Petro-Democracy:

Oil, Power and Politics in Niger

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For Angela and Edzard

Abstract

In 2008, Niger signed an oil contract with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) over the Agadem oil block located in the far eastern region of Diffa; and in 2011, they inaugurated the country's first and only oil refinery near Zinder, the second biggest city, situated in the country's south-east. While the inauguration had been planned as a major celebration to mark the coming of oil, it soon became a highly contested political event. That day, with new President Mahamadou Issoufou coming from the capital Niamey (located in the west of the country) to Zinder to mark the occasion, youths set alight tire street barricades and clashed with police. The protests turned into violent riots some days later with youth clashing with security forces in the streets, burning down a police station and looting a bank. Two people were killed and several were injured.

Using in-depth ethnographic material collected over 13 months of fieldwork from 2011 to 2014 within the methodological framework of the extended case method, the book takes the event of the oil refinery's inauguration as point of departure. Based on the tradition of the Manchester School, but reformulated in light of contemporary social theory, the extended case method is used to extend out from the ethnographic description of the inauguration to the historical processes and structural conditions that made the celebration and contestation possible in the first place: first, to the colonial and postcolonial entanglements in the quest for Niger's natural resources, and then to political conflicts that were played out on the public political stage after the signing of the oil contract in 2008. The main section of the book then focuses on the political arena that formed in Zinder around the inauguration. It shows the political work that turned the opening ceremony into a highly contested event and thereby contributed to making oil into a social and political reality, reconstructing social and political difference and reinforcing patterns of domination. In the next step, abstracting from the ethnographic material, the historically sedimented patterns of domination in Nigerien politics and society are analyzed and placed in relation to the politics of the oil infrastructure. Doing so enables an understanding of how the spatial dispersion of the petro-infrastructure in Niger over different administrative regions produced and connected different publics. Furthermore, it makes visible how local historical narratives of repression and marginalization were stitched together to reconfigure collective identities. Finally, the transformation of Niger into an oil state is analyzed, mainly focusing on the period from the beginning of oil production in 2011 until the time of writing in 2018, to understand how entanglements of Western and Chinese economic, political and military forces shape such a development. The empirical findings are then used to theorize on the significatory, temporal, material, and spatial dimensions of an oil state in the making, arguing that oil acts as a catalyst that transforms meshwork-like structures or dynamic systems from one state to another. In the case of Niger, a formerly authoritarian uranium-based state was transformed into a petro-democracy.

Keywords: Oil, protest, social movements, civil society, African politics and the state, China in Africa, capitalism, assemblage.

Zusammenfassung

Im Jahr 2008 unterzeichneten die nigrische Regierung und die China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) einen Vertrag zur Erdölförderung im Agademblock, der in der fernöstlichen Region Diffa liegt, und eröffneten 2011 die erste und einzige Ölraffinerie des Landes in der Nähe von Zinder, der zweitgrößten Stadt im Südosten des Landes. Während die Einweihung als eine große Feier geplant war, um das Erdölzeitalter in Niger einzuläuten, wurde die Einweihung bald zu einem stark umkämpften politischen Ereignis. Zur zeremoniellen Eröffnung der Feierlichkeiten reiste der neue Präsident des Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, aus der Hauptstadt Niamey im Westen des Landes nach Zinder. Zeitgleich setzten Jugendliche in Zinder gegen seine Ankunft Barrikaden in Brand und es kam zu gewaltsamen Auseinandersetzungen mit lokalen Polizeikräften. In den darauffolgenden Tagen eskalierten die Proteste weiter und entwickelten sich zu urbanen Aufständen. Männliche Jugendliche lieferten sich Straßenschlachten mit der Polizei, brannten eine Polizeiwache nieder und plünderten eine Bank. Es gab zwei Tote und mehrere Verletzte.

Die Dissertation greift auf dichtes ethnographisches Material zurück, das im Verlauf von 13 Monaten Feldforschung zwischen 2011 und 2014 mit der erweiterten Fallmethode gesammelt wurde. Basierend auf der Tradition der Manchester Schule, aber im Lichte zeitgenössischer Sozialtheorie neu formuliert, wird die erweiterte Fallmethode verwendet, um ausgehend von der ethnographischen Beschreibung der Einweihung der neuen Raffinerie zu den historischen Prozessen und strukturellen Bedingungen zu gelangen, die dieses umkämpfte Ereignis erst ermöglichten. Zunächst werden die kolonialen und postkolonialen Verflechtungen auf der Suche nach Nigers natürlichen Ressourcen untersucht. Danach werden die politischen Konflikte betrachtet, die nach der Unterzeichnung des Erdölvertrages 2008 auf der politischen Bühne im Idiom des Erdöls ausgetragen wurden. Der Hauptteil des Buches konzentriert sich vorrangig auf Zinders politische Arena, die sich um die Einweihung herum formierte. Es zeigt die Politiken verschiedener Akteure, die die Eröffnungszeremonie zu einem höchst umstrittenen Ereignis machten und so dazu beitrugen, Öl in eine soziale und politische Realität zu verwandeln, soziale und politische Unterschiede zu rekonstruieren und bestehende Herrschaftsmuster zu verstärken. In einem nächsten Schritt werden, abstrahiert vom ethnographischen Material, die historisch sedimentierten Herrschaftsmuster der nigrischen Politik und Gesellschaft analysiert und nachfolgend in Beziehung zur Politik der Erdölinfrastruktur gesetzt. Dies ermöglicht ein

Verständnis darüber, wie die räumliche Strukturierung der Erdölinfrastruktur in Niger über verschiedene Verwaltungsregionen hinweg unterschiedliche Öffentlichkeiten hervorgebracht und miteinander verbunden hat. Durch diese Verflechtungen wurden ortsspezifische historische Narrative der Repression und Marginalisierung zusammengefügt und kollektive Identitäten in diesem Prozess rekonfiguriert. Abschließend wird die Transformation Nigers in einen Erdölstaat analysiert, die sich hauptsächlich auf den Zeitraum vom Beginn der Ölproduktion 2011 bis zum Zeitpunkt des Schreibens im Jahr 2018 konzentriert. So wird nachgezeichnet, wie Verflechtungen von westlichen und chinesischen wirtschaftlichen, politischen und militärischen Kräften diese Transformation formen. Schließlich werden die empirischen Untersuchungen dazu verwendet, um die bedeutungsgebenden, zeitlichen, materiellen und räumlichen Dimensionen eines Erdölstaates im Werden zu theoretisieren. Die Dissertation argumentiert, dass Erdöl als Katalysator wirkt, der netzwerkartige Gefüge oder dynamische Systeme von einem bestehenden Zustand in einen anderen neuen Zustand transformiert. Im Fall von Niger wird dargelegt, wie sich aus einem ehemaligen autoritären Uranstaat eine Petro-Demokratie entwickelt.

Schlagwörter: Öl, Protest, soziale Bewegungen, Zivilgesellschaft, Politik und Staat in Afrika, China in Afrika, Kapitalismus, Assemblage.

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1. Introduction

On 28 November 2011, Niger's first oil refinery was inaugurated near Bakin Birgi in the country's south-east. The new government had planned the inauguration as a major celebration to mark the coming of oil, but it soon became a highly contested political event. In nearby Zinder, Niger's second largest city, regional and municipal councilors, opposition politicians, businessmen, civil society activists, and other social and political actors strongly criticized the government in the media. Before production had even begun, these local actors had named a series of oil-related grievances for the government to address, especially the marginalization of eastern Nigeriens in the recruitment of workers, and the need for a subsidized oil price to benefit the population.

Two weeks before the refinery's inauguration, the government had fixed the new official Nigerien fuel price at 579 FCFA/liter (0.88 Euro)[1], well above the 250 FCFA/liter (0.38 Euro) maximum that Zinder's political and social actors were demanding.[2] Although the announced price was lower than the former fuel price of 679 FCFA/liter (1.04 Euro), a new surge of mobile phone messages circulated, especially among the youth of Zinder. These text messages called on the population to resist and fight the new government on the day of the inauguration. With new president Mahamadou Issoufou in Zinder to mark the occasion, youths set alight tire street barricades and clashed with the police. In the phone messages and talk-back shows on local radio that followed, the riots were glorified as resistance against Issoufou and western Nigerien domination, and as a profession of faith in the former government under Mamadou Tandja, who had been ousted in a military coup the year before.

Following his arrest several days before the inauguration, these messages also focused on Zinder businessman, civil society activist and politician Dan Dubai. In them, Dan Dubai was portrayed as a "folk hero" who dared to speak the truth in the name of the poor. The messages also called on the population to show their support at his December 6 trial. That day, and the two days that followed, were marred by violence and disorder, with youth clashing with security forces in the streets, burning down a police station and looting a bank. Two people were killed and several were injured. The destruction and violence was also fueled by chain messages spreading misinformation such as "100 police cars are on their way from Niamey to Zinder to massacre the *Zinderois*". To quell the protests, the government temporarily shut-down the SMS network in Zinder, and announced on state television *Office du Radiodiffusion Télévision du Niger* (ORTN) that the leading police officers had been dismissed, that Prime Minister Birgi Rafini would immediately visit Zinder, and that a commission had been formed to uncover the masterminds of the riots. On December 8, Prime Minister Rafini met with the sultan, the governor, high religious authorities and representatives of teachers, parents and students. Directly after the meeting, the religious authorities appealed publicly for an end to the violence and protests. Following the appeal, the situation in Zinder remained calm, albeit tense.

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[1] Introduced in 1945, the West African franc CFA (*Communauté Financière d'Afrique*) has a fixed exchange rate to the Euro: 1 Euro = 655.957 FCFA.

[2] According to statistics of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in 2011 Niger had a purchasing-power-parity (PPP) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 795 USD (578 Euro) per capita.

In this thesis, I trace the work and the affect that made the oil refinery political in Niger, the political practices and the intensities that turned the intended celebration first into contestation and violence, and then back to social peace. As the contestation of the refinery's opening did not emerge from a void, it needs to be situated in Niger's already well-structured economic, political and socio-cultural configuration. Therefore, to analyze the diverse practices and to situate them in a historical process, I follow Barry's (2012) call to focus on "political situations" as uncertain, ambiguous and contested events that stretch over extended periods of time and scales, and as material-semiotic assemblages that include artefacts and technologies as well as the discursive movements of ideas. Using in-depth ethnographic material collected over 13 months of fieldwork from 2011 to 2014 within the methodological framework of the extended case method, the event that becomes this thesis' point of departure is the refinery's inauguration (chapter 2). I then extend out from the empirical analysis of the inauguration to the historical processes that made it possible: first, to the colonial and postcolonial entanglements in the quest for Niger's natural resources (chapter 3) and then, to political conflicts that were played out on the public political stage after the signing of the oil contract in 2008 (chapter 4). From an ethnographic perspective, I show how "political arenas" – social spaces constituted by different strategic groups that contest, cooperate and negotiate with each around an issue (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1998) – formed around the inauguration (chapter 5). Understanding political work as more than human actors or groups of actors disputing certain issues, I also include the material-semiotic practices that made the inauguration political and turned it into a highly contested event: the (anticipated) material effects of the petro-infrastructure in terms of pollution, employment provision, and economic possibilities, and the ordering technologies such as radio stations and mobile phones that enabled and restricted political moves of talking, mobilization and contestation. My ethnographic material enables me to think about how material-semiotic practices of talk and violence contribute to making oil a social and political reality, thereby reconstructing social and political difference and reinforcing patterns of domination. Building on the rich ethnographic material presented primarily in chapter 5, in chapter 6 I analyze the historically sedimented patterns of domination in Nigerien politics and society. In chapter 7, I look at these patterns to understand how the spatial dispersion of the petro-infrastructure in Niger over different administrative regions produced and connected different publics, and how local historical narratives of repression and marginalization were stitched together to reinforce regional identities. In chapter 8, I look at the development of the Nigerien oil state, mainly focusing on the period from the beginning of oil production in 2011 until the time of writing in early 2017, to analyze the entanglements of Western and Chinese economic, political and military forces, and to compare different forms of capitalism on a global scale. In the conclusion, I explore and elaborate on the significatory, temporal, material and spatial dimensions of my empirical findings. Before I turn to this by elaborating on the research questions and the focus of the thesis, it is important to briefly place the oil refinery's inauguration in its historical context.

1.1. Oil-age Niger

The 2011 inauguration of the refinery ushered in a new, long-anticipated era in Niger, the oil-age. In June 2008, the Tandja government had signed a contract with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) to produce oil from the Agadem block in the Eastern Rift Basin and to build a refinery near Zinder (see figure 1). Like other Sahel-Saharan countries, despite evidence to suggest significant reserves, with its land-locked position and harsh environment limiting profitability, Niger had long remained underexplored in the quest for new oil reserves (Augé 2011). From 1958 onward, inspired by major discoveries in neighboring Algeria two years previous, primarily French and American oil companies had been exploring for oil in Niger. Although the first positive results became known in Nigerien political circles, and at least among segments of the broader public by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the oil remained in what Witte (2017) calls a "state of not-yet-ness" – a state of expectation and waiting. This not-yet-ness would last over three decades.

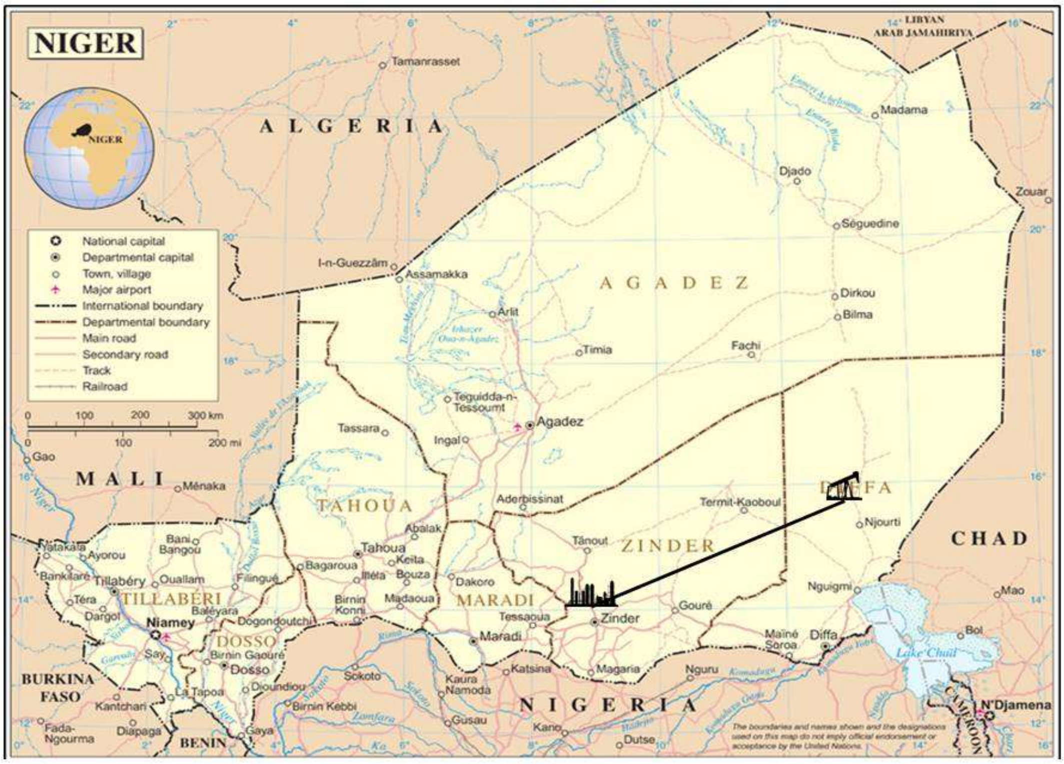

NIGER
NIGER
National capital
Departmental capital
Town, village
Major airport
International boundary
Departmental boundary
Main road
Secondary road
Track
Railroad
0 100 200 300 km
0 100 200 mi
ALGERIA
LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA
MALI
CHAD
NIGERIA
BURKINA FASO
BENIN
CAMEROON
AGADEZ
TAHOUA
TILLABÉRI
DOSSO
MARADI
ZINDER
DIFFA
Tamanrasset
Madama
Djado
Zouar
Séguedine
I-n-Guezzâm
Assamakka
Arlit
Dirkou
Bilma
Timia
Fachi
Teguidda-n-Tessoumt
Agadez
Tassara
Ingal
Gao
Ménaka
Aderbissinat
Termit-Kaoboul
Njourti
Abalak
Tânout
Tahoua
Keita
Bouza
Illéla
Bagaroua
Dakoro
Mao
Nguigmi
Birnin Konni
Madaoua
Tessaoua
Zinder
Gouré
Maradi
Mainé Soroa
Diffa
Bol
Lake Chad
Ayorou
Bani Bangou
Bankilaré
Tillabéry
Ouallam
Filingué
Téra
Dargol
Baléyara
Dogondoutchi
Niamey
Say
Birnin Gaouré
Dosso
Kantchari
La Tapoa
Dioundiou
Sokoto
Kaura Namoda
Katsina
Magaria
Nguru
Birnin Kebbi
Gusau
Kano
Dutse
N'Djamena
Fada-Ngourma
Diapaga
Gaya
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Figure 1: Oil production in Niger. Source: own illustration based on UN map no. 4234.

Rather than fulfilling the promise of oil production, postcolonial Niger became inextricably entangled with French uranium production. This entanglement laid the foundation for autocratic regimes which were to follow independence in 1960, and would remain until the democratic transition in the early 1990s (van Walraven 2009). From its inception, French colonial policy had systematically marginalized eastern Nigeriens and other ethnic groups (especially in the perception of Hausa from Zinder*)* in favor of western Nigeriens and Zarma ethnicity. This trend continued after independence, with Zarma constituting the political elite of the country until the National Conference and the transition to democracy in 1991 (Ibrahim 1994).

With shrinking uranium revenues, external pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, particularly through the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP), and internal pressure from student and labor unions, the military regime finally agreed to a National Conference, and following the conference a multiparty system was enacted in 1993. The multiparty system changed the rules of the game, bringing with it political parties (often with regional strongholds), political competition between the opposition and the government, businessmen investing in politics for economic advantage and favors, civil society activism and media pluralism (which politicians sought to control), as well as bringing youth groups *(fada* and *palais)*, emerging with growing unemployment and poverty following the implementation of the SAPs, into the public sphere (Lund 2009; Masquelier 2013; Boyer 2014). In the Zinder region, where the refinery was constructed, the CDS-Rahama party established (and has maintained) its political stronghold as an eastern Nigerien and Hausa ethnic response to historical western Nigerien and Zarma dominance (Lund 2001). It was in this context that the oil project started in 2008 and was put to use in political disputes.

At the oil refinery's foundation stone ceremony in Zinder in late 2008, the political entourage of then Nigerien president Tandja (MNSD-Nassara) launched *Tazartché* (Hausa for "continuation" or "continuity"), a campaign to change the constitution to allow his re-election. Youths wearing pro-*Tazartché* t-shirts and waving placards were mobilized to welcome Tandja. In the national *Tazartché* narrative, in bringing oil production to Niger, Tandja had finally succeeded where others had failed. Moreover, himself from further east in Diffa, Tandja had won support by opting to build the refinery in Zinder, a region and a population that had always felt marginalized by and dissatisfied with national politics in the capital Niamey, situated in the west of the country.

The Nigerien political elite united against the attempt to centralize power, calling on the international community to implement sanctions against Tandja's regime. With international sanctions in place, on 18 February 2010, Commander Salou Djibo overthrew Tandja in a military coup. This was before the first barrel of oil had been produced. Claiming he wanted to make Niger an example of democracy and good governance, Djibo had organized new elections within a year. In March 2011, the former opposition parties PNDS-Tarayya and MODEN-FA Lumana came to power, with Mahamadou Issoufou at the helm. With these two parties in control during the inauguration, Zinder became the stronghold of the political opposition (CDS-Rahama and MNSD-Nassara). As the opening ceremony was also the first official visit of new President Issoufou, it became an ideal stage for the political opposition to pursue their agendas in a new political landscape.

1.2. The focus of the thesis and the research questions

Using the extended case method to trace the historical and spatial processes that led to the contested event of the oil refinery's inauguration, the overall question of this thesis is: how does oil become a source of economic, political and socio-cultural transformation. To answer this question, I combine ethnographic analysis with a processual perspective to focus on the process of Niger entering the oil-age, the making of its petro-infrastructure, and the forms of political contestation and resistance that emerged along the infrastructure.

