healthcare as well as consumer and agricultural subsidies.<sup>5</sup> Algeria's domestic political economy was substantially re-cast.

Moreover, in the wake of the nationalisation, Algeria quickly emerged as a leader of the Third World project, waging war on the 'imperial' international oil cartel, most famously through the 1973 embargo.<sup>6</sup> Algeria also established itself as a leader of the New International Economic Order (NIEO), which sought to reshape the global economy on more egalitarian terms between rich and 'developing' nations.<sup>7</sup> The nationalisation of 1971, then, seems both the close of a gradual, inevitable process and a 'moment' of foundational rupture.

Indeed, historians have often viewed the 1965-75 decade as two distinct periods: an 'unwinding' between 1965-71 and then 'independence' from February 1971 onwards. This broadly accepted chronology has, in turn, distinctively shaped historiographical

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<sup>4</sup> Boumediene used this speech to inaugurate two key policies this effect an agrarian revolution and new laws of socialist enterprises thereby linking oil and socialist emergence; "Meeting of the union executives: speech of President Boumediene," 24 February 1971, PO ALG V 730, MDAE, CDAN. Boumediene in 1974 would describe the impressive results of hydrocarbon valorisation to the UN, bracketing these years as an 'intense and continuous struggle' placing hydrocarbon policy front and centre of what he called 'economic liberation' Houari Boumediene, speech to the UN Assembly General, 10 April 1974, 55.00\_SON.02, CED.

<sup>5</sup> Camilla Sandbakken, "The limits to democracy posed by oil rentier states: The cases of Algeria, Nigeria and Libya," *Democratization* 13, no. 1 (February 2006): 140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340500378464>

<sup>6</sup> Garavini, "From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

approaches to these years. First, the 1965-1971 period has received comparatively few detailed scholarly analyses as these years tend to be lumped together as a march towards a seemingly inevitable final nationalisation. As a result, the range of actors narrows and alternative motivations and potential outcomes lose their dynamism and impact in what becomes a linear story, rushing towards 1971. For example, in a uniquely detailed account of the day-to-day, granular changes of this period, Musso illustrated how the Algerian state was able to develop critical technical skills and market diversification through international partnerships. These skills and markets, Musso argues, in turn enabled the state to nationalise successfully.<sup>8</sup> But Musso does not significantly consider why international partners would seek out these partnerships and how in practice, they were actually maintained through nationalising policies and rhetoric. Furthermore, as a result of assuming 1971 as a clear rupture, the 1971-1975 period tends to be characterised in terms of state spending. Scholars define these years as the welfare era of the Boumediene administration and also the root of the oil crash of the early 1980s: a second teleological cycle.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Algeria tends to emerge as an archetypal case of the ‘Dutch Disease.’ In this account, the vast accumulation of wealth to a state without accountability to its citizens and great dependency on this money makes the eventual crash seem all but inevitable.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Musso, “Taking Control”

<sup>9</sup> Sandbakken, “The limits”; Garavini, “From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics”

<sup>10</sup> On the Dutch Disease in Algeria see, for example Ali Aïsaoui, *Algeria. The Political Economy of Oil and Gas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Sidi Mohamed Chekouri, Mohamed Benbouziane and Abderrahim Chibi, “Oil rents and institutional quality: empirical evidence from Algeria,” *Topics in Middle Eastern and African Economies* 1, no. 2, (September 2017). <http://www.luc.edu/orgs/meea/>

Three clear themes emerge from this historiography: first, that the nationalisation of 1971 was inevitable; secondly, that this nationalisation was a watershed change; and thirdly, that the oil industry through these years was characterised by pursuit of government revenue and centrally dictated policy.

This chapter questions these three assumptions. It analyses the period instead from the perspective of oil companies, tracing their interactions with state actors from the firms upwards rather than from the state downwards. In this way, the chapter will demonstrate that oil actors in this period did not perceive any inexorable trend towards a nationalisation and moreover, that this foundational 'change' was neither a 'moment' nor a universal experience. Instead, I demonstrate that the nationalisation process was fitful, uneven, and evolved over a protracted timeline. Moreover, I demonstrate that these fits and bursts emanated from policies and struggles formed at this 'middle' level. That is to say, oil companies were critical not only in shaping how oil policy was formed and applied, but also in defining its consequences. Overall, by exploring an unfolding process of economic decolonisation in Algeria from the perspective of industry, the chapter shows that economic decolonisation was less teleological and more shaped by a nexus of oil actors than historians have previously grasped.

In section one, I focus specifically on the Franco-Algerian relationship through this period. I argue that oil companies created and radicalised an economic and ideological divide between the two states by their varied responses to their privileged positions within the oil nexus. As outlined in chapter three, I use notion of a 'nexus' to

conceptualise the web of mid-level actors embedded within an interconnected Franco-Algerian oil sector. I argue that it was in fact these corporate as well as infrastructural agencies that forced political actors down a 'rabbit hole' of nationalisation, rather than nationalisation being imposed from the political centre of Algiers.

I then turn to the operations of international oil companies in Algeria. I follow these interests through the seemingly antithetical Algerian policy drives of radical attacks on foreign, western influence amidst the vast expansion of these same interests in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I argue that the management of these seemingly contradictory policies was possible only because of the unique channels, actors and opportunities of diplomacy operated at company level, well below the conventional state level diplomacy that is more usually studied. At the same time, this section highlights the critical importance of the space between the perception and the realities of French neo-colonialism in shaping the political and commercial outcomes. In effect, the Algerian state framed oil policy as a blanket response to what it identified as ongoing French operated economic control and influence within Algeria, thus creating a space for ongoing negotiations and alliance with international partners, particularly through oil company diplomacy.<sup>11</sup> I thereby demonstrate how the fluidities and uncertainties created by both the shifts in the Franco-Algerian oil

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<sup>11</sup> This draws on approaches developed by Langan and Brown which consider the forms of external influences operated in the African context, with a focus on aid, and the extent to which African political actors were able to impose political agency through 'legal and juridical' sovereignty. William Brown, "A question of agency: Africa in international politics," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no.10 (2012): 1889–1908 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2012.728322>; Mark Langan, *Neo-colonialism and the poverty of 'Development' in Africa* (Newcastle: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 4; 207-8. See also Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1963) which forms the basis of Langan's definition of neo-colonialism.

connection and the slow completion of contracts with international oil companies created crucial commercial and diplomatic opportunities for the Algerian government.

### Down the Rabbit Hole: Corraling the State Towards Nationalisation

In September 1967, the Algerian government was embroiled in a long-running contention with CAMEL, a French-Algerian gas company in which it held a minority interest. The company's French-dominated Board was refusing to enact a series of terms agreed by the French and Algerian governments at Algiers back in 1965. These included the appointment of an Algerian president, the relocation of company headquarters to Algeria and the accelerated 'Algerianisation' of its staff.<sup>12</sup> These policies were at the heart of Algerian attempts to gradually decolonise its oil industry and feed the narrative of the hydrocarbon sector slowly and deliberately transitioning towards nationalisation as Algeria steadily took over the control and running of the industry. The company's ongoing refusal to comply with the state's mandate, however, throws light on a stark gulf between state policy and actual industry development, calling the narrative of a simple transition into question.<sup>13</sup> In this section, I focus on the relationship between the oil companies (particularly the French companies), the Algerian state and the overarching shape of the Franco-Algeria oil connection in the post-Algiers years. I show that the Algerian nationalisation of French oil interests in 1971 was not the inevitable results of a well-developed and applied state policy but was instead the unexpected outcome of oil companies'

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<sup>12</sup> Meeting Report, CAMEL and Abdesselam, 4 September 1967, B-69478, CDEF.

<sup>13</sup> In contrast, scholars have tended to present nationalisation as an organised, ascendant and carefully planned transition imposed from the state down, see, for example, Musso "Taking Control."

activities combined with the underpinning structures of the Franco-Algerian oil connection I call the nexus.

I open with a brief discussion of the evolution of the nexus in the aftermath of the Algiers accords of 1965, demonstrating how the agreed financial and political terms of the accords cascaded down through, and were rechannelled by, different actors which were increasingly entrenched in and dependent on the interlinked system. I then move to focus on how the nexus corralled the two nation-states into a polemic disagreement and ultimately nationalisation.

After the 1965 Algiers Accords, Algerian oil was still produced and traded as a bi-national industry. Algerian oil was channelled almost exclusively into France, confined to this market by a financial umbrella of reference prices and franc oil. This system depressed Algerian state income and kept the profit margins for French producers buoyant. The advantageous prices were a supposed *quid pro quo* for a guaranteed market, state aid and the initial capital investment made by French oil companies.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Algerian oil was still traded in French francs. This perpetuated a bilateral currency connection long after Algeria had moved to the dinar in 1964 and provided France with very healthy exchange reserves.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, franc oil was legally protected. All oil companies operating in France still had to draw a set proportion of their oil from franc oil sources. As noted in chapter three, If the

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<sup>14</sup> *Petroleum Intelligence Weekly*, 7 October 1968, FCO 67/178, NA.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

companies could not meet this quota, they had to purchase franc oil to process, at a hugely inflated cost.

Analysing the oil sector below this overarching financial umbrella highlights the depth and enduring nature of these connections. French quotas on franc oil limited the ability of Algeria to diversify oil sales through international companies. As discussed above, to capture a piece of the profitable French market, international companies continued to shape their operations in Algeria around their access to this outlet, rather than on any standalone merit. This shaped how the oil deposits developed, such as the limited exploitation of CPA holdings by Shell, as well as the size and longevity of their contracts.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, internationals operating in Algeria were vulnerable to French political pressure due to their status as French company subsidiaries and reliance on French partnership in other contexts. For example, when Algeria attempted to negotiate price increases with their international partners, the French state, worried these would pressure French companies into accepting similar hikes, threatened to pull its stake in the crucial Iraq Petroleum Company.<sup>17</sup> In this case we see how the international context in which French influence worked shaped the narrower Franco-Algerian system.

Even when Algeria nationalised and finally abandoned franc oil in 1971, French economic connections continued to define its oil income. This was because so many other Algerian imports drew from France because of similar baked-in financial

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.; Tomkya letter to Dawbarn.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas, Telegram, 21 April 1970, FCO 39/792, NA.

advantages. The mismatch between Algeria's main source of income, oil dollars, and its expenses, francs, left Algeria particularly vulnerable not only to oil shocks but also to the fluctuations in both the US dollar and French franc.<sup>18</sup> The consumer boom inspired by the oil nationalisation further compounded the problem.<sup>19</sup>

### Applying the Algiers Accords

I now move to delve more closely into the operational aspects of the post 1965 oil sector, focusing on how oil companies and the public more broadly both understood and shaped its transition. I demonstrate how these perceptions and expectations, as well as the specific ways in which companies leveraged their entrenched positions and advantages within the oil nexus, ultimately corralled both governments towards nationalisation. In effect, nationalisation was, to a significant extent, the result of company agency over state policy, rather than a teleological outcome of the application of state policy from the top down.

In the years following the Algiers Accords, French oil companies retained a huge dependence on Algerian oil, which accounted for a high proportion of their own supplies, particularly at ERAP. Indeed, by December 1965 80% of ERAP's supplies came from Algeria, two years later, in 1967 this was still as high as 73%.<sup>20</sup> As noted

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<sup>18</sup> Imène Laourari, and Farid Gasmi, "The Dynamics of the Real Purchasing Power of Algeria's Oil Revenues," *Les cahiers du cread* 113/114, no.5 (2015): 6-7. Accessed at [https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/77612/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_77612.pdf](https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/77612/1/MPRA_paper_77612.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 8. See also Farid Gasmi and Imène Laourari, "Has Algeria Suffered from the Dutch Disease? Evidence from 1960-2016 Data," *Revue d'économie politique* 127, no. 6, (2017). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26596195>.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Technology, "ERAP and ENI," undated, 18, POWE 63/569, NA; Farid S B Saad, "France and Oil: A Contemporary Economic Study," (PhD. Diss. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, August 1969), 59; Michael T. Hatch, *Politics and Nuclear Power* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 215.

in chapter three, ERAP further benefitted from the profitable trade in franc oil to international companies operating in France. ERAP then reinvested this income into expanding its interests in refining, distribution, and exploration, both domestically and within Europe.<sup>21</sup> In this way, ERAP's future, as well as its short-term position, clearly continued to hinge on effective exploitation of its exorbitant Algerian privileges, with little expectation of, or preparation for, an impending nationalisation.

Notwithstanding its complacency about the longer run future, ERAP's reliance on Algerian crude throughout this period still had significant long-term political consequences. Within the EEC, to protect its privileged position, ERAP worked against the establishment of any joint Community oil policy that might cut into its privileges. For example, in 1967, ERAP worked with German independent oil companies to oppose proposed changes to the tariff system and was instrumental in ensuring the restrictive definitions on Community Enterprises remained in place.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the first steps towards a joint Community policy were not agreed until 1974, as French domestic protectionism had begun to unwind.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, to protect and eke out the advantages of its Algerian supply, ERAP worked to extend and reinforce the French dependency on this supply line. For example, the company successfully opposed the development of alternative supply routes which

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<sup>21</sup> Department of State reports, ERAP and Clatx negotiate renewal of agreement, 3 December 1968; Merger of German-French petroleum companies, 2 May 1968 and National interest crude petroleum requirement, 15 March 1968, Box 1619, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Demagney, "France," 317-8.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Robert Kuiken, "Empires of Energy: Britain, British Petroleum, Shell and the Remaking of the International Oil Industry, 1957-1979," (PhD Diss., Boston College, August 2013), 328-9, 333, 409-410.

would have competed with its Algerian imports.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, ERAP was instrumental in persuading the French state to accept Algeria's 1969 price increases and continued to apply significant pressure on the administration to accept proposed price increases up until 1971.<sup>25</sup> This economic appeasement aimed to keep Algeria within the franc system, and ERAP profiting from its privileged status, for as long as possible. In these ways, oil companies, and particularly ERAP, were hugely influential on economic policy. As a result of commercial dependence on Algerian crude and a political influence wedded to the nexus, then, ERAP successfully pushed policymakers to maintain the status quo as long as possible, with far-reaching consequences on oil networks across France, Algeria, and Europe.

For the Algerian state, oil policy through these years, and its ultimate outcomes, was similarly shaped by company operations and influence. Viewed in this light, the state was not imposing a steady progression towards nationalisation, as conventionally suggested in the existing historical literature, but was instead engaged in a series of individual struggles with commercial interests.<sup>26</sup> These struggles produced unexpected results which narrowed and ultimately defined the scope of political action. For example, under the terms of the 1965 deal, French producers paid taxation and repatriation amounts in Algeria based on their profits of sale. In practice, French companies sold oil to their own affiliates in France at very low prices, facilitating their own domestic growth and simultaneously minimising tax and thereby

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<sup>24</sup> Mattie Wheeler, "The Avant-Garde in Petroleum: Franco-Algerian Oil Cooperation, 1962-1971," *Oil-Industry History*, 15, no. 1, (2014). <https://archives.datapages.com/data/phi/v15-2014/wheeler.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Alaa Taha Yaseen Alnuami and Ata alah Hussain Faris Alkhazrajy, "Algeria: economy and freedom from France 1965-1975," *Al Malweah for Archaeological and Historical studies* 7, no.22, (2020). <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/article/189892>. Wheeler, "The Avant-Garde in Petroleum"

<sup>26</sup> Musso, "Taking Control"

production costs.<sup>27</sup> Company policy, particularly at ERAP, further exacerbated the issue by leveraging their control of transport pricing and pipeline consortiums (the setting of transport costs was a pre-independence concession privilege that had been protected and retained in the 1965 accords). By charging themselves high transport fees on their pipelines, oil companies vastly reduced the taxes due to the Algerian government.<sup>28</sup> This really underlines how the 'baked in' advantages of the oil companies continued to shape state options.

Confined within these narrow strictures, the Algerian government could only pursue an increasingly radical policy line. Under the bilateral structures of the nexus the Algerian government had no scope to directly attack these practices by, for example, changing its own taxation regime.<sup>29</sup> In order to escape these strictures, therefore, Algeria became the first state ever to legislate the price at which its oil could be sold onward, effectively ending the cherished 'freedom of disposal' of the oil companies.<sup>30</sup> In this way, then, Algeria's radicalism in oil policy, increasingly notorious on an international scale, and often explained in terms of the FLN's ideological commitments to economic sovereignty, was responsive rather than deliberately planned, moulded by the very specific nature of its broader hydrocarbon connections with France.<sup>31</sup> The narrow aim was to limit the extent to which individual companies could exploit the unique terms of the interlinked market, whilst continuing to abide within the legal framework of this same market.

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<sup>27</sup> *Petroleum Intelligence Weekly*, 7 October 1968.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Garavini, "From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics," 84.

A similar corralling towards hard line, polemic policies is also clear in the increasingly rigid financial controls imposed by the Algerian state. On the surface, these measures, which included controls on moving capital in and out of Algeria and mandates on the use of dinars, seem to have been designed to minimise foreign and capitalist influences on the Algerian economy and to fuel the ongoing tensions with France.<sup>32</sup> In reality, these shifts again were primarily responsive. For example, the tensions with CAMEL over the failure to adhere the terms of Algiers (the Algerianisation of its staff and relocation of the company head offices) remained unresolved.<sup>33</sup> Appeals to the company and DICA went unanswered.<sup>34</sup>

The Algerian state could only apply the singular form of leverage it had - ground level monetary control. The state simply stopped producing the necessary authorisations now required for CAMEL to transfer its money out of Algeria, where it owed vast sums in interest to its financial backers and shareholders, predominately in France.<sup>35</sup> As early as 1967, the blocked transfers already amounted to 8,500,000 dinars and the company was on the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>36</sup> This deployment of financial controls created a legal grey area that enabled Algiers to hold CAMEL in a state of ongoing ambiguity and financial loss *without* incurring a legal battle with France. Ultimately, the Algerian government successfully enforced its position whilst holding carefully to

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<sup>32</sup> R C Robinson letter to E J Jackson, 10 January 1966, FO 371/187638, NA. American Embassy in Paris to Secretary of State, Telegram 17416, 2 May 67, Box 1345, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>33</sup> G Gorse, letter to Kaid Ahmed, 6 January 1968, B-248838, CDEF.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

the strictures of the Algiers Accords, but its radical strategy had been largely shaped by the baked-in characteristics of the nexus.

Overall, Algerian oil policy in this period can be understood as both fragmented and responsive, driven by the distinct and differentiated tussles with individual companies. Somewhat ironically, perhaps the most coherent element of this policy was the struggle to continue to operate *within* the confines of the nexus, although the result of that struggle was to force the Algerian state into increasingly radical and polemic positions.

#### Re-Negotiating: Sovereign Rights and Economic Appeasement

The French and Algerian governments opened a state-to-state negotiation to review the terms and prices agreed at Algiers in November 1969. Over eighteen months of discussion, the scope of the talks moved from the comparatively limited issues around setting a new reference price to the entire scope of the hydrocarbon connection and its influence over sovereign governance.<sup>37</sup> The talks were eventually broken off, and Algeria nationalised its oil industry. This critical shift in focus, from pricing to sovereignty, which took the negotiations into increasingly polemical territory, was shaped by public perceptions and the pressures of the nexus, which, particularly in France, were wedded to consumer wellbeing.

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<sup>37</sup> Grimaud, "Le conflit pétrolier," 1293

Early Algerian efforts to push for an increase in reference prices made little headway against French negotiators who held carefully to specific terms of the Algiers accords. In so doing, the dispute was confined to a narrow, financial contention, within which Algeria had little leverage.<sup>38</sup> Even by accepting negotiations on these terms, the Algerian side was de facto legitimising the entrenched role of the French state within its oil sector. Indeed, the French team was so confident in their position that early negotiations led them to counter with a *reduction* in oil prices.<sup>39</sup>

These moves were viewed very differently from the French and Algerian perspectives. Public opinion on the issue in France were so strong that the state initially attempted to impose a media blackout around the negotiations.<sup>40</sup> Algerian proposals to increase the reference price were met with panicked reporting that such price increases targeted the individual French consumer, who would be hit primarily at the fuel pump, as Algerian crude was reported to fuel 'one in three French cars.'<sup>41</sup> Reference prices were portrayed as defining the purchase price, and any Algerian increase would thereby directly hit the pocket of French consumers.<sup>42</sup> In reality, of the 116 cents a litre a French citizen paid for premium petrol, the purchase price accounted for a mere 6.05 cents. Domestic taxation equated to 83.75 cents.<sup>43</sup> The narrative, then, was of personal suffering provoked by Algerian greed, which invoked a strong reaction. In particular, there were outbreaks of racist violence against

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1292-3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1298, 1286-7.