Adopting a historical perspective, I show how politics and society in pre-oil Niger were inextricably entangled with uranium production in the north of the country. Understanding uranium-age Niger prior to the beginning of oil production is important for analyzing the transformations induced by oil. The historical juncture of Niger becoming a new oil producer thereby offers the unique opportunity to analyze the economic, political and socio-cultural transformation processes induced by oil production in real time. As the synchronic method of long-term fieldwork in anthropology allows for detailed analysis of oil induced processes in the making (Behrends and Schareika 2010), I adopt an ethnographic approach to perform this analysis.

As the study of oil has been an important topic in economics and political science for several decades and an anthropology of oil has only recently begun to emerge (Behrends et al. 2011), the question arises: "What (More) Can Anthropologists Contribute to the Study of Oil?" (Behrends and Schareika 2010). As such, most research on oil has only been able to look at the socio-political effects of oil several years or even decades after the start of production. For these researchers then, I contend, it has been difficult to distinguish between oil-induced effects and other causes of social, political and economic change. That is, in looking retrospectively at oil induced change without having a clear understanding of a society prior to oil may lead authors to see oil everywhere. In addition, many approaches consider the production of new orders either from a macro-perspective, which has the disadvantage of describing the relationship of abstract entities such as indicators for conflict, governance, economic growth and so on that are themselves the result of dynamic processes, or from a historical *longue durée* perspective, which is based on fragmentary information and deduced from social theory. To understand how oil is productive of new orders, an ethnographic and anthropological approach can complement the established macro perspectives which dominate economics, political science and historical research by analyzing transformation processes in the making, and by capturing internal dynamics from within.

In their programmatic article, Behrends and Schareika (2010: 86) call for more ethnographies of oil production, arguing that "an anthropological study of oil should not only take up and make use of frameworks set by political economy, but use its particular theoretical and methodological strengths to develop new perspectives in this increasingly important field". This illustrates two important points for any anthropological study on oil: firstly, the scientific concepts related to oil that have been well established by political science and economics should be taken as a starting point of analysis, and secondly, empirical data should be gathered using ethnographic and anthropological methodology.

Developing such an approach, I argue that to understand how oil became political and contested in Niger, we have to situate the oil refinery's inauguration temporally and contextually. In doing so, I show how the beginning of oil production in Niger was incorporated into an already established, structured political game, where pre-existing political conflicts were initially played out in the language of oil. Nevertheless, the processual development of these conflicts also transformed the political configuration through new alliances, cooptation and repression. Taken together, I argue that oil acts as a catalyst that accelerates pre-existing dynamics, slowly transforming the socio-political configuration in which it operates in the process.

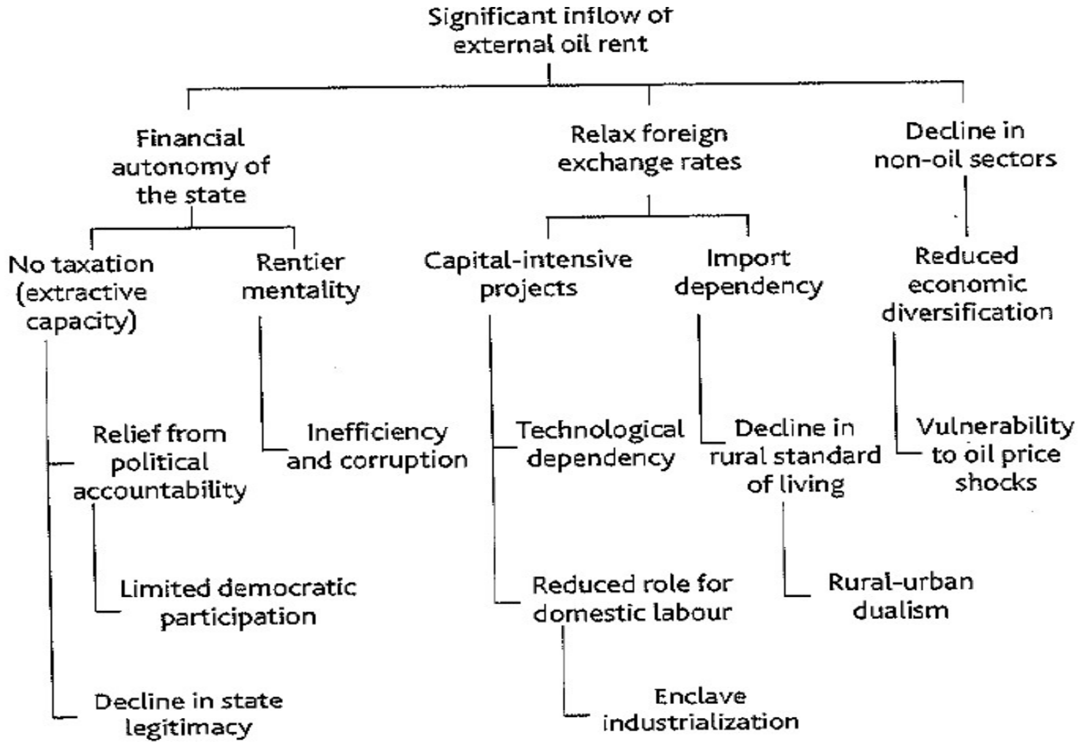
To fully develop my argument, I first briefly summarize the dominant paradigm in economic and political science studies on oil, namely the rentier state and the resource curse framework. I then look at how the social sciences have contributed to the study of oil before I develop my own approach to oil production by drawing on the analytical frameworks of "resource assemblages" and "making things political". My study thereby makes three main contributions: first, it provides a particular anthropological contribution to the study of oil; secondly, it aims to provide a rich ethnography of contemporary Nigerien politics and society; and thirdly, it reformulates the extended case method originally developed by the Manchester School of the 1940s and pushes it through contemporary social theory.

1.3. Rentier states and the resource curse

Most early resource scholars, especially when discussing Africa, argued that oil production and its revenues would reduce the continent's dependency on oil imports, enable infrastructural development, and allow the African economy in general to "take-off" (Baker 1977; for a review see Genova and Falola 2003). In his seminal work on Iran, however, Mahdavy (1970) asked why oil production in the Middle East had not spurred capitalist development in line with European experiences. To answer the question, Mahdavy and others following after him developed the "rentier state theory". In this theory, "rent" is external, unearned and unproductive income for the state's government which has adverse effects on the economy and on politics by triggering the development of a minute, elite rentier class rather than a broad, productive working class that capitalist development had done in European countries (Beblawi and Luciani 1987).

With numerous studies since the 1990s delivering similarly counterintuitive or paradoxical empirical findings, that many – but not all – oil states were worse off after years of production, the dominant analytical model in economics and political science have been the theses of the "resource curse" (Auty 1993), the "paradox of plenty" (Karl 1997) and the "oil curse" (Ross 2012). Over the last two decades, resource curse theorists have claimed that a number of causal relations between resource wealth and economic, social and political transformations exist. These include economic decline (Auty 1993), increased incidents of war (Humphreys 2005; Collier and Hoeffler 2004), political centralization (Ross 2001), corruption (Leite and Weidmann 1999; Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian 2003) and gender discrimination (Ross 2008).

In developing his notion of the African rentier state, Yates (1996; 2012) formulated a coherent chain of causality for many of these phenomena. According to the rentier state theory then, the chain of causality in a rentier state proceeds as follows (see figure 2):



Significant inflow of external oil rent
Financial autonomy of the state
Relax foreign exchange rates
Decline in non-oil sectors
No taxation (extractive capacity)
Rentier mentality
Capital-intensive projects
Import dependency
Reduced economic diversification
Relief from political accountability
Inefficiency and corruption
Technological dependency
Decline in rural standard of living
Vulnerability to oil price shocks
Limited democratic participation
Reduced role for domestic labour
Rural-urban dualism
Decline in state legitimacy
Enclave industrialization

Figure 2: Chain of causality in a rentier state (Yates 2012: 87)

The left of Yates' chart illustrates how the inflow of oil rent creates a financially autonomous state which becomes stabilized. Based on the "no taxation, no representation" assumption, Yates' follows that the state is able to relieve itself of internal pressures for democracy through high spending on security, cooptation and bribery. At the same time, external oil revenues establish a "rentier mentality" or a "something for nothing" reward system in which the only game left in town is the elites' greed to pocket as much of the oil rent as possible. These causal mechanisms lead to an overall decline in state legitimacy, limited democratic participation, corruption and institutional inefficiency.

The chain of causality in the middle of the figure shows that, as crude oil is traded in US dollars, oil rent relaxes foreign exchange rates. Consequently, large export gains bring in foreign exchange, causing the national currency to strengthen. This is especially the case for West African CFA countries as the franc is controlled by France, and they have no national control over currency adjustments. With a strengthening currency, national products become more expensive, while the massive influx of US dollars makes imports relatively cheaper, resulting in increasing import dependency. This import dependency leads to an increase in the urban service sector and a decline in rural standards of living, leading to a widening rural-urban divide. At the same time, the capital intensive nature of the oil project makes the oil-producing country technologically dependent on multinational oil companies. Moreover, there is little increased demand for domestic labor (especially as the few positions available in the extractive industries are often highly skilled), and few secondary industries are created. This results in an enclave industrialization largely dominated by its fiscal character, but disconnected from the local population and the local economy.

The chain of causality on the right shows that currency appreciation renders non-oil sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing internationally less competitive and thus unprofitable. The decline in non-oil sectors – known as the "Dutch Disease" because it was first observed in the Netherlands' following offshore gas production (The Economist 1977) – reduces the country's economic diversification and makes it more vulnerable to oil price shocks, which in turn leads to a fall in its overall economic performance. These mechanisms trigger underemployment (especially of women who often occupy jobs in the declining manufacturing sector), poverty, rising inequality, and increased grievances, which together with greed, corruption and authoritarianism lead to increased conflicts.

In short, the rentier state theory and the resource curse thesis consider oil – or better, oil money – as the origin of structural changes within (African) politics, economy and culture. According to these theories, there is a causal relationship between the inflow of resource revenues into state coffers and processes of economic, political and socio-cultural transformation. That is, once oil has been found and extracted, it transforms political actors into rent-seekers, greedy rebels, corrupt individuals, brutal dictators or warlords. In other words, oil is seen as a fundamental game-changer, as being the root cause of the ensuing conflicts over access to its rent. The resource curse thesis and the rentier state theory thus argue that a unilineal, inevitable and deterministic social, political and cultural transformation takes place within emerging oil states.

The unilineal, deterministic causalities predicted by the resource curse thesis and rentier state theory have become highly controversial in more recent economics and political science literature. There are by now contrary assertions to almost all the causal relations predicted by these theories. Firstly, there are ambiguous effects of oil wealth and oil dependence on violent conflict (Basedau and Lay 2009). Whereas the resource curse predicts that the commencement of oil extraction leads to violent conflict due to greedy rebels and a weak state, the rentier state theory predicts a "rentier peace" through the purchase of political legitimacy, and the cooptation or repression of political opponents (ibid.). Secondly, in a revised version of his 2001 article on oil-based authoritarianism, Ross (2009) admitted that there was little empirical support for the three causal mechanisms between resource wealth and authoritarianism he had suggested, namely a rentier, repression and anti-modernization effect. Rather, he found that the rentier effect was the only mechanism that mattered. In a more recent quantitative study, Haber and Menaldo (2011) criticized the short-term focus of a large body of scholarship on the link between resource wealth and authoritarianism. By employing long-term datasets, they concluded that there was no such link. In fact, they found that oil had been a "blessing" for democratic development in many cases. In addition, Brunnschweiler and Bulte (2008) criticized the causality of resource abundance, development and the onset of civil wars. Rather, they argued that civil war created dependence on primary sector exports (but not vice versa), and that resource abundance was associated with a reduced probability of the onset of war. Cavalcanti, Mohaddes and Raissi (2011), as well as Leong and Mohaddes (2011), argued that it was not resource abundance but resource's trade volatility that drove negative growth effects. In recent years, scholars have also suggested the opposite causal mechanism between oil and corruption, namely that the pre-existing quality of institutions is the underlying cause for any negative effects of oil to materialize, rather than oil itself creating these deficient institutions (Humphreys et al. 2007). Complicating causality relations even further, the literature on the state in Africa seems to agree that many of what the resource curse literature identifies as transformations due to oil production are rather general features of African politics (Médard 1982; Bayart 1989; Chabal and Daloz 1999).

This causality problem is exacerbated by the dominant methodological paradigm in economics (and political science). Most of these oil studies build on econometrics using statistical methods (regression analysis) to find empirical correlations of variables (such as resource abundance and civil wars) and then try to establish causalities between these correlations (such as oil production would lead to civil war). However, statistics first of all reveal something about the representativeness of empirical findings, and not about logical or causal interference (Mitchell 2006). Moreover, the conflicting results of the new resource curse studies reveal that even minor changes in data selection, process and design of econometric analysis may lead to huge differences in outcome. This is also true because the statistical methods borrowed from mathematics and physics were designed for large samples (n>1000), and seem to fail for area or country comparison, with a maximum of 193 countries worldwide (n=2-193).[3]

Based on the contradictory results of new resource curse studies, academics are increasingly moving away from the determinism of the rentier state theory and resource curse thesis to less deterministic and more context-sensitive approaches. For example, Basedau (2005) suggests looking at both country and resource specific factors to explain why the negative effects of oil exploitation materialize in some contexts but not in others. Dunning (2008) tries to show from a game theory perspective that natural resource wealth and democratic political regimes may very well go hand-in-hand. Humphreys, Sachs and Stiglitz (2007) argue that the resource curse exists, but it can be overcome by mechanisms of good governance, particularly transparency and institution building. As such, a new paradigm is emerging in political science and economics in which “governance” has become the most important factor in explaining the occurrence of the resource curse, with “good governance” becoming the solution to turn the “curse” into a “blessing” (for a review see Heinrich and Pleines (2012) who speak of “resource challenges”). Such a neoliberal reformulation of the resource curse shifts the blame away from market failures to the poor performance or bad governance of governments in the Global South.

Taken together, whereas economics and political science have mostly explained oil induced transformation by focusing on the economic, political and socio-cultural effects of resource revenues, an emerging anthropology has not only taken up the focus on oil as money but also shifted it to other socio-cultural and political phenomena related to oil production. In what follows, I first summarize the most important perspectives on oil for and from anthropology, and then elaborate on my own approach to analyzing oil production.

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[3] Aware of this fundamental causality problem, there is a growing tendency in economics and political science away from econometrics to disciplines that borrow methods from natural sciences like real-world experiments and then analyzing the effects of these interventions, or going for a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) to qualitatively test for the causality of quantitative correlations.

1.4. Oil and anthropology

I see four dimensions that have become particularly important for and from anthropological studies of oil, especially for studies of oil in the Global South[4]: 1) rents/capital accumulation, 2) culture/significations, 3) temporality, and 4) materiality/infrastructure.[5]

Firstly, inspired by Neo-Marxism, social science approaches to oil first analyzed social fields of global oil by looking at the development of oil in producer countries on peasants and the agricultural sector (Berry 1984; Watts 1987), on the lives of oil workers (Lubeck 1978; Turner 1986), and on processes of proletarization (Lubeck 1989). Later work focused more on conflicts and state formation spurred by oil production (Coronil 1997; Apter 2005), as well as resistance to multinational oil corporations attempts at capital accumulation and environmental destruction (Turner 2004; Sawyer 2004). With their increasing prominence since the early 1990s, the resource curse thesis and the rentier state theory have also been the focus of some recent social science studies. In a brief 2008 review of the main anthropological works on oil (namely Coronil, Sawyer and Apter), Reyna and Behrends (2008) argue that these three works confirm political economy findings, namely that oil production spurred on social actors to compete for oil rents, thereby producing violent oil realities. However, based on these works, Reyna and Behrends also criticize the resource curse thesis and the rentier state theory, arguing that to understand the effect of oil rents on politics and society, production must be analyzed in the context of pre-existing patterns of domination (ibid).

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[4] Another focus has been on the consumer societies in the West and how capital accumulation based on the burning of fossil fuels trickled down into Western culture in terms of mobility, individualism and nuclear family life and liberalism (Huber 2013; Strauss et al. 2013). By looking at the effects oil has on consumer societies, these studies made use of Foucauldian concepts of neoliberalism, biopower and governmentality in pointing to the production of new subjectivities in an oil-age (Boyer 2011; 2014). However, (Foucauldian) concepts developed to analyze Western societies are not easily translatable to non-Western contexts in which the tools and technologies (like statistics, laws, rules, pictures and plans) designed to shape or reshape human life conditions to navigate their behavior into calculable and precise ways are less developed and less widely deployed. In this sense, the neoliberal "conduct of conduct" is first of all a transnational endeavor of the West to reshape life in the Global South that may (and indeed often does) fail, making way for "hard" governance technologies of coercion and force (Schritt 2013).

[5] For a review of oil and anthropology see also Rogers (2015), who points to the dimensions of materiality and temporality in particular.

Secondly, anthropological works generally show that oil is significant not only for its monetary power, but also is as important for its socio-political framing. As such, oil as money and oil as meaning or signification have to be analyzed symmetrically. In this sense, the production of meanings or significations of oil are essential in constructing an oil reality, and therefore in understanding the social, political and cultural transformations induced by oil. For example, Coronil (1997) points to the imaginative and discursive dimension of oil that induced state-building processes in Venezuela, combining it with the natural dimension of resources and their processes of commoditization. Focusing mainly on cultural production in Nigeria, Apter (2005) illustrates the "politics of illusion" at work as an attempt by the government to use oil production to help construct a national identity. This led to an "unstable field of significations" in which people first thought of oil as a "blessing" from God which would alleviate poverty, but that later turned into a "curse", with oil being a sign of the Devil and of their corrupt regimes (for the case of Chad see also Yorbana 2017). Focusing on conflicts in Chad before the first barrel of oil was produced, Behrends (2008) analyzed the role expectations and significations of oil might have before production started. In looking at anthropological works, Behrends and Schareika (2010) have suggested that "signification" as a concept marks a distinctively anthropological approach to the study of oil production. Starting from the tradition of symbolic interactionalism and pragmatism, they see it as theoretically and methodologically necessary for future research to study significations as coming from the social practice of signifying rather than cultural systems of meanings. In other words, Behrends and Schareika conceptualize significations as produced in, through and for processes of political negotiation between actors with opposing economic interests, and varying and potentially conflicting positions of power and degrees of socio-political knowledge (ibid.).

Thirdly, temporality was already implicit in early anthropological research on oil and processes of state formation. For example, Coronil (1997) for Venezuela and Apter (2005) for Nigeria showed how oil was used politically to create the illusion of prosperity, fetishizing and imbuing it with magical qualities. However, as harsh and violent realities emerged with its production, oil was increasingly portrayed as demonic. As a concept however, temporality was first made explicit in the edited volume "Timely Assets". Here, Ferry and Limbert (2008) try to explicitly theorize the temporal aspects of resources-making and resource-claiming, arguing that questions around resource discovery and its supposed ends "frame the past, present and future in certain ways; they propose or preclude certain kinds of time reckoning; they inscribe teleologies; and they are imbued with affects of time, such as nostalgia, hope, dread, and spontaneity" (ibid.:4). In this vein, Limbert (2010), for example, shows how the end of oil was anticipated in Oman and how oil thus became visible again after years of unquestioned prosperity. Similarly, Fricke (2017) illustrates how the uncertain future of oil in Gabon conjures up diverse histories, temporalities and affects. Weszkalnys (2011; 2014; 2016) for São Tomé and Príncipe and Witte (2017) for Uganda have also pointed to the importance of temporality by analyzing how the absence or not-yet-ness of oil production spurred various anticipatory practices and economies of expectation.

Fourthly, Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the "material turn" have gained high currency in the social sciences and anthropology. In thinking oil beyond the resource curse, these approaches seek to account for forms of agency and control contained in the materiality of the resources, and the technological as well as socio-political infrastructures surrounding oil production, be it in relation to capital accumulation (Appel 2012a), (structural) violence (Appel 2012b; Murrey 2015), corporate social technologies (Rogers 2012), (in)visibility of infrastructural failures (Landa 2016), standardization procedures (Barry 2006), or transparency and ethics (Barry 2013a). Mitchell (2011: 5) prominently articulated the idea that "politics are engineered out of the flow of energy". The idea serves a heuristic purpose to look at forms of agency and control that are linked to processes of extraction, transportation, distribution and consumption of oil, and thus to overcome the narrow focus of economic and political science studies on oil rents.