<sup>41</sup> "The Price of Oil," *Le Monde*, 28 July 1970, B-248838, CDEF.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. ; Alain Murcier, "Et pour quelques cents de plus..." 31 July 1970, Press cutting, B-248838, CDEF.

<sup>43</sup> J. Basdevant, "Report on French-Algerian Oil Companies," 23 July 1970, B-248838, CDEF.

Algerian communities, most notably in Marseille in 1971.<sup>44</sup> Public opinion in France strongly opposed any compromise on pricing, a stance rooted in perception of the nexus as both an integral, ongoing and entirely economic influence over French lives, with little sympathy for 'greedy' Algerian claims.<sup>45</sup> In some respects then, this response demonstrates a fear of being colonised by a former colony, an infiltration and influence operated here through the petrol tanks of France's drivers.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast, international and domestic opinion in Algeria was increasingly adopting critiques of the oil system as a direct attack on sovereign rights. Boumediene, for example, held that French oil interests had effectively ignored Algeria's independence and were attempting to operate a form of 'co-sovereignty' through resource control.<sup>47</sup> These claims certainly pre-dated the accords themselves but, ironically, it was ERAP who accidentally opened the door to actually having negotiations on these broader terms. In an effort to dissuade Algerian pressure on pricing, in a public statement, ERAP's president played off oil prices against the *entire* cooperation framework between the two countries.<sup>48</sup> The intent perhaps was to push Algeria into agreement by implying that wider French aid and investment was too important to risk over 'a few cents.'<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the result was that France was now publicly engaged on the issue within the framework of sovereign powers.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Miller, "Reluctant Partnership," 225.

<sup>45</sup> Murcier, "Et pour quelques cents "

<sup>46</sup> For an account of these fears relative to community activism around migrant rights and welfare see Melissa K Byrnes, *Making Space: Neighbors, Officials, and North African migrants in the Suburbs of Paris and Lyon* (eBook: University of Nebraska Press, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.9421058>.

<sup>47</sup> Boumediene speech, 16 July 1970, cited in Belkacem Iratni, "Foreign Policy and Nation-State building in Algeria 1962-1985," (PhD Diss., University of Warwick, May 1986), 327-8.

<sup>48</sup> Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Murcier, "Et pour quelques cents"

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

The increasingly divergent and radical stances of the French and Algerian administrations, then, were the direct result of entrenched public perceptions and company interests. Recognising their increasingly weak position, French negotiators tried twice to salvage their position with attempts at economic appeasement, offering extraordinarily generous terms that far exceeded the initial pricing demands.<sup>51</sup> The second attempt, the Alphard mission, ceded not only pricing but also even industry control in a deal that would have been extremely profitable for the Algerian state.<sup>52</sup> The Algerian refusal to engage in this last-ditch attempt suggests perhaps that the rhetoric around the issue had extended so far that any level of climb down, or even a perceived climb down, had become politically impossible.<sup>53</sup>

#### An Unexpected Alliance: Nationalisation and the Nexus

Perhaps the most surprising tension at the heart of the journey towards nationalisation was that the structure of the nexus itself was uniquely conducive to the nationalisation of this same industry. As I will show, although the nexus generally favoured entrenched French hydrocarbon interests, because of its interlinked structure, Algeria was also well placed to nationalise both French and non-French interests at the same time, for two reasons.

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<sup>51</sup> Grimaud, "Le conflit pétrolier," 1300-1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1302.

First, under this system, there was a very limited ability or inclination to protest the takeovers. Indeed, the progressive nationalisations sparked comparatively little international outcry. This muted response resulted, largely, from the uniquely narrow channelling of Algerian crude and the flagrantly protectionist legislative structure of the Franco-Algerian oil system. Unlike in Mexico and other early nationalisation attempts, the international companies lacked either the means or incentive to oppose the creeping expropriations of 1967 onwards, precisely because of the legacy of very comprehensive colonial protectionism.<sup>54</sup> This was because colonial policy had been to retain Algerian oil almost exclusively in the hands of French companies.<sup>55</sup> This status quo was maintained after independence because of the ongoing advantages of French companies, not least their beneficial pricing structures alongside amortised equipment costs.<sup>56</sup> As a result, the internationals had comparatively little interest or ability to affect Algerian production.<sup>57</sup> This was critical. In Mexico, for example, US and Anglo-Dutch oil companies had alone been able to entirely shut down Mexico's exports, causing huge economic hardship *despite* the policy of the US government.<sup>58</sup> The motivation had been to force extravagant compensation payments. By contrast, the paucity of their stake in Algeria removed both the incentive and the means to obstruct nationalisation: the nexus was in this sense its own worst enemy.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> On the Mexican nationalisation see Fidel Pérez Flores and Clayton M. Cunha Filho, "The Oil Nationalizations in Bolivia (1937) and Mexico (1938): A Comparative Study of Asymmetric Confrontations with the United States," *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 4 (2020) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.514> and Noel Maurer, "The Empire Struck Back: Sanctions and Compensation in the Mexican Oil Expropriation of 1938," *The Journal of Economic History* 71, no. 3 (September 2011) <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050711001859>.

<sup>55</sup> Musso, "Oil Will Set Us Free," 73

<sup>56</sup> Morin, Memorandum of conversation with Johnson (ALFOR), 20 January 1969, 5678, RG 59, NARA; Pennisi and Würker, "The Franco-Algerian Agreement," 386-397; Malti, *Le pétrole rouge*, 69 Naylor, *France and Algeria*, 91, 254.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Pérez Flores and Cunha Filho, "The Oil Nationalizations"; Maurer, "The Empire Struck Back."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Secondly, the nexus actually handed the Algerian state a shortcut to the direct control of its industry at independence and facilitated the development of both a global markets base and technical expertise. Between 1965 and 1971, the Algerian state had remarkable success in securing direct management of its oil sector, broadening the markets for its crude and gas and training local staff.<sup>60</sup> As detailed below, these three factors would ultimately prove decisive in facilitating the nationalisations.<sup>61</sup> But, crucially, it was the nexus structure itself which handed the Algerian government these advantages. First, Algerian management of sections of its oil and gas industries was rapidly achieved. Most oil producing governments in the late 1960s were caught in long, drawn-out battles with the oil majors in order to gain any participation in their own oil interests, including in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. In contrast, the Algerian government had inherited the vast holdings of the French state in its own oil sector at independence.<sup>62</sup> These interests were so vast precisely because the colonial policy had deliberately sought to create a strongly state-orientated, protectionist sector in Algeria to free France from dependency on the Anglo-Saxon oil cartel.<sup>63</sup> A combination of rigorous and direct control of colonial era government and the deliberate exclusion of the internationals then left Algeria uniquely positioned to sidestep the international influence of the oil companies.

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<sup>60</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>62</sup> Seijire Matsumura "Participation Policy of the producing counties in the international oil industry," *The Developing Economies* 1 no. 2 (1972), 40-1  
[https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Periodicals/De/pdf/72\\_01\\_02.pdf](https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Periodicals/De/pdf/72_01_02.pdf); Kuiken, "Empires of Energy," 254-260.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

More indirectly, too, the nexus facilitated the expansion of expertise and international markets. As detailed below, the Algerian state was able to concurrently nationalise international interests and establish itself as an international trading partner by leveraging the neo-colonial interests inherent within the nexus. In essence, Algerian negotiators so entirely camouflaged their policies around resource nationalism within the context of the anti-French/pro-independence struggle, that international partners failed to perceive longer-term threats to their own position. Moreover, these trends helped fuel the polemic with France as French negotiators and companies underestimated Algerian strength here.<sup>64</sup> This is perhaps most evident in the reading of the US position through 1970 and 1971, as French negotiators misread the depth of US support, leading them to continually escalate their own position, increasingly undermining fleeting options of compromise.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, because the nexus had narrowly channelled Algerian oil into the hands of small pool of actors, Algeria was well placed to weather the storm in the aftermath of the nationalisation. Economic sanctions aimed at forcing Algeria back to the table failed in part because of the success of the diversification, with major deals such as Getty and El Paso, already in the works, supported by the buoyant oil prices.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, other international companies had little natural inclination to support the efforts of the French companies to prevent Algerian oil ever making it to market (the infamous *pétrole rouge* campaign).<sup>67</sup> French attempts to bolster their case with threats of legal actions against buyers held little sway. Not only did international law

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<sup>64</sup> Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 89.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 38, 63; Kuiken, "Empires of Energy," 252; Malti, *Histoire secrète*, 139-140, 178-9.

<sup>67</sup> Soames telegram, 2 July 1972, FCO 39/792, NA.

mandate that natural minerals in the ground belonged to the state sovereign over that territory, but these laws had actually been strengthened in the Franco-Algerian context, ironically in an attempt to protect the intertwined market structure.<sup>68</sup> The structure of the intertwined Franco-Algerian oil system and the operation of the nexus here, then, were critical to enabling nationalisation, providing a means to neatly circumvent French company opposition to the move as well as facilitating market and skills development, moving beyond the dependency on France.

In summary, the nationalisation of French oil interests in Algeria was not a state directed, linear or transitory policy. Instead, political actors were corralled into polemic disagreement and ultimately nationalisation by the nexus, by the company actors who had remained empowered by these overarching connections. In France, these entrenched interests used the post Algiers years to build pragmatic and ideological dependencies on the notion of an enduring but narrowly defined connection (entirely financial). These dependencies forced state negotiators to operate on this basis, placing them on a collision course with the Algerian state. This was because in Algeria, the ways in which oil companies leveraged and abused their privileged position within the oil system forced an increasingly radical policy line which, unable to achieve traction *within* the tight constraints of this system, framed the issue in the wider terms of sovereignty and independence. Ironically, then, the uniquely coercive neo-colonial structures of the Franco-Algerian oil connections actually created an equally uniquely smooth route into nationalisation, removing the

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<sup>68</sup> Jared G Carter, Memorandum, 16 April 1971; "Implications of State Department approval of Imports of LNG from Algeria," 18 April 1971. 5678, RG 59, NARA.

possibilities of effective opposition, facilitating state control of its oil industry control, and providing the necessary technical expertise and wide market base.

### Negotiating Nationalisation: The Internationals

On 15 May 1968, the Algerian government nationalised all non-French foreign oil companies in distribution, marketing, and transport. The date was chosen to publicly mark the twentieth anniversary of Nakba, the exodus of much of Palestine's Arab population as the result of the 1948 Israel-Palestine war.<sup>69</sup> Coming in the wake of the Arab oil embargo, which in turn had been precipitated by the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, this latest gesture expressed a clear sense of regional and economic alliance that would surprise few historians of the period.<sup>70</sup> This targeted takeover seems to fit well with the idea of an onward march to full nationalisation, a 'dress rehearsal' for February 1971. Moreover, the takeovers seem entirely coherent with the view that this period was defined by an overt third worldist diplomacy, operated primarily through resource nationalism.<sup>71</sup> Given that many observers had anticipated a nationalisation coming the following month, on the FLN's own anniversary, the outward looking nature of Algeria's oil diplomacy emerges even more clearly.<sup>72</sup>

And yet, commenting on the nationalisations, Quesne, the British ambassador, described the choice of date as 'rather odd.' Rather than interpreting the move as a deliberate expression of Arab oil diplomacy and alliance, Quesne perceived the date

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<sup>69</sup> N.W Fenn letter to W. F. Marshall, 16 May 1968, FCO 54/28, NA.

<sup>70</sup> See particularly, Dietrich, *Oil Revolution*.

<sup>71</sup> On Algerian foreign policy and resource nationalism, see, for example, Garavini, "From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics," and Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*

<sup>72</sup> Fenn letter to Marshall.

as entirely incidental. In fact, he commented that the Algerian regime must simply 'have found it hard to think of an appropriate anniversary' to mark with the nationalisation.<sup>73</sup> From any linear, retrospective perspective on the ascendance of resource nationalism in Algeria, the comment seems jarringly blinkered and ill informed.

In fact, however, Quesne's remarks reflect a widely held view of Algerian oil policy among 'western' diplomats and international oil actors at the time. Algerian oil policies were consistently read in a surprisingly benign way, with little consternation over an ascendant resource nationalism and progressive takeovers of international interests. Indeed, despite the nationalisations, this period witnessed an impressive evolution of international oil interests operating in Algeria.<sup>74</sup> This included a series of ground-breaking deals with the American oil and gas company El Paso, the first of which was signed mere months after the 1968 nationalisations. These deals amounted to over \$4 billion of investment to sell 10 billion ft<sup>3</sup> of LNG annually over a period of 25 years.<sup>75</sup>

This seeming anomaly tends to be explained as the result of the Algerian government deliberately diversifying its oil markets and operators in its pursuit of economic independence from France.<sup>76</sup> This argument, however, sheds no light on

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ghetts, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 38, 63; Kuiken, "Empires of Energy," 252 ; Malti, *Histoire secrète*, 139-140, 178-9.

<sup>75</sup> C. R Jonathan et al, "Collapse of Natural Gas Deal Is Costly Despite U.S., Algerian Boasts," *Washington Post*, 26 March 1981, accessed at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/03/26/collapse-of-natural-gas-deal-is-costly-despite-us-algerian-boasts/71303884-ea91-4355-97d9-3b81789ac1c6/>

<sup>76</sup> Musso, "Taking Control"

why international oil companies would continue to operate in these conditions, particularly while the global oil market was oversupplied.<sup>77</sup> This question is particularly critical because of the centrality of oil companies to US-Algerian diplomacy. The US State Department not only backed these deals but also doggedly believed that such deals would help secure the Algerian government in a Western alliance.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, as I demonstrate here, it was deliberate US policy to use the oil companies as diplomatic intermediaries to this end.

From this perspective, the critical question is: How were these two polarising positions, ascendant resource nationalism and increased international oil partnerships, actually maintained at the same time? To understand how this operated in practice, tracing the interactions between the Algerian state and the international companies is critical. Focusing on these more granular mechanisms highlights both how oil companies defined and operated oil policy but also overturns the teleology of planned, snowballing expropriation and nationalisation building inexorably to 1971.

In order to answer these questions, one needs to look not from the top down or bottom up, but rather examine diplomacy 'from the middle,' specifically the role of oil companies. Here, I adopt this 'from the middle' approach, first briefly outlining the alternative perspective on Algerian oil strategy provided by state policy and rhetoric. I will then move to closely examine the two key mechanisms deployed to maintain and

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<sup>77</sup> Francesco Petrini, "Eight Squeezed Sisters: The Oil Majors and the Coming of the 1973 Oil Crisis" and Brian C. Black, "Energy Hinge? Oil Shock and Greening American Consumer Culture Since the 1970s" in *The 1973 crisis and its economic legacy* eds Giuliano Garavini, Federico Romero and Elisabetta Bini, (London: I.B. Taurus, 2016), 92, 219.

<sup>78</sup> Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 106-7; Lowrie memo to Boot, 24 September 1969, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

expand the pace of international investment. The first of these mechanisms was the leveraging of the ongoing changes within the Franco-Algerian nexus to secure long-term international partnerships. Secondly, commercial and ideological polemics were minimised and camouflaged as incidental consequences of Algeria's attempts to escape specifically French neo-colonial influence. Finally, I closely interrogate the process of negotiating and signing these international contracts. I explore how the critical fluidity introduced by the slowness and range of different actors engaged in these processes were leveraged effectively by the Algerian state to obtain US funding for the oil sector without ceding any political commitment.

#### Setting a Collision Course? Price Hikes, Embargoes, and the Internationals

The public rhetoric and key policy drives of the FLN in this period emphatically endorse the view of Algeria as a radical voice at the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and within the NIEO, appearing to move in a linear direction towards the nationalisation of foreign oil interests. Firstly, in the aftermath of the 1965 Algiers accords with France, the Algerian government introduced a string of deeply contested laws and operating terms targeting foreign oil companies in Algeria. These laws were based on the terms of the Algiers Accords, effectively bringing international companies into line with the position of French ones. These new laws introduced enforced hikes in posted prices, taxes, and repatriation of sales, and removed access to international arbitration.<sup>79</sup> These legislative shifts seem to be an

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<sup>79</sup> Simon Dawbarn, letter to John Fearnley, 7 October 1966 and Dawbarn letter to Tomyka, 14 November 1966, FO 371/187638, NA. Department of State, Telegram 1881 to American Embassy Tripoli, 14 December 1966; Jernegan, telegram 1822, 8 December 1966; Bohlan, telegram to Secretary to State, Paris 7896, 25 November 1966, Box 1378, RG 59, NARA.

overt declaration of growing resource nationalism. They placed the oil companies in direct confrontation with the Algerian government, constituting an extension of state control and revenue over the oil industry.

Secondly, adding to this emerging tension, was the escalating ideological and political antagonism. For example, in its response to the Arab-Israeli war, the Algerian government joined the oil embargo against Israel and its allies in 1967. The embargo explicitly set out to use 'Arab oil' in service of 'Arab aims,' thereby strongly demonstrating what Dietrich has called an 'oil consciousness .... closely attuned to regional politics.'<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the embargo fundamentally struck at the heart of global capitalist structures, because the physical security of oil was so tightly bound within the post-war capitalist 'formula of high growth, high consumption, and low unemployment.'<sup>81</sup> US-Algerian diplomatic relations were severed. The 1967 embargo then transitioned to the 'custodianship' of international companies, which were placed under Algerian management, and then gradually nationalised. The FLN also joined OPEC, urged other third world countries to take control of their natural resources, and entered into a string of important oil partnerships couched in terms of Arab fraternity.<sup>82</sup> Announcing these partnerships, the FLN was explicit that Sonatrach's role was not merely for 'commercial gain' but also to improve 'the general level of Arab oil expertise' as a means to move towards obtaining 'economic emancipation.'<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Dietrich, *Oil Revolution*, 124, 147.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 144; Rüdiger Graf, *Oil and Sovereignty, Between national and human security and Claiming Sovereignty in the Oil Crisis*, Translated by Alex Skinner (Oxford: Bergham, 2018).

<sup>82</sup> Telegram, 17 March 1971, FCO 54/28, NA.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Domestically these impressions were reinforced by a state rhetoric which stressed that dependence on private foreign interests was a 'danger' both to national sovereignty, economic development, and to 'our advancement towards a socialist society.'<sup>84</sup> In the US, Algeria's ideological status as a dedicated socialist state cast the country as an outright opponent in the high-stake economic rivalries of the Cold War world, with bans on trading repeatedly considered by Congress as result.<sup>85</sup>

Oil, then, was explicitly presented on the domestic and international stage as a mechanism through which Algeria and others were achieving a global economic shift, forging international south-south diplomatic ties and threatening the heart of the western capitalist alliance.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, this rhetoric deeply implicated oil in the expression of independence and socialism in a timeline that seems to build inexorably towards the final nationalisation of 1971.

### The 'Usual Algerian Way of Bargaining'?

Beyond these broad policy lines and political discourse, however, the Algerian government was actually expanding and deepening ties with the international oil interests. This was achieved in two distinct but interlinked ways, both dependent on and shaped by the changes in the Franco-Algerian oil connection. Firstly, the 1965 accords, rather than instituting an 'end,' were actually used to facilitate longer term and wider partnerships with international powers, through the oil companies. And

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<sup>84</sup> Boumediene's Speech Announcing the nationalisations, 15 May 1968, cited in "Nationalisation of private oil and gas distribution companies in Algeria," 16 May 1968, Box Pet 15-2, RG 59, NARA; Houari Boumediene, 'Introduction,' Report on the Algerian Bureau of Mineral Research, 1967, 55.00\_SON.02, CED.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Sebastian to Hoffacker, May 19 1969: 3. 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

secondly, Algerian diplomats fuelled a sense of security and the promise of profitable ongoing partnerships with international oil companies by framing shifts in its oil policy as limited only to a struggle against French neo-colonialism rather than a broader economic or political statement. This was particularly the case for the US.

The Algiers accords therefore instituted a deeply confused position for international companies, many of whom held their concessions under the French petroleum code, initially under agreement with the colonial French government. The question, then, was whether the new bilateral, state-to-state accords between France and Algeria, which brought in new pricing structures, developmental and investment protocols as well as legislative rights, could and would be applied to international companies.<sup>87</sup>

The resultant proposed changes in domestic law codes to reflect the new terms of the accords were vehemently opposed by the internationals, given the extra costs involved and their exclusion from the negotiations over the terms.<sup>88</sup> The unilateral decision of the Algerian government to go ahead with these changes does suggest a decisive and aggressive move against the international companies.