The four dimensions of rents, significations, temporality, and materiality are closely interrelated, and many of the cited studies have focused on more than one of these dimensions simultaneously. Combining these dimensions, anthropologists and other social scientists have recently made use of the concept of assemblage[6] to point to the multiplicity and heterogeneity of oil's manifestations (Mitchell 2011; Watts 2012; Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014; Appel et al. 2015; Schritt 2016). I turn to that now.

1.5. Resource assemblages

Acknowledging that the various uses of the concept of assemblage have been criticized for their theoretical vagueness and ambiguity (Reyna 2016a), I will briefly clarify my understanding of assemblage and illustrate its added value before elaborating on my specific notion of resource assemblages.

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[6] The term assemblage is from the English translation of the term *agencement* used by Deleuze and Guattari (1980) in the French original "*Mille Plateaux*". It is often translated into German as *Gefüge*.

Drawing on DeLanda's (2006) interpretation and systematization of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I conceptualize assemblages as emerging from connections between different elements, both material and expressive, whose entity exercises different sets of capacities. In contrast to understandings of wholes (such as society) as organisms characterized by relations of interiority that are logically necessary for the totality to exist, assemblage theory understands entities not as totalities, but rather as contingent formations characterized by relations of externality between heterogeneous, self-contained elements (ibid.). Building on calls to holism typical of anthropological studies since Malinowski, I employ assemblage theory as it allows the researcher to specify relations between heterogeneous elements, their properties and causalities (DeLanda 2006). Inherent to DeLanda's conceptualization of assemblage theory is catalysis as a productive, relational, complex and multidimensional causation, in contrast to a linear, mechanistic causation. While econometric models have been criticized for assuming a laboratory like closed system where certain factors are said to be isolated or neutralized (Lawson 1989), contemporary social theories such as assemblage theory understand the world as a chaotic, uncontrollable and open system. In an open system, different mechanisms interact simultaneously in complex, heterogeneous and dynamic ways, making it impossible to isolate out factors in laboratory-like experiments (ibid.). In other words, instead of the same causes leading to the same effects every time and everywhere, "DeLanda points to cases where a cause merely serves as a catalyst for something without automatically unleashing it" (Harman 2008). Thus, in contrast to the unilineal or statistical causality of resource curse studies (which predict the same effects of oil in every country), the concept of assemblage allows me to look at the catalytic reaction between the diverse elements involved in oil production and the elements pre-existing it in a specific context, Niger.

Building on this theory, I approach the resource extraction of oil and uranium in Niger with the concept of resource assemblages. Mitchell (2009) showed, for example, how different resources (solar energy, coal, and oil) unfold as different assemblages of materiality, infrastructure, and political power. He thus illustrates how politics are inextricably entangled "with the ways oil is extracted, processed, shipped and consumed, the forms of agency and control these processes involve or the powers of oil as a concentrated source of energy" (ibid.: 400). The concept of resource assemblages then captures the technological infrastructure that is needed for extracting, producing, refining, transporting and consuming oil, as well as the resource companies, oil contracts, revenue laws, resource materiality, scientific controversies and economic theories that entangle with the petro-infrastructure in the process of making resource production possible.

The resource assemblage of oil corresponds with Watts's (2005: 378) notion of the "oil complex" that he defines as "a configuration of social, political, and economic forces with a broadly similar 'petrostructure'", that is, the dual process of securitization and capital accumulation (by dispossession) of the oil industry. The notion of "oil assemblages" (Watts 2012: 440) which he developed later should then "do justice both to the relations between the deep infrastructures of the oil world – pipelines, rigs, flowstations, tankers, financiers, engineering firms, security forces, and so on – and to the regimes of life and death in the postcolonial South and the advanced capitalist North". Furthermore, as Richardson and Weszkalnys (2014: 16) point out: "From this [*assemblage*] perspective, natural resources are not 'out there' ready to be seized upon and utilized but always in flux and open-ended. They 'become' as resource materialities, that is, as constitutive of and constituted within arrangements of substances, technologies, discourses, and the practices deployed by different kinds of actors." The becoming of resources here refers to a particular kind of historicized relational ontology, that is, what happens when the properties of the assemblage shift and change due to the dis/connection of elements (ibid.). In the same sense, Appel, Mason and Watts (2015: 17) state: "In this [*assemblage*] approach, states, companies, universities, insurgents, local geographies, representations, and the materiality of oil itself cannot be approached as discrete, but must be understood as co-constitutive". Using assemblage theory to highlight the multiplicity, heterogeneity and material-semiotics of resource production, these authors criticize the resource curse and rentier state theory for setting the diverse ontologies inherent in resource assemblages into a blunt equation of money and politics: "oil rents + developing country = corrupt state" (ibid.).

As the elements of the wider oil assemblage have been described as relatively standardized forms (Barry 2006), as a package that is unpacked in the context of arrival, most authors speak of a global oil assemblage. However, as I will show in chapter 8, Western and Chinese approaches to oil production incorporate different elements, be it different forms of petro-infrastructure, economic theories, corporate practices, diplomacy, military approaches, corporate structure, and even oil contracts. Taking the various elements of different assemblages of resources (such as oil and uranium) and of political powers (such as China and the West) into account, I analyze how they entangle with elements of the Nigerien context and form what I call "resource-political configurations". Such a configuration is a network of economic, political and socio-cultural elements of context-specific politics and transnational resource production that emerges as an entity with particular properties. Building on this notion, I compare the uranium assemblage's long-established translocal entanglements in Niger (chapter 3) with the oil assemblage's newly emerging translocal entanglements (chapter 8), thereby revealing their differences, and showing how their entanglements with Nigerien politics have produced the emergence of a new resource-political configuration that I call "Petro-Democracy". By acknowledging the spatial dimension of these configurations, I compare Western and Chinese spaces of oil assemblages, which I refer to as "oil zones" (conclusion).

To avoid falling into the trap of assuming an "invisible hand" that ties heterogeneous elements together into a configuration, I combine an assemblage theory perspective with a practice-oriented multi-actor conflict approach. A practice-oriented multi-actor conflict approach should allow us to focus on actors' practices of connection and disconnection, practices that can hold assemblages together or break them apart. In other words, while assemblage theory points to the historical regress and the becoming of different-sized assemblages through emerging dis/connections between heterogeneous elements, we also need look at how these relations are made and unmade.

Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars use an actor and conflict-centered approach – often relying on war metaphors and a vocabulary of conflict to show the hard work of engineering heroes in overcoming opposition to associate diverse socio-technical elements in the buildup of large technological systems (Hughes 1983; Latour and Woolgar 1986; Law 2012). Callon and Latour's (1981: 279) concept of "translation" – "all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force" – can be thereby used to analyze power in terms of associations of human and non-human elements. However, in focusing largely on successful associations or translations, STS scholars often render fissures, fractures and disruptions in the chain of translation invisible, as having no place in the idyllic world of engineering heroes who successfully build systems (Rottenburg 2008). In doing so, these studies elide the actors' manifold ordering practices of dissociation and exclusion. Thus, a conflict perspective on the practices of "exclusion" and "inclusion" (Schlee 2008) or an "arena approach" (Bierschenk 1988) seems useful to additionally identify the diverse ordering practices of different actors, actor groups or coalitions in associating themselves to the emerging resource-political configuration, and in dissociating others from it. Only by considering the actors' diverse practices of dis/connection are we able to understand the processual emergence of configurations (*Figuration*) – as evolving networks of interdependent humans – and its unequal power relations of the "established" and "outsiders" (Elias 1994). However, in maintaining the importance of both humans and non-humans, I add the material-semiotic dimension to my understanding of configurations and unequal power relations. I elaborate on this multi-actor and multi-actant conflict perspective now.

1.6. Making oil political

From a pragmatist analytical perspective, politics emerge around issues such as oil, rather than the issues being incorporated into a pre-existing political and cultural system. Building on Dewey's pragmatist understanding of publics, Latour (2005a) and Marres (2005b) argue in "Making Things Public" that people are connected to each other by objects and issues (matters of concern) that emerge from problems that available institutions are unable to address, rather than by shared values, norms or culture. In this sense, people's commitments to certain issues, problems and things create attachments or affective bonds between them (Marres 2007): "Whatever the term one wishes to use – object, thing, gathering, concern – the key move is to make all definitions of politics turn *around* the issues instead of having the issues enter into a ready made political sphere to be dealt with. […] Such is the hard headed *Dingpolitik* of STS as opposed to the human centered *Realpolitik*" (Latour 2007: 5). Latour argues, in other words, that proponents of *Realpolitik* have long overlooked the significance of materials and objects in politics.

In attempting to take the opposed notions of *Realpolitik* and *Dingpolitik* into account, an analytical puzzle appears to emerge: Is new oil simply incorporated into an already existing political sphere, or do politics emerge around new oil? Thinking in assemblages, however, this is not necessarily a contradiction – configurations always *become* through a contingent process of associations between new and the substitution of old elements. Looking at the moment of oil production starting is then to acknowledge how the new elements of the oil assemblage dis/connect with existing elements of Niger's uranium-political configuration, and the specific, particular character of this newly emerging entity. In this sense, some political spheres are already well-structured. At the national level, for example, politics was dominated by well-established players with large networks that pre-existed oil production. In Niger's multiparty setting, established political parties, civil society and the media immediately appropriated the sensitive issue of oil into their political agendas. In this sense, we might say that due to its importance and symbolism for Niger, an event like the inauguration of the refinery was in and of itself political. At the same time, however, new social and political actors (oil workers, taxi drivers, lorry drivers, expropriated farmers, pastoralists living in the vicinity of the oil installation, unemployed youth) emerged by becoming affected by the resource-political configuration along the petro-infrastructure (the oil wells, the pipeline, the refinery, the transport, and the petrol stations).

Taking both Latour's and Marres' pragmatist understandings of politics as a starting point, I thus analyze how the construction of the petro-infrastructure in Niger generated various publics by establishing dis/connections between heterogeneous elements. However, this focus on issue-centered publics cannot account for the hard work and the multiple conditions of establishing these dis/connections, and demands that I incorporate a *Realpolitik* approach. I thus develop an analytical framework of "making things political" that includes the logic of the political game (chapter 4), framing, mobilization, and ordering technologies (chapter 5), structural dynamics and historical patterns of domination (chapter 6), and the material politics of the petro-infrastructure (chapter 7).

First, to understand the processes of "making things political" it is important to analyze how the political game is being played (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2010). Drawing on Bailey (1969), I see politics first of all as a game with a specific logic in which players focus on winning access to power and resources. Analyzing political actors' strategies to access power and resources is not about following a theory of rational choice, but rather about the logic of the political game which emerges through its publicly defined social rules and its quietly applied practical norms (Herdt and Olivier de Sardan 2015). In Niger, the inauguration took place in a competitive multiparty setting in which public political debates were a key feature of the game. To understand how oil became political and contested in Niger, it is thus important to first decode the logic of the time and place-specific political game, which I look at in detail in chapter 4.

Second, building on Goffman's (1974) theory of framing, I show how political logic determines how actors situationally interpret and frame Niger as a new oil producer, and thereby make oil a social and political reality. In this sense, political actors' positions (roles) within the political arena (stage), and their subsequent scripts (frames) shape how they articulate the significations of oil. As politics are about “frontstage” and “backstage” (Goffman 1959), the political spectacle is constructed on the frontstage through narratives designed to address the needs and desires of the population (Edelman 1988). These public narratives, however, mask backstage political projects. To understand how the game is being played, it is thus important to reveal the political projects behind the public narratives. This includes a rather classical focus on politics, political mobilization, demonstration and protest (which is missing in Latour’s and Marres’ concepts of attachments). Moreover, I include the material-semiotic dimension of these politics, focusing on the ordering technologies such as radios, mobile phones, tires, fuel, stones and money through which the public is formed and politics move. Such a focus is important to analyze how access to the media and other ordering technologies is a critical condition for participation in the public, and how privileged access to these technologies is a means of domination (van Dijk 1996). Following Fraser’s (1990) theorization of the public, I look at the socio-economic inequalities that inhibit groups – like dispossessed workers, the poor, women, or ethnic, religious and national minorities – from gaining significant access to the public in the first place. I examine this dimension in detail in chapter 5.

Third, in focusing only on the life histories of issues, Latour’s and Marres’ account of issue-centered and affected publics fails to adequately integrate the pre-existing possibilities that enable any *thing* to become political in the first place. To avoid these shortcomings, I focus on the multiple socio-political and historical conditions significant in the emergence of publics and the existence of inequalities that inhibit certain actors or coalitions from gaining significant access to the public. By doing so, I show that publics along the petro-infrastructure do not emerge from nowhere, but rather draw on pre-existing foundations and established constellations of the political configuration like political parties, civil society activists, businessmen and youth groupings. While some new actors did emerge along the infrastructure, most were already well-established players who reemerged, changed, regrouped or dissolved in the process. Moreover, to understand key political actors’ practices, we have to understand the local discursive power of Zinder’s history as a sultanate, the first capital of Niger, and as “a people” who see themselves as having resisted French colonialism and having been political marginalized for it. Drawing these elements together, I focus on the historical sedimentation of colonial and postcolonial practices and experiences into a fragmented political and socio-cultural order (Bierschenk 2014). Such a historical and processual perspective is important to understand the structural dynamics and patterns of domination as conditions of the emergence of publics. I examine this dimension in detail in chapter 6.

Fourth, drawing on Barry's (2013a) book "Material Politics", I explore how the petro-infrastructure in Niger became integral to political disputes. In Barry's understanding, rather than providing only the passive and material bases on which disputes emerge, infrastructures and political disputes are themselves inextricably entangled in material-semiotic assemblages. He contends that analysts looking at how *things* become political need to "attend to the historically and geographically contingent ways in which diverse events and materials come to be matters of public dispute" (ibid.: 8). As a material-semiotic practice of interpreting and creating infrastructure, "infrastructuring" interweaves economic, political, legal and socio-cultural orderings with ethics, morals, technologies, affects and imaginations, and thereby reconfigures pre-existing assemblages in new and unpredictable ways (Calkins and Rottenburg 2017; Barry 2016a; Harvey and Knox 2012; Jensen and Morita 2015). Building on the conclusions of chapter 6 on the sedimented and fragmented order in oil-age Niger, in chapter 7 I focus on the development and dispersal of the oil infrastructure in Niger and its entanglement with different administrative spaces, revenue laws, and oil's materiality. In doing so, I illuminate how different "infrastructural publics" (Collier et al. 2016) are produced and connected, and how these publics stitch together historical narratives of marginalization to (re)produce regional, ethnic and national collective identities.

Throughout this thesis, I draw assemblage theory ("resource assemblages") and a conflict approach ("making things political") together to understand the workings of oil, as it is only by considering how pre-existing elements in the Nigerien political configuration dis/connect with new elements of the oil assemblage, and how these dis/connections are realized by the various actors or actor groups' concrete practices, that the question of how oil induces transformation processes can be answered.

1.7. The argument of the thesis and an overview of the chapters

In seeking to answer how oil induces transformation processes, I conclude that oil acts as a "catalyst", rather than as a "blessing" or a "curse". As a catalyst, oil accelerated the reaction between heterogeneous elements of the incoming resource assemblage and the Nigerien political context in an "ensemble-effect". This conclusion contrasts to the binary understanding inherent in the resource curse framework, in which oil, as either a "blessing" or a "curse", and never anything in between, triggers a series of profound transformations.

Building on theoretical perspectives of conflict and assemblage, I show that oil is much more than the cause or item of conflict, or a simple actant in an actor-network, but rather establishes dis/connections between heterogeneous elements in the build-up of resource-political configurations. Seen from the perspective of assemblage theory, assemblages accommodate complex forms of causal productivity, especially catalysis, so that one factor does not have the same effect on all occasions. This understanding of catalysts, as accelerating the reaction between heterogeneous elements in both building and cutting connections, is incompatible with deterministic, unilineal causal conceptions such as the resource curse thesis. Seen from a conflict perspective, oil then provides political players with new ideological and material resources to dis/connect relations through practices of association (inclusion) and dissociation (exclusion). In other words, the case study shows how incoming oil assemblages dis/connect with pre-existing economic, social, cultural and political elements at the place of arrival, thus transforming existing configurations and fueling or quelling political conflict by providing various political actors or groups of actors with new material and symbolic resources to engage in the political game. In particular, I illustrate how oil is used to make claims to power and legitimacy, build alliances, gain negotiating power, find recognition as an interest group, compete for position and a share of state revenues, and formulate visions of the future. The thesis that "oil acts as a catalyst" has several supporting arguments, each of which illuminates particular aspects of a catalytic reaction. These supporting arguments are laid out chapter-by-chapter.

In chapter 2 *Crude Celebration,* I describe the day of the oil refinery's inauguration. Starting with descriptions of the drive to the oil refinery and the ceremony itself, I describe the celebration, the ceremonial speeches and its discontents from a close-up ethnographic perspective. The detailed description of the opening of the refinery in oil-age Hausaland – based on Gluckman's seminal analysis of the opening of a bridge in modern Zululand – sets the stage to identify the heterogeneous elements of the resource-political configuration in the moment of Niger entering the oil-age. From the thick description of the oil refinery's opening, I then develop an extended case method approach reformulated in light of contemporary social theory, especially pragmatism and assemblage theory, and from which I extend out in the following chapters to analyze the spatio-temporal relations which brought the event into being.

In chapter 3 *Crude Beginnings*, I focus on Niger before the conclusion of the oil contract in 2008 to analyze the uranium-political configuration that pre-existed oil production.

Although the search for oil started with the colonial conquest of Niger in the early 20th century, and had some impact on Nigerien politics and society, it was uranium, and not oil, which dominated the Nigerien postcolonial political landscape until 2008. Therefore, building on the notion of resource-political configurations that I develop more fully in the chapter, I analyze from a historical perspective how the monetary, symbolic, temporal and material dimensions of uranium became inextricably entangled with Nigerien politics and society. I show that several elements are particularly important in understanding the uranium-political configuration in Niger. Firstly, Niger was at a particular historical conjuncture: a French colony that had developed into a postcolonial state long dependent on uranium revenues with French control over extraction, use and profits through nuclear company Areva, and an extractive infrastructure which did not provide for any kind of production linkages within Niger itself. Secondly, these elements articulated with (neo)classical economic theories, secret military agreements laid down in independence negotiations, and the succeeding authoritarian politics which persisted until the National Conference in 1991. I argue that the uranium-political entity in Niger has been characterized by a neocolonial discursive formation and political disputes that have predominantly revolved around the distribution of profits between Areva/France and Niger. Understanding this uranium-political configuration prior to the beginning of oil production is essential in understanding the transformations induced by oil, which I develop in the following chapters.

In chapter 4 *Crude Awakening,* I analyze macro-politics in Niger as they became visible in public political disputes between the signing of the oil contract in 2008 and the opening of the oil refinery in 2011. Rather than instantly changing the rules of the political game, I argue that oil was incorporated into the pre-existing game. The political game in Niger, as I show, is characterized by a logic of code-switching between an extroverted character and rhetoric to gain access to international financial flows, and an introverted character and rhetoric focused on the redistribution of spoils, postings, and privileges. Analyzing various actors' political rhetoric, I show how the coming of oil has been used to make claims to power and legitimacy. In other words, oil appears as an idiom within which Niger's current political and social processes are framed. Applying the concept of oil's significations also affects my approach to the resource curse thesis: not only does the significations approach throw light on serious shortcomings in the thesis, but it also illuminates how the very notion of the resource curse has become a political rhetoric and an instrument of discursive power used by various local actors to play the political game.

In chapter 5 *Crude Moves*, I analyze the collective action – mobilizations, protests and violent riots – before, during and after the inauguration in November 2011. The event acts as a case in point for a "political drama" or "phase development" (Swartz et al. 1966b) with a succession of theatrical acts, from the mobilization of political capital, to a showdown, to a crisis, to mechanisms of redress, and finally to the restoration of peace. The phase development helps me to identify the multiple causal relations in Nigerien politics, and to show how significations of resource wealth and development in Niger became part of the more localized, everyday political game. I show that in 2011 and 2012, Niger was characterized by oil's immediate presence, which produced all kinds of oil talk, especially oil politicking. Various political actors, including government authorities, opposition politicians, civil society associations and businessmen developed notions, images and meanings of oil to transform it into a political resource. Drawing on Felstiner*,* Abel and Sarat (1980-1981), I call the logic of framing politics in the language of oil "the politics of naming, blaming and claiming". Finally, I show that privileged access to media technologies was essential in becoming a potent political actor in the talk around oil.

In chapter 6 *Crude Order,* I use the findings of the previous chapters and similar protests that occurred afterwards to abstract to a more general socio-political order in oil-age Niger. Building on the notion that the context lies within the situation, I analyze the socio-cultural, political, economic and religious workings behind recurrent protests in Niger. I discuss historically accumulated patterns of protests through the notions of politics by proxy, Nigerien political machines, a hybrid civil society, collective identities, (neo)colonial experiences, religious coexistence, the situation of youth, and patriarchy. I argue that the logic of the Nigerien socio-political order in the moment of oil's immediate presence largely pre-existed oil production. This analysis of Niger's socio-political order forms the basis of the comparison of pre-oil and post-oil Niger in the following two chapters.

In chapter 7 *Crude Controversies,* I build on the findings of chapters 5 and 6 to examine the transformations induced by oil. I show how a political decision to disperse the infrastructure of oil over different regions produced transcultural processes of territorial and symbolic reconfigurations, and that it was through these processes that political, regional and ethnic differences became newly articulated. The chapter focuses on forms of resistance and contestation in relation to Niger's new oil infrastructure, and shows how seemingly purely technical matters turned political. By focusing on Niger becoming a new oil producer in 2011, the chapter shows how the politically-motivated decision to construct the oil infrastructure over different regions spurred processes of "territorialization" in which temporally and spatially separated histories of marginalization were stitched together to (re)produce collective identities.

In chapter 8 *Crude Dis/entanglements*, I examine the spatial, economic, political and socio-cultural transformations induced in the process of Niger becoming a new oil producer in 2011. I do so by analyzing dis/entanglements of "Western" and "Chinese" oil assemblages in Niger. I argue that the specific properties of these two assemblages have produced the emergence of a particular "petro-political configuration" in Niger. The argument proceeds through four stages. Firstly, looking at economic entanglements, I argue that the Chinese oil assemblage enabled the Nigerien economy to develop so-called upstream and downstream oil industries. That is, not only is oil extracted and produced in Niger, but it is also refined and processed there, something that the Western oil assemblage had not allowed. Secondly, analyzing political and socio-cultural dis/entanglements, I argue that by being co-opted into *Tazartché*, President Tandja's political project for constitutional amendment, China's oil diplomacy became a kind of soft power in Niger that was (at least partly) subjectified within Nigerien public discourse, in a manner that Western political rhetoric had not. Thirdly, focusing on geopolitical and military dis/entanglements, I argue that the militarization of global space is likely to ensure capital accumulation, especially in situations in which the translation of transnational governmentality has failed. Finally, I use these dis/entanglements to identify the heterogeneous elements of Western and Chinese trans-territorial spaces of order and the specific capitalist properties these assemblages generate.

In the *Conclusion*, I argue that in looking at oil as an idiom, the material politics of the petro-infrastructure, the notion of oil zones as spaces of assemblage with particular capitalist properties, and the Chinese oil zone's dis/entanglements with the Nigerien context, I reveal how a time and space-specific resource-political configuration emerged in Niger. I call this configuration "Petro-Democracy". Finally, I conclude that the notion of oil as a catalyst is best suited to grasp and explain oil's multiple, various time and space-specific effects.

2. Crude Celebrations: Extending the oil refinery's opening

In this chapter, I detail the case of the oil refinery's opening ceremony on 28 November 2011 in Zinder. I describe my participation and the observations I made throughout the entire day: from making my way to the refinery, to the preparation, decoration and setup of the festival site, to the ceremony, speeches and performances, and to the dominant perceptions and representations of the inauguration afterwards. I start this chapter with a detailed description of the refinery's opening because I believe it allows us to identify what is at stake in the moment of Niger entering oil-age. From the detailed ethnographic material which I present in this chapter, I then elaborate on the extended case method I use to analyze and make sense of the situation. To do so, I first build on Barry's (2012) notion of the "political situation", before discussing the four "moments" of Burawoy's (1998) extended case method, which I then push through contemporary social theory, especially assemblage theory and pragmatism. In doing so, I develop the methodological framework which guides the thesis.

2.1 The day of the inauguration

> SOS GHOST TOWN – LET'S BOYCOTT THE ARRIVAL OF THE PRESIDENT BY STAYING AT HOME – LET'S SACRIFICE THE DAY OF THE ARRIVAL BY FASTING (AZOUMI) TO BEG GOD TO FORCE OUR LEADERS TO HAVE MERCY ON HIS PEOPLE. (SMS sent on 28 November 2011 in Zinder)[7]

While waiting for my research assistant to pick me up on the morning of the inauguration, I received this text message calling on the people to make Zinder a "ghost town". The message was one of several circulated prior to the inauguration which named oil-related grievances, attacked the incumbent government, and called on the population to resist and fight. Written in either Hausa or French, the messages had started to circulate about two weeks prior to the inauguration, just after the government had announced the new fixed fuel price of 579 FCFA/liter (0.88 Euro). The messages demanded the fuel price be fixed at 250 FCFA/liter (0.38 Euro) or below, and accused the incumbent government of stealing, embezzling and plundering the country for personal profit. Other messages demanded a regional quota for *Zinderois*[8] in the recruitment of oil workers, the realization of infrastructural projects, and environmental protection against oil pollution. Sent initially from unregistered SIM cards often bought informally at the local market, the messages also often included a call to forward to friends, to a certain number of people, or even to one's entire mobile phone book.

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[7] I have translated the mobile phone messages as closely as possible from the originals in Hausa or French. However, while the original messages typically contained a number of abbreviations to keep them short, I have written the translations in full for the sake of clarity. If there are errors or brackets ( ), these are citations from the original messages. The text inside square brackets [ ], however, have been inserted for clarity.

[8] *Zinderois* is the self-designation of the urban population of Zinder city itself. However, it also often refers to those living beyond the boundaries of the city to include the territory of the former Hausa sultanate of Damagaram.

My research assistant,[9] Papa, arrived at my guest house in Zinder around 9 am to go to the inauguration. To attend the inauguration ceremony at the refinery's site near Bakin Birgi, a small village about 50 km north of Zinder, Papa had rented a car with a driver for the day. On his arrival, Papa told me that the president and his delegation had landed at Zinder around 7.30 am. I immediately became anxious, as I had already missed one of the important events of the day, one which I had awaited eagerly, and one I saw as crucial in conducting an extended case study. As if to reassure me that I had not missed anything, Papa emphasized that "no one" had been there to welcome the president. Quite the contrary, in fact, a large group of youth had tried to disturb the president's official arrival by throwing stones and shouting at and insulting him. Papa said that a massive turnout of security forces (military, police and gendarmerie) was needed to stop the youths from entering the airport, and that the police expelled and arrested some of the protestors. Later, one of my friends would tell me that he was among the organizers of the protests. Another friend, however, would tell me that his patron, a high ranked politician from the ruling PNDS-Tarayya party had given him 10,000 FCFA (15.24 Euro) to join the welcome for the president, and that he had gone with about ten family members to the airport. According to his estimations, about 1000 people were at the airport to welcome the president, and only about 100 protestors, mainly youth.

When we got into the car, Papa covered his face with a tagelmust[10], leaving only his eyes visible. I was puzzled, as one normally wraps a tagelmust around the face either as a marker of identity or to protect against wind-born sand. Without having to be asked, Papa explained that he was concealing his face to avoid being recognized, as others may think he was going against the boycott and was eager to welcome the new President Mahamadou Issoufou. Indeed, Papa claimed that no one in Zinder supported Issoufou or his party, the PNDS-Tarayya. Rather, Zinder was the stronghold of the political opposition, especially of the CDS-Rahama, the party of the first democratically elected Nigerien president, Mahamane

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[9] I had several different research assistants in different areas and phases of my study.

[10] Worn by men from different ethnic groups in Niger including Tuareg, Tubu, Fulani, Hausa or Songhai, a tagelmust is a garment that looks like a veil and a turban combined.

Ousmane (1993-1996). Papa explained that the *Zinderois* also supported former MNSD-Nassara leader and President Mamadou Tandja (1999-2010). Through his political decision to build the refinery in Zinder, Tandja was represented (and widely received) as ending the region's (perceived) historical, political, and social marginalization.

2.1.1. En route to the inauguration

Military and police had showed out in force to secure the streets. Along the route to the inauguration, people lined the roadside, waving in support of the cars heading to the inauguration. After Papa had just asserted that no one in Zinder supported the new government, I was surprised to see so many people on the streets. The people, he claimed, were "villagers" who the governor had brought into Zinder on trucks to stage public support for the president, as no *Zinderois* would dare to do so. Moreover, he stressed that the crowd was small in comparison to the foundation stone ceremony three years earlier. According to Papa, the *Zinderois* had turned out in their thousands to support President Tandja and his campaign to change the constitution, *Tazartché.* That day three years ago, wealthy Zinder businessman Dan Dubai had mobilized the crowd to demand that Tandja, in the name of the Nigerien population, remain in office in order to complete the "great construction sites" that he had initiated, especially those that had made Niger an oil producer.

During the drive, Papa told me that earlier that morning youths had built and set alight tire barricades on the streets around the main bus station, and had violently clashed with security forces. As the presidential procession passed through the city, people had worn t-shirts of Tandja and shouted his name, torn up pictures of Issoufou, performed insulting gestures, and thrown stones. Papa asserted that the political opposition had planned and organized violent youth demonstrations, and that supporters of the opposition (especially agents of Dan Dubai) had not only sent the text messages, but also bought slingshots at Zinder's central market and distributed them to youth to attack the presidential motorcade. Pointing to the violence, Papa concluded that there were no peaceful demonstrations in Niger. This might be possible in the West, he said, but in Niger a demonstration would always turn violent, as political players were always operating in the background. Moreover, in referring to the public discourse surrounding the inauguration, Papa – himself of Fulani ethnicity – disputed the call for a regional quota of *Zinderois* in the recruitment of oil workers. This was, he said, "racism: I=Hausa, you=Fulani, he=Kanuri".[11] Most importantly, they were all Nigeriens, and it therefore should not matter what ethnicity the directors' of the oil refinery (*Société de Raffinage de Zinder*, SORAZ) were. In Niger, he continued, there is uranium in the north (Agadez region), oil in the east (Diffa region), and gold in the west (Tillabéri region), and people of Hausa ethnicity would occupy directors' posts within the resource extracting companies in these regions. If this kind of "racism" was to be continued, he feared that the *Zinderoi*s would have to leave Agadez, Tuareg would have to leave Zinder, and so on.

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[11] The ethnic makeup of Niger is approximately as follows: 53 percent Hausa (dominating southern Niger with Zinder being the center of Hausaland), 21.2 percent Zarma-Songhai (dominating western Niger), 10.4

After passing the northern checkpoint of Zinder city along the 50 km route north to the refinery, our driver switched on the hazard lights to show we were part of the festive procession. The route was secured by soldiers at intervals of about 500 meters, with two soldiers in each village along the route, which was lined by local residents. Arriving at the junction to the refinery, we saw about 30 colorfully decorated horse riders lining both sides of the street and colorful flags along the access road to the refinery. The horse riders appeared to refer to the pre-colonial Damagaram sultanate, and as such, were a sign of a powerful Hausa traditional society, which at the end of the 19th century had possessed an army of 5000 cavalry, 30,000 foot soldiers, and a dozen cannons, before it was crushed by the French at the turn of the 20th century.[12]

2.1.2. The festival site

Having parked the car in the lot, we walked to the festival site, which was located in front of the refinery. The entrance was marked by a red inflatable archway, with a red ball in the center flanked by two golden dragons (see photo 1). To mark the launch of both the refinery and the start of oil extraction in Diffa, the text on the archway (in Chinese and French) read: "Launching ceremonies of oil exploitation activities in Niger and the commissioning of the Zinder refinery". Beyond the archway, five flagpoles holding large red vertical banners framed the fairground (see photo 2). In French and Chinese, the flags read: "A modern refinery for the self-sufficiency and energy independence of Niger", "United for win-win cooperation and a collaborative partnership contributing to the development of Niger",

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percent Tuareg (dominating northern Niger), 9.9 percent Fulani (spread throughout the country), 4.4 percent Kanuri (dominating south-eastern Niger), 0.4 percent Tubu (dominating the Niger/Chadian borderland), 0.3 percent Arab (mostly in eastern Niger), 0.3 percent Gourmantché (in western Niger) and 0.2 percent others (INS-Niger 2011).

[12] With colonialism, the position of the Sultan was merely reduced to symbolic power, and in 1926 the administrative center of Niger was transferred to Niamey in the far west of the country.

"Long live Sino-Nigerian cooperation", "SORAZ, a shining jewel in the Sahel-Saharan region" and "Fraternal friendship, sincere cooperation".

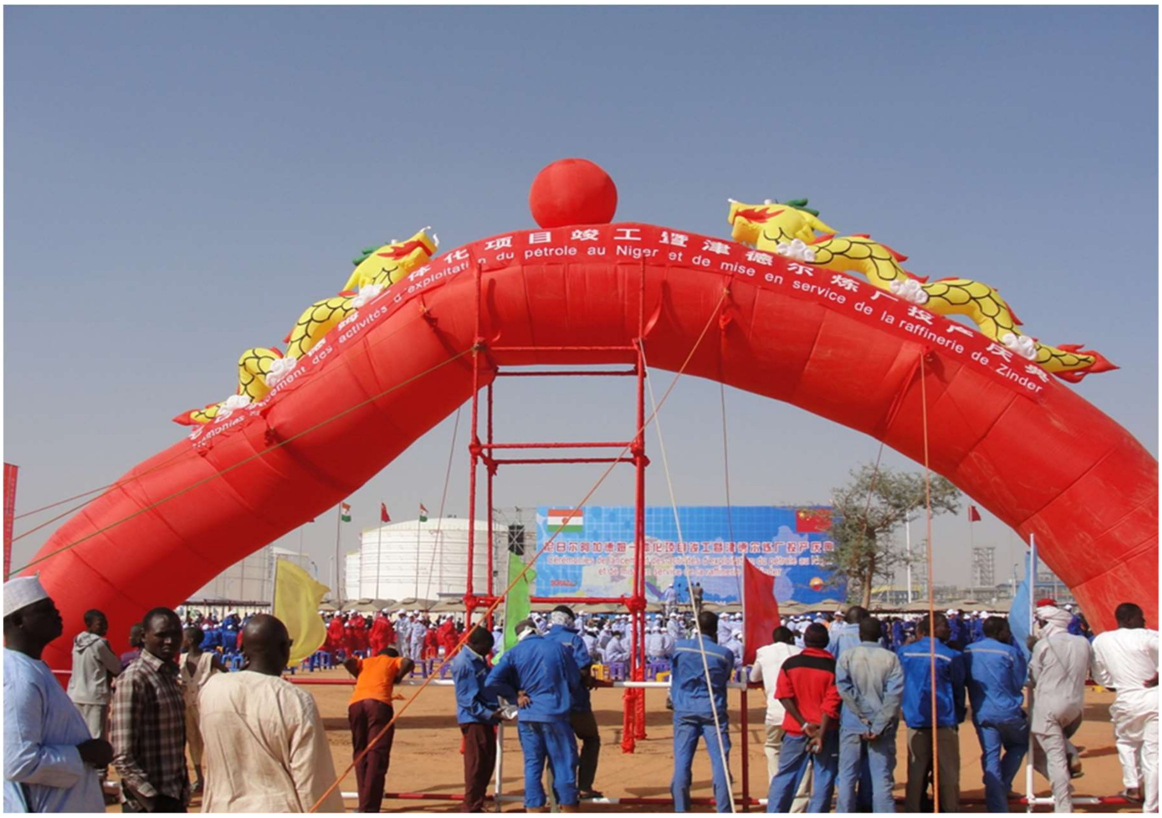
一体化项目竣工暨津德尔炼厂投产庆典
Cérémonies ement des activités d'exploitation du pétrole au Niger et de mise en service de la raffinerie de Zinder

Figure 3: The archway marking the entrance to the festival site. Photo: Jannik Schritt

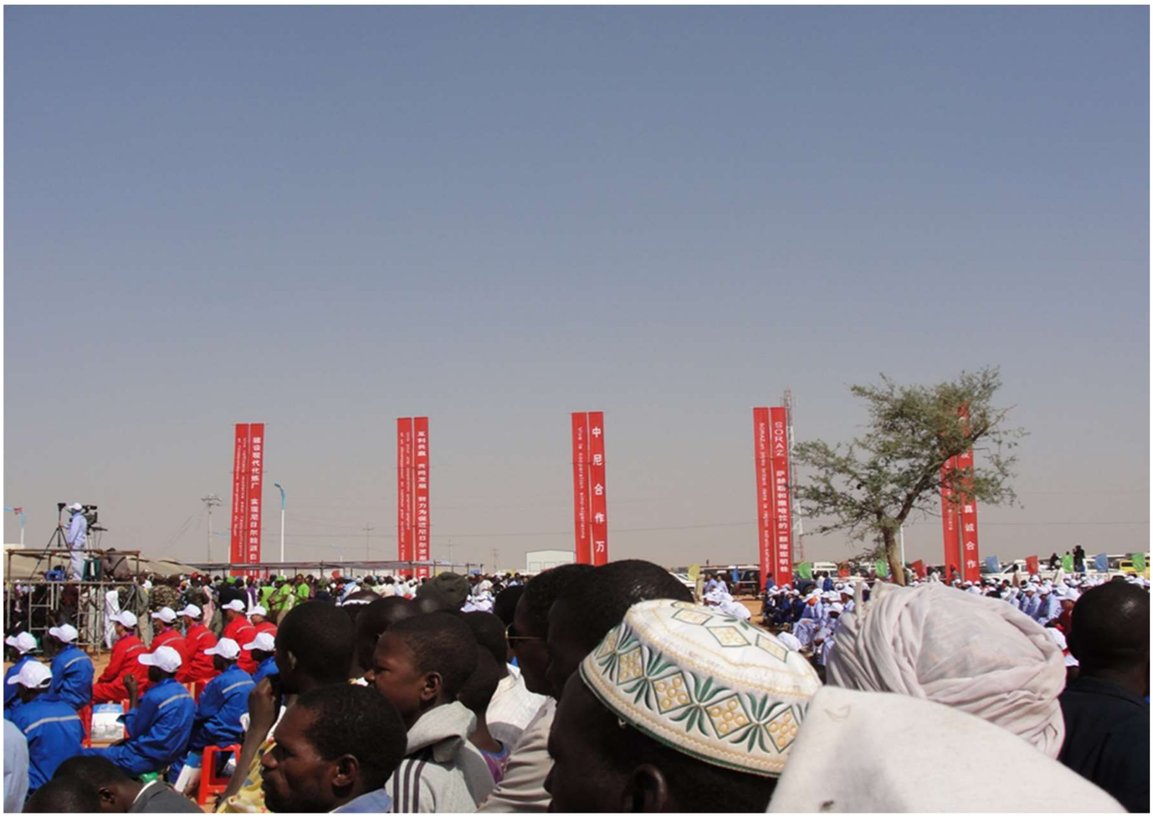

Figure 4: The five flagpoles bordering the festival site to the right. Photo: Jannik Schritt

Opposite the archway entrance, a stage had been installed. The backdrop included a patchwork of maps of Niger and China on a blue background with the respective national flags, the logos of China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and SORAZ, and once again the slogan of the day: “Launching ceremonies of oil exploitation activities in Niger and the commissioning of the Zinder refinery” (see photo 3).