In reality, however, the status of the companies in the wake of the 1965 accords was kept deliberately fluid. Even as Algerian laws started to change, international companies remained deeply uncertain about the terms and rights that actually applied to them. Even some of the most fundamental changes remained deeply uncertain in practice. In 1969, for example, Sinclair attempted to take the Algerian

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<sup>87</sup> Department of State, Telegram 1881; Jernegan, Telegram 1822; Bohlan, Telegram Paris 7896.

<sup>88</sup> State Department Report, 13 January 1966, Box 1378, RG 59, NARA.

government to international arbitration over the enforced forfeiture of their concessions following what was deemed an illegal merger.<sup>89</sup> Not only were the grounds for forfeiture disputable under the questionable applicability of the accords, so was the right even to international arbitration. Recourse to arbitration was permitted to Sinclair under their initial agreements with the French state, but abrogated under the 1965 accords. The Algerian government refused to recognise the case on those grounds.<sup>90</sup> Further indicative of the reigning confusion, pricing and taxation terms were widely interpreted. As one example, the applicability of a new employee contribution tax introduced in the 1965 accords to the internationals was deeply confused. Phillips started paying the tax immediately, whilst others, like Mobil and Esso, interpreted the higher rates as applicable only to French companies.<sup>91</sup>

The simmering confusion was stoked and exacerbated by both the special status of oil as a franc currency and by changes of state direction, which the internationals attributed to internal divisions within the FLN regime. In 1967, for example, El Paso was sued on the grounds that it had illegally failed to repatriate 100% of its profits.<sup>92</sup> Its operations had certainly been extra-legal because the company had been using French franc 'advances' to make payments.<sup>93</sup> But this same system was used by all companies operating in Algeria under the direct guidance of the Algerian Minister for Energy. The workaround was a pragmatic necessity, international suppliers simply

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<sup>89</sup> D. R. Henderson, Elizabeth Verville and Arthur L Lowrie, Memorandum to James Blake, 6 April 1970, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.; Butcher to Stevenson, Nationalization problems, 18 November 1969, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>91</sup> State Department Report, 30 September 1966, Box 1378, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>92</sup> Bohlen, GOA Action Against El Paso, 2 May 1967, Box 1345, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

would not accept payment in dinars.<sup>94</sup> El Paso's culpability here was interpreted, by US diplomats, simply as the result of tensions between the Algerian Ministers for Energy and Finance.<sup>95</sup> Thus, although the terms of the 1965 accords appeared to impose a clear confrontation between the international companies and the Algerian state, the slow and inconsistent application and understanding of the new terms left contemporary actors with no definitive sense of their long-term position in the country and provides little evidence of an impending split.

Critically, the perpetuation of this uncertain status of the internationals in the wake of the 1965 accords left the negotiations over their operations open and ongoing. Throughout the negotiations on the application of the terms of the accords, as well as through company takeovers, the stance of the Algerian negotiators was that the terms of operations, including legal rights and pricing, would only be set alongside an agreement on investment plans. As one US diplomat wrote, the Algerian negotiators were essentially saying 'tell us what you will give us and we will tell you what it costs.'<sup>96</sup> This he described as the 'usual Algerian way of bargaining' and it underwrote much of the broadly accepting, or perhaps complacent, stance of the internationals.<sup>97</sup>

The inference was that the Algerian state was interested in long-term partnerships: in essence, that ongoing investment would result in advantageous terms of business.

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<sup>94</sup> Bush, Memorandum of Conversation, 15 June 1967, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>95</sup> Morin letter to Sebastian, 14 April 1969, Box Sinclair, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>96</sup> John Root and George Carameros, Current Petroleum Problems in Algeria, 14 November 1966, 5678 6, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>97</sup> Morin letter to Sebastian, 14 April 1969.

The threat of falling under the terms agreed at Algiers was an effective ‘stick’ to move these negotiations onward. As a result, oil companies drew up and submitted a range of investment plans. These included anything from the large-scale aluminium production to cognac and shoe factories.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately then, the Algerian state effectively stoked anticipation and expectation of ongoing foreign operations. Thus, despite their confrontational appearance, the Algiers Accords were actually deployed to force re-negotiations, in which long-term partnerships were proffered, and used as leverage for wider investment and industrial development. Thus, we see here, how setting nationalisation in its longer-term framework gives a very different account of the US-Algerian relationship to that of short-term, rapid accounts of nationalisation as imposing a rupture.

US diplomats were supportive of oil companies’ investments. The view of the State Department was similarly that the law changes were simply a means of leveraging the oil companies for long-term financial commitment.<sup>99</sup> Even further, many diplomats believed that the ultimate goal of the law changes and resultant uncertainty was to force a state-to-state negotiation with the US government and thereby to maximise public and private US investment.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the relationship between oil companies and the Algerian state foundationally shaped the US view of Algerian oil polity: state changes were not interpreted as a definitive move towards state control of oil production and networks but simply a short-term political lever to achieve wider development goals. This view was also deeply enduring. Even some company

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<sup>98</sup> Petroleum negotiations, 26 November 1966, Box 1378, RG 59, NARA Lowrie memo to Root, 3 September 1969, Box Sinclair, RG PET 6, NARA; Root, Memorandum, 16 November 1968, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>99</sup> Root and Carameros, Current.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

takeovers were read this way, reflecting how invested both companies and diplomats were in this outlook.<sup>101</sup>

The benign view of the Algerian oil policy was reinforced by the second crux of Algerian oil diplomacy. By framing the shifting of controls and operational terms as a strike against French neo-colonialism only, rather than against global capitalist extraction at large, Algerian policy shifts fitted closely with OPEC's ascendant resource nationalism but was equally mollifying to the US and other international partners. Even the nationalisation of the internationals was seen as a warning to the French over the upcoming pricing structures rather than any definitive political statement, further driving the perception that nationalisation itself was superficial and impermanent, simply political leverage.<sup>102</sup>

Here again, the actual lived relationship between the Algerian state and international oil companies was critical, and the 'view from the middle' revealing. Throughout the long and ongoing negotiations over the furore of the nationalisations, the Algerian team continued to treat the internationals as long-term partners. One central tactic in dissipating the obvious tension was the presentation of the disputes as fundamentally an issue of colonial legacies and ongoing French control rather than any broader attack on company rights. For example, after Mobil was nationalised, Ait Laoussine, the former Algerian minister for Industry and Energy and by then Senior Vice President at Sonatrach, and his team were insistent on Algeria's wish to continue the

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<sup>101</sup> Lowrie memorandum to Root, 4 December 1969, Box 6, Folder PET, NARA: Hoeffacker, memorandum of conversation with McDonald, Stansky, DeCoyne and Morris, 17 February 1969, Box 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

state's relationship with the US oil companies.<sup>103</sup> The problem, he stressed, was fundamentally the nature of pre-independence deals and their lack of value to the Algerian state, which therefore needed to be renegotiated.<sup>104</sup>

In these ways then, as Algerian state oil policy and laws underwent significant change through the late 1960s and early 1970s, negotiations with oil companies carefully minimised political polemics, framing the shifts as targeting only historic legacies of French imperial greed and even presenting nationalisations as doors to long-term partnership. The changes in oil policy themselves are critical for two reasons. First because they were rooted in the Franco-Algerian nexus itself and its continual evolution over this period. And secondly, because of the immense political import of the company-state mid-level relationship which then impacted 'upward' through political channels, shaping a supportive response from the US State Department in spite of incendiary and polemic policy decisions.

International partners themselves also used this idea of the centrality of the Algerian escape from the nexus as a highly influential form of leverage. For example, El Paso was faced with strong opposition to its 1969 LNG deal with Algeria from the US Department of Defense and conservative members of the Federal Power Commission (FPC).<sup>105</sup> The Department argued that the US should avoid dependence on Algerian hydrocarbons based on its socialist politics and alliance with the USSR, and concluded that the trading license for the deal should be denied.<sup>106</sup> Adopting the

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<sup>103</sup> State Department Report, 16 February 1968, Box 1345, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> "Confidential Talking Points," 18 October 1972, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>106</sup> Peter Sebastian letter to Hoffacker, 19 May 1969, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

same approach as their Algerian counterparts, however, El Paso and the State Department deflected the accusations of capitalist/socialist polarity by placing Algerian oil politics in the context of neo-colonial oppression. They wrote of Algerians' 'pathological fear' of French interference in the deal, and the impact the deal might have on the upcoming negotiations with France.<sup>107</sup> They further bolstered their argument by pointing to the Algerian wish to 'Americanise' the contract as far as possible, with Sonatrach stipulating 'American equipment, American engineers and American knowhow.'<sup>108</sup> In fact, US diplomats were so convinced of the Algerian need to escape French clutches that the CIA concluded that even in the event of an Arab oil embargo, Algeria would remain a steadfast supplier to the US, needing this new purchase line to offset losses of the French market.<sup>109</sup>

Diplomatic reports further assuaged the fears over the security of commercial deals with a socialist Algeria by writing extensively on the personal behaviours and beliefs of Algerian oilmen. Sonatrach's leadership were described as 'sophisticated Algerians' who were 'not as yet Western.'<sup>110</sup> The strong belief then, was that Algerian businessmen were well on their way to accepting a Western alliance. The oil sector is demarcated again: not only a literal space of political partnership but also of economic, industrial, and even ethnic 'advancement.' The 'rationality' of these partners was further underscored by pointing to their personal histories and relationships. This included, for example, periods studying in the US, their 'charming

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<sup>107</sup> Galanto letter to Lowrie, 4 September 1970, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> CIA, 'Algeria's International Relations,' 31 July 1971, R01012A, accessed at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve05p2/d27>

<sup>110</sup> Author's emphasis, Hoffacker letter to Sebastian, 5 May 1969, Box Sinclair, RG PET, NARA.

American wives' and their 'Mediterranean bourgeois' style of dress.<sup>111</sup> In fact, American observers drew a sharp distinction between their 'bourgeois' Sonatrach trainees and the 'proletariat' style of the Cuban and Vietnamese students studying (under American instructors) at the Algerian Petroleum Institute.<sup>112</sup> In these ways, local observers were already drawing a clear distinction between radical Algerian socialist rhetoric and public, popular, and even policy realities. Overall, the belief that Algerian oil politics was defined exclusively by a fight for post-colonial economic freedom from France was strongly held by international companies and diplomats. These international interests were persuaded of their own security in Algeria by the on-the-ground realities in company workings despite the FLN's overt and confrontational political stance. This view was so well entrenched that it was even deployed to persuade anti-socialist voices domestically.

The case of the Sinclair oil company exemplifies how these two tactics, the leveraging of the uncertainty of transition and the primacy of escape from French neo-colonial clutches, worked in practice. In 1967, all of Sinclair's Algerian concessions were abrogated. The Algerian state argued that the company's recent merger with Atlantic-Richfield in the US represented a fundamental change in company structures that had failed to obtain the requisite approval of the Algerian government.<sup>113</sup> Throughout the long-running negotiations over the issue, Algerian negotiators were careful to root the problem in historic colonial structures, rather than contemporary geopolitics of socialist-capitalist tensions, almost playing off two

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<sup>111</sup> Hoffacker letter to Root, 31 January 1967, 5678 6, RG 59, NARA.; "Petroleum," 29 December 1971, Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>112</sup> Maxim, Airgram A-86.

<sup>113</sup> Henderson, Verville and Lowrie, Memorandum to James Blake.

different ideological-political temporalities. Thus, the stress was on Sinclair's role and establishment during colonial times, whilst the country was 'struggling for freedom,' Sinclair had taken 'advantage of the very thing we were fighting against.'<sup>114</sup>

Moreover, the shifting legal landscape of the nexus left a critical grey area. The Algerian state contested the legality of the Sinclair merger itself under pre-independence laws, thereby shifting much of the 'blame' back to the French state. Indeed, Abdesselam went so far as to insist that, 'the French wrote the rules which govern such cases; therefore they have an advantage of interpretation over you and me.'<sup>115</sup> At the same time, however, Sinclair's right to international arbitration to dispute the ruling depended on whether or not the terms of Algiers could be applied to international companies. Even here, both the Algerian and American state officials turned to the French government for a judgment.<sup>116</sup> In these ways, the Algerian state neatly deflected both responsibility and polemical disagreement, rooting the issue in the colonial past rather than the contemporary tensions around resource nationalism more broadly. This was facilitated directly by the evolving shape of the nexus, leveraging the fluidity created by these shifts.

At the same time, the Algerian team kept the dispute boxed away from the long running political tensions around socialist management and resource nationalism by presenting a clear route for Sinclair to resume its commercial operations. A greater Algerian stake in the company interests and significant investment in its oil

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<sup>114</sup> Meeting notes, meeting between Abdesselam and Elson, 19 April 1969, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

exploration and wider development programmes, and the forfeiture would 'go away.'<sup>117</sup> The investment issue itself was rooted in disputes over post-Algiers Accords pricing for internationals, with the Algerian state calling for greater investment, in exchange for price reductions on par with French companies.<sup>118</sup> Even in public, in slightly couched terms, Abdesselam called for 'practical solutions,' euphemistically referencing the much-discussed investment terms, instead of 'hiding behind legal pretexts,' the disputed legal frameworks and terms.<sup>119</sup>

The State Department was thereby convinced that Sinclair's takeover was simply a form of political pressure for long-term financial gain, rather than a creeping march of expropriation. Thus assured of the security of American oil investments, and the political import attached to these investments, the department pushed Sinclair to reach a resolution.<sup>120</sup> US diplomats had become increasingly concerned that the unresolved dispute would interfere with the general improvement of relations between the two nations bound up in the crucial El Paso deal (discussed below). Interestingly, as well as the assurances of the negotiating teams, the department also carefully considered the minutiae of ground level operations in some detail when making their recommendations. Their reports on the issue include, for example, the fact that the Algerian government left Sinclair's company housing empty and guarded, as evidence of openness to an imminent return.<sup>121</sup> Sinclair itself was

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<sup>117</sup> "Sinclair Problem," 9 May 1969, Box 1345, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>118</sup> Root and Carameros, Current.

<sup>119</sup> "Sinclair Problem"

<sup>120</sup> "Sinclair Problem- talking points," 24 May 1969, Box 1345, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>121</sup> "Sinclair Problem"

similarly drawn along, drawing up plans for a cognac factory in Oran, subject to a deal on compensation.<sup>122</sup>

Thus, the reality of company relations with the Algerian state was entirely opposite to the direct antagonism of state nationalistic rhetoric at a diplomatic level. Instead, as illustrated in the Sinclair case, diplomats consistently understood Algerian state policy as an unwinding of colonial/neo-colonial oppression, a phenomenon they distinguished from the ideological and political antagonism surrounding Algerian socialism in practice and resource nationalism. This response was shaped by the reports and realities of the companies themselves, which came up from 'the middle,' ranging from the minutiae of the status of company housing to cleverly couched state negotiations. These experiences framed the issues surrounding law changes and company takeovers non-antagonistically by pointing to the colonial root of present-day tensions and exploited the uncertainties of the shifting legal landscape.

### Oil Deals: A Critical Fluidity

I move now to focus on the new and expanding partnerships undertaken between Sonatrach and international partners. In particular, I illustrate how the *process* of signing deals on the delivery or extraction of Algerian hydrocarbons created another form of political fluidity as well as alternative diplomatic channels. These channels were skilfully leveraged by both oil companies and the Algerian state to further shape the political and commercial partnership with the US.

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<sup>122</sup> Lowrie memo to Root, 3 September 1969.

One of the critical outcomes of these manoeuvres was the vast increase of much needed US funding into Algeria whilst maintaining a state of overt political antagonism. Throughout this period, the two states ostensibly remained at loggerheads over oil prices, Palestine and their respective relationships with the USSR and allies. Seen from 'the middle' however, the maintenance of hydrocarbon trading was critical to the US administration. Firstly, US consumption of LNG was expanding, and domestic producers were anticipating an eventual shortfall. US policymakers firmly believed that an Atlantic Basin hydrocarbon supply line would shortly emerge as the critical global trading route. Securing Algerian gas imports into the US was therefore becoming increasingly important.<sup>123</sup>

Secondly, the US administration was keen to go beyond economic partnership and to secure a formal political alliance. Algeria offered huge potential as a strategic partner through which to influence the Middle East, OPEC and the NIEO.<sup>124</sup> The State Department was convinced that a growth of US business interests was a 'useful contribution to prospects for an eventual improvement of bilateral political relations.'<sup>125</sup> Even further, the department maintained that the drive for American investors was the best mechanism to 'bring home to GOA the arguments [about political partnership] we are making on political level.'<sup>126</sup> Thus, the US administration was keen to push US commercial investment into Algeria, where the business interests were overwhelmingly in oil and gas.

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<sup>123</sup> Dawbarn to Tomsy, 19 November 1966, FO 371/187638, NA; Ghetts, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 61.

<sup>124</sup> "Confidential talking points"

<sup>125</sup> "Sinclair Problem- talking points,"

<sup>126</sup> Lowrie memo to Root, 24 September 1969.

These were not entirely abstract ambitions. Phase one of the huge LNG deal with El Paso directly facilitated the widely publicised 1969 meeting between the Algerian Foreign Minister and American Secretary of State.<sup>127</sup> Even further, it seemed to the US State Department that the El Paso deal alone took them right to the precipice of reigniting the formal political relationship. As outlined below, this was repeatedly implied by the Algerian negotiating teams. Indeed, faced with continual legislative roadblocks to the deal, President Boumediene allegedly went so far as to declare that 'if resumption of diplomatic relations is what it will take [to complete the deal] than that is what we will do.'<sup>128</sup> This case, then, clearly exemplifies how the Algerian state deliberately leveraged US foreign policy ambitions to its own advantage through the ongoing delays emanating from the commercial actors and contract negotiations.

It is clear, then, that the US administration attached great importance to the success and expansion of oil and gas commercial partnerships in Algeria. Of particular interest was the huge El Paso deal. However, despite the political interest here, the deal ultimately remained in the hands of commercial actors, most decisively El Paso, as well as other state enterprises, like EXIM bank ,who ultimately provided Algeria the required funding. Moreover, the realisation of deals on this scale required financing, physical infrastructure, state authorisation, and commercial sign offs. All of these were large-scale, slow, and uncertain processes. These very uncertainties were the key to the careful Algerian balancing act, which attracted extensive US

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<sup>127</sup> William B. Quandt, "Algeria: Yes," *Foreign Policy* 7 (Summer 1972): 123 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1147759>

<sup>128</sup> Morin letter to Clark, 9 September 1969, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

funding over this period whilst still holding the line as a ground-breaking, radical Third World leader in its resource politics.

The central Algerian tactic was to leverage the delays and stutters of the El Paso contract to push the US to demonstrate its commitment to the deal and the wider commercial partnership through increased economic investment. For example, EXIM bank was at the forefront of the extensive negotiations around the deal. Sonatrach had few viable alternatives to raise the funding needed for the LNG plant and transport infrastructure, and both the State Department and El Paso lobbied EXIM to step in.<sup>129</sup> EXIM's President was intrigued by the deal but struggled to persuade his conservative Board, who were unwilling to deal in Algeria at all. To navigate these concerns, EXIM attempted to impose extensive safety nets on the loan. These included a controversial 30-day prepayment clause, and a 'double guarantee' set against the risk of disruption to gas flows: in essence both an 'assignment of proceeds' set aside from Algerian profits to pay the bank if needed *and* a unilateral undertaking by Algeria to pay any such costs accrued.<sup>130</sup> Algerian negotiators were outraged. They cast the terms as an outrageous affront to Algeria's sovereign status and rights, focusing on the phrasing of the draft deal that Algeria would 'transfer its rights.' They also deeply contested EXIM's refusal to accept a unilateral state guarantee as sufficient.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 60-62.

<sup>130</sup> George N Lane, Memorandum, 21 December 1972, Box 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

To the great alarm of the State Department, the disagreement was serious enough to nearly sink the entire deal by striking the critical funding.<sup>132</sup> Adding to the pressure, the Federal Power Commission (FPC) continued to hold out on the required import authorisations.<sup>133</sup> The talks were broken off. The US State Department was increasingly frantic about the loss of its diplomatic centrepiece: in one particularly melancholy letter to a colleague, one US diplomat described both intense hopes invested in and crushing disappointment of the deal's progress so far. He described the highs and lows of this statecraft in Algeria as a 'mania,' saying 'delusion would be more understandable state.'<sup>134</sup>

For Boumediene and Abdesselam, however, these roadblocks and the flailing US diplomatic prerogative actually represented a unique opportunity. Each time the deal appeared on to be on the rocks the Algerian team could leverage the US fear that the deal itself and the resumption of diplomatic relationship, which by this point were almost inextricably linked to the US State Department, would entirely fail. This in turn was used to motivate the Department to help clear these roadblocks as well as to commit other economic resources. One of the clearest examples of this tactic in action is the Newsom cable to Washington after a dispute over the escalating FPC delays. Coming direct from a meeting with Abdesselam, David Newsom, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs urged 'major economic actions to maintain momentum,' referring to the progress in diplomatic relations between the two.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, after more stalls in June, Boumediene, gave a 'verbal commitment'

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<sup>132</sup> Ghetas, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 103-4.