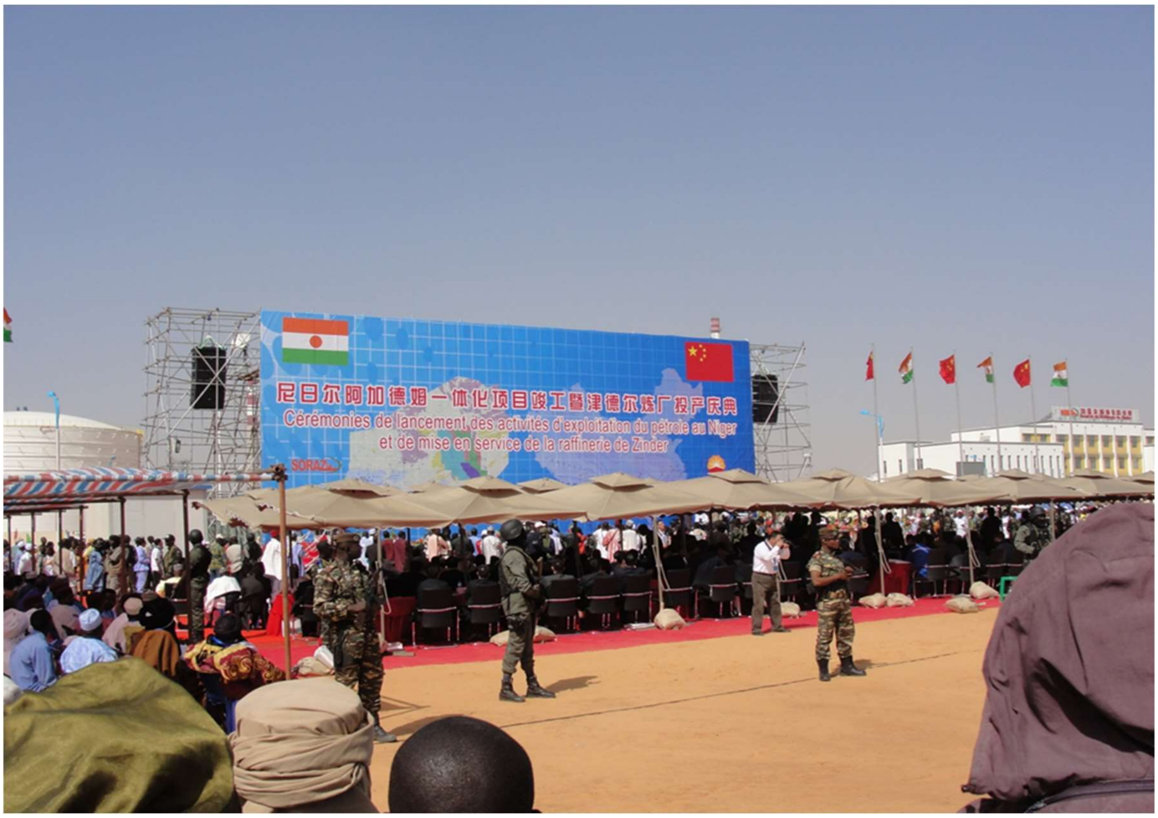
尼日尔阿加德姆一体化项目竣工暨津德尔炼厂投产庆典
Cérémonies de lancement des activités d'exploitation du pétrole au Niger
et de mise en service de la raffinerie de Zinder
SORAZ

Figure 5: The VIP area in front of the stage. Photo: Jannik Schritt

The festival space was clearly hierarchically structured. A red carpet was rolled out around the stage, and the site was divided into several sections. In front of the stage, several rows of ocher-colored marquees were set-up to provide shade for the VIP guests. In the center of the first row, a brown sofa was reserved for the most important guests – President Issoufou and chairman of CNPC Jiang Jiemin. On both sides of the brown sofa stood black sofas reserved for important Nigerien and Chinese leaders, including the president of the National Assembly Hama Amadou from the coalition partner MODEN-FA Lumana, the vice president of Petro-China Bo Qiliang, the Chinese ambassador of Niger Xia Huang, the Nigerien oil and energy minister Foumokoye Gado, and the governor of Zinder Oumarou Seydou Issaka. The second and third rows were made up of black chairs and tables with red tablecloths. These rows were reserved for important national and international guests, including the Sultan of Zinder, as well as ministers and ambassadors from around the world.

Together, these rows built the inner circle in front of the stage. This area was tightly controlled by the military (see photo 3).

The VIP area was flanked by plastic pavilions with red, white and blue-striped roofs. The area was reserved for invited guests, who sat here on plastic chairs. In the center of the fenced-off festival area, but some distance behind the secured military zone, several rows of plastic stools were placed in the blazing sun. These stools were staggered into five, different-colored vertical blocks (see photo 4).

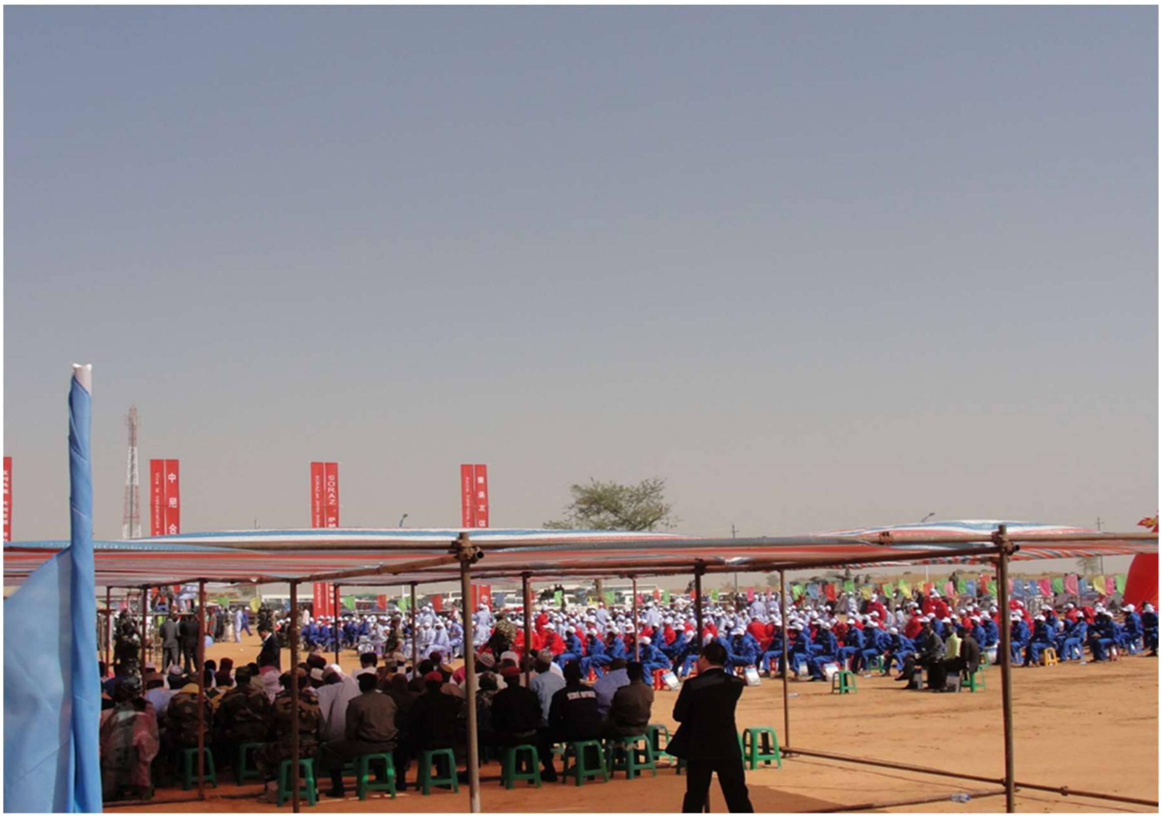

Figure 6: Five blocks of oil workers sat on plastic stools in the blazing sun. Photo: Jannik Schritt

A Chinese worker told me the division of the chairs indicated the company structure and the classification of workers. In the first block on the far right, the workers wore dark blue uniforms, classifying them as unskilled CNPC workers. This block was uniquely composed of Nigeriens. In the second block, the oil workers wore red uniforms. As the recruitment process of Nigerien workers was still underway at SORAZ, the Chinese-Nigerien joint venture oil refinery, these workers were exclusively Chinese. The third block was again composed exclusively of Chinese workers who wore light blue uniforms, classifying them as technical operators at SORAZ. Like the unskilled workers, the workers in the fourth block also wore dark blue uniforms, but this time the workers were both Chinese and

Nigerien, and wore the emblem of CPP (China Petroleum Pipeline) on their backs.[13] The fifth block was reserved for skilled workers such as technicians and managers. They wore sashes. Towards the end of the ceremony they would be rewarded for their "outstanding work", from the start of the construction process until the refinery's completion. The state television channel *Office de Radiodiffusion et Télévision du Niger* (ORTN) and a Chinese cameraman filmed the event from a centrally built gallery just behind the VIP area. Private radio and television from Zinder were also present at the fairground (including *Shukurah*, *Anfani*, *Association Alternative Espace Citoyen*, and *Radio Télévision Téneré* (RTT)), but they were not provided with a gallery and were left to mingle among the crowd.

By the time we arrived at the fairground, people had already taken their seats. Only open to invited guests, we were left to stand outside the fenced-off area. Here we stood with people from the surrounding villages, as well as Chinese and Nigerien oil workers not selected for the representative seating arrangement. Although most of these workers were standing in groups uniquely composed of either Chinese or Nigeriens, the groups did not appear to be entirely segregated, with several members of each group greeting each other and shaking hands.

My companions commented that the audience was a lot smaller than at the foundation stone ceremony held at the same spot three years earlier. They claimed that if former President Tandja or current opposition leader and president of CDS-Rahama Mahamane Ousmane had inaugurated the oil refinery, the festival site would have been "bursting at the seams". Whilst Issoufou, as then leader opposition had been at the foundation stone ceremony, neither Tandja, Ousmane, nor Tandja's successor as leader of the MNSD, Seyni Oumarou, were present at its inauguration. For my companions, the absence of these political leaders, especially of Tandja as "the father of Niger's oil", as well as the small crowd, signaled the new government's lack of acceptance both among the political opposition and amongst the *Zinderois* population.

2.1.3. The ceremonial speeches and performances

Nigerien music blared out of on-stage loudspeakers as we waited for the ceremony to start. A Nigerien and a Chinese animator made announcements in Hausa, French and Chinese, repeatedly mentioning and welcoming the VIPs. Shortly before 10 am, Issoufou's arrival was announced, but it took a second announcement and another 30 minutes before he finally walked down the red carpet.[14] While waiting, the entertainers repeatedly encouraged the audience to applaud and welcome him. Shortly after he walked the red carpet, guests without official invitations were allowed to enter the festival space, while the inner, military-controlled zone was retained for the VIPs.

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[13] CPP is a subsidiary of CNPC and was responsible for laying the 462.5 km long oil pipeline from Agadem in the east of the country to the refinery near Zinder.

With Issoufou seated, the entertainers invited the Iman to hold the opening prayer, the *Al-Fātiḥa*. Papa commented that Issoufou had brought his own marabout from Niamey, rather than calling on one from Zinder. For Papa, as for many others in Zinder, this move was incomprehensible, as they considered their region the most pious in Niger. Indeed, Issoufou's decision to bring his own marabout became a significant issue in Zinder, with a narrative emerging that he was afraid of the *Zinderois* as they supported Tandja and the political opposition. Issoufou's decision was also widely interpreted as shunning Zinder and its people. This narrative was supported by rumors circulating prior to the opening that Issoufou would take a helicopter from the airport directly to the refinery to avoid passing through Zinder city by car, as he was so afraid of being attacked. These rumors linked back to Issoufou's 2010 visit in the lead up to the presidential elections, where he was greeted by acts of great hostility, with my interlocutors proudly telling that he was attacked with stones.

After the marabout, the governor of Zinder addressed the crowd. A PNDS member appointed by the central government rather than elected, the governor highlighted the government's great efforts to address the challenges facing the Zinder region, in particular the security situation and the lack of agricultural and pastoral production. He emphasized the profitability of the petroleum sector, and how this would help to reduce youth unemployment, as well as the government's so-called "3N" program – "*les Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens*" ("Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens") – for agricultural self-sufficiency. After the governor finished, the Zinder cultural group *Madoubi* danced on-stage.

Following *Madoubi*, the chairman of CNPC Jiang Jiemin spoke, underlining the friendship between China and Niger, and the collaborative and amicable relationship between the Chinese and Nigerien workers. He also stressed how organized and coordinated the integrated oil project had been, and how quickly it had been completed. Indeed, the exploitation of the Agadem oil block in the Diffa region, the construction of a 462.5km pipeline, and the refinery in Zinder had all been opened only three-and-a-half years after the contracts had been signed. He then emphasized CNPC's socially responsible approach, in particular the creation of jobs, the training and development of Nigerien personnel, the construction of education, health, water and electricity infrastructure, and the financial contributions to commemorative events and to the regional governments of Zinder and Diffa.

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[14] Before arriving at the ceremony, Issoufou was said to have visited his maternal village about 30 kilometers north of Bakin Birgi. This is why he arrived so late, although his presidential motorcade had passed the route to the refinery long before us.

Following the chairman of CNPC, Chinese ambassador Xia Huang also stressed the friendly cooperation between China and Niger. He underlined that the dream of all Nigeriens was for their country to become an oil producer. And after many years of exploration work, Chinese engineers had finally realized the dream – and that in only three years. He emphasized that the oil refinery would be profitable for Niger, and pointed to the development of Chinese-Nigerien relations and Chinese investments in Nigerien infrastructure development. Finally, he emphasized that Chinese friendship and development cooperation came without any conditions, and was guided by one, single goal: to enhance the development capacity of Niger. After the ambassador, the Niamey group *Anachoi* performed a dance.

Following *Anachoi*, Nigerien oil and energy minister Foumokoye Gado spoke, stressing that Niger's entrance into the circle of oil producers was a historic moment. The minister first thanked the "almighty and merciful Allah" for making the oil project possible. The launch marked Niger's future as a new, energy independent country. He emphasized the hope, pleasure and joy of the moment, but also pointed to the decades of disappointment and pain caused by the failure to develop the country's petroleum wealth. He reminded the audience of the history of oil exploration in Niger, which had started in 1958, with the first wells drilled by a French company in the 1960s. He also reminded the audience that in 2006 Esso and Petronas had abandoned the Agadem oil block, judging that it would not be profitable in the context of low world oil prices and with reserves of only about 350 million barrels, according to their estimation. With the increase in oil prices in 2007, dozens of multinational oil companies had again shown interest in Niger's oil. In 2008, CNPC won the tender, agreeing to construct an oil refinery and a pipeline connecting the upstream and downstream oil industry inside the country. Gado then praised the Chinese for their determination to complete the petro-infrastructure, as well as the Nigerien oil workers for their professionalism and patriotism.

He then turned to oil revenues, their paradoxical effects, and the threats that they may pose – intensifying inequality, engendering frustration, and even civil war. He went on to explain the phenomenon of the rentier economy, in which the profits only come to serve a minority, and the social peace of the country starts to dissolve, with many "deviations" starting to develop: corruption, the distribution of public markets for money laundering, the emergence of mafia-like networks of letter box companies intervening in the petroleum sector, pre-financing activities in anticipation of an inflow of petroleum cash, unjust enrichment through false vouchers in the redistribution of petro-dollars, inefficient petroleum contracts, and unwarranted changes to the constitution. He thus concluded that oil always brought with it an opportunity and a trap.

To avoid falling into the trap, which he said had already started to develop – a reference to Tandja's campaign for constitutional change – he stressed the importance of good governance and transparency in the resource sector. He emphasized that this was at the top of the government's agenda: Niger had declared its adherence to the principles of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in March 2011; the new constitution of the Seventh Republic imposed transparency on the government authorities; and that the former military government had developed a project for a national charter on good governance in January 2011. Gado underlined the Issoufou government's firm determination to implement all the necessary instruments for guaranteeing good governance and transparency, in this case in oil development. This commitment would guarantee that all Nigerian people, but especially the poorest, would profit from the wealth of these sub-soil resources. Gado then addressed the population's preoccupation with the fuel price fixed by the government, assuring the audience that he will always remain open to dialog. He stressed that he is willing to find a just and fair fuel price without, however, compromising the possibilities of the Nigerien state to assure the country's economic and social development. He then emphasized that such development is at the heart of the population's expectations and the government's program. He then referred to President Issoufou's inaugural speech and new Prime Minister Birgi Raffini's political declaration, in which both elaborated on the government's development program to improve access to water, education and health, develop the road infrastructure, and end Niger's long history of food insecurity with the 3N program. Finally, Gado launched a "patriotic" call to all Nigeriens to remain peaceful and patient in the management of the future petroleum "manna".

After Gado's speech, important individuals in the oil project were presented with awards. Firstly, five of the Chinese VIPs – the chairman of CNPC, the vice president of Petro-China, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CNPC-Niger, the CEO of CPP, and the CEO of SORAZ – received the Legion of Merit of the Republic of Niger. Secondly, Gado honored five Chinese and five Nigerien petroleum technicians and managers who had been involved in the oil project from the outset with awards. After the decoration ceremonies, a delegation headed by Issoufou and the president of CNPC went behind the stage to the refinery itself for the symbolic start of the oil-age in Niger. Meanwhile, the hosts announced the presence of the diplomatic community present at the ceremony: ambassadors from all over the world, ministers from other (West) African countries, governors from the neighboring regions, religious authorities, and they personally named one businessman, Dahirou Mangal.[15] They also announced that together these people had donated four million FCFA (6,098 Euro) for the cultural groups to perform. The opening ceremony ended with the Zinder music group *Haské Star* performing a song specially composed for the event, in which they honored Issoufou as the lion (*Zaki*) – a name given to him for his "great qualities" by his political comrades (Abdouramane 2015). At around 1 pm, the three-hour ceremony was over, and we made our way back to Zinder.

2.1.4. Discourses in Zinder

Back in Zinder in the early afternoon, the events surrounding the president's arrival were already on everyone's lips. Having missed the morning protests while waiting for Papa to organize a car, at around 3 pm I was finally able to walk through the city to the main bus station and the central roundabouts, and to see the remnants of the protests firsthand. I then visited the radio stations to get their views and collected their reports on the day. The private radio stations reported extensively on the youth protests rather than on the inauguration ceremony itself. Although some radio commentators questioned reports that the presidential motorcade had been attacked and official cars destroyed, all agreed that the ceremony had been a failure for Issoufou, who was not welcomed as a president should be. According to the director of Zinder community radio station *Alternative,* the protests related back to Tandja's *Tazartché* campaign for constitutional change. The director argued that Tandja had not told the population the truth about the oil contracts, but had rather focused on making promises that could not be kept about jobs, wealth, a low fuel price, and much more. While the new government had detailed the calculation behind the fuel price in terms of the purchasing price at SORAZ and additional taxes, many people would not believe them as Tandja's promises had created the illusion of prosperity.

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[15] Originally from Niger, Mangal pursues his economic operations mainly in Nigeria. His is said to be a close ally of Mahamadou Issoufou (see chapter 4).

Anfani radio station reported that a group of *kabou kabou* (motorcycle taxi drivers) had been organized that morning to accompany the presidential procession from the airport through the city of Zinder. The motorcade was to travel from the martial arts arena over the sultanate to the governorate before passing through the city, but was stopped along the route after being attacked by protestors. The chairperson of the motorcycle taxi labor union whom I visited some days later confirmed the story, telling me that a member of the PNDS had paid him and a group of about 30 *kabou kabou* 100,000 FCFA (152 Euro) to welcome the president with a festive procession and to carry portraits of his likeness. They had done the same when Tandja had arrived for the foundation stone ceremony. This time, however, the *kabou kabou* had to stop their motorcade because they had been abused and feared being attacked. He claimed that around 1000 protestors had been creating havoc and destruction in the streets that morning. Although he actually supported Tandja, in accepting the money, he had made a contract to show support for Issoufou. He then claimed that Issoufou's election win in March that year was not legitimate, and that the MNSD-Nassara candidate Oumarou was the true winner of the election. However, since Commander Salou Djibo had ousted Tandja in a military coup in February 2010, Djibo could not have restored the MNSD to power. To maintain the legitimacy of the coup, Djibo had therefore needed the PNDS candidate Issoufou to win. He knew all this, including the election results, because Dan Dubai had shown him documents claiming that Issoufou had won 48 percent of the vote, whereas Oumarou had won 52 percent – a statement that I came to hear repeatedly during my fieldwork.