<sup>133</sup> "Memorandum El Paso Project," 17 December 1971, Box 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>134</sup> Morin letter to Clark.

<sup>135</sup> Ghetas, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 67.

to set a time frame to resume diplomatic relations, three days before the critical next round of El Paso talks with EXIM.<sup>136</sup>

Throughout these talks, the oil sector and oil companies provided a unique space and new mid-level channels to operate the state-company relationship. For example, oil companies were used as de facto diplomats to resolve the Newmont Mining, Phillips, and Mobil nationalisation cases. All three claimed compensation for their recently nationalised assets and were caught in protracted settlement negotiations with the Algerian state. But El Paso was dependent on the Algerian government being given a 'clean bill of health' to the FPC from these companies.<sup>137</sup> And yet, direct negotiations with the Algerian state continued to 'utterly fail.'<sup>138</sup> Instead, it was specifically El Paso's role as a private interest in these negotiations, welcomed by both states, which helped bring them to successful conclusion.<sup>139</sup> Boumediene also directed an informal channel of direct negotiation with oil companies and the US State Department, particularly through Messoud Zeghar, who had strong connections with these companies. It was through these informal channels that Algeria allegedly extracted a US guarantee not to intervene in the French nationalisation, submitted guarantees to EXIM and the US State Department on the settling of compensation claims, and made veiled promises about the renewal of diplomatic relationships once the El Paso deal was completed.<sup>140</sup> Overall then, the delays and obstacles to the progress of the El Paso deal actually played into Algerian hands, creating

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>137</sup> Department of State Report, 14 October 1970, Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>138</sup> Keller letter to Lowrie, 5 September 1970, Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ghetts, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 41, 59, 105.

opportunities for economic gain without political commitment, facilitated by the informal channels of the oil sector.

This tactic was so effective that the US State Department was fully expecting a resumption of formal political relations to be confirmed at a meeting between the US Foreign Secretary and Boumediene in Algiers in August 1973.<sup>141</sup> Here, however, Boumediene and his diplomats rapidly backpedalled. They pointed to the economic division of the Third World as a critical political polemic and argued instead that Algeria could retain economic partnership with the US decoupled from these problematic political issues. They further softened the blow with a mix of regional fraternity and betrayal, arguing that whilst they were unable to publicly break the Arab line against the US, they could continue to offer Washington both an insight into and a back door political channel to the Arab oil producers.<sup>142</sup> In this way, they solidified the oil circuit as an ongoing political channel.

At the Algiers-hosted Non-Aligned Movement conference only weeks later, Boumediene cried out against capitalist international economic inequality, and pressed for the use of resource nationalism as a third world weapon in the fight for equality.<sup>143</sup> He also reaffirmed regional alliances and denounced US support for Israel.<sup>144</sup> The gulf between the US expectations and this reality is so stark that historians have concluded that US State Department was, if not entirely 'deluded,' at least guilty of 'wishful thinking' in its anticipation of the imminent resumption of

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

political relations.<sup>145</sup> However, as demonstrated here, by exploring the channels and mechanisms of Algerian oil diplomacy, it is clear that this unwavering belief in the immediate future of diplomatic alliance was created and fuelled by highly effective Algerian negotiation. The success of this Algerian policy was primarily dependent on the barriers and obstacles of the proposed gas partnership, their skill in navigating these roadblocks, as well as the informal political channels offered by the oil connection.

This leveraging of the incompleteness and uncertainty surrounding oil and gas contracts was a tactic also deployed by the US administration itself. For the US state, the slowness of the progress of El Paso phase two held the answer to the thorny question of maintaining a neutral, supportive line to two potentially important allies through the furore and aftermath of the nationalisation of French companies in 1971.<sup>146</sup> The State Department was under intense pressure from its French ally to pull the entire deal.<sup>147</sup> Without El Paso, the already limited market options for Algeria would be further diminished, thereby weakening the Algerian negotiating position.<sup>148</sup> The State Department equivocated. The Department held that the El Paso deal could not progress without FPC approval, which would take time. This bought the deal an important window of time that the US State Department used to extract the El Paso deal from the immediate concerns of the nationalisation, without antagonising either party.<sup>149</sup> Ultimately, however, this equivocation would prove critical to the

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 89.

nationalisation itself. Considering it had secured critical US support, the French state escalated its punitive measures against Algeria. Similarly assured about the future of the critical gas partnership, Algeria also radicalised its position in response, ultimately destroying any final hope of reconciliation.<sup>150</sup>

The international partnerships secured over this decade, then, were critical not in their finality but in their continued uncertainty. The space left by the contentions and diverse priorities of non-state actors, combined with the cloaked and informal negotiating channels they created, was a crucial diplomatic corridor which both shaped and facilitated state-to-state relations. Through these backchannels, Algerian negotiators were able to maintain decisive political and financial support from the US without alienating its key allies in the third world, instead maintaining and even extending its radical image. Moreover, the US funding obtained was not restricted to the El Paso project. These investments also covered the Algerian Petroleum Institute (IAP) and later, the aggressively expanded production and export of Algerian oil and gas under the Valorization Hydrocarbon Development Plan (VALHYD). Fascinatingly, both VALHYD and the IAP were renewals of existing projects, initially Soviet-funded.<sup>151</sup> These projects, like the oil nationalisation itself, were conceived of as specifically 'socialist' projects. In all three cases then, Algeria successfully employed 'capitalist means' to 'achieve socialist ends.'<sup>152</sup> The key to this success? The careful management of state-company relations, through which Algeria could maintain a

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Iratni, "Foreign Policy" 399; Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 65, 66.

<sup>152</sup> Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 65.

measured continuity and ambitious future partnership as the ‘true’ reality, consigning the radical political landscape to a benign abstract.

In sum, the evolution of the status and operations of international oil companies in Algeria over this decade was completely at odds with the government’s confrontational rhetoric and political self-stylisation. While the state endorsed a vision of a vehemently anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle carried through resource nationalism, foreign capitalist interests were proliferating. The careful management of the company-state relationship encouraged oil companies and foreign capital to maintain and expand their Algerian interests, companies and interests which shaped the operation and outcomes of state-to-state relationships. The development of these company or middle ground connections was achieved by the skilful leveraging of the transitions of the Franco-Algerian nexus through these years. These changes were used to reframe and defang contemporary resource nationalism and institute a state of uncertainty and constant negotiation, thereby securing critical economic partnerships. At the same time, the process of actually signing these deals introduced an additional leverage point as these deals were shaped and defined by commercial over state prerogatives. Such priorities and the informal politico-commercial diplomatic space they created enabled the Algerian state to maintain decisive political and financial support particularly from the US without alienating its key allies in the third world, maintaining and even extending its radical image.

## Conclusion

Overall, despite government rhetoric, the decolonisation of Algeria's oil sector was not steered unilaterally or teleologically from the top down. Instead, an uneven and unpredictable evolution of the nexus was shaped from the middle, by and through company actors. It was oil companies which directly funnelled both the French and Algerian administrations towards nationalisation, creating and hardening economic and ideological polemics. When these tensions reached a tipping point in early 1971, it was the specific shape of the interlinked system which ultimately facilitated the nationalisation itself. The protected and sheltered nature of nexus had removed the possibilities of effective company opposition, brought large swathes of the oil sector under direct Algerian control, and facilitated the development of the necessary technical expertise and wide market base.

International oil companies constituted a critical conduit through which the Algerian state could effectuate its carefully balanced foreign policy. Careful curation of a novel company-state relationship grounded in working realities over ideology, policy or rhetoric enabled the Algerian state to embark on a radical programme of resource nationalism whilst still attracting extensive foreign investment. Particularly persuasive here was the presentation of the France-Algerian nexus as the root and target of policy changes in order to assuage international concerns about the viability of Algeria as a long-term trading partner. While oil company operations opened a highly effective informal diplomatic circuit with the US, the disjuncture between commercial and diplomatic priorities provided critical leverage for obtaining economic support from the US State Department.

## **Chapter Five: Endogenous to the State? Economic Independence and the Infrastructures of Oil**

### Introduction

On 14 February 1973, the Minister for Industry, Belaïd Abdesselam, one of the central architects of the nationalisation and oil policy more broadly, began a month-

long visit to the oil fields in the Sahara to personally observe Sonatrach's workings. In his memoirs, Abdesselam described how he expected to see his own sense of triumph in the success of the nationalisation, the decisive victory in the battle for economic independence, reflected back at him. His intention was to personally thank the cadres and workers for their crucial work in carrying the battle for oil to victory, and to express the nation's gratitude for the work they had accomplished.<sup>1</sup>

Abdesselam described the reality as a 'sword to the stomach.' High level staff were unable to answer basic questions. Due to an ongoing staffing crisis, many were inexperienced and extremely underqualified, including the engineer in charge of one of the largest fields of production in the country, formerly a mechanic in the north.<sup>2</sup>

The Minister was left with a 'horrible sense of responsibility' as he saw for himself how the 'grand political decisions' of the government actually played out in reality.<sup>3</sup>

Faced with such a stark staffing crisis and the acute risks to the economy this represented, Abdesselam was forced into a strategy that went against the core of two other key nation-building strategies: austerity and regional equilibrium. Abdesselam doubled, and in some cases tripled, the salaries of postings in the Sahara compared to those in the north.<sup>4</sup> As President Boumediene protested, these wages vastly outstripped those of other state agents working in the Sahara.<sup>5</sup> Sonatrach thereby flouted the policy of holding state wages comparatively low, in an effort to create long-term agricultural and industrial growth.<sup>6</sup> Further, this shift undermined efforts to

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<sup>1</sup> Abdesselam, *Le pétrole*, 490-1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 491-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 516-7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

homogenise wages and costs across the country, part of a wider effort to integrate the Sahara within a cohesive nation-state.<sup>7</sup>

This episode encapsulates the central tensions to be explored in this chapter. They highlight an overlooked disconnect between, on the one hand, the assigned role of the oil sector within a state-sponsored vision of the post-independence nation-state and its economy, and, on the other, the realities of oil production. As evident in the case of the Saharan salary hikes, crucial operational factors and industrial actors, in this case staffing, could force strategies within the sector that directly undermined broader policy directives and ideological commitments, with important consequences. These issues have often been obscured because evolutions in the oil sector have been framed purely in politico-economic terms and as levers for state policy. In other words, we often take for granted that the oil nationalisation was a direct translation of and mechanism for the state's vision of economic independence. In many ways, as this chapter will show, it was neither.

For the FLN government, oil wealth, and particularly the increased income from the nationalisations, were integral to the production of a strong, centralised and socialist state, tying the nation together, and overcoming the colonial segregation of north and south.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the prosperity, balance and sense of promise of this decade of 'true independence' became the cornerstone of FLN identity and legacy, an image that still

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., N. M. Fenn, letter to W. F. Marshall, 16 May 1968; "Nationalisation des sociétés de distribution," *El Moudjahid*, 15 May 1968. FCO 54/28, NA.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, "Nationalisation," *El Moudjahid*; Simon Dawbarn letter to W. F. Marshall, 29 January 1968. FCO 54/28, NA; Communiqué by Algeria Government, cited in "Potential Buyers of Algerian Crude Warned By French Companies," *Middle East Economic Survey* 14, no.27 (30 April 1971): 3-4. Press Cutting. FCO 67/592, NA.

holds political and scholarly currency to this day.<sup>9</sup> Even critical scholars have replicated the underlying premise of the malleability of oil revenue under state control, arguing that the rush of nationalised oil wealth was the beginning of the end for pluralism and balanced economic growth, creating both an economic dependency and oil-funded corrupt, clientelist networks around the government.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst such accounts have drawn attention to the aims and macro-economic outcomes of state policies, they are less concerned with how the relationships between the nationalisation of oil, economic 'independence' and the centralising intentions of the state actually played out on the ground. By focusing on oil as monetary flows, other important actors such as oil infrastructures and local communities are obscured. This oversight is particularly surprising given the open acknowledgment of the Algerian state that their plans depended on these actors. One notable example was the overriding concern with the 'Algerianisation' of oil sector staff in order to be able to nationalise.<sup>11</sup>

The analysis here focuses on these actors, moving downward from the company and diplomatic circuits discussed in chapter four. I explore the unfolding, intertwined but sometimes antithetical processes of oil nationalisation, economic independence and post-colonial nation building from the more granular perspectives of staffing, infrastructure, and local government. I explore particularly how these actors reflected,

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<sup>9</sup> See for example, Ed McAllister, "Algeria's 'Belle Époque': Memories of the 1970s as a Window on the Present," in *Algeria: Nation, Culture and Transnationalism: 1988-2015* ed. Patrick Crowley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 46-62; Abdelkader Nouibat, "Economic transition in Algeria: A review," *Transition Studies Review* 27, no.1 (2020): 124-6. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.14665/1614-4007-26-2-008>.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Henry, "Algeria's agonies"; Entelis, "Algeria".

<sup>11</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 7.

navigated, and exploited the disequilibrium across these policies in the decade between 1965 and 1975. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the realities of oil nationalisation and exploitation did not simply follow or transpose economic policy into practice: instead, the relationship between the two was deeply complicated. In some cases, this disequilibrium created new avenues of political possibilities for state actors, and in others, created counter-forces that ran against policy aims and ideological values, because of the ground-level forces that emerged. Thus, whereas chapter four showed how mid-level actors, notably oil companies shaped the Algerian oil nationalisation and oil diplomacy, this chapter demonstrates the important role of ground-level forces in shaping these political and economic currents.

I explore first how the expanding need for skilled staff in a nationalising and growing Algerian oil sector shaped the nationalisation process itself even as it facilitated and protected the proliferating commercial and political relationships with the US.<sup>12</sup> In section two, I explore how the centralising intentions behind an expansion of oil infrastructure in both Algeria and France actually resulted in the fragmentation of political and economic ties between the state and its southern regions.

### Staffing a Nationalisation

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<sup>12</sup> This approach draws on a wide body of literature exploring a pragmatism within Boumediene's foreign policy, extending these frameworks into oil and labour specifically. See, for example, Ghetta, *Algeria and the Cold War*, 3, 47, 69. For earlier accounts of this tendency see John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), particularly 211 and Amine Aït-Chaalal *L'Algérie, Les Etats-Unis et la France: Des Discours à L'action* (Paris: Publisud, 2000), particularly 37.

On 2 November 1971, the US Interests Section received a report from a US oil service company, Globe, regarding their operations in Algeria. The 'Interests Section' was a key diplomatic actor through these years, an operational hub for US-Algerian commercial and political exchanges established in the Swiss Embassy after the diplomatic relationship between Algeria and the US had been severed in 1967.<sup>13</sup> Globe was reporting on a lucrative four-year contract it just secured with Sonatrach, worth over \$16 million. In the report, the company was optimistic about the Algerian potential in the international oil market but describes a litany of concerns about Sonatrach's staffing. It concludes that the company would remain dependent on foreign oil technicians for 'years to come,' and that any attempt to full Algerianise the programme would 'risk the collapse to the [entire] Algerian research programme.'<sup>14</sup> Such reports, bemoaning Sonatrach's staffing capabilities were frequently received by the State Department from US oil interests in the years 1965-75. Throughout this period, the department and oil companies were deeply concerned about the precarious situation of their business interests in the country, and its links to staffing. The expansion of US interests in Algeria was a key priority for the State Department, for both political and economic reasons.<sup>15</sup> However, there was a widespread fear amongst commercial and political observers that the Algerian state was engaged in an ongoing battle with the major international oil companies, pursuing a de facto nationalisation as early as 1965, through a combination of Algerianisation and workers' rights.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, the Algerian state was publicly endorsing Algerianisation

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<sup>13</sup> Quandt, "Algeria," 119-120.

<sup>14</sup> Maxim, Telegram to Department of State, A-89, Field Trip to a Globe Seismic Research Crew November 1971, Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>15</sup> See chapter four for full discussion.

<sup>16</sup> See chapter three for full discussion.

as both a way to retain oil profits and benefits through localisation money flows in wages, and also as the prerequisite to increased Algerian control of this critical industry.<sup>17</sup> Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that it was the capability of Algerian staff that was the crucial determinant of when and how Algeria nationalised the oil sector.<sup>18</sup>

But, as the Globe report suggests, US companies and state interests were somewhat less concerned with Algerianisation than these accounts might suggest. Instead, the perceived weaknesses of Sonatrach's staffing capability fuelled a belief in the security of their investments in the country, both before and after the progressive nationalisations of this period. In very broad terms, Algerian take-overs had begun in 1967, initially as temporary 'custodianships' of international oil companies in response to the Arab-Israeli War. This was progressively expanded to permanent nationalisations, starting with international marketing and distribution interests in 1967, the well-known 24 February nationalisation in 1971 that took a majority share in French interests and later, through until 1975, taking a 100% stake in some interests.<sup>19</sup> In fact, as I will show here, as Algeria pressed on with taking over international interests and expanding an Algerian-led exploration programme in an effort to secure economic independence, international interests perceived their medium and long-term future in the country as increasingly assured.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>17</sup> See discussion in chapter four, and Musso, "Taking Control," 7-8, 15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 15-16.

<sup>19</sup> Mustafa Erkan, *International Energy Investment Law: Stability Through Contractual Clauses* (New York: Kluwer Law International, 2011), 144; Musso, "Oil Companies," 146-148.

<sup>20</sup> Bradford Dillman, "Reassessing the Algerian Economy: Development and Reform Through the Eyes of Five Policy-Makers," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 35, no.1 (1997): 160, 166. DOI: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/162058>. "Algeria Signs Up For Soviet Help on Big New Oil Target," *Petroleum*

French interests were invested in a similar perception of Algerian weakness, which significantly shaped their response to the nationalisations. Staffing, in other words, became a key generator of influential political-economic perceptions.

In this section, I interrogate these seemingly contradictory trends. I demonstrate first how the staffing requirements of nationalisation and independent exploration drove an expanded commercial and informal diplomatic relationship with the US, even during and after the nationalisation of US companies. As the viability and security of US investment in Algeria was increasingly threatened by the economic and ideological tensions between the two governments, I show that US companies and political interests remained persuaded of the long-term safety of commercial investment in Algeria by both the short-term shortages of a skilled workforce and due to the perceived emergence of a class of senior and middle managers sympathetic to the US and capitalism within Sonatrach.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, I focus on the relationship between the Algerian state and French oil interests, demonstrating how divergent understandings of Sonatrach's staffing capabilities shaped the build-up and response to the 1971 nationalisation of French oil companies. Across both cases, I interrogate the chronologies and actors around the nationalisation strategies. I focus on how ground level oil actors enable a more critical perspective on the process of the oil nationalisation and its relationship to post-colonial state building. That process was

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*Intelligence Weekly* (25 May 1970). Press Cutting; "The Role Of Sonatrach In Algeria's Development," *Middle East Economic Survey* 13, no. 15 (6 February 1970). FCO, 67/517, NA.

<sup>21</sup> Tensions with the overtly socialist Algeria were high throughout the 1970s, against a backdrop of wider US led economic 'warfare' against state socialist countries, notably wielding access to technology as means to weaken these economic threats and even neutral allies. See for example Ivan T Berend, *From the Soviet bloc to the European Union: The Economic and Social Transformation of Eastern Europe since 1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30.

neither linear nor inherently supportive to state building, adding another dimension to the arguments made in chapter four. Indeed, the unfolding of and reaction to the oil nationalisation was shaped from below. In some places this created 'counter chronologies' that ran against the foundational aims and values scholars have typically ascribed to processes of oil nationalisation and state building.<sup>22</sup>

### Ideology and Incompetence: The Internationals

The notion that Sonatrach was trapped in a dependency on international companies was a critical determinant in the relationship between Algeria and the US for two reasons. Firstly, because, as I show below, this perceived dependency contributed significantly to short and long-term planning of US companies in Algeria, specifically the decisions taken by companies like Globe, Getty and Western Geophysical, to start, continue, or expand operations in Algeria through and after the nationalisation process.

Secondly, this idea of dependency was a key determinant of and plank in the policy of the US State Department. As discussed in chapter four, the State Department remained fairly consistent in its stance that Algeria was a critical partner for the US, a policy line which shaped its responses to potentially contentious Algerian diplomatic policies, including the oil nationalisations and the 1967 embargo. To offset the

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<sup>22</sup> For studies of the relationship between oil nationalisation and state building in alternative contexts, see, for example, Nimah Mazaheri, "Oil Wealth, Colonial Legacies, and the Challenges of Economic Liberalization." *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2014). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24371950>; Steffen Hertog, "The oil-driven nation-building of the Gulf states after World War II," in *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History* ed. John Peterson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) Spaskovska, "'Crude' Alliance"; Watts, "Resource curse".

concerns about Algerian reliability raised in Congress and by the FPC the State Department engaged in a range of arguments which presented Algeria as a reliable partner, using staffing and working conditions to provide conclusive evidence that expanding commercial and financial interests in Algeria was a sound investment.<sup>23</sup> Diplomats here identified here two key themes. The first was pragmatic, the idea that despite all the rhetoric, Sonatrach remained reliant on foreign expertise. And the second was more ideological: an entrenched belief that oil was fundamentally a capitalist enterprise, a sector that had to be run on neo-liberal economic principals. According to this interpretation, the Algerian state was pragmatic enough to recognise that socialism in practice simply could not be extended into these dealings in both the short and longer term. At the same time, these staffing vulnerabilities and interchanges were deployed by the State Department as an important diplomatic tool in expanding US influence in Algeria.

In the first instance, for both international companies and diplomats, the security of their Algerian contracts lay in Sonatrach's biggest weakness, the capability of its staff. Globe and other interests, like the Director of the Algerian Petroleum Institute (IAP), furnished the US State Department with a range of reports and evidence that 'notwithstanding political and demagogic assertions to the contrary, Algeria will have to rely on foreign technicians for the next 10-15 years.'<sup>24</sup> It is of note that diplomats were so engaged in such operational matters, and indicative of how much importance diplomats attached to commercial realities over and above political

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<sup>23</sup> Sebastian to Hoffacker, 19 May 1969; See chapter four for a full discussion on this.

<sup>24</sup> Maxim, Airgram to Department of State A-86, 25 July 1972. Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

rhetoric as a determinant of Algerian domestic and foreign policy.<sup>25</sup> The outlook, consistently, was deeply pejorative about Sonatrach's chances of operating successfully because of its staff. This was perhaps best summed up by the CEO of Western Geographical who bemoaned 'these *people* act like they don't want to find oil.'<sup>26</sup> In contrast, other key factors, like budget, were of almost no concern. In fact, in 1969, US advisors recommended that Sonatrach required a budget some \$300 million below what was ultimately assigned, highlighting that financial resource, or potential lack thereof, played no role in the evaluation of Sonatrach's viability.<sup>27</sup>

Staffing weakness fell into three categories: volume, capability, and culture. As Algerian state policy aggressively increased oil production to offset French domination and later, to offset withdrawals precipitated by the nationalisations, and to drive state income, these weaknesses were thrown into sharper relief.<sup>28</sup> In essence, for these actors, the gap between state ambition and sector realities, despite, or even because of the escalating ideological and political provocations of the Algerian state, was a key reason to deepen political and commercial links. The perceived dependency on US companies then further increased through the period of the Algerian nationalisations because of the resultant labour and technical needs of the newly nationalised companies.

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<sup>25</sup> See chapter four for other examples of this tendency.

<sup>26</sup> Authors emphasis. Maxim, Airgram to Department of State, A-10, Local Geophysical Oil Research Firms Assess the Outlook for 1972, 1 February 1972, Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>27</sup> American Embassy Algiers, Airgram A-313 to Department of State, 3 November 1969, Box 1345, RG 59, NARA..

<sup>28</sup> US Interests Section, telegram 1535, to Secretary of State, September 1971, Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

Firstly, there simply weren't enough staff available to carry out the required tasks. Sonatrach's flagship expansion of research required a huge pool of skilled labour, from field prospecting to actually processing the weight of daily, weekly and monthly seismic reports. For example, Ray Geophysical was contracted by Sonatrach on a two-year prospecting contract in 1969. They had support at the highest level of government, with special Presidential dispensation to release funds for the work and to secure workarounds to combat a variety of operational difficulties, including customs restrictions.<sup>29</sup> But the company itself was clear that Sonatrach would simply not be able to make effective use of its work. Speaking to the US Interests Section they outlined that Sonatrach was 'trying to do altogether too much at once.' They highlighted that on this contract alone, Sonatrach would be receiving reports for 35 to 40 seismic crews with no way of digesting the flow of information.<sup>30</sup>

Numeric staffing shortages were compounded by the second factor, the lack of trained and experienced Algerian staff. In the field, inexperienced and rushed staff managed the prospecting poorly, with some observers writing that they were sinking 'test holes virtually at random,' then covering up these mistakes in ways that had long term consequences.<sup>31</sup> For example, on identifying a new reserve at 4,000m one manager invested in a new high specification drill. Some way into the drilling project it was uncovered that the drill had only ever been rated to 3,000m, leading the manager to doctor the initial report to conclude that possible deposit would be found

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Keller, Memorandum of conversation with Karl Beek, 2 October 1970, Sonatrach Algeria 1970, 5678, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Guy de Jonquieres, "Bad feeling behind the oil embargo," *Financial Times*, 26 September 1969, Press cutting ARC18161, BPA.

at 3,000m, and simply report that no oil had been found, leaving the actual deposit unexplored.<sup>32</sup> In this case then, individual staff and human error were mapped into the geological knowledge of and patterns of resource exploitation in the Sahara desert.

Finally, these cases of individual incompetence and poor training were compounded by a company culture that did little to retain its field staff. Salaries were rigid and limited and field jobs lacked basic infrastructure, including schools and housing.<sup>33</sup> Newly qualified staff could instead move quickly into comfortable desk jobs in Algiers after only minimum term out in the field.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, it was particularly this culture that Globe noted in their discussion of the risks to the Algerian state mission. Staff were making this move, Globe argued, in droves. Such high staff turnover, they held, put the entire research programme, if left in Algerian hands, at risk.<sup>35</sup>

Even Sonatrach's attempts to overcome these critical staffing issues through expanded domestic training programmes actually compounded a medium-term dependency on international support. Sonatrach's approach was adopt to a rapid turnaround training programme, an approach operated on two fronts. The first was through on the job training with international contractors. This was woven into the terms of international contracts, thereby entrenching this dependency.<sup>36</sup> The second was formal graduate programmes administered most notably through the IAP which

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<sup>32</sup> Laurent Morin, Memorandum of conversation with Yves Saubadu, 29 January 1969, Box 1345, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>33</sup> Maxim, Telegram, A-10; Maxim, Airgram A-86.

<sup>34</sup> Maxim, Telegram.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Morin, Memorandum of conversation with Peter Bawden, 1 April 1969; 5678 6, RG 59, NARA; Morin, Memorandum of conversation with Glenn Jones, 7 May 1968, 5678, RG 59 PET, NARA.

opened in 1966. The IAP initially focused on intensive short programmes of two to three years to push out graduates as fast as possible.<sup>37</sup> But the limited curriculum offered in the early years of IAP left gaping weaknesses in staffing expertise. For example, IAP did not offer a course specialising in LNG until 1974.<sup>38</sup> This shortage had significant political consequences as Algerian hydrocarbon policy pivoted to LNG export in the early 1970s. This again created a huge demand for international contractors and cut into profit margins significantly.<sup>39</sup>

Particularly interesting from the US perspective, moreover, were the emerging tensions between the 'graduates' of both training routes by the mid-1970s. The eventual arrival of the IAP graduates at Sonatrach was delayed through the late 1960s, due to the time lag between recruitment and graduation, and worsened by a state edict drafting petroleum school graduates for basic training in the Algerian armed forces before they could start their time at Sonatrach.<sup>40</sup> As a result, for much of the late 60s and early 70s, the Algerian oil industry was entirely in the hands of the 'in house engineers,' those on the job trainees.<sup>41</sup> The late arrival of the IAP graduates and their attempts to impose themselves within the company in the early 1970s resulted in huge internal tensions as the two groups tussled over the respective

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<sup>37</sup> Azzedine Ali Benali, "Engineers of the Algerian Petroleum Institute: training and career paths" in *Maghreb Engineers in Training Systems* ed Éric Gobe (Tunis: Institute for Research on the Contemporary Maghreb, 2001). Online version, unpaginated. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.irmc.139>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> On the shift to LNG exports, see Hayes, "Transmed and Maghreb projects," 52 and Aïsaoui, *Algeria*, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Nacer-Eddine Hammouda, "Les ingénieurs algériens : une élite économique et sociale ? Étude de leurs comportements d'activité et de leurs conditions de vie," in *L'ingénieur moderne au Maghreb (xix-xxe siècles)* ed. Éric Gobe (Tunis: Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain, 2004). Online version, unpaginated. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.irmc.1537>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

importance of formal qualifications versus on the job competence.<sup>42</sup> These tensions deepened an ongoing fragmentation at Sonatrach along class and income lines, which broke out into internal strike action between workers and managers.<sup>43</sup> This marked a critical departure from the universalising language of the anti-imperialist struggles that had dominated sector activism to date. And critically, such issues added weight to the US belief in a growing capitalist class within the oil sector, the impacts of which are discussed below.

US interests also followed how Algerian state economic policies were being exploited and fractured by other domestic operators within the oil sector. The activities of these operators, often independent contractors, continued to exacerbate the dependence on international labour. This is perhaps clearest in the construction of the Arzew refinery, where a Japanese oil company had a \$75 million contract for the construction of the factory. The refinery represented a key element of state oil policy, increasing Algeria's refining and export capacity, and moving beyond the dependence on French refineries and the French market. Moreover, the refinery was intended to train up Algerian oil professionals.<sup>44</sup>

For local subcontractors, however, the contract represented a huge opportunity to increase personal income in the short term. Capitalising on the Algerianisation push that prioritised employment of locals, they doubled their prices and even shut down work crews to bolster their demands for further price increases. This drove a huge

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Musso, "Taking Control," 13.

<sup>44</sup> Maxim, Airgram to Department of State A-25, Japanese Gasoline Company's Arzew Refinery Encountering Severe Problems, 29 February 1972, Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

increase in running costs at Arzew as well as significant logistical issues and time loss for the company, not least because the required dinars were increasingly difficult to buy.<sup>45</sup> The scarcity of available subcontractors forced the company to bring in over 500 additional Japanese workers, and they had to be paid in hard currency, further driving up costs significantly. By 1972 the company had already lost heavily on the contract, which was running substantially behind schedule.<sup>46</sup> In this case then, the concurrent state efforts to push for expanded Algerian controlled production and greater domestic technical capacity were manipulated and undermined at ground level, with significant implications for wider economic policy.

The final key indicator of pragmatic dependency was the treatment of American staff and contractors operating in Algeria. Even after the 1967 takeovers, American technicians remained highly sought after in Algeria and contracts continued to proliferate. Sonatrach recruited aggressively in the US as well as Canada, even hiring a PR firm to give it some 'gloss.'<sup>47</sup> Their job offers were popular, creating a busy interchange and enough work 'to keep a petroleum attaché occupied,' according to the diplomat Laurent Morin.<sup>48</sup> In fact, large numbers of technicians with contracts in hand consulted with the Department of State, with very few having any knowledge of the state of the US-Algerian political relations, demonstrating that diplomatic posturing had little relationship to the on the ground realities of working with Sonatrach.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Sebastian letter to Morin, 12 January 1969, Box 6, RG 69, NARA.

<sup>48</sup> Laurent Morin letter to Albert Post, 29 January 1968, 5678 4, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>49</sup> Sebastian letter to Morin; Hoffacker, Memorandum of conversation with Abde Meghateli, 18 January 1969, 5678 6, RG 59, NARA.

One particularly interesting case within this growing professional stream was that of the US embassy school. The school had initially been founded to educate the children of English-speaking diplomats in Algeria. As the Algerian oil industry grew, many American and Canadian workers enrolled their children at the school, and its size grew exponentially. The embassy ceased to operate as an official diplomatic hub in 1967, when diplomatic relations between the countries were suspended, but strikingly numbers enrolled in the school continued to grow.<sup>50</sup> As I show here, this growth was indicative of the dependence on the US and Canadian technicians, but also, crucially the embassy school became a hub for a novel form of state-to-company-to-state relationship.

By 1969 the school was so overwhelmed by numbers that Sonatrach proposed a joint venture with the US State Department to facilitate the school's expansion. Under this scheme, Sonatrach would supply the State Department with the necessary funds to expand the school. Under the same funding stream, Sonatrach also sought, with the State Department's guidance, to invest in similar schools for the growing numbers of US technicians and their families across Oran, Skikda and Hassi Messaoud. The proposal came directly from Sonatrach's Director of Exploration, indicative of how central both foreign workers and the 'package' provided to their families were to Sonatrach's strategic development. Moreover, Sonatrach deliberately proposed a partnership scheme with the US government. In discussions on the project the Director explicitly noted that Sonatrach had the option to simply

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

open and operate its own school, but stressed the partnership with the US government, albeit fully funded by Sonatrach, would be the company's preferred option.<sup>51</sup>

Given the political situation at the time and the suspension of formal US-Algerian diplomatic links, it is perhaps surprising Sonatrach would deliberately choose such a partnership. This choice and the emblematic growth of a partnership at a nominally defunct Embassy underline just how important histories of ground level oil diplomacy are. Not only does the case underline just how rapidly US interests in the country were growing, despite the political contention, it also highlights how the growth of the oil industry and rapidly evolving infrastructural needs, in this case, in housing foreign workers and their families, drove and shaped a novel form of diplomatic relationship. This active and effective circuit operated despite the high-level political antagonism, to the point of quite literally locating itself at the very heart of the political void, the empty US Embassy in Algiers. At the same time, the willingness to engage in this form of diplomacy, on both sides, illustrates how disconnected the reality of the US-Algerian relationship was from the conventional chronologies of an Algerian 'war' on a western cartel.<sup>52</sup>

In all, the insights offered by staffing cultures and capabilities within the Algerian oil sector demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between the sector and state

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<sup>51</sup> Hoffacker, Memorandum of conversation, Meghateli.

<sup>52</sup> See for example, accounts of Algeria's radical role in OPEC, Christopher R.W. Dietrich, "'First Class Brouhaha': Henry Kissinger and Oil Power in the 1970s" in *Oil Shock: The 1973 crisis and its economic legacy* eds Giuliano Garavini, Federico Romero and Elisabetta Bini (London: I. B. Taurus, 2016), 47; Garavini, "From Boumedienomics to Reaganomics," 82-84.

policy. It is clear that Sonatrach did not operate as a real-time lever for the transposition of economic policy into operational reality, and instead was significantly shaped by the on the ground realities rather than by political-diplomatic rhetoric. The lack of qualified and experienced staff was a key factor in the high costs inherent in Algerian production, and a delay of key policies, most notably, the development of an Algerian controlled refinery. At the same time, however, the inconsistencies between rhetoric and reality, which became increasingly exposed through the process of nationalisation, created political opportunities. In particular, these discrepancies were a key enabler of the maintenance of expanding commercial, but nominally depoliticised links with the US. This was particularly because the State Department based their policies on operational realities, over political rhetoric. The staffing of the Algerian oil sector, as well as the commercial strategies of company directors and mid-level officials discussed in chapter four, thus emerged as a critical political and diplomatic determinant.

For US diplomats, the expanding presence of and dependence on American oil workers in Algeria was a crucial political opportunity. Firstly, oil workers were important diplomatic agents. As noted in chapter four, international and particularly US diplomats deliberately drew policy from tangible commercial experience in Algeria, rather than the government rhetoric or more formal political circuits. And with the exception of the hydrocarbon sector, American commercial footholds in Algeria were minimal.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, diplomatic partnership with Algeria was a pressing concern for the US, and re-securing this partnership became all the more crucial after

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<sup>53</sup> Quandt, "Algeria," 111.

formal ties were broken off in 1967.<sup>54</sup> Thus, oil workers occupied a unique position. They were the living, breathing incarnations of a commercial connection limited almost entirely to hydrocarbons. As such, their labour and work with Sonatrach was important proof that the two nations could work together, effectively and highly profitably.

This diplomatic framing of the oil labour force is clearly exemplified by the ways in which the US Embassy deliberately deployed oil workers as exemplars of American businessmen and values in Algeria. In September 1967, the US Ambassador John Durnford Jernegan wrote to a diplomatic colleague about the importance of oil workers giving Algerians a 'good impression of Americans.' Jernegan wrote that this was one of his own 'principal concerns' and that he was doing 'everything possible to keep it that way,' ensuring that these men continued to be 'careful in their personal conduct' and demonstrate their 'serious purpose.'<sup>55</sup>

Such concerns were highly politicised through the prism of the Cold War. As the nationalisations of oil companies progressed through 1967 and 1968, the situation of American staff became increasingly contentious and rife with difficulties. There were escalating tensions between US staff and the new Algerian management, including alleged 'harassment' of staff and even arrests of senior managers.<sup>56</sup> US officials faced a difficult decision on whether or not to authorise new and returning staff to enter the country. They choose to continue authorising entries, writing that these staff

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<sup>54</sup> Jernegan letter to Soapy, 14 September 1967, Box 1, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> American Embassy Algiers, Telegram number 63450, to Secretary of State, November 1967; American Embassy Paris, Telegram number 63480, to Secretary of State, November 1967. Box 1345, RG 59, NARA.

were 'among the last threads [of US representatives] remaining' in Algeria. In particular, the State Department was deeply concerned that Algeria could turn to the 'French or Soviets' to replace any loss of technicians.<sup>57</sup> In this way, US diplomats saw staffing as an important political opportunity in Algeria, and deliberately shaped policy around this to ensure on the ground influences remained, bound up with the ideological and political tensions between socialist and capitalist interests.

In fact, in the same way that staffing capability was used as a predictor of investment security, staff behaviour and reporting on the daily lives of oil workers and sector operations were used as critical indicators of Sonatrach's standing within the crucial ideological tensions between the two states. The message was, uniformly, that the daily realities of their oil workers reflected, at most, an ambiguity towards, if not outright dissent from, the state's socialist values. As discussed in chapter four, reporting on Sonatrach's managers and staff stressed their values, behaviours and even dress codes as coherent with US and capitalist outlooks.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, diplomatic reporting explicitly cited the training of these oil engineers as a clear contradiction to Algeria's 'classless' socialist society.<sup>59</sup> In these ways, then, the US diplomats saw the emerging class of engineers and technicians bound up in the growth of this new economic force, the oil sector, as political allies.

Moreover, these commercially minded Algerian technocrats were seen as important allies for the US diplomatic efforts in Algeria. Perhaps the most striking case is that of

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<sup>57</sup> Hoffacker, Telegram number 4124, to Ambassador Jernegan, 12 June 1967. Box 1345, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>58</sup> Hoffacker to Sebastian, 5 May 1969; Hoffacker to Root, 31 January 1967; Maxim, Airgram A-86.

<sup>59</sup> Maxim, Airgram A-86.

the Algerian oil commissaires, the managers put in charge of nationalised US firms, who, despite personifying anti-imperialist resource nationalisation, emerged as powerful allies in the eyes of Washington. The initial appointment of the commissaires who embodied the US losses, was, unsurprisingly, deeply unpopular, and the relationships with between these managers and the US interests were deeply polarised.<sup>60</sup> Within two years, however, the State Department considered these very symbols of Algerian resource nationalism as highly attractive and influential partners for their diplomatic mission.

The State Department believed that the commissaires' newly acquired working knowledge of the foreign oil companies had persuaded them that these companies were critical to the nation's economy.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, US diplomats believed that the commissaires were now aware of 'how little incentive' there was for these critical economic levers to remain in Algeria 'under present conditions.'<sup>62</sup> As such, they were important potential political allies. No longer wedded to the conventional view of oil companies as the very 'symbols of capitalist greed,' they were now converted to the US economic vision, and in an ideal position to promote it.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the mid-level managers at Sonatrach in the early years were able to climb the career ladder very rapidly to the very highest level as the oil sector continued to grow in importance.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See for example, Conrad Drescher's discussion with Cherif Faïdi, Commissar for Phillips and El Paso, Drescher, Memorandum of Conversation with Cherif Faïdi, 8 November 1969. 5678 6, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>61</sup> Hooper, Memorandum of conversation with Galanto, 30 May 1969, Box 5678 6, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Dawbarn to Marshall.