Returning to my guest house at around 6 pm, I switched on the television. The state television channel ORTN report focused exclusively on the festive character of the event, making no mention of the protests. From the president's arrival at the airport, they only showed clips of Issoufou's supporters, leaving out the protestors. During the ceremony, they closely framed the stage to avoid showing images of the small crowd. At the end of the ceremony, they followed the presidential delegation to the refinery, showing what had happened behind the stage. Here, together Issoufou and the CNPC president symbolically opened the pipeline and planted a tree. Then, Issoufou and the presidential delegation left the festival site in their four-wheel drives, with youth from the surrounding villages crowding the roadside to catch a glimpse of the president. Late that evening, as I switched off the television to go to bed, I received another short message, this one mocking the "the lion":

> Scandal in Zinder: The head of state [*Kai*: *disrespectful form of address*] has lost his value to Nigeriens. This morning, the president and the delegation that accompanied him were made unwelcome in Zinder. The *Zinderois* population criticized, insulted and threw stones at the presidential procession, destroyed official vehicles, and shouted: we want Papa Tandja back. A real sabotage of the opening ceremony for the lion [*zaki*]. Please, send this information to your brothers and sisters. It is your right. This is freedom of expression. (SMS sent on the evening of 28 November 2011, translated from French)

2.2. The extended case method in contemporary social theory

I started this chapter with a detailed description of a political situation in oil-age Hausaland, in the style of Gluckman's (1940) analysis of a bridge opening in modern Zululand, as I assume that the context of the situation lies already within the situation itself and can be revealed with situational analysis or the extended case method (Clarke 2003; Gluckman 1940). The detailed description thus allows me to identify the heterogeneous elements and the translocal forces at play in the situation, including Zinder as the political center of the opposition, collective identities of ethnicity and regional belonging in Niger, the political campaign *Tazartché,* patterns of political mobilization, the history of oil in Niger, Western versus Chinese oil engagement and diplomacy, and the resource curse thesis and rentier state theory.

Looking closely at the heterogeneous elements of the situation brings into question the following: what made oil in Niger political and contested? Were the conflicts at the opening ceremony already an early sign of the resource curse in Niger: the notion that oil wealth itself may lead to negative effects for the economy, governance and the society, as oil and energy minister Gado had mentioned in his speech? Was *Tazartché* triggered by Tandja's and his entourage's desire to capture the oil revenues? Did the population at the refinery's inauguration protest because of oil-related grievances? Or, was the opening ceremony rather a stage for political conflicts to be played out on a public occasion?

To answer these questions, throughout the thesis I will contextualize and analyze the situation by tracing the relations between the situation's heterogeneous elements into time and space. I do so by reformulating the extended case method (as developed in the tradition of the Manchester School), in light of contemporary social theory, especially to include aspects of the material turn or "distributed agency" between humans and non-humans as proposed, for example, by assemblage theory, Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), or Science and Technology Studies (STS) more broadly.

2.2.1. Political situations

Founded by Gluckman in 1947 at the University of Manchester, the Manchester School conceptualized and focused on events as moments of crisis and conflict that revealed a breach with everyday routinized structures or patterns of society. In doing so, the Manchester School shifted the focus from the functions of social structures that formed the basis of the dominant school of British anthropological theory at the time, the structural functionalism of Radcliff-Brown and his followers, to class conflict and reconciliation. As became clear during my research, the oil refinery's opening ceremony could be seen as a case in point of such a moment of crisis, conflict and reconciliation. However, although the Manchester School distanced itself from structural functionalism, early formulations like those of Gluckman (1940) still interpreted moments of crisis as atypical events that would, over time, return to some form of structural social equilibrium. Although social peace did return after the inauguration, throughout the thesis I show that this did not equate to a longer-term stability or equilibrium, and rather, that the socio-political constellation changed through the protest cycle and continued to change in the following years.

Since the 1980s, however, when postmodernist influence came to dominate anthropological theory, the focus has moved away from analyzing "bounded" social situations to look rather at instability and flows between multiple sites. In more recent years, anthropological interest in "the situation" has re-emerged, re-conceptualizing it in new ontological and methodological ways that draw on pragmatism, notions of globality, and/or assemblage theory (Kapferer 2010; Zigon 2015; Tsing 2000; Evens and Handelman 2006).

In analyzing the event of Niger becoming an oil-producer, I try to bring the perspectives of assemblage theory and pragmatist politics together. As outlined in the introduction, I understand assemblages as material-semiotic entities which are, through associations and substitutions of heterogeneous elements, in a constant state of "becoming". Elements are understood in the widest sense, covering component parts, be they human or non-human, technologies, discursive formations, symbols, the physical environment, and so on. These material-semiotic assemblages are "onto-epistemologies" (Barad 2007) in which significations and materials are inextricably linked in networks whose elements define and shape one another (see also Lynch 2013; Law 2009). However, I understand material-semiotic assemblages never as completely enclosed entities or networks but as always more or less interconnected with other assemblages. This contrasts to positions of proponents of the "ontological turn" (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998; Descola 2014), who seem to understand material-semiotic assemblages as independent, homogenous and self-contained totalities characterized by "radical alterity" that can be studied as worlds of distinct mattering and being, or what they call "ontologies". However, in such a conception, ontology may become "just another word for culture" (Carrithers et al. 2010), and thereby lead to back its fundamental problem, cultural reification. I therefore propose to always understand and study onto-epistemologies not only in their multiplicities but also their interconnectedness. I contend that ethnographic situations offer an epistemic window into contested material-semiotic assemblages that dis/connect with various other networks, thus allowing us to extend out from concrete observations of the situation itself into broader synchronic and diachronic dis/entanglements. In doing so, I am seeking to respond to Kelly's (2014) call for the ontological turn to lead to a realist theorization and understanding of situations. I turn to that in more detail now.

Gluckman (1958: 9) understood "social situations" as "the underlying system of relationships between the social structure of the community, the parts of the social structure, the physical environment, and the physiological life of the community′s members". Drawing on assemblage theory, Kapferer (2010) reformulates this, understanding "social situations" as "generic moments of becoming" that open up new possibilities in forming social realities, rather than returning inevitably to the structural equilibrium of society. Bringing assemblage theory together with pragmatist politics, I adopt Barry's (2012; 2013; 2016) notion of "political situations". According to Barry, political situations are contested events and material-semiotic assemblages that include artefacts and technologies, as well as discursive movements of ideas. He thereby understands events "not […] as moments in time, but as points of interference between multiple trajectories, which may generate unexpected and emergent effects, as well as new spatio-temporal relations" (Barry 2016b: 4). A political situation in his understanding is thus not "bounded" in local places, but rather stretches over extended periods of time and scale. Looking at the interconnectedness of a localized project with broader forces of progress and modernization, its conflation with other projects of various scales, and its linkages with flows and circulations, we come to understand how local experiences and practices clash with these broader forces and projects, thereby making the situation inherently "global" (Tsing 2000). In extending out over time and scale then, we come to see how imminently current, local projects are inherently both rooted in history and dis/entangled with translocal forces.

Building on ANT notions of "performativity" and "enactment" according to which all kind of heterogeneous elements assemble and together enact a set of practices that shape reality (Law 2009: 150/151), Barry (2012: 331) states that "a political situation should be understood as performed or empracticed, whether through the publication of policy statements, news media, public demonstrations and experiments, or in the analytical writings of social scientists, including policy analysts and theorists of regulation and governance". Economic theory in particular has been said to bring forth or enact the subject matter into being that it pretends to analyze (Çalışkan and Callon 2009). The resource curse thesis is a case in point of the articulation of economic theory within political situations (Weszkalnys 2011; Hoinathy and Behrends 2014; Barry 2016: 7/8). In this sense, the Nigerien case of the opening was performed or empracticed not only by the protests and their national and international media coverage, but also by the academic theories and policy concepts of the rentier state and the resource curse that articulated with the emerging situation. However, these concepts are more than just a policy model to foster transparency and good governance as materialized in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) campaign, with oil minister Gado's speech just one example of many in this thesis of how academic models have also entered into macro and micro-political disputes and negotiations.

To empirically study the articulation of economic theory and the discursive movement of other ideas from one context to another, the concepts of "travelling ideas" or "travelling models" has been suggested (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Rottenburg 2009; Behrends et al. 2014). Within these concepts, as the underlying element in the travels of ideas, the theory of translation takes center stage (Kaufmann and Rottenburg 2012). Here translation refers to the process of so-called "re-territorialization" or "re-embedding" of travelling elements. That is, the arriving elements connect, link or associate with existing elements at the destination, thereby altering not only the travelling idea, but also the network into which it is integrated (ibid.). Rather than assuming fixed or homogeneous cultural contexts of transfer, or a national context of departure and a national context of destination (see e.g. Espagne 2013), I show how images, ideas and models of oil are translated in a heterogeneous political arena in which different political actors compete for power, resources, and legitimacy (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1998).

In translating the concept of translation into the field of politics – which I defined briefly in the introduction as a game with certain rules and a particular logic of conflict which is primarily about winning access to power and resources – it becomes clear that not every translation is either possible or desirable. As Barry (2013) states, politics are simultaneously about secrecy and publicity, about attempting to make some things and ideas public and transparent, while trying to suppress or distract from others. Thus, political actors may actively block and create obstacles to some translations. Instead, in speaking of "translation zones", Barry (2013b) proposes the metaphor of conflict for translations in the space of international politics. I adopt his critique of a dominant focus in Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) and Science and Technology Studies (STS) on perfect translations and his proposed focus on conflict to equally look at failures, fissures and fractures in translation processes (see also Rottenburg 2008). In acknowledging translation failures, I, however, do not believe that translations are impossible, nor in the incommensurability of knowledge systems as a condition to be found in the world – like proponents of the ontological turn need to assume for their ontologies to exist as distinct worlds in the plural – but rather that incommensurability is one possible outcome of translations in settings of unequal power relations and domination.

While the Manchester School focused on events or situations as a theory generating methodology, in the social science literature, situations have been often used as "apt illustrations" of already formulated theories, rather than the very material from which to generate new theories and understandings (Kapferer 2006). To avoid simply using the event of the oil refinery's inauguration as an apt illustration, I make use of Burawoy's (1998) suggestion to extend the situational analysis into four moments: first, by extending out from being the observer to also being the participant; second, by extending observations over time and space; third, by extending out from the micro to the macro levels; and fourth, by extending or reformulating existing theories through rigorously engaging them with the empirical case material. Although I follow the four moments of Burawoy's extended case method, I also reformulate each of these moments, adding to the traditional strength of the extended case method on the "practice" and "process" insights of the material turn. Such a reformulation looks not only at the practices of human actors, but also at how they act in concert with various ordering technologies such as the radio, text messages, tires, and fuel and their dis/entanglements in wider assemblages. I will now elaborate on how I understand these four moments.

2.2.2. Extending from observer to participant

Practice theory assumes that human action is inscribed in an implicit and informal logic of social life, and follows a tacit knowledge inherent in practice (Reckwitz 2003). If this is the case, then, a large part of this knowledge cannot be drawn out through interviews.[16] The best way to study this logic and knowledge must therefore be through participation in social life as it unfolds in real time. Indeed, "participant observation" has been the key method in social and cultural anthropology since Malinowski (1922) famously outlined the essentials of long-term fieldwork. Nevertheless, while it appears to me that interviewing has become the dominant method of research in much contemporary social science and even some anthropological work, it is one that privileges the normative, ideal principles, formal rules, and self-representation. Whether this dependence on interviewing is due to time constraints or a postmodern anthropology that transcends the boundaries of classic anthropology in rural settings, and shifts the ethnographic focus to multi-sited ethnography or urban settings where it is often difficult to participate in daily activities like work or family life, it nevertheless remains the key challenge for anthropologists to find (new) ways or forums of participation. Otherwise, the key strength of the anthropological approach, gathering deep insights into the various "entangled logics" (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 11) of the field by performing the same activities as one's interlocutors, will become lost. If this is the case, anthropologists will face the danger of merely collecting subjective self-representations that are framed by and addressed to the questions, person and positionality of the researcher. With the emergence of the "practice turn" (Schatzki et al. 2001) in contemporary social theory, these shortcomings highlight the importance of re-emphasizing participant observation and the extended case method's focus on "social life in terms of its lived, concrete reality" (Evens and Handelman 2006: 3). In this context, I argue that the extended case study should once again be adopted as a methodology, as its great strength lies in the focus on events as they are lived and unfold in real time (Evens and Handelman 2006; Rössler 2008).

As I have outlined above, the extended case study became the primary focus of the 13 months of fieldwork I conducted between 2011 and 2014. During four separate periods of fieldwork, I collected in-depth ethnographic material on social and political dynamics in Niger in the time of oil. I had my first stay in Zinder, Niamey, and Diffa from March to

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[16] It must be noted that there are, of course, different forms of (ethnographic) interviews (see Spradley 1979). Narrative and sequential interviewing seems most appropriate for revealing a case structure and to call for logical inference (in contrast to statistical inference of quantitative methods) (Rosenthal 2011; Small 2009).

May 2011, which I used as a classical anthropological orientation phase to acquire language skills[17] and to conduct interviews with different kinds of social and political actors along the oil production chain. I also used this period to develop my understanding of the political arenas and strategic groups that had formed around oil as the matter at stake in politics (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1995) and as matters of public concern (Latour 2004). From October 2011 until March 2012 I was in Zinder (and Niamey briefly), where I primarily conducted a situational analysis of the refinery's inauguration, including its preparation, course of action and follow-up events. I returned to Niger from October 2012 to December 2012, and finally for a month in March 2014, where I followed up on events around the refinery's inauguration to analyze political and socio-cultural continuities, as well as transformations that had occurred.

To best analyze practice as it is lived, I followed Spittler's (2001) outline of the three dimensions of "thick participation". First, he argues for a combination of observation and conversation. As the description of the oil refinery's opening ceremony showed, the social situation allowed me to observe practices and concrete realities, and to then have conversations about these realities, either by collecting statements directed at me as the researcher or by asking questions about the observations. Through observation and conversation, topics that would not have been possible for me to imagine or ask about arose inherently (ibid.: 18). Spittler's second dimension of thick participation is apprenticeship, which I completed by becoming a committee member in the civil society organization *Comité Regional des Associations et Syndicats de la Région de Zinder* (CRAS). As a committee member, I participated in political activities around the oil refinery's inauguration, an experience which helped me decode the political logic of oil-age Niger more generally (chapter 5 and 6). Splitter's final dimension is sensuous experience (in my case of contestation and violence), which I was unlucky enough to feel as a participant observer, when, following the arrest of Dan Dubai in December 2011, I found myself caught in the middle of violent protests and police and military repression (chapter 5).

To further analyze practice and talk as it is lived and unfolds in real time, I applied and adapted methodologies that Meyer and Schareika (2009a) bring under the umbrella of

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[17] Although I took a Hausa language course in Zinder for several months during my first and second stays, I became proficient in neither Hausa nor Zarma. Given the circumstances, this is not surprising: my field research was broken up over four periods, different languages were spoken at the two main research sites, Niamey and Zinder, and I had to constantly switch between French, Hausa and Zarma. These language hurdles may be a common weakness of multi-sited, multi-stay fieldwork.

"neoclassical fieldwork". Neoclassical fieldwork is an attempt to push Malinowski's key insights of long-term fieldwork through contemporary social theory, especially through the practice turn. One of the means to gather empirical data of "natural conversations" that they propose, in contrast to artificial interview situations, is to conduct "participant audition" (2009b). Participant audition is where the researcher records actual conversations and interactive communications not directed at him or her (ibid.). The recorded conversation can then be analyzed using any number of techniques, such as those developed in ethnomethodology (Bergmann 2007; Deppermann 2001). Indeed, conversations that unfold in real-life situations and without the intervention of the researcher provide exemplary data that can be studied to analyze how reality is socially constructed in everyday face-to-face interactions (Berger and Luckmann 1980), thereby reducing the shortcomings associated with the staged interview situation.

I adopted the participant audition method to record CRAS meetings from its very foundation until its disintegration. Afterwards, Ali – my research assistant who himself was a CRAS committee member but who was not in the leadership circle – transcribed the meetings (which were often held in a mix of French and Hausa), identified the different voices, and helped me interpret und understand the different statements afterwards. These transcriptions and interpretations were invaluable not only in understanding the positions of the various civil society activists, but also the approaches they adopted to achieve their goals, and how the organization operated hierarchically.[18] I also extended the participant audition method to gather actual political talk that I did not record myself by collecting footage, audio, or newspaper transcriptions of political speeches, radio debates and media statements and so on of committee members, politicians and businessmen. In chapter 4, I will analyze some of these political speeches and in chapter 5, I will analyze two of these radio debates.

The focus on practice as it unfolds in lived, concrete reality does not prevent the researcher from a reflexive anthropology. Indeed, the presence of the researcher within the situation must be critically reflected upon (Evens and Handelman 2006; Burawoy 1998). In some public events, such as the oil refinery's inauguration ceremony, where I recorded the political speeches, my presence as a researcher is unlikely to have had any influence on the performance of the speeches (or the staging of the event more generally). This is especially so as the speeches would have been written in advance, and were addressed to an audience in which my presence was both barely known and lacking relevance for the speakers. However, at other events, like informal meetings of the civil society committee, my presence as a researcher may have had some impact, such as leading to the silencing of certain actors, or framing of topics in a certain way. The gathering of empirical data must therefore become part of the situational analysis itself. Instead of reflecting on “the field”, “the process of fieldwork”, and “the position of the researcher” in isolation from the presentation of the data in an introductory chapter, I contend that the researcher can never be understood as retaining one single position in the field, but only a situational positionality, one which dynamically emerges through interactions and negotiations at specific times and in specific places. Therefore, both the access to as well as the gathering and interpretation of the data have to be incorporated into the data itself, and thus need to be included within the analysis and analytical chapters themselves. This may also include the researcher’s affective or emotional reactions in interactive situations, as these too invariably impact on data collection and knowledge production (Stodulka 2015). Throughout the thesis then, I make my presence (and my affective/emotional reactions) transparent in cases in which it most obviously influenced the data; not as distortion, noise or bias, but as inherent in the generation of any data. My description of the inauguration ceremony in this chapter and the violence that unfolded afterwards (chapter 5) make this clear. Contrary to claims that it distorts objectivity, incorporating my own presence and intervention into the analysis is essential in adhering to a realist perspective.

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[18] Although these transcripts provided important empirical data on which my interpretation is based, I have been forced to omit them due to length constraints.

Situational analysis furthermore enables the researcher to look at the social relations between the actors, thereby revealing the very situatedness of their practices. In contrast to Durkheim’s sociology of artefactual social things, Gluckman emphasized the interdependent but asymmetrical social relations between groups in action as part of a socio-economic structure of positions at a particular period (Frankenberg 2005).[19] As Evens and Handelman (2006: 5) write, situational analysis is “a way of theorizing practice as it was practiced” and thereby “produces, procedurally, a theory of practice, one that, given its situationalism, comprehends praxis (including ethnographic praxis) as an ongoing, open-ended dialectic” and conceptualizing an actors’ agency as “always dynamically relative to his or her situatedness”. I therefore situate the agency of the different actors, groups of actors, and coalitions of actors in their particular sites of struggle as skilled practices in order to identify their positions, projects and practices (Li 2003).

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[19] It is therefore no coincidence that the members of the Manchester School were also among the most important exponents of social networks analysis (Mitchell 1969).

In understanding political situations as material-semiotic assemblages, to reveal how agency is distributed between humans and non-humans, we must necessarily extend the focus from situations of face-to-face interactions to also include human-to-non-human interactions (Latour 1986). Going even beyond interactions to acknowledge the distributive agency of assemblages (Bennett 2010), I identify the heterogeneous elements that are to be found in a situation. Of course, these elements are seemingly endless but I contend that the most important ones become visible in interactions and are addressed by the actors themselves. The refinery's opening, for example, made clear who was present and who by consequence was absent at the ceremony, how people were mobilized to attend the celebration, and how the people themselves commented on these facts. Moreover, as shown by ethnomethodology, even at staged events, the context has to be constantly referred to and is thus reproduced by the participants themselves (e.g. Meyer 2014). In this sense, as I showed above, the speakers on the ceremonial stage referred to the social and political context of oil production in Niger, whether it was Niger's long history of oil exploration, the country's problems of unemployment, poverty and illiteracy, China's entry into the oil market, Tandja's *Tazartché* campaign, or even the resource curse thesis itself. It is these sensemaking practices and the technologies that are entangled with these practices and together make them happen such as the trucks that carried the people into the city or the mobile phones that diffused organizing information for the youth to mobilize that help the researcher to identify the elements at play in a situation.