<sup>64</sup> Hammouda, "Les ingénieurs algériens "

In these ways, Sonatrach's staffing weaknesses were perceived and deployed by US interests as a critical commercial and political opportunity. As the formal political circuit with this critical potential ally closed, the US State Department deliberately deployed oil workers as a means to shore up a commercial alliance, cutting off potential connections particularly with the USSR and furnishing a very real, active form of company-state diplomacy, notably through the Embassy school. Moreover, US observers were increasingly persuaded of the industry's fundamental sympathies to the US position because of the growing class of Algerian engineers, technicians and managers who came up through the nationalising process itself. These people's individual behaviours and ideologies were taken as concrete proof of the viability of commercial over partnership without formal diplomatic links. Staffing structures, then, highlight the ways in which ground level and operational forces shaped the relationship between the oil nationalisation and state economic policy: in this case, these ground level forces were a key enabler of the maintenance of expanding commercial links with the US, despite the growing political estrangement at state level.

#### Keeping the Fires Burning: French and Algerian Workers

On 6 March 1971, a French oil worker who had been away on leave returned to Hassi Messaoud with his wife. He was shocked to find no other French workers remaining at his base, Maison Verte, which had belonged to CFP A. Both CFP A and ERAP had been locked in an escalating dispute with the Algerian state after the latter had taken a majority share in the companies on 24 February. Over the coming months, the dispute over legal rights and compensation rapidly escalated,

culminating in an attempt by these companies to prevent Sonatrach selling the oil on the global market.<sup>65</sup> CFP A was withdrawing staff in response, and the occupants of Maison Verte had been evacuated out of the country via the Tunisian border, under Algerian guard. As the unnamed worker arrived back and was appraised of the situation, his wife was shocked to see that the flare stake at Hassi Messaoud was still burning, exclaiming 'You see! You see! The fires are still burning! And you always told me if we left, everything would stop!'<sup>66</sup>

Her shock illustrates that, much like the international oil companies, their French counterparts were strongly convinced that Sonatrach was simply unable to staff its industry without their support. Indeed, as negotiations were ongoing, both CFP A and ERAP threatened the withdrawal of their staff as leverage, with CFP A using this in an attempt to force down their purchase price.<sup>67</sup> In these ways then, the same belief in Sonatrach's staffing problems shaped the French companies' response to the political shifts at all levels of the organisation, here resulting in management continuing a policy of escalation. In this section then, I turn to explore the notion of Sonatrach's staffing crisis from the perspective of the Franco-Algerian relationship. I then draw attention to the ways in which Sonatrach was able to turn this weakness into a strength through the ongoing negotiations with the French oil companies, particularly in reaching its final settlement with ERAP in December 1971. Further, the perspectives of the staff themselves, working on the ground through these uncertain months, provide crucial insights into the staggered timelines and time lags between

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<sup>65</sup> See particularly, Malti, *Le pétrole rouge*, Malti, *Histoire secrète*, 185-7.

<sup>66</sup> Malti, *Le pétrole rouge*, 263.

<sup>67</sup> J R Johnson, Negotiations between Sonatrach and French oil companies, 24 June 1971; British Embassy in Algiers to Alec Douglas-Homes, 12 July 1971, FCO 67/592, NA.

political decisions and famous ‘moments’ and events like the nationalisation on 24 February, and the slower, pragmatic realities of the evolving economic and commercial interconnections.

As we have seen, Sonatrach was certainly experiencing an acute staffing crisis through the nationalisation processes of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Attempts to resolve the issue in many cases created or entrenched dependencies on external actors. In other cases, attempted resolutions counteracted other key policies in the quest for economic independence, such as Abdesselam’s later efforts to recruit for field technicians in the Sahara.<sup>68</sup> One crucial factor here was that staff themselves and even company cultures were not simply levers of or supplicants to state policy. Instead, their interventions often ran counter to state policy as well as to contemporary historiographies of the ascent of economic independence from France. Sonatrach’s struggle to recruit from French companies and French training schools throughout this period is a key example of this.

Perhaps surprisingly in a period of upswell in nationalistic patriotism and a perceived economic liberation from France, between 1962 and 1977 there was an increase in the Algerian presence at engineering schools in France. Even more striking, these students were referred to by their schools as ‘fake foreigners,’ reflecting perhaps vestiges of Algérie-Française sentiment. In any case, the overwhelming majority of these highly qualified graduates, on completion of their courses, chose to pursue

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<sup>68</sup> Abdesselam, *Le pétrole*, 490-1, 516-7.

their careers in France.<sup>69</sup> For these technicians, careerism rather than nationalist politics determined their professional choices. Comparably well paid, high-flying public sector engineering jobs simply did not exist in the Algerian system until the late 1970s.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast, for those trained Algerians already working within the sector, a move from French or international companies into Sonatrach was deeply unappealing because of the depth of the culture of economic independence and place of oil within it. Such staff would have to endure a steep pay cut and their longer-term career options were poor. Company culture lower down the corporate hierarchy did not replicate the pragmatism of some of its highest management, and working culture was defined by its place in Algeria's revolutionary history. As such, through the 1960s and into the 1970s, career progression was outwardly acknowledged as a result of how staff had contributed to the political and economic revolutionary struggle. In practice, those who had been employed by Sonatrach in early, and particularly, prior to the nationalisation were favoured for promotions and progression.<sup>71</sup> For the newer arrivals, in contrast, the result was pay cuts, stalled career progression and day-to-day tensions and isolation.<sup>72</sup>

The unfolding of the nationalisation, like independence itself, was comparatively slow and uncertain for those working through it. For French staff, the edict of 24 February

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<sup>69</sup> Anousheh Karvar, "Polytechniciens algériens, tunisiens et marocains : des acteurs de l'histoire nationale aux témoins de la mondialisation," in *Les ingénieurs maghrébins dans les systèmes de formation* ed., Éric Gobe (Rabat: Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain, 2014), 201.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Abdesselam, *Le pétrole*, 497.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 498

did not spark an immediate or comprehensive withdrawal. Staff remained employed in Algeria for weeks, and sometime months, after the decision was taken. This was a reflection, to a significant degree, of the reigning confusion and uncertainty.

Politically, there seemed a very real possibility of a new agreement and terms of cooperation, whilst the companies wrestled with negotiations over terms, pricing, and compensation.<sup>73</sup> Many French managers continued operating 'cordially' within the Sonatrach system in the interim, whilst French staff continued on in their existing roles.<sup>74</sup>

During this time, Sonatrach offered almost all of these employees' individual contracts direct with Sonatrach. ERAP actually lent its support to this option by giving any employees choosing to take up such contracts a window of 3 years to change their minds and simply be reintegrated into ERAP.<sup>75</sup> In essence, this proposal allowed French staff to continue on in their roles on site in Algeria with the total assurance that they could redeploy through their French employer at any time. Ultimately then, the message to staff was that the commercial disentanglement did not extend to them in practice, and that the thoroughfare of oil personnel between France and Algeria remained entirely open.

It was here that ERAP had a crucial weakness that was adroitly manipulated by Sonatrach to hold on this expertise for months without incurring any expenditure. ERAP needed to encourage as many employees to remain in Algeria as possible.

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<sup>73</sup> Naylor, "A Post-Colonial Decolonization," 186-7.

<sup>74</sup> US Interests Section Algiers, Telegram 418 to Secretary of State, March 1971, Box 1487, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>75</sup> American Embassy Paris, Telegram Number 07916 to Secretary of State, 15 May 1971, Box 1486, RG 59, NARA.

Despite the rhetoric around staffing in the build-up nationalisation, for ERAP, personnel was a weakness. In its failure to prepare for the possibility of an impending nationalisation, personnel were concentrated in Algeria and despite the company's promises there were very few viable options to redeploy returning staff.<sup>76</sup> Sonatrach was able to capitalise on the uncertainty by simply refusing to contribute to the wages of these personnel for three months, leaving the French operators out of pocket as they had to continue to pay staff who were not working for ERAP in practice.<sup>77</sup>

In all, the perceptions and realities of Sonatrach staffing capabilities shaped both the nationalisation of the oil sector, but also, more broadly, how the process of oil nationalisation sat, sometime awkwardly, within the Algerian state's larger pursuit of economic independence and nation building. Through the years of progressive nationalisations, Sonatrach wrestled with an ever-growing staffing shortage, brought into ever sharper relief by the state's pursuit of economic independence through oil. International perceptions of staffing capabilities and cultures were, however, a key enabler of Algerian foreign and domestic policies, most clearly illustrated by the maintenance of expanding commercial, but nominally depoliticised links with the US. Staffing structures and capabilities also shaped the nationalisation of French oil companies, underwriting the aggressive strategy towards settlement terms within ERAP, and was leveraged as a strength by the Algerians through the negotiations. At the same time, however, domestically, efforts to shore up the staffing crisis resulted

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<sup>76</sup> American Embassy Paris, Telegram Number 9006 to Secretary of State, 25 May 1971, Box 1487, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>77</sup> American Embassy Paris, Telegram 07916.

in reduced state income and control as well as reinvigorated regionalised divisions and economic disequilibrium.

### Technocrats, Mayors, and Farmers: Oil Infrastructures and Economic Policy

Between 1965 and 1975 the output and consumption of hydrocarbons in both Algeria and France rose by truly staggering amounts. In oil alone, Algeria doubled its output and nearly tripled its consumption, and French consumption doubled.<sup>78</sup> A wide historiography has detailed how the oil nationalisations defined the impacts of these shifts in Algeria, causing a vast accumulation of wealth at state level, which was wielded to consolidate centralised state power.<sup>79</sup> Scholars have documented how oil duties accounted for 21.3% of total state revenue in 1971, rising to 36.8% the following year and to over 60% by 1976.<sup>80</sup> This was used to 'buy' a range of political support, from clan patronage to the state subsidies of energy, education and food.<sup>81</sup> Oil revenue was also used to dilute factions and regional divisions and bolster economic institutions, with the twin aims of reducing reliance on French trade and on the private sector, driving towards an independent socialist economic structure.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> CEIC Data, "Algeria Oil Consumption," 1965-2023," and "France Oil Consumption, 1965-2022," accessed at <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/algeria/oil-consumption> and <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/france/oil-consumption> (accessed 19 September 2023); Euan Mearns, "Post-peak Algeria?" 21 March 2014, accessed at <https://euanmearns.com/post-peak-algeria/> (accessed 19 September 2023).

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Henry, "Algeria's agonies," Lala Muradova, "Oil wealth and authoritarianism: Algeria in the Arab Spring," *Revista Española de Ciencia Política* 40 (March 2016): 69-70; Entelis, "Algeria".

<sup>80</sup> Schliephake, *Oil and Regional Development*, 53.

<sup>81</sup> Entelis, "Algeria," 654-5; Michael J Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring* (London: Hurst and Company, 2012), 235.

<sup>82</sup> Dirk Vandewalle, "At the Brink: Chaos in Algeria," *World Policy Journal* 9, no.4 (Fall - Winter, 1992): 706-7. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40209277>.

The impacts and the chronologies of the Algerian hydrocarbon nationalisation on France have been comparatively less studied. However, these perspectives are critical to understanding how the nexus and its infrastructural legacies operated and the impacts they had on the French side. Whilst it is notable that the nationalisation precipitated French state efforts to capture new supply lines, primarily from the Middle East, most work on the energy policy in France in the 1970s takes the 1973 oil crisis as their starting point, exploring how this provoked efforts to reduce energy consumption and drive towards nuclear energy sources.<sup>83</sup> This is despite evidence that in the early 1960s, the French state was able to use the quota system underpinned by Algerian oil to great effect. They do so not only in macro-economic terms, moving the French balance of payments from a deficit (of which oil accounted for one third) to a positive, and fuelling domestic refining, but also, as in Algeria, by shaping economic policy and shoring up political support.<sup>84</sup> In these years, the French state deliberately wielded the quota system to favour national companies, to advantage smaller or larger oil companies, (dependent on shifts in wider policy development) and to benefit specific geographical spaces, most notably Paris and certain rural areas. This policy sought to stimulate growth in assigned areas, off-setting political pressure from local agricultural groups and to drive political support from local voters.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> See for example, Andrzej Jakubowski, "Phasing out coal in the French energy sector," *Towards a just transition: coal, cars and the world of work* ed, Béla Galgóczi, (ETUI: European Trade Union Institute. Belgium 2019), 82. Retrieved from <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/2067219/towards-a-just-transition/2821321/>; Stephen Cihan Aykut, "Reassembling Energy Policy: Models, Forecasts, and Policy Change in Germany and France," *Science & Technology Studies*, 32, no.4 (2019): 18-19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23987/sts.65324>; Allen Dulles Jebson, "Comparing the Energy Security Strategies of France and West Germany," *The Fletcher Forum* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 260-263 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45331083>. See also, Bohling, Joseph "Energy and Power,"

<sup>84</sup> Brault, "Oil Roads," 4-6.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

Existing studies therefore highlight the ways in which states sought to wield oil revenue as an enabler: the monetary facilitation of independent administrative policy. In both cases, this revenue was used to create political support and impose a planned, centrally driven approach to the economy. In the Algerian case, this use of oil revenue was bound inextricably to both the oil nationalisation and the construction of the independent nation-state, whilst historiographies on the French case tend to replicate the chronologies of political independence, binding the impacts of Algerian oil to the late colonial years, with little consideration of the shifts through the later 1960s and early 70s. However, as we have seen in earlier chapters, oil does not operate solely on state balance sheets, nor did its infrastructures keep pace with political shifts.

In this section, I turn to the interplays between both the French and Algerian administrations and the physical infrastructures of oil in the decade 1965-1975. I explore the ways in which state policy attempted to deploy these infrastructures in pursuit of key policy goals, comparing and contrasting these state efforts to the relationships between local actors, the physical infrastructures, and the state policies translated through or vested within the physical assemblage.<sup>86</sup> I focus primarily on those infrastructures linked to the Franco-Algerian oil nexus, including the Fos megaport in Marseille and the Arzew refinery in Algeria, as well as the Saharan oil installations, which were painted, by the Algerian state, as ‘outposts’ of ‘neo-colonial’

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<sup>86</sup> On assemblage, see discussion in chapter one and Watts “Hyper Extractivism,” 208-9.

influence.<sup>87</sup> I argue that the physical networks of oil, not just its revenue streams, played a crucial role in the design of state policy, but also, critically, shaped its local and social impacts. First, I will demonstrate that both states saw oil infrastructures as key to a centrally planned economy and as an important means to entrench themselves politically, particularly in their respective southern ‘hinterlands.’<sup>88</sup> I then turn to consider the role of local forces, most notably local government, and communities, to demonstrate how these actors leveraged these infrastructures to create and shape local power bases and economic centres. In doing so, local actors fractured and undermined the centralising intentions behind state sponsored infrastructures.

### Oil Nodes and the Central State

Both the French and Algerian states in this period had ambitious plans to deploy oil infrastructures, as opposed to oil revenue, as a means to impose centralist economic planning and to shore up domestic support and political influence. I trace here how central states attempted to use oil networks to expand their administration and control over critical constituencies in their respective southern hinterlands,

For the French government, these efforts centred on Marseille, and specifically, Fos. Until the government opened a new port here in 1968, Fos was a small port town,

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<sup>87</sup> Belaid Abdesselam, “L’industrialisation en Algérie : Echec ou réussite? ” August 2009, 94.

[http://www.belaidabdesselam.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/industrialisation\\_en\\_algerie-pdf.pdf](http://www.belaidabdesselam.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/industrialisation_en_algerie-pdf.pdf)

<sup>88</sup> On Marseille’s relationship with Paris and central power see, for example, Sophie Biass and Jean-Louis Fabiani, Marseille, a City beyond Distinction,” *Nottingham French Studies* 50, no.1 (March 2011): 83-85 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297052171\\_Marseille\\_a\\_city\\_beyond\\_distinction](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297052171_Marseille_a_city_beyond_distinction) and Nicholas Hewitt, *Wicked City: The Many Cultures of Marseille* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2019), 27. On the Sahara’s relationship with Algiers, see Amir Mohamed Aziz, “The South of Algeria has something to say,” *Africa is a Country*, 30 July 2019, <https://africasacountry.com/2019/07/the-south-has-something-to-say>

50km west of Marseille city. Fos had a deep-sea port, ample clear land for development and was close to the North African ports.<sup>89</sup> Here, the state intended to build a hydrocarbon specialist mega-port, using this oil infrastructure as the basis for two interlinked strands of economic and political policy.<sup>90</sup>

The first was the creation of a Marseillais economic pole. This was one of the eight new industrial nodes which intended to re-shape economic growth in France, by balancing developing across France, beyond Paris.<sup>91</sup> The idea was written into the Fifth Economic Plan (1966-70). At its core, this plan intended to reinforce France's status as a regional leader in the refining and sale of oil but also to stimulate local economic development. The new port would support a resource transport node, centring France in the European supply network, supply an expanded refining and petrochemical production site, and power a huge industrial grid. The local availability of crude and gas was predicted to bring down local energy prices and stimulating growth in new industries, such as steel, and thereby provide high levels of employment.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, it was estimated that by 1985 Fos would provide some 160,000 jobs.<sup>93</sup> The depth of the Fos port was absolutely critical to state plans here and explains why the port was located so far west of the existing urban centre. Unlike the existing ports in and closer to Marseille itself: Fos could accommodate the ever-growing size of oil tankers.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Joanna Kinsey, "The application of growth pole theory in the aire métropolitaine Marseillaise," *Geoforum* 9, no.4-5 (1978): 253. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185\(78\)90002-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185(78)90002-7).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.; John N. Tuppen, "The Development of French New Towns: An Assessment of Progress." *Urban Studies* 20, no. 1 (1983): 14-15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43082571>.

<sup>91</sup> Gwynne and Giles, "The Concept," 37; Jennings, "The Marseille Petroscape," 3.

<sup>92</sup> Tuppen, "Development of French New Towns," 25; Kinsey, "The application of growth pole theory," 253.

<sup>93</sup> Gwynne and Giles, "The Concept," 40.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 36; Jennings, "The Marseille Petroscape," 2-3.

Secondly, De Gaulle's government was seeking to offset a rapid growth in anti-centrist movement sparked by regional imbalances in economic growth.<sup>95</sup> Here again, the new oil infrastructures offered a unique opportunity. Broadly speaking, state-led reforms to combat these movement sought to impose centrist and nationalist policy through a narrow group of regional powers, which were closely linked to the state through communal co-operation and regrouping, local financial reform, and incentives for creating metropolitan authorities.<sup>96</sup> These efforts were reformed but continued under Pompidou, who came to power in 1970, with efforts to keep regions under the strict control of the prefectures on one hand, and local notables on the other.<sup>97</sup>

The Fos port satisfied both of these prerogatives. The port itself fell directly under state control. This meant that planning rights and much of the taxation benefit fell to central government.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the port would reshape the political landscape of the wider port region under a narrow regional leadership. Here, the role of Fos in motivating and underwriting the imposition of a 'new urban area,' or 'ZAN' around the Fos-Etang de Berre region is critical. The Etang de Berre ZAN was one of the nine 'new towns,' built in the late 1960s and early 70s, to accommodate demographic growth as well as underpin the wider effort de-centralise the pattern of economic

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<sup>95</sup> Bivar, *Organic Resistance*, 91; Andrew W. M. Smith, *Terror and Terroir: The Winegrowers of the Languedoc and Modern France*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 89-91.

<sup>96</sup> Yves Mény, "France: The construction and reconstruction of the centre, 1945–86," *West European Politics* 10, no.4 (1987): 54-55. DOI:[10.1080/01402388708424651](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402388708424651).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 55-56.

<sup>98</sup> Jacques Garnier and Jean-Benoît Zimmermann. "L'Aire Métropolitaine Marseillaise et les territoires de l'industrie," *Géographie, économie, société* 8, no. 2(2006): 223-4. <https://doi.org/10.3166/ges.8.215-238>; Kinsey, "The application of growth pole theory," 261.

growth beyond Paris.<sup>99</sup> The Etang de Berre was the last ZAN to be designed, and was specifically created to accommodate the growth in population sparked by the new industrial complex, as well as to support the ongoing expansion of Marseille.<sup>100</sup> The ZAN was effectively a centralised structure, with vast planning and budgetary controls held by the state but, in line with wider policy, offered a relatively strong influence for a narrow group of designated local actors.<sup>101</sup>

The relationship between the evolving plans for the Fos port and the Franco-Algerian decolonisation process was complex. Whilst it would be an overreach to claim the port was shaped entirely by the Algerian oil connection, the two were deeply interconnected. For the central state, its specialist hydrocarbon port had to be built in close proximity to Algerian and Libyan crude sources.<sup>102</sup> Early plans for the port had been built on the assumption that the Algerian supply would remain a critical and reliable supply.<sup>103</sup> It is notable, as discussed in chapter three, that without this supply line Marseille was poorly placed in the global networks of oil. It was to a significant extent therefore the Algerian and North African supply line which dictated that the hydrocarbon port should be located in the centre of the Mediterranean coastline.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Tuppen, "Development of French New Towns," 14-15.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid; James M. Rubenstein, *The French New Towns* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 38, 42, 47-8; René Borruet, "Les villes nouvelles françaises ou l'intercommunalité forcée le cas des rives de l'étang de Berre," *Rives nord-méditerranéennes* 25 (2006): 65-69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rives.596>.

<sup>102</sup> Arthur D. Little, Bertrand L. de Frondeville, James L. Goodier, Michael C. Huston and Bruce M. Putnam, "Foreign Deep Water Port Developments: A Selective Overview of Economics, Engineering, and Environmental Factors," Institute of Water Resources Report 71-11, December 1971, 29-35. accessed at <https://www.iwr.usace.army.mil/Portals/70/docs/iwrreports/IWRREPORT71-11DECEMBER1971VOLUMEIOFIII.pdf> on 5 January 2024.

<sup>103</sup> The first work in Fos was the creation of a deep-water port in 1961 by the Marseille Chamber of Commerce, at which time the Algerian supply line was viewed as secure in the long term. Daumalin and Gramaglia, "Neither leave here"; Hoyle, "Oil-refineries," 172-174.

<sup>104</sup> Beltran, "The French gas network," 268; Merk and Comtois, "Competitiveness of port-cities," 67.

Other deciding factors in the location selection were the close ties to a hinterland for the oil products, in this case, facilitated by the South European pipeline, itself closely tied to the Algerian supply line.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, there were other factors connected with the Algerian line that contributed to Fos' selection by the state above rival pitches for the nation's hydrocarbon port. Selection parameters included that the region could demonstrate viable growth in traffic over the past ten years. In Marseille, this was fuelled in part by its franc oil connection.<sup>106</sup> Marseille was already a hub in LNG imports, thanks to the Arzew line, which would be supplemented by the Skikda-Marseille Tonkin port from 1973. The Algeria LNG would be a power source for the south coast, the Rhône region and even Paris.<sup>107</sup> More locally, this gas functioned to fuel crucial inter-industry synergies, such as in 1972, when Air Liquide started using by-products from the regasification of Gaz de France's LNG.<sup>108</sup> For the French government, a hydrocarbon specialist port was a critical political and economic lever. The placement and expansion of this port was thus shaped, to a significant extent, by the networked geographies of Algerian oil.

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<sup>105</sup> Little et al "Foreign Deep Water Ports," 29-35; Gwynne and Giles, "The concept," 39.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Between 1956 and 1966, French oil imports from North Africa, which predominately routed through Marseille rose from nothing to some 40% Comité Professionnel de Pétrole, "Eléments Statistiques, Activité de l'Industrie Pétrolière," *Pétrole* 79 (Paris: 1980): B26, E 112, cited in Jebson, "Comparing the Energy Security Strategies," 223. Merk and Comtois, "Competitiveness of port-cities," 67.

<sup>107</sup> Jacques Joly and Henri Chamussy, "Géographie du futur engagé : le port industriel de Fos-sur-Mer," *Revue de géographie alpine* 57, no. 4 (1969) : 846. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/rga.1969.3448>.

<sup>108</sup> Kinsey, "The application of growth pole theory," 259. Nicolas Mat, Juliette Cerceau, Lei Shi, Hung-Suck Park, Guillaume Junqua and Miguel Lopez-Ferber, "Socio-ecological transitions toward low-carbon port cities: trends, changes and adaptation processes in Asia and Europe," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 114 (2016): 367. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.04.058>.

Similarly, Algerian state officials had vast ambitions for their expanding oil infrastructures as a basis for new economic nodes and extended powers of the central administration in its southern regions. State influence over these physical networks had been expanding over the 1960s and more fell under Algerian state control through the progressive nationalisations. As in Marseille, there were clear, interlinked economic and political motivations here, and the state plan focused along two channels. First, the creation of wealth and interlinked industries by devolving wealth via production nodes. In this vein, the state attempted to create agricultural and industrial zones around the desert oil centres. Abdesselam, for example, wrote of his 'dream' to use specifically the oil and gas nodes to create 'centres of life' and oasis settlements in the Sahara. In this vein, he directed a number of studies into establishing zones of agricultural exploitation around Hassi Messaoud, Gassi Touil and In Amenas. The state also undertook other vast agricultural development schemes aimed to 'green' the Sahara, taking advantage of the enormous land resources and cheap fossil energy.<sup>109</sup> This would, in turn, reduce Algeria's reliance on expensive food imports, and was intended to establish Algerian agriculture as a regional leader.<sup>110</sup> Such schemes would also channel oil revenue and leverage hydrocarbon infrastructures into other economic sectors with higher employment rates.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Abdesselam, *Le pétrole*, 506; Salah E Zaimeche and Keith Sutton, "The degradation of the Algerian environment through economic and social 'development' in the 1980s," *Land Degradation and Development* 2, no.4 (1990): 320. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ldr.3400020407>; Lahouari Addi, "Algeria's New Oil Strategy," in *Oil in the New World Order* eds Henry Clement-Moore and Kate Gillipsie (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1995), 89-92.

<sup>110</sup> Hamamouche et al, "New reading," 221.

More generally, the Algerian state designed its oil infrastructure to create entirely new economic centres in deprived areas. In 1974, for example, US operators were baffled by Sonatrach's insistence on locating its latest four refineries well outside of the established nodes and pipeline networks, Tiaretm, Constantine, Bour'ou Arredidz and Tizi Ouzoo were all being considered. The state logic was that this placement would devolve resource wealth across the country, fuelling both associated industries and employment opportunities, despite the significant increase in cost.<sup>112</sup>

As in France, moreover, these infrastructural nodes did not just offer economic opportunity but also the potential to expand centralised administration beyond major cities and populous heartlands. Well into the 1960s and 70s, the desert remained a hub of separationist tensions. Rooted in historic and colonial segregation, contemporary intra-Saharan independence movements, like the Tuareg uprising and defiance against an 'exclusionary' and wealth-stealing Algiers, secessionist movements were a real threat.<sup>113</sup> The new state pursued a number of policies to secure its position here, including the neutralisation of the authority of potential rivals in the region, most notably Tuareg groups, and fuelling sectarian division in a deliberate attempt to reinforce state claims, particularly in oil rich areas.<sup>114</sup> Abdesselam also saw his proposed new oil-based urban and agricultural centres in the same way, writing that 'For the Algerian political leadership, this Sahara is our country and it is imperative to fill it if we do not want others to one day think of taking our place in doing so.'<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> American Consul Oran, Airgram A-26 to Department of State, 7 May 1974, Box 46B, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>113</sup> Sèbe, "A fragmented and forgotten decolonization," 205-6, 212-214.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 212; Aziz, "The South of Algeria," International Crisis Group, "Algeria's South"

<sup>115</sup> Abdesselam, *Le pétrole*, 506.

Oil infrastructures were directly leveraged to achieve these ends. Perhaps most directly, oil-fuelled industrial areas could be declared 'industrial zones' under Algerian law. These were areas of 50-200 hectares which housed at least five industrial enterprises and provided at least 1,000 jobs. In ways similar to the ZAN in Marseille, industrial zones were formally insulated from local political influences, who had no authority over planning or economic policy in these regions.<sup>116</sup> Instead, investment and oversight were provided directly from the state. Such regions were in operation at Hassi Messaoud, In Amenas from 1969, and Ghardaïa.

Oil infrastructure was also used to extend the influence of the central government as a mechanism through which to co-opt support and regulate sectarian divisions to its advantage. This included at Ouargla, a city which had grown exponentially due to its proximity to Hassi Messaoud and its location at the heart of the oil transport network.<sup>117</sup> Here the state invested in a generous 'special development fund' to expand the administration and increase regional control through this new political seat. Ouargla quickly emerged as an administrative capital and regional metropolis with a close relationship to Algiers.<sup>118</sup>

The fuelling of sectarian divisions through oil infrastructure is particularly evident in the case of Ghardaïa. Here oil-backed businesses and the associated 'industrial

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<sup>116</sup> Ratiba Herizi and Djamila Belkacem, "Local industrial development in Algeria," *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research* 10 no. 3 (July 2016): 25-26 24-33 25-26. [https://jbrmr.com/cdn/article\\_file/i-24\\_c-226.pdf](https://jbrmr.com/cdn/article_file/i-24_c-226.pdf).

<sup>117</sup> Mohamed Chaba, "Une vieille cité devenue métropole : Ouargla," *Méditerranée* 99 no.3-4 (2002): 104-6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/medit.2002.3269>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

zone' concentrated a growing wealth in the region. The state deliberately localised the settlement of Saharan tribes here throughout the 1960s to fuel Mozabite-Chaamba tensions, using the growth in wealth to play off the politics of exclusion.<sup>119</sup> The exclusion of indigenous and particularly Mozabite claims were later worsened by designation of Ghardaïa as the provincial capital in 1985, a nomination linked again to the oil growth in the region.<sup>120</sup> This then multiplied the presence of Arab officials and administrators and deepened sectarian tensions, setting Mozabites against Bedouin Arabs, the latter leveraging the Arab national parties for economic and political gain.<sup>121</sup>

For both the Algerian and French state governments then, oil infrastructures were perceived as important levers of state policy. In both cases, targeted infrastructural expansion, as opposed to purely monetary exchanges, were critical policy and state-building tools that were deployed to build nationalist economic and political ties, particularly in regions like the Sahara where state boundaries and administrative authority were deeply contested. These policies sought to extend and reinforce state influence and control, retaining centralised authority and tax benefit, and deploying power through narrow channels of local political support, and directing revenue sharing, particularly through employment. Moreover, the futures they aimed to conjure, and the operating strategy of state level actors, were influenced by the immediate past. The case of Fos, for instance, shows the continued influence of the

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<sup>119</sup> Aziz, "The South of Algeria,"; International Crisis Group, "Algeria's South"

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

infrastructural momentum created by the interconnected Franco-Algerian oil nexus. Furthermore, the state's approach here took little account of the importance of local agency around these infrastructures, to which I now turn.

### The Importance of Failure: The Re-Appropriation of Oil Infrastructures

In both Algeria and France, the state's attempts to create new economic nodes around the oil infrastructures met with very little success, and as a result, the outputs of the centralising political intentions beyond these nodes have often been obscured in the historiography. In Algeria, for example, the Saharan agricultural zones failed to emerge as a new economic force.<sup>122</sup> Marseille-Fos, meanwhile, failed to develop into a powerful port within the European market, and the southern economic pole never materialised.<sup>123</sup>

In both cases, scholars, like Amichi and Paché have attributed the failures to the government's overly technocratic approach to the economy, which lacked appreciation for local economic realities.<sup>124</sup> In addition, the state's dependency on oil as an *income stream* has been seen as a crucial determinant. Most scholars have attributed the failure of the Marseille- Fos port to the 1973 economic crash (itself rooted in oil prices), which stalled investment in the area, and to its hydrocarbon

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<sup>122</sup> Meriam Fareh Hamamouche, Tayeb Otmane and Yaël Kouzmine, « Bilan spatialisé de la mise en valeur agricole au Sahara algérien. Mythes, réalisations et impacts dans le Touat-Gourara-Tidikelt, » *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography* 632 (2013). DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/cybergeo.25732> Online version unpaginated; Farida Amichi, Sami Bouarfa, Marcel Kuper, M., and Patrick Caron, "From Oasis Archipelago to Pioneering Eldorado in Algeria's Sahara," *Irrigation and Drainage* 69 (2020): 169-170. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ird.2308>.

<sup>123</sup> Comtois and Merk, "Competitiveness of port-cities," 49.

<sup>124</sup> Otmane and Kouzmine, "Bilan spatialisé," Amichi et al, "From Oasis Archipelago," 169-70; Giles Paché, "A socio-political analysis of obstacles to inclusive regional development: The case of Marseille metropolitan area," *Advances in Management and Applied Economics* 7, no.1 (2017): 55-56. ISSN 1792-7552.

dependency.<sup>125</sup> As historians have shown, whereas the aim of the administration was to use the Marseillais economic zone to knit the region under a singular political and economic unit, the port's failure led instead to a stagnation of the historic port in the east, high levels of unemployment, and a progressive disconnect between east and west.<sup>126</sup>

But while the existing literature thus emphasises economic dependency on oil, I argue that a crucial role was played by the interactions between the physical networks of oil and local actors. Thus, both the planned economic nodes, and their ultimate outcomes, were largely shaped by *local* interests, rather than being merely a product of centrist planning. I suggest that viewing these efforts retrospectively through the lens of economic flows, and thereby ultimately failure, has obscured the important interventions and influences of this dynamic groups of local actors, acting according to their agenda. This is not, however, to overstate the role of local government. Certainly, the central state retained a critical role: it was central state funding that facilitated the development of new urban and industrial areas as well as transport networks. The point is rather that local government wielded a combination of tools at its disposal (port location, state ambition and existing local powers and privileges) highly effectively to influence the political and economic shape of the region.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Nicolas Mat, Juliette Cerceau, Guillaume Junqua, Frédéric Dagnet and Hervé Moine, "La gouvernance Port-Ville face aux enjeux d'une société bas carbone: illustration avec le cas de Marseille-Fos, » in *Port City Governance* eds., Yann Alix, Bruno Delsalle and Claude Comtois (Cormelles-le-Royal : EMS éditions, 2014), 252.

<sup>126</sup> Garnier and Zimmermann, "L'Aire Métropolitaine Marseillaise," 225-6; Kinsey, "The application of growth pole theory," 261.

In both France and Algeria, these local interests exploited particularly the specific geographies, infrastructures, and technocracies of oil to achieve their goals. Indeed, as we will see in the case of Fos, these interactions actually reversed the state's centralising ambitions and instead shaped the rise of local political influences that the national government could not control. Because these programmes in many senses failed to tangibly materialise, their impacts on the local regions have been understudied. Nonetheless, the *potential* as well as the concrete infrastructural changes imposed by these plans had huge impacts on local communities and local governance.

In the Marseille region, local councils and political actors shaped how the state vision of a new economic and urban node translated into political and physical space. These actors effectively leveraged the state's ambitions and practical needs for the new port and town developments to ultimately invert the centralising aims. In particular, they secured increased power and influence across smaller, fragmented, and independent pockets of local government. The role of oil was crucial here, because, as noted above, it was the technocratic regimes of oil (that is to say, the location of the deep seaport so far west, in Fos) and their disconnect with established and expected economic and political regimes that centralised Marseille which created the critical space for local governments to wield influence. With the new port, the shape of the region's demography and economy shifted decisively in favour of the peripheries, which gained 100,000 inhabitants and 55,000 jobs from Marseille-city

after 1970.<sup>127</sup> Fos-sur-Mer alone saw its population over triple between 1968 and 1975.<sup>128</sup> In addition, local councils exploited the state's vested interest in the success of the port as well as the difficulties managing the urban explosion caused by its location and construction, which began in 1966. Local governments held much of the land that was required for both the new housing and industrial sites.<sup>129</sup> They could, and as I will show, ultimately did, withhold planning rights and access to assert their interests vis-a-vis the central state as needed.

The evolutions of the White Paper for the new ZAN issued in 1967 demonstrates both of these mechanisms. This proposal set out a ZAN structure that wove together the series of towns from Marseille to Fos, where each town had a relatively equal access to central funding as well as influence over the ZAN. The Marseille administration, however, refused to support any version of a ZAN which divested significant power and money into its neighbouring towns, many of which, as Communist Party-led councils, were seen as rivals.<sup>130</sup> The central state, meanwhile, faced a time crisis: the port was already in construction and the structure of the ZAN was critical in providing oversight, management and land.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, given the wider ambitions for the Marseillais area, the support of the Marseille's Mayor, Gaston Defferre, and his administration was key.<sup>132</sup> The central state was therefore forced to adopt key changes to the proposal.<sup>133</sup> New towns lost much of their initial status,

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<sup>127</sup> René Borruey and Mario Fabre, « Marseille, les nouvelles échelles de la ville portuaire, » *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine* 55-56 (1992) : 58-59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/aru.1992.1673>

<sup>128</sup> Daumalin and Gramaglia, "Neither leave here"

<sup>129</sup> Borruey, « Les villes nouvelles françaises, » 74.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 71-4

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

power and funding, which would instead be funnelled to existing developments, and particularly Marseille. The new proposal included an explicit stress on Marseille's 'preponderance in the urban hierarchy' and set out increased connections between Marseille and Fos in order to reinforce Marseille's role as a local leader.<sup>134</sup> In this case, then, Marseille interests drew on their own centralisation in the state's economic planning as well as the practical requirements of the port construction to reinforce its own predominance despite the best efforts of the government in Paris.

Other local interests also engaged in similar exploitation of the state's ambitions for the Fos-port. Indeed, as a result, the state was ultimately forced to concede, despite vehement objection, to a far greater divesting of power into the councils of Fos-sur-Mer, Martigues, Port de Bouc and Saint-Mitre. In 1972, the state's attempt to apply the Boscher law to the ZAN, triggered an outright rebellion.<sup>135</sup> A number of councils, including Marseille, simply withdrew. The ZAN, the centrepiece of the integration of the region under the Marseillais pole was entirely fractured, shrinking from 14 municipalities to 4, geographically and politically scattered under the supervision of different municipal councils.<sup>136</sup> Crucially, those consenting to join the reconstituted ZAN leveraged the weak state position to achieve greater local powers and funding access. Fos-sur-Mer for example, only agreed to take up membership if its municipal council was granted vastly expanded rights over urbanisation.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 71-2.

<sup>135</sup> Briefly, the Boscher law gave local authorities in the new towns to choose three possible structures under which to constitute themselves, either as an Ensemble Urbain, or a Syndicat Communautaire d'Aménagement, or a Communauté Urbaine, with important implications for the operations of local power. See Rubenstein, *French New Towns*, 54-5 for more details.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 73-4; Tuppen, "Development of French New Towns," 14-15.

<sup>137</sup> Borruy, "Les villes nouvelles françaises," 74.

Others, notably Martigues, Port de Bouc and Saint-Mitre took this further, not only refusing to integrate within the ZAN but also refusing to authorise municipal building permits for months.<sup>138</sup> This was a critical blow to the state, particularly due to the vast land, urgently needed for the industrial and demographic development, held by these councils. The state was forced to negotiate.<sup>139</sup> In return for the movement on building permits, the towns obtained permission to constitute themselves as a *syndicat intercommunal à vocation multiple*, under which they held the rights to manage development intercommunally.<sup>140</sup> They also leveraged significant financial investment for their own towns, funds that had initially been reserved exclusively for the planned new developments.<sup>141</sup> These local successes in leveraging land and building permits for funds had significant impacts on the economy and demography on the region. Martigues in particular, alongside Vitrolles, capitalised on these opportunities to underwrite a service industry boom.<sup>142</sup>

Even after the initial construction of the port, moreover, planning and land control remained key tools of local governments. The Mayor of Port-Saint-Louis du Rhône, for example, placed some of the land bordering the industrial zone and residential areas under an agricultural designation.<sup>143</sup> This set deliberate limitations on the shape of the new infrastructures.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, the localisation of heavy industry

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> A SIVOM, or intercommunal association. Ibid. Rubenstein, *French New Towns*, 56.

<sup>141</sup> Borruey, "Les villes nouvelles françaises," 74.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 73-76; Tuppen, "Development of French New Towns," 17.

<sup>143</sup> Daumalin and Gramaglia, "Neither leave here."

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

and associated pollution around Fos created a groundswell of public opinion against oil pollution. In a 1970s mayoral campaign in Fos-sur-Mer one candidate capitalised on the outcry and ran on a platform that linked greater local control over planning with control over pollution.<sup>145</sup> In this case, divested local control was justified specifically in terms of oil infrastructure, with the ubiquity and deleterious impacts of oil pollution lending popular support and legitimacy.