My attempt to reformulate the situational analysis or extended case method in anthropology in light of contemporary social theory is similar to an attempt in sociology. Here, Clarke (2003; 2009) sought to articulate situational analysis in the sociological tradition of the Chicago School grounded theory with theory after the postmodern turn. In doing so, she extended grounded theory from symbolic interaction, phenomenology and ethnomethodology to include actor-network theory (ANT) (and the material turn more broadly). Whereas in the first formulation of grounded theory Glaser and Strauss (1967) had centered on framing of action over time as basic social processes, Clarke proposed that to elucidate complexity, the situational mapping of 1) human, non-human, discursive and other elements, 2) the arenas of the actors' commitments, and 3) the position's they did or did not take should be included. Whereas Clarke's sociological analysis places great emphasis on mapping narrative, visual and historical discourses in a situation, in the anthropological extended case method, extending out from the conflict situation in time and space is the primary focus. I turn to that now.

2.2.3. Extending over time and space

A political anthropology approach that shifted the attention from structures to processes was first undertaken by Gluckman during his fieldwork in South Africa in 1938. In 1966 some of Gluckman's former students edited a programmatic volume called "Political Anthropology" that aimed at conceptualizing the "wind of change" in political theory by studying political processes and dynamic phenomena instead of structures (Swartz et al. 1966a: 1). One of the editors later called this approach a "processual anthropology" (Turner 1985). The Manchester School developed the situational analysis or extended case method as a tool kit to study conflicts, which they understood as offering the unique opportunity to observe processes of transformation in real time, and then by tracing and analyzing these transformations out in time, even over decades (van Velsen 1967; Burawoy 2009). To follow the inauguration case over several years, I conducted four research stays. Although my last period of field research was in 2014, through accounts from my assistants and interlocutors via information and communication technologies, and by following media coverage on internet platforms such as *tamtaminfo.com* or *nigerdiaspora.net*, I have continued to follow events in Niger. Drawing on the in-depth knowledge I acquired in the field, I was able to follow and situate events up until the time of writing and final revision in 2018.

Burawoy (1998: 18) argues that by extending observations over time and space (the second moment), "theorizing is compiling situational knowledge into an account of social process" which can be done "because regimes of power structure situations into processes". Historicizing an extended case study thus means following "methodological situationalism" (Knorr-Cetina 1981), in which social reality is understood as emergent from a situational logic, rather than focusing on individual motives or presupposing a basic structure of society. In adopting a methodological situationalism, each individual observation must be interpreted in a threefold process: a) what happened before and after the individual observation, b) the events that preceded and followed the studied event, and c) the context in which the event occurred (Meyer and Schareika 2009a). Here, "the context" is a metaphor for the totality of all the events that preceded the studied case and the translocal forces that brought the situation into being as it was produced and reproduced from within. Put in a different theoretical language, the context is merely a metaphor for the web of relations that extends out of the elements of the situation over time and space. A processual perspective thus allows us to identify the transformation of ever becoming assemblages over time through the associations and dissociations of elements.

Extending the analysis over space addresses the micro-macro problem in the social sciences, and points to the need for a multi-level approach. The micro-macro problem is one of the most salient in the social sciences; and one to which the most promising answers do not see levels of the micro and macro as given, but focus instead on processes by which micro-actors grow to macro-actors through the construction of networks of scale. In doing so, these approaches necessarily assume that the macro is generated within micro-social action. In contrast, the "grand theory" approaches that have dominated the social sciences have typically accepted the macro as given, or are built around an agency (micro) versus structure (macro) dualism, including the most recent attempts at synthesis by Giddens and Bourdieu (Berard 2005). However, as Callon and Latour (1981: 280) argue, we should not "presume a priori that macro-actors are bigger than or superior to micro-actors". After all, they argue, "[t]he financier's office is no larger than the cobbler's shop". As such, we need to consider empirically how "the difference between them is brought about by power relations and the construction of networks" (ibid.). By extending networks spatially, we are able to theorize power inequalities as networking practices of different scales. In this sense, we should consider scales not as pre-existing and a priori "frames of action, or planes at which certain processes can operate", "but as the effects of different networking practices" (Legg 2009: 240). Whereas historiography helps us to identify the emergence of resource-political configurations, the extension over space provides a systematic analysis of the kind of relations (inclusion as well as exclusion) that are established in the formation of trans-territorial assemblages.

In this case, the extension of observations over time and space led me to explore the connections between the events at the inauguration ceremony in Zinder and events in Diffa, Niamey, Paris, New York or Beijing. Through this extension I realized, for example, that the violence around the oil refinery's inauguration was indeed a political conflict that dated back to Tandja and *Tazartché*, which in turn became entangled with Western sanctions and the Chinese oil project (chapter 4 and chapter 8). To better track historical processes and follow their extensions over time, the case study is presented in a roughly chronological order, while the chapters also zoom in and out to highlight spatial connections of networks of scale. This structure is also important in organizing the core argument of the thesis, namely that oil is a catalyst that accelerates pre-existing dynamics and transforms configurations over time through translocal dis/entanglements.

2.2.4. Extending from processes to force

Burawoy (1998) argues that a critical scientific approach needs to set the microscopic analysis of social situations in a wider framework of global power constellations and capitalist market forces. Burawoy's (1998: 19) formulations contrast with grounded theory which deploys a horizontal approach of comparison by "seek[*ing*] out common patterns among diverse cases". Burawoy (ibid.) states that "the extended case method, on the other hand, deploys a different comparative strategy, tracing the source of small difference to external forces. This might be called the integrative or vertical approach. Here, the purpose of comparison is to causally connect the cases. Instead of reducing cases to instances of a general law, we make each case work in its connection to other cases." The main example he uses is based on the history of the "colour bar": the established power relations between white managers and black workers in Zambia's copper mines and the forces sustaining the racial division of employment after independence (Burawoy 1972). In the case study, he describes how "international forces [*are*] not [*only seen*] as constraints but as resources mobilized by the ruling elite to legitimate its domination" (Burawoy 1998: 20). In his analysis, the reproduction of the "colour bar" was a "paradox – class interests were responsible for the postcolonial reproduction of a colonial racial order" (Burawoy 2014: 967). In his sense, macro-forces such as global capitalism and racism not only restrict the actors' agencies in the studied situation, but also provide resources for the actors' to draw on in situations. Nevertheless, in Burawoy's conceptualization, it is the macro-forces that shape the situation and consequently have to be given prime focus in the extended case method's analysis.

Based on Burawoy's famous formulations of the extended case method, ethnography has been said to largely draw upon two epistemologically competing perspectives, grounded theory and the extended case method (Tavory and Timmermans 2009). Whereas grounded theory tries to grasp the narrative character of the field and is thus said to neglect the invisible macro-forces that shape it, the extended case method focuses mainly on how larger structures affect the situational context, and is said to risk substituting the narrativity of social life with theoretical narratives (ibid.). I believe, however, that these two epistemological perspectives are not necessarily incompatible. As Tsing (2000) shows, each situation is inherently “global”. As such, we are able to both locate forces of globalization (like neoliberalism) in particular locales, and avoid having to accept or imagine the world hegemony of these forces by looking at their frictions, fissures and fractures. In chapter 8, I therefore shift my attention to forms of transnational governmentality and reveal the frictions, cracks and failures of these macro-forces in Niger.

2.2.5. Extending theory

Situational analysis or the extended case method is the paradigmatic methodology to develop social theory through ethnography (Mitchell 2006; Glaeser 2006). In his conceptualization and interpretation of the role of theory in the extended case method, however, Burawoy makes a significant departure from the Manchester School. Whereas the Manchester School emphasized rigorous theorization from pure empirical data (not unlike a grounded theory approach), Burawoy (1998) stressed the impossibility of such an endeavor, as observations are always guided by theoretical assumptions, be they either naïve folk models or sophisticated social theories. Thus, instead of the context arising “*ab novo* from the facts, it required the prism of theory” (Burawoy 2014: 968). He therefore argues that the task of social scientists should be the reconstruction and thus the reformulation of existing social theories. Although I agree with Burawoy’s assumption that there is no innocent observation, I do not agree with his conclusion that we must focus solely on reconstructing big theories. Rather, I contend that a different model of theory building is also possible, namely the combination of “abduction” (Peirce 1933) with “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer 1954).

First, Peirce coined the term “abduction” “to denote a knowledge-extending means of inferencing that would be categorically distinct from the normal types of logical conclusion, namely deduction and induction” (Reichertz 2009: 5). Instead of subsuming an individual case under an already known rule (deduction) or extending features of the empirical data into a general rule (induction), abduction “consists of assembling or discovering, on the basis of an interpretation of collected data, such combinations of features for which there is no appropriate explanation or rule in the store of knowledge that already exists” (Reichertz 2009: 16). In my conception of the extended case method, extending theory is thus always a matter of reformulating, expanding on and rejecting existing theoretical concepts based on the concrete empirical material until a suitable concept has been found to explain the processes and events I have analyzed.

Second, I argue that it is openness and the inquiry into the unknown and unprepared which creates surprise, thereby revealing not only novel phenomena, but also the possibility to advance theory building. Of course, it can be argued that the unknown and unprepared is already part of ethnography (Bajc 2012). The focus on practice as the lived and concrete reality of social life "always exceeds and surprises even the best-laid plans and most practicable ideals [*and thus…*] generates its own emergent properties, altering itself" (Evens and Handelman 2006: 4). This intellectual process has recently been discussed under the notion of "serendipity" – as unsought, unexpected and surprising findings that are important for new discoveries and theoretical advancement (Hazan and Hertzog 2011; Rivoal and Salazar 2013).[20] As most anthropologists can relate, serendipity also played an invaluable role in my own fieldwork. It was by chance that I met a unionist at a radio station who told me he was meeting with other civil society groups from Zinder to explore future forms of collaboration. This meeting led to further meetings from which CRAS emerged, and through which I received my apprenticeship, becoming drawn into the production of disorder around the oil refinery's opening, and thereby discovering the various entangled dynamics and logics of politics and society in Niger.

Although serendipity "cannot be really 'planned' […] the conditions facilitating the process can be manipulated" (Rivoal and Salazar 2013: 180). To manipulate these conditions, we need not only to immerse ourselves into the lived and concrete reality, but we also need theory to render phenomena visible that would otherwise remain unseen. By theory I do not mean a "definitive concept" or a precise definition or content of reality, but rather what Blumer (1954: 7) would call a "sensitizing concept" that enables us to approach empirical phenomena by suggesting "directions along which to look". To help approach empirical phenomena in the field that would otherwise remain invisible or go unnoticed, these sensitizing concepts should come from theory prior to fieldwork. These sensitizing concepts are therefore to be seen as points of departure for empirical research, rather than the end product (Corbin and Strauss 1990). However, as they may also turn our focus away from other important aspects, it is important to avoid adopting concepts that are too narrowly defined. For this thesis, I found the following sensitizing concepts proposed by Rottenburg and Engel (2010) – signification, technology and dis/order – to be particularly fruitful in understanding global processes of transformation in Africa. For Rottenburg and

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[20] Although not named as such, serendipity was already a key topic in the debate between Glaser and Strauss over the development of grounded theory (Konecki 2008; Reichertz 2009).

Engel (2010), significations refer to all forms of attributing meaning; technology is understood in the widest sense (ranging from artefacts to infrastructures to governance and subjectivation); and dis/order is considered as the active process of dis/ordering. These concepts cannot be regarded as separate and unrelated entities, but rather are to be examined in close relation to each other. As Rottenburg and Engel (2010: VI) argue, "technologies and significations are the primary means in the production of order and disorder". In this sense, I focused my analysis of events surrounding the refinery's opening on the significatory and technological means used in the production of dis/order.

In adopting Peirce's abductive inquiry approach, extending theory led me to take the resource curse framework as the hypothesis to test, re-define and partly deconstruct. In doing so, it soon became clear that the resource curse hypothesis did not fit well with my empirical data, and that the Nigerien reality could more appropriately explained by politics and socio-economic exclusion instead of oil-induced dynamics. As I will show throughout the thesis, the framework of the resource curse and rentier state simply cannot adequately describe the dynamics of oil-age Niger. Contrary to the deterministic predictions made by these theories: the conflicts around the opening ceremony were first of all political rather than about access to the oil rent; the oil project has benefited the Nigerien economy through the establishment of manifold linkages rather than triggering economic decline; and democratic rather than authoritarian political configurations have emerged. Indeed, the sensitizing concept of signification helped to see how the resource curse thesis has become a travelling idea creatively adapted by players in the political game. Moreover, the sensitizing concept of technology helped to elucidate the role of the oil infrastructure and the dis/ordering technologies such as radio and mobile phones in creating publics and playing politics. In adopting different sensitizing concepts and theoretical approaches than the resource curse model's nearly exclusive focus on oil revenues and political elites, I have been able to develop new concepts and notions – oil as idiom, material politics, oil zones and Petro-Democracy (see conclusion).

Following the extended case method, in chapter 3 and 4 I extend the case of the opening ceremony into time. In chapter 5, I extend out from my observations of the inauguration day to include my participation in the immediate process of making the oil refinery political. In chapter 6, I build on the analysis of the previous chapters to describe a general socio-political dis/order that characterizes Niger in times of oil. I then extend into space, comparing contestations of the oil project across different Nigerien regions in chapter 7, and then comparing the differences between Western and Chinese oil engagement in Niger in chapter 8. In the conclusion, I extend on theory.

3. Crude Beginnings: The scramble for Africa and the emergence of Niger's uranium-political configuration

In this chapter, I look at both the political history and the political economy of natural resources in Niger. Typically, political historical and political economic strands are looked at in isolation, but in bringing them together, I am able to create a more holistic picture of how discourses, institutions, materiality, infrastructures, political systems, political economy and the sciences become entangled into a sort of resource-political configuration which ultimately brings resource exploitation into being. In contrast to uranium exploitation which was entangled with and shaped the very form of Nigerien politics from its inception (independence came in 1960) to produce what I call a "uranium-political configuration", the "petro-political configuration" did not come into being until China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and the Nigerien government signed an oil contract in 2008. I show that the history of Niger as a French colony, and as one of the world's largest uranium producers, one of the lowest ranked countries on the international poverty scale, and lacking oil production despite its physical presence, is important for understanding contemporary Niger. Let me turn first, however, to my understanding of resource-political configurations.

3.1. Resource-political configurations

I understand the resource-political configuration as a network that emerges out of entanglements between both the heterogeneous travelling elements of the arriving resource assemblage, and the pre-exisiting heterogeneous elements of Nigerien politics and society. In developing a notion of resource-political configurations to analyze the transformation from uranium-age to oil-age Niger, I analyze four important dimensions in the diverse manifestations of resource assemblages and their methodological implications: 1) heterogeneity, 2) contingency, 3) stability and durability, and 4) multiple scales.

Heterogeneity. Drawing on assemblage-theory as laid out in the introduction, the concept of the resource-political configuration enables us to identify the heterogeneous elements involved in resource assemblages, and to look at how and which entanglements are forged in the process of "becoming" a resource in a particular context (Zimmermann 1933; Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014). It is important to keep in mind here that the effects of the resource assemblages' translocal entanglements are always time- and place-specific, and can only be outlined through empirical observation (Appel et al. 2015: 18). As such, to effectively answer the research question of a resource's economic, political and socio-cultural effects, we have to account for the particular historical conjuncture in each case.

To do this, I have developed the concept of resource-political configurations to trace the technological infrastructures needed to extract, produce, refine, transport and consume a resource, as well as the imperial powers, diplomatic soft powers, companies, contracts, laws, civil society associations, political parties, media coverage, scientific controversies, economic models, political claims, and ideological narratives that entangle with the extractive infrastructure in the very process of becoming a resource.

Contingency. Following a realist philosophy, each element of the assemblage is understood as self-contained and existing autonomously from the conceptions we have of it (DeLanda 2006). Moreover, the grouping as such enacts “inward” and “outward oriented forces” (Ong 2007: 7) or an “agency of assemblage” (Bennett 2010) that exceed the sum of the single components. The result is that once an element is separated from or added to an assemblage, it changes not only the properties of the whole configuration, but also the capacities of the associated or substituted elements. The concept of resource-political configurations thus enables us to analyze how entities and their parts emerge or change over time through new associations and the substitution of elements. Such a contingent understanding of emergence and change builds on the idea of a catalytic causality by which dis/connections of elements switch meshwork-like structures or dynamic systems from one state to another (DeLanda 2006).

Stability and durability. Although some authors have criticized the concept of assemblage for its focus on fluidity (Elder-Vass 2008), others have argued that it accounts well for stability and durability by the “clotting” of the relations between elements’ to produce more structured formations (Verran 2011). These processes of stabilization and destabilization are captured in the notions of “(re)territorialization” and “deterritorialization” which typically involve phase transitions from more fluid into more stabilized configurations, and back again (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; DeLanda 2006: 12). Particularly in the early phase of an assemblage’s emergence, relations between the heterogeneous elements are fragile and open to dynamic changes. Over time, however, they evolve into more routinized and stabilized relations, and consequently lead to forms of path-dependency.

Multiple scales. As resource assemblages are always global in scale (Collier and Ong 2005b), a case study has to be extended to account for the nature of trans-territorial entanglements. We thus need an approach to entanglement which is multi-scalar, thereby conceptualizing scale not as pre-existing frames (global, national, local), but rather as aggravated effects of networking practices (Callon and Latour 1981; Legg 2009, 240).

From a methodological point of view, the concept of assemblage directs our empirical focus to the historical and spatial "process of composition" (Dittmer 2014). Niger's entrance into the oil-age offered me, as an anthropologist, the opportunity to observe transformation processes in the making, firstly by identifying and focusing on the elements which have come together in Niger, then by tracing the paths of the global entanglements out, before comparing the aggravated effects of the resource-political configurations of oil and uranium in Niger. I now turn to the first extension laid out in chapter 2, the extension out in time.

3.2. The military conquest of Niger

Since ancient times, wherever it has seeped through the earth's surface in one form or another, oil has been used for numerous purposes including construction, medicine and lighting. However, its modern prominence first emerged around the turn of the 20th century. After the invention of the process to distil kerosene from petroleum and the internal combustion engine in the 19th century, the world demand for petroleum quickly grew. As an energy source, fuel, industrial chemical, and raw material for the production of goods like plastics and pharmaceutics, oil increasingly became the lifeblood of industrial capitalism, and as such, a geostrategic resource. Indeed, the emergence of Western industrial capitalism at the end of the 19th century made the strategic supply of natural resources like coal, oil, uranium, copper and tin a pivotal aim in colonial exploitation and warfare. In the wake of the oil boom which started in the United States in the mid-19th century, the supply of natural resources outside the territories of Western states became increasingly vital for Western countries to guarantee the development, expansion and reproduction of their industrial capitalism. As such, the expansion of Western industrial capitalism brought forth a "special stage of imperialism" (Lenin [1917]2010) to supply industrial capitalist development with labor and raw materials. This imperialism resulted in the scramble for Africa which peaked in the 1880s and 1890s.

Niger's particular history of oil starts with the colonial search for natural resources in Africa in general. Even before military conquest had begun in the 1890s, the European powers had already divided the African continent on paper. The 1884-85 Berlin Conference formally partitioned Africa and provided the participating countries[21] with the legitimacy to govern Africa politically, militarily and economically. It was primarily the French and the British who had competed for dominion over the geographic regions of the Sahara and the Central Sudan[22], and so the areas were divided up between the two at the conference. With the 1890 Franco-British agreement, the British claimed the lion's share of the regions through a faked treaty with Sokoto Caliphate, a powerful Islamic state covering most sections of contemporary Hausaland in Nigeria (Fuglestad 1983: 49). The French received all the land to the north. However, quickly growing frustrated with the poor soil on the land, the French sent out a mission to explore the region and to determine the real extent of British influence (ibid.: 50). Other missions to conquer present day Niger followed, with the definitive border between French Niger and British Nigeria finally being established in 1898, a little further south than the original demarcation line. In other words, military conquest and exploration for natural resources in the Central Sudan and the Sahara were two sides of the same coin.