A similar dynamic was also at work in a different context, showing the breadth of the phenomenon. This was the case of how the Marseille Council approached the rationalisation of oil depots. Small scale and company-run, these nonetheless also reflected the placement of the Marseille region in the wider state economic plans and the significant of local pressures as well as the effective wielding of land controls. Up until the mid-1960s, oil depots multiplied across the region, including in densely populated areas.<sup>146</sup> These were not correspondent to the local market but instead were shaped by the longer distance oil supply lines into which Marseille, through the South European pipeline, had become increasingly entrenched.<sup>147</sup> The depots' location in highly urbanised areas was a growing concern for local authorities, particularly after Algerian independence groups attacked the Mourepiane depot. The fire burned for ten days, there were 17 casualties, and houses were evacuated.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Marseille Technical Services, Note for the Secretary General of Expansion, 7 June 1972, Box 753 W, MAM; Jennings, "The Marseille Petroscape," 4-5.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

Municipal officials, however, had no authority to enforce closures, and the companies refused to co-operate with any rationalisation of regional storage for over seven years. The local council eventually forced the issue by leveraging their power over planning permissions: they only passed applications on newly proposed depots and related infrastructures in exchange for a closure or reduction on less desirable existing sites.<sup>149</sup> The offer was further sweetened by the Council actually buying up and re-appropriating the old sites. In this way, Total's large former oil depot in the Saint Andre neighbourhood of Marseille was re-appropriated into emergency social housing.<sup>150</sup> Such changes were a material echo of earlier financial flows of oil into Marseille's social housing system under the Constantine Plan.<sup>151</sup> Local authorities were not only able to rationalise the depots, but also shape the evolution of oil infrastructures on their own terms: applications with strong employment opportunities, for example, were favoured.<sup>152</sup> In all, although lacking clear legislative powers, local governments were critical in defining and mediating the spatial dynamics of oil through local land controls, engaging in a process of urban reinvention with long term consequences for the social geography of the Marseille region.

Local governments were not the only actors who shaped how oil infrastructures, and the economic plans attached to them impacted local communities. The case of the industrial and agricultural centres planned in the Sahara, and the critical role of local

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<sup>149</sup> Marseille Technical Services, Note; Marseille Municipal Council, Meeting Minutes, 21 June 1965. Box 753 W, MAM; Jennings, "The Marseille Petroscape," 5; Jennings, "Environmental Colonialism," 16.

<sup>150</sup> Lacroix, Note for the Assistant Secretary General, Camp de St-Mene, 1 April 1977, Box 80 W 803 MAM; Jennings, "The Marseille Petroscape," 5; Jennings, "Environmental Colonialism," 16.

<sup>151</sup> On oil money, the Constantine Plan and Marseille's social housing see Nasiali, *Native to the Republic*, 79-82.

<sup>152</sup> Marseille Technical Services, Note; Marseille Municipal Council, Meeting Minutes; Jennings, "The Marseille Petroscape," 5.

farmers and oil workers, is a key example here. Oil workers played a crucial role in linking oil infrastructure and state economic and political initiatives. For example, in Ghardaïa, new businesses founded in and around oil were booming by 1971. As noted above, the region qualified for the industrial zone designation, which was due to the emergence of local businesses founded by former oil workers using their surplus wages.<sup>153</sup> Alongside their direct earnings, the oil sector was critical to these emergent businesses, providing a steady market for car parts in the region.<sup>154</sup> The state was then able to fuel and encourage these efforts in support of their political and economic aims for the region. In particular, these new businesses could keep their own running costs very low as the government provided energy made from condensates from Hassi R'Mel at a substantially reduced cost.<sup>155</sup> This was a deliberate new move made by the independent state: condensates had long been available but had previously been burnt off as waste: now they powered local business.<sup>156</sup> In this case, then, oil revenue in the form of wages, alongside the market and energy it provided, directly fuelled economic growth and increased centralised control through the critical 'industrial zone' designation.

Granted, the Ghardaïa case was an exception. More broadly, very few oil-centred industrial start-ups were founded in the Sahara. Interestingly, however, whilst only a small minority of oil workers chose to invest in the industrial sector using their high wages, these wages did enable them to propel new demographic and social trends. Most chose to invest instead in housing. This was facilitated by the unique structures

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<sup>153</sup> Schliephake, *Oil and Regional Development*, 120-124

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. Malti, *Le pétrole rouge*, 175.

of the Sahara, where high monetary assets combined with a rare availability of space comparative to the north.<sup>157</sup> By the mid-1970s the Oasis Wilaya had by far the most houses per person and the highest proportion of privately funded houses in the country.<sup>158</sup>

An often overlooked, but critical, segment of oil sector workers were the local oil service providers. Unlike Sonatrach itself, such local providers were staffed almost entirely by local people.<sup>159</sup> They therefore seemed to embody and facilitate state efforts to devolve resource wealth and underwrite wider employment opportunities. However, in a deeply ironic twist of state policy, this group, and the economic connections they represented were marginalised and excluded from the flows of oil wealth by the oil nationalisation itself. Through the nationalisation process (and in an attempt to manage its ever-growing portfolio) Sonatrach centralised its service provision.<sup>160</sup> This in turn eradicated local service providers around the Saharan oil locales. The net result of the centralisation drive therefore was to divert these earnings away from local Saharan communities, favouring the predominately northern and temporary workforce of Sonatrach, whose interactions with local businesses and markets was far more limited.<sup>161</sup> Taken together, the perspective of workers in the Algerian oil sector demonstrates the complex and sometimes contradictory relationships between oil infrastructures and nation-building. Oil

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<sup>157</sup> Schliephake, *Oil and Regional Development*, 115, 121; Jennings, "Contested Sovereignties," 6.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-5

<sup>159</sup> Schliephake, *Oil and Regional Development*, 105-6.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*; Abdesselam, *Le pétrole*, 559-561.

<sup>161</sup> Schliephake, *Oil and Regional Development*, 104-6.

centralised political control but reinforced divisions between oil nodes and local areas as well as between the north and south of Algeria.

Finally, it is worth briefly considering the role of Saharan farmers, who illustrate most clearly how even ‘failed’ state plans connected to oil infrastructures drove significant change in local communities. Whilst the commercial agricultural centres attached to and funded by the oil industry failed to materialise as a large-scale economic force, they definitively marked the region’s economy because of the interventions of these actors. Further, as in Marseille, the manipulation of state inputs by these local actors ultimately altered the intention and aims of the initial state policy. Local farmers, for example, reappropriated the techniques designed to encourage and support commercial scale farming, but did so at a much smaller scale.<sup>162</sup> This included, for example, re-introducing plant varieties intended for mono-cropped palms into diverse, multidimensional systems. They also used drip and crop irrigation techniques, such as in greenhouse cultivations in the Biskra province.<sup>163</sup> These adaptations of the state backed innovations were actually illegal when they were first introduced, but met with significant success.<sup>164</sup> In particular for local ecologies and economies at this scale, these new measures encouraged cultivation within familial

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<sup>162</sup> Hamamouche et al, “New reading,” 221; Bendjelid et al, *Aménageurs*, 419

<sup>163</sup> Hamamouche et al, “New reading,” 221 ; Ali Bensaad, *L’eau et ses enjeux au Sahara* (Paris: Karthala, 2011), 242 ; Abdelkrim Ould Rebai, Tarik Hartani, Mohamed Nacer Chabaca and Marcel Kuper, « Une innovation incrémentielle: La conception et la diffusion d’un pivot d’irrigation artisanal dans le Souf (Sahara algérien) » *Cahiers Agricultures* 26, no,3 (2017): 2-9. DOI : 10.1051/cagri/2017024; Mohamed Naouri, Tarik Hartani and Marcel Kuper, « Mobilités des jeunes ruraux pour intégrer les nouvelles agricultures sahariennes (Biskra, Algérie), » *Cahiers Agricultures*, 24, no. 6 (2015) :381-2 DOI : <https://doi.org/10.1684/agr.2015.0778>.

<sup>164</sup> Meriem Farah Hamamouche, Marcel Kuper and Caroline Lejars, « Émancipation des jeunes des oasis du Sahara algérien par le déverrouillage de l’accès à la terre et à l’eau, » *Cahiers Agricultures* 24, no. 6 (2015) : 415-416, DOI:[10.1684/agr.2015.0777](https://doi.org/10.1684/agr.2015.0777).

units.<sup>165</sup> As Bebbington suggests, these cases demonstrate how the infrastructures attached to oil which ostensibly targeted commercial interests, also inspired and facilitated local people to actually 'co-steer the development trajectory.'<sup>166</sup>

In all of these ways, local interests played an important role in shaping how oil infrastructures translated those state policies they were built to enact, mediating these policies in unintended ways. In the Fos-Marseille region, local governments were able to exploit the gap between the state's economic and political visions for the port and the geographic realities of oil networks. These geographic predeterminants, moreover, were shaped to a significant extent by the enduring Franco-Algerian connection. These interventions caused a fragmentation of local political interests, which in turn, fractured central state influence on the ground. This enabled a marked growth in local autonomy over central planning, and greater control and access to funds: in other words, reversing the state's centralising ambitions for the port. In the Sahara, similar inversions of the relationships between economic policy and oil infrastructures are evident at the level of local farmers, oil sector workers and contractors. Here, local actors redirected efforts to use these infrastructures to integrate the Sahara within the nation state, in ways which fuelled regional disequilibriums and fractures. The growing distance between the Saharan communities and the political north, moreover, was exacerbated by the oil

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<sup>165</sup> Hamamouche et al, "New reading," 221.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.; Anthony Bebbington, Denise Humphreys, Jeffrey Bury, Jeannet Langan, Juan Pablo Muñoz and Martin Scurrah, "Mining and Social Movements: Struggles Over Livelihood and Rural Territorial Development in the Andes," *World Development* 36, no.12 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.11.016>.

nationalisation, which increasingly excluded local communities from the nation's natural resource wealth.

### Conclusion

Although the evolution of the oil sector has conventionally been regarded as intrinsic to economic policy in this period, most famously in the 1971 nationalisation as the concretisation of Algerian independence, the actual processes of oil exploitation and management did not simply transpose central policy into reality. Whilst state revenue streams from oil tend to suggest a kind of uniformity between policy and production, this chapter has argued differently. It has shown the physical and human infrastructures of oil evolved at a more staggered pace and according to logics set by non-state actors. These discrepancies, in turn, had significant impacts on the direction and impact of central economic policy. For the Algerian government, staffing shortages and static working cultures exacerbated by the process of nationalisation were instrumental in securing international capital and markets, and thereby securing more meaningful economic independence from France. Paradoxically, domestic nation-building projects, and particularly the economic integration of the Sahara, were undermined by state attempts to 'staff' the nationalisation. Meanwhile, both the French and Algerian governments attempted to deploy the physical infrastructures of oil to impose economic policies that solidified the power of the post-colonial state. This was the case notably with efforts to centralise economic planning and win political support from domestic peripheries. These same infrastructures, however, were exploited by a range of local actors, including local political circuits, oil sectors workers, and farmers in ways that the state could not control and that reproduced

and reinforced regional divisions. In all, local level oil actors had an important role in moulding the process of economic decolonisation.

### **Conclusion: Oil Imperialism?**

Decolonisation and the end(s) of empire remain amongst the most controversial topics in contemporary historical scholarship. These twin processes are widely accepted to have been amongst the most transformative in recent history, but their boundaries and definitions remain fluid and contested. How, when, why, and where they occurred, and if and when they finished, remain open to debate.<sup>1</sup> As historians

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas and Thompson, "Rethinking Decolonization," 21-22.

have increasingly recognised decolonisation as a process persisting beyond the end of formal imperial rule, the ongoing nature of colonial structures and influences into a postcolonial world have become a focal point of research.<sup>2</sup> The oil sector, both within the Franco-Algerian context and more broadly, is often cited as a stark example of colonial continuities beyond political independence and even into the present day, as was exemplified so powerfully during the Hirak protests.<sup>3</sup> However, whilst ‘leapfrogging’ between past and present is politically potent, an uncritical assumption of these continuities by historical scholars tends to hamper our understanding of both the end of empire and the subsequent trajectories of political independence.<sup>4</sup> In particular, it overlooks the agencies and influences of a range of actors who engaged with, mediated, and shaped colonial legacies.<sup>5</sup>

The thesis has focused on oil, as both a physical assemblage and network of actors, and as a means to examine these dynamics. The analysis has integrated oil revenue and state policy alongside pipelines, commercial interests, and local communities. In so doing, the thesis has drawn a clear distinction between, on the one hand, colonial continuances and their ‘endings’ at a political level and, on the other, the continuities and transformations of colonial-era structures at the level of these non-state actors. Indeed, I have argued that it was precisely the mismatches between colonial continuities and transformations at a political level and the evolutions in physical and commercial structures which created avenues of both anti-imperial challenge and neo-colonial levers. In effect, the pace of developments in infrastructural networks,

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 17-18, Vince, *Algerian War*, 189-90.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, “The Layers,” 324; Willis, *Algeria*: 161-162; 168-170.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 17-18, Vince, *Algerian War*, 189-90.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

commercial strategy, and staffing capacity, which were evolving more slowly out of the imperial economy comparative to the pace of policy, lawcodes and treaties, created important spaces for states, companies, labour forces and local communities to shape the decolonisation process.

At the level of state actors, the thesis has shown how the socio-technical networks of oil shaped constructions of state and sovereignty in these years. For the late colonial administration, the revenue provided by the oil discoveries was certainly important in underwriting ideological, economic and diplomatic projects which aimed to retain Algeria, and particularly the Sahara, under French influence. However, oil's physical infrastructures and material natures also had a critical and widely overlooked role in changing how the possible futures, or even endings of colonial rule were conceived of and imposed. Perhaps most impactful were the natural geographies and physical networks of oil and gas, concentrated in the Sahara, but also critical were the depths of the deposits and resultant technological challenges of extraction as well as the light and condensate-rich nature of the crude. These properties decisively shaped economic planning as well as the military and diplomatic contests of the war, and, in particular, extended forms of imperial control and active violence into often-overlooked regions of the Sahara and rural Algeria. Moreover, a policy to partition Algeria between north and south, and draw the latter even closer to Paris was shaped by these natural geographies, which defined the geo-political limits of the colonial Sahara. Further, these logics were enacted through a huge expansion in oil infrastructures and the interventions of oil companies, which connected oil extraction nodes in the desert with France. It was onto these infrastructures which the regime

mapped border controls, political and economic hubs and public services. In this way, the Saharan frontier emerges, not as a brief, ideological or rhetorical device, but as a lived experience which shaped the physical landscape, economy, and ecology of the region.

After political independence, the physical infrastructures and financial and commercial networks of oil remained interconnected. These are rarely examined in more detail than as an expression of an archetypal neo-colonial influence in the early 1960s: certainly the French state continued to wield significant influence over the Algerian economy through the oil sector in this period. Oil typically only emerges in conventional histories as a key Algerian state tool in defining national belonging and sovereignty claims in the late 1960s and 1970s, enacted by a steady, state-led policy of ascendant resource nationalism. As this thesis has shown, however, the role of oil through these years, and the evolutions in these interconnected networks were more nuanced but also more impactful than these accounts suggest. In particular, we have seen how the infrastructural and commercial legacies enfolded within the process of political independence empowered a ‘nexus,’ a network of mid-level actors who imagined the future as an endless defence of their status quo and therefore worked to entrench an ongoing financial interdependency. Their interventions, and their leveraging of the infrastructural momentum of the interconnected systems constrained state agency at the highest level and the shaped the outcomes of economic policy. We see this impact particularly clearly at the Algiers Accords, where the French state was forced to cede to Algerian demands for greater control of oil interests in Algeria: critically, then, the nexus cannot be conceived of as simply as a

conventional form of neo-colonial influence operating only on formerly colonised states.

Even more striking, however, was the ways in which the nexus and oil infrastructures influenced the nationalisation of the Algerian oil sector. The progressive takeover of international oil interests and then French oil companies in February 1971 are synonymous with independence in economic terms: a deliberate and radical state policy driving towards sovereignty as economic control. The reality, however, was that through a series of individual and unplanned struggles with the nexus, the Algerian state was corralled into an increasingly polemic stance on the oil sector, and ultimately, into nationalisation. Further, the success of the nationalisation, was actually enabled by the re-deployment of colonial structures and persistent French influence in the Algerian oil sector. The protection of state and French influence had enabled the Algerian state to have a more direct role in managing its oil sector, and further, had removed the possibilities of effective international opposition. At the same time, the development of the necessary technical expertise and an alternative market base were also rooted in the leveraging of these structures, which provided both assurances as to the security of international investment and opportunities for re-negotiation of contracts on terms more favourable to Algeria. It should be underlined, however, that oil infrastructures and the legacies bound within them did not consistently operate to the benefit of the Algerian state. The legacy staffing structures, for example, were a key weakness in the FLN's attempts to increase state revenue as well as efforts to integrate the Sahara into the national Algerian political and economic space. What is clear, however, is that the re-deployment of these

infrastructures and legacies was a key plank in state economic and foreign policy. That this met in places with significant success demonstrates further how oil operated on states and sovereignty more holistically, and moves away from accounts that centralise oil as a neo-colonial lever.

Local and social mediations of oil structures have also emerged as a key factor in shaping decolonisation and its impacts from the ground up. The interventions of these actors, notably oil workers, local governments, and local communities, show a more dynamic relationship between social groups, oil and the state than is accounted for in a historiography centred on an either a colonial state seeking ongoing economic and political entrenchment, or later, emergent Algerian rentierism. Further, these accounts draw attention to the ways in which French political and economic life at the level of local governments, but also household consumers, continued to be shaped by Algerian oil far past the ruptures of independence or even nationalisation. In the latter case, for example, in the Marseille region, local governments continued to exploit the Franco-Algerian oil connections to wrest greater localised control and funding from an unwilling central government into the mid-1970s. Further, in the Sahara, oil infrastructures facilitated a ‘co-steering’ of economic development by local groups, notably farmers.<sup>6</sup> Given the importance of these local interventions, there is certainly room to extend and interrogate the findings of this thesis by engaging more directly with a local source base, particularly a source base spanning the interconnected oil nodes in Algeria and France, across Hassi Messaoud, Skikda and

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<sup>6</sup> Hamamouche et al, “New reading,” 221.

Fos. Such accounts may provide new perspectives on the ways in which local actors engaged with, reformulated or redirected state building projects.

Oil labour is a critical exemplar of the impacts of the social mediations of oil and its networks. We have seen that far from being compliant, complicit, or politically ineffectual, oil workers imposed themselves strongly on and within the decolonisation process. Further, this group drew significant political leverage from the ongoing interdependencies in Franco-Algerian oil. Some French workers attempted to exploit a perceived dependency on their labour within this system to shape economic policy in Algeria, whilst, on the Algerian side, labour movements framed their struggles as anti-neo-colonial. In the latter case, these manoeuvres were so significant that workers' campaigns, which focused on workers' rights and conditions, superseded and undermined wider government economic policies here, and actually entrenched Algerian dependencies on France. In its focus on these groups, this thesis has highlighted the depth and impacts of the clashes between labour and the Algerian state in these years, often obscured by behind a shared mantra of anti-neo-colonialist struggle. This was accessed primarily from the perspectives of mid-level diplomats and international company managers, and therefore, the understanding of the activities, motivations and outcomes of worker's activism could useful be extended by a more granular, localised approach, drawing in more workers' voices, possibly from oral histories. Further, these approaches could usefully be applied to the post-1975

period, interrogating more closely the notion of this period as a linear consolidation of state power over Algerian unions.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis has shown how the relationship between hydrocarbon energy systems and economic life at large shaped both the end of empire and the subsequent trajectories of political independence across France and Algeria. This focus on oil could be further understood by applying these models in new geographic contexts. The framework could be applied, for example, across France and its empire, or, alternatively, compare the role of oil in the ends of the British and French Empires. Such an approach, spanning different hydrocarbons, both heavy and light crudes as well as gas, and different natural geographies, such as deposits in built-up areas and offshore fields, could offer crucial insight to colonial and postcolonial histories, given the importance of the material natures of hydrocarbons found in this analysis. Further, the varied political and economic structures, particularly the differing levels of state protectionism, could offer greater illumination on the mechanisms of interactions between non-state oil-actors and sovereignty. Centring hydrocarbons in this way will provide crucial new perspectives on the complex ways in which natural resources framed, limited, and facilitated the promises of independence.

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Alexander, "The Architecture of Militancy: Workers and the State in Algeria, 1970-1990," *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 3 (2002): 319-20. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4146956>; Jessica Ayesha Northey, "Associations and democracy in Algeria," *Democratization*, 24, no.2 (2017) 209-225, DOI: [10.1080/13510347.2016.1144590](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1144590)

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## Appendix One

OCRS, Map of Saharan road network, 1959. F60 4004, ANF