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[21] The participating countries were Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden–Norway (union until 1905), the Ottoman Empire and the United States.

Ideologically, Western imperialism was justified through the colonial discursive separation of the "civilized white man" and the "uncivilized black man" (Ziai 2006: 33ff.). In this narrative set, the "uncivilized" were unable to appreciate their abundance of natural resources, and as such, the "white man" was allowed or even obliged to directly exploit and use the "educational instruments" of coercion and force to accomplish their important "civilizing mission" (ibid.). Access to natural resources in the colonies was therefore completely managed and controlled by the colonial power. As such, the colonial power provided the human expertise, capital, and technology for resource extraction, production and distribution, and the colonized were used as the labor force.

In the colonial scramble for Africa, military conquest was driven by an inner logic of expansion. Due to the *terra nullius* principle in international public law, sovereignty over territory that has never been subject to any state may be acquired through occupation. Of course, against the background of the colonial civilizing discourse, African spaces of dominion were not acknowledged as states, but rather as blank areas on the map. Once under way, colonial conquest became self-perpetuating, with powers seeking to ensure that no blank spots or regions should remain outside their control, as that may allow opponents or rebels to set up bases against their dominion (Fuglestad 1983: 51). French-British competition for the Central Sudan and the Sahara further accelerated this expansion, with both powers anxious the other would take any available land (ibid.).

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[22] The Sudan is a geographic region to the south of the Sahara. It stretches from Western Africa to Eastern Central Africa and is divided into the Western, Central and Eastern Sudan basins by mountain ranges. The Central Sudan denotes the region encompassing the Chad basin and the Logone River. At the time of colonial conquest, the region was characterized by large Hausa empires which mainly occupied areas of contemporary eastern Niger and Nigeria.

By the end of the 19th century, French military conquest had reached Niger. It had been motivated by two political and strategic considerations: first, France's ambition to craft an empire which would expand from North Africa to the Red Sea; and second, its determination to counter expanding British power by defeating the Mahdists, who, under Sultan Rabeh, had conquered and controlled Bornu in the Lake Chad region since 1893 (Charlick 1991: 33). On 5 May 1898, on their way to the Bornu Empire to negotiate with Rabeh, French captain Marius Gabriel Cazemajou and his interpreter passed Zinder, which had been the capital of the powerful Damagaram sultanate since the 18th century.[23] On the day of their arrival, however, the Sultan of Zinder Amadou dan Ténimoune, commonly known as *Kouran Daga* (the fighting hyena), had Cazemajou and his interpreter murdered, as he feared an anti-Zinder alliance between France and Sultan Rabeh of Bornu (Decalo 1989: 161).

The French immediately retaliated, and after facing resistance from Hausa and Tuareg warriors, ultimately defeated the Sultanate Damagaram and established the Third Military Territory of Niger in 1911, of which Zinder became the capital. In 1926, the colonial power moved the capital to Niamey in Niger's south-west, a move which represented a major historical shift in the center of power, from the east to the west. The French had concluded that "the Zarma" were best suited to their "civilizing project" (Idrissa 2001), but also formed alliances with Fulani and Soudié[24], granting members of these ethnic groups positions of authority without regards to traditional norms of political legitimacy (Charlick 1991: 34). With the imposition of such puppet regimes, these installed chiefs gained political leverage as long as they remained loyal to the French (ibid.). As such, from the outset, the French opportunistically shaped internal administration and politics of Niger to suit their own interests.

The French colonizer's economic policy in Niger was purely exploitative, and took a heavy toll in terms of material (taxes, grain, livestock) and human resources (construction, labor, troops), often leaving the population impoverished, hungry, and exhausted (Charlick 1991:

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[23] Damagaram's wealth was based on the reinvestment of taxation revenue from agricultural production into military conquest and slave labor, while its military strength was built on a Trans-Saharan trading economy and close ties with Tuareg nobles (Baier 1980).

[24] Of Hausa ancestry but adopting Zarma customs and language, the Soudié were considered to be Zarma (Idrissa and Decalo 2012: 418). The Soudié's conversion of ethnicity reminds us that ethnic boundaries are always in the making and are not primordial (Barth 1969).

37). To keep both colonial administration costs to a minimum and to consolidate their control, the French introduced a series of monetary and taxation policies. The most notable was perhaps the replacement of existing currencies like the cowry shell with the franc, the currency the administration demanded their taxes be paid in (ibid.). To acquire the new currency and to be able to pay taxes, farmers across the country switched to cash crop farming, leading to a drop in subsistence farming and leaving the population vulnerable to famine (ibid.: 37/38). The platform to achieve its primary goals was groundnut, which quickly became the primary cash crop, as it enabled the administration to generate tax revenue, and to supply the French vegetable oil industry (ibid.: 39).

Although the scramble for Africa was motivated by the imperial quest for natural resources, oil and uranium from the Sahara-Sahel region did not play an important role in the early phase of French colonialism. Rather, French policy focused on the exploitation of labor resources and natural resources like timber, livestock and agricultural crops. Indeed, with its dense woodland, higher population density and easy accessibility, tropical and coastal Africa was more interesting for colonial powers than the sparsely populated, relatively barren, difficult to access and landlocked Sahel and Saharan regions. However, after World War I (WWI) the colonial powers would start to shift their focus to Africa's sub-soil resources, especially oil.

3.3. After WWI: Niger during the classic period of colonial rule

Until the end of WWI, France had no national oil policy. However, with the increasing importance of fuel for airplanes, trucks and artillery in warfare, the empire started to look for a stable and ready future oil supply. Oil seeps had been known in Northern Algeria since antiquity, and in 1892 an English company drilled the first oil wells there (Laherrere 2014: 2). While companies believed more oil reserves were likely to be situated in the Sahara, discouraged by the immensity and inhospitality of the Saharan desert, they had ceased explorations there and shifted their focus to the Middle East. French geologist and discoverer Conrad Kilian was the first to undertake oil exploration trips into the Sahara, first in 1921-1922, again in 1927-28, and in 1943. As early as 1922 Kilian had argued that the Sahara showed some geological formations likely favorable for possible oil deposits. However, Kilian himself was not foremost a geologist, but rather a "sovereign explorer" whose main aim was to claim French sovereignty over territory considered *terra nullius* (Laherrere 2014: 4). But contrary to Kilian's aim to claim French interests on the Sahara, the Middle East would first become the main focus for the French national oil supply.

Whereas the period of military conquest and consolidation in Niger from the early 1890s until 1922 had been characterized first by the rush to claim territorial sovereignty and then to bring these regions under control and install patterns of rule (Fuglestad 1983: 49–106), the classic period of colonial rule, which started with the formation of the Nigerien colony in 1922 and ended with WWII in 1945, was characterized by practical administrative matters and the installation of an extractive apparatus to exploit the colony's labor and natural resources (ibid.: 119-146). World-spanning companies first emerged in the colonial metropoles, where they started out by exploring for natural resources. These companies focused mainly on those few areas in Africa with valuable resources, areas that French banker Edmond Giscard d'Estaing had labelled *Afrique utile* ("useful Africa") in the 1930s (Cooper 2014: 21). Initially considering it part of *Afrique inutile* ("useless Africa") after WWI, the French pursued limited economic goals in Niger (Charlick 1991: 37). Rather, the French attempted to streamline the administration of Niger, realizing exploitation and extraction of resources, preserving their power and maintaining political order with as few human and financial resources as possible (Charlick 1991: 37; Fuglestad 1983).

Indeed, due to the colony's weak economic base, the French transformed their standard model of colonial administration from direct rule to a model of "indigenous chieftaincy" (Charlick 1991: 35/36). In installing "administrative chiefs" the French transformed, extended or even invented the traditional power of local authorities, and incorporated them into the colonial administration (Olivier de Sardan 1999b: 141). Due to their lack of resources, the French also neglected the education of the local population, which in turn provided extremely limited trained manpower. Rather, a tiny Europeanized and assimilated elite (the *évolués*) emerged in Niger, most of whom were members of the complicit Zarma/Songhai ethnic groups (Charlick 1991: 37). Moreover, by transferring the capital from Zinder to Niamey in 1926, France had started to systematically favor western Nigeriens and Zarma ethnicity over eastern origin and other ethnic groups in Niger.

3.4. After WWII: Towards a new order in Niger

After WWII, in which oil had played a vital role in the Allied victory, the official political strategy of the successive governments under Charles de Gaulle was to develop all crude deposits within the French colonial empire that were discovered (Yates 2000: 73). The Gaullists established a national oil authority in 1945, the *Bureau de Recherches de Pétrole*

(BRP)[25]. The BRP's goal was to achieve complete French energy independence through a vertically integrated oil industry, from exploration to production to refinement to service stations. In this context, the Sahara became strategically important and French oil companies, the *Société Nationale de Recherche et d'Exploitation de Pétrole en Algérie* (SN REPAL) and the *Compagnie Française de Pétrole* (CFP), carved up the Sahara into 40 km² concessions, and made aerial reconnaissance flights over them (ibid.: 122).

With the end of WWII, US political claims on Africa grew. In 1947-48, however, the American-based oil company Esso declared that the Sahara was of little interest, as the long distances to the coast necessitated huge oil deposits to make extraction viable, and only a few rather minor outcrops had been found (Laherrere 2014: 5). This changed in 1956 when the French oil companies SN REPAL and CFP discovered Hassi Messaoud, the largest Algerian oil field, and the largest field that any French company had ever discovered. The discovery triggered a Saharan oil boom that would soon reach Niger. In 1958, through its intermediary Mobil West Africa, the Cipao[26] started the first geological and geophysical field detection in the Iullemenden Basin in western Niger. The region was, however, classified as unfavorable for oil production. Nevertheless, with production beginning at Hassi Messaoud in 1960, France soon began to reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil, which at that time had been supplying about 90 percent of the national consumption.

With the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, WWII also illustrated the military supremacy of a nuclear strike force. As such, the end of WWII also marked a decisive change in the colonial empires' energy policies, not only towards fossil fuels but also toward nuclear energy. In 1945, de Gaulle founded the *Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique* (CEA) to pursue scientific and technological research on the use of nuclear energy and the development of nuclear weapons for national defense. In 1954, the *Bureau de Recherches Géologiques, Géophysiques et Minières* (BRGGM) and the CEA began prospecting at Tamanrasset in Algeria, and in 1956 they expanded their explorations to include the Agadez region in northern Niger, where the existence of uranium deposits was confirmed later that year.

The end of WWII also marked a decisive change in French political administration of its colonies. This era can be seen as a "historical and social state of emergency" (Foucault

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[25] In 1966 the BRP fused with the *Régie Autonome des Pétroles* (RAP) and the *Société Nationale des Pétroles d'Aquitaine* (SNPA) to form ELF-RAP. In 1976, it became Elf Aquitaine, which became Total in 2003.

[26] The Cipao was bought by Mobil Oil in 1970 and merged with Exxon in 1999 to become ExxonMobil.

1980: 194), a crisis in colonial policy and colonial thinking which created the necessity to reconfigure the established relations of the colonial apparatus into a new development apparatus. This transformation was related to a number of factors and interests, including ethical-religious reasons after the Holocaust that made it politically more difficult to continue the direct exploitation of colonies. Moreover, growing political claims to equality and participation emerged in Niger (as in other colonies) from urban workers, the *évolués*, religious movements, and commercial farmers. Finally, the reordering of world affairs around the Cold War[27] block formation, as well as the economic demands of an expanding industrial capitalism made it necessary to slowly include the colonies globally into political institutions and economic networks.

In his speech to start his second term of office on 20 January 1949, US President Harry Truman separated the world into "developed" and "underdeveloped" countries, promising those "underdeveloped" countries development in line with the industrialized nations, thereby emphasizing "development assistance" (Ziai 2006: 33; Escobar 1995). While France publicly endorsed the development discourse, the ultimate aim was to uphold their influence, domination and control of the colonies in a changing world order. Adapting to these competing demands, the French adopted "developmental colonialism", an ideological concept that would ultimately bring forth rising demands from the colonies, first on the issue of governmental spending and later on gaining control over the state (Cooper 2002: 37).

This shift in French colonial policy was first articulated at the Brazzaville conference in January 1944, where the emphasis was placed on French responsibility and a moral obligation to assist their colonies (Fuglestad 1983: 145/146). This policy shift would radically change the interaction between the French and the small circle of educated elite in Niger, triggering a "new order" in the colonies – the era of nationalist politics (1945-1960) (ibid.). According to Charlick (1991: 40/41), three forces shaped post-WWII politics in Niger: first, Niger's tiny educated elite, the *évolués,* started to formulate political and economic claims; second, the creation of the Fourth French Republic allowed Africans to participate in the political process; and third, political competition in France opened the door to involving Africans in the political process. Approved in October 1946, the new

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[27] The Cold War resulted in a number of "hot wars" in Africa. These proxy wars were in Algeria, Angola, Kenia, South Africa, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and so on (Gleijeses 2002; Greiner 2011). The very notion of the Cold War is thus Euro- and US-centric.

French constitution integrated the colonies – renamed Overseas Territories (*Territoires d'Outre-Mer)* – inside the structure of the Fourth Republic. The colonized finally became, at least legally, citizens with almost the same rights and duties as the people of metropolitan France (Fuglestad 1983). For Fuglestad (1983: 148), this "generous" concession was an elegant solution to the ethical problem posed by the Holocaust and WWII, and one that managed to maintain the French empire after colonial rule had become distasteful to many French people. At the same time, it also fulfilled the *évolués'* aspirations for upward mobility, as they would become the major beneficiaries of the new constitution.

The new constitution allowed Africans from the colonies to compete for overseas deputies in the National Assembly of France, and triggered the emergence of African political parties. In Niger, political activists founded the *Parti Progressiste Nigérien* (PPN), which was dominated from the outset by ethnic Zarma. Hamani Diori, a teacher of Zarma origin who had lived and worked in France, became its first overseas deputy (Charlick 1991: 42). As a political party of the *évolués*, the PPN had no mass base. From the beginning, their political strategies needed to focus on acquiring blocs of rural votes to gain electoral political legitimacy. Thus, although the *évolués* positioned themselves as against both the administrative chiefs and the French colonial administration, the PPN was forced to form pragmatic alliances with both political players. While the PPN perceived the "traditional authorities" as an impediment to "modernization", they also needed their support to acquire rural votes. Likewise, the French colonial administration was perceived as a barrier to national autonomy, but their support was essential for political survival. In aiming to secure rural votes, the PPN tactically played off administrative chiefs against one another to win over one party or the other (Charlick 1991: 41). At the same time, the political constellation in France, in which no single party was able to govern with an absolute majority, made political alliances with African parties an important aspect of internal French politics. With the beginning of the Cold War in 1947, the importance of the African parties grew even more, with them becoming proxies in great-power international politics, rather than being merely tied to group interests in Niger and France (ibid.:41).

The beginning of the Cold War coincided with the *Parti Commmuniste Français* (PCF), which the PPN had been aligned with, being forced from the ruling coalition into the political opposition. Now supporters of an opposition party, French colonial officials in Niger used the "spectre of communism" to harass and suppress the PPN (Charlick 1991: 41). When it appeared in 1948 that the PPN was gaining strength and had nominated Djibo

Bakary, another educated Zarma commoner, the French colonial Governor of Niger, Jean Toby, created a rival political movement. Toby's party, the *Union Nigérienne des Indépendants et Sympathisants* (UNIS) pragmatically bound French and Nigerien traditionalists and modernizers together in their distaste for the "communist" PPN (ibid.: 44). Although UNIS was formed only three weeks before the election and had no mass base, it won nearly all the rural constituencies, thus making it clear that "the most important factor for electoral success was French support" (ibid.). In this sense, the French colonial administration "could still deliver the vote", especially outside the urban centers of Niamey, Zinder, and Maradi (ibid.).

Nigerien politicians quickly understood that strategic alliances with the French government were essential for political success. In 1951, the PPN broke with the French Communist Party and joined the *Union Démocratique et Sociale de la Résistance* (UDSR), a center-right group in the French parliament headed by French Minister of Overseas Affairs François Mitterrand. As a result, the PPN expelled left-wing and anti-traditional party member Djibo Bakary, who had agitated against such a political U-turn (Charlick 1991: 45). After the U-turn, the PPN increasingly turned toward traditionalist politics, thereby becoming once again an appealing partner for Governor Toby's colonial administration. In 1952, Toby appointed the PPN leader Diori to the Municipal Council of Niamey. At the same time, Toby's UNIS party and its domination of the political scene began to disintegrate over factional disputes. Most of UNIS's traditionally-based politicians split off to form the *Bloc Nigérien d'Action* (BNA), which represented an eclectic coalition of nationalist é*volués* and traditional power brokers from eastern regions, where non-Zarma administrative chiefs could still have electoral success (ibid.: 46). Throughout the 1950s, then, the PPN pursued a two-track strategy: in urban centers, they continued to advocate anti-traditional views, whereas in the rural areas, they appealed to ethnic solidarity, played off interethnic conflicts, and made extensive use of bribery of administrative chiefs to secure blocs of votes (ibid.). In 1954, Bakary founded a new political party, the *Union Démocratique Nigérienne* (UDN). Due to political competition with the PPN, Bakary's radical nationalist UDN turned to oppressed groups such as former slaves, low-level civil servants, urban workers, domestic servants, and petty traders who had been largely neglected by the PPN. In doing so, the UDN grew into a highly successful party with a substantial cross-ethnic base in all the major towns (ibid.).

In 1956, the *Loi-Cadre* allowed for the first municipal and territorial elections for a Nigerien government. In the run-up to the elections, Governor Toby was replaced by French socialist party governor Paul Ramadier. Ramadier chose to support Bakary's UDN, which was affiliated with the *Mouvement Socialiste Africain* (MSA), an arm of Ramadier's own party. Urban workers support for the UDN also made it attractive for a Socialist governor to promote greater self-reliance (Charlick 1991: 48). Prior to the election, the UDN (which had a strong urban voter base) entered into a pragmatic, opportunistic and potent coalition with the BNA, who had strong rural support, to form the Nigerien branch of the MSA. The MSA consequently won the national elections, taking more than two-thirds of the seats in the Territorial Assembly. Bakary became mayor of the capital, Niamey (ibid.: 49).

In short, from its outset, electoral politics in Niger has been built on pragmatic or opportunistic alliances, vote buying, the bribery of administrative chiefs, cooptation, and the politics of agitation. Due to the particular historical constellation of colonialism and "underdevelopment", "African nationalism generally involved the rejection of colonial control and the promotion of economic and social modernization, implying the end of 'traditional' control over the population" (Charlick 1991: 41). Until today, political parties' ideology has predominantly been based on the discourse of "development" in which "the West" has become the appropriate model (Escobar 1995). Here, it is also important to note that party cleavages in Africa are often ethno-linguistic rather than ideological or programmatic in nature (van de Walle 2003). These are patterns of *longue durée* which continue to dominate politics in Niger and beyond. Reading the present through the past and the past through the present, Fuglestad's (1983) conclusion that French colonization did not have a major impact on Nigerien politics and society is difficult to fathom. Looking especially at the logic of the political game that came to be played after WWII, which continued after independence, and continues (at least in part) today, we see a strong continuity emerging out of colonial politics.

3.5. Niger and the creation of the *Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes* (OCRS)

On 10 January 1957, the French formed the *Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes* (OCRS) with the objective in its first article being "the development, economic growth and social advancement of the Saharan areas of the French Republic". The territorial and political reorganization – assembling the Saharan zones of Algeria, Mauritania, Sudan, Niger and Chad under joint patronage – reflected the growing geostrategic significance of the Sahara for France. Firstly, the Sahara's significance had grown on the back of major natural resource discoveries: coal in Algeria in 1917, copper in Mauritania and Niger in 1942 and 1943, tin in Niger in 1945, uranium prospects in Algeria in 1954, and finally major oil discoveries in Algeria in 1956 (Bourgeot 2000: 37). Secondly, the Saharan's military significance grew during the world wars, and especially with the so-called North African Campaign (1940-1943), in which wars were fought between the Allied and Axis forces in the Sahara in Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Thirdly, although OCRS was primarily created to focus on the Saharan sub-soil resources, especially oil, it also reinforced an earlier plan to reorganize the Sahara based on racial fantasies of a "white Tuareg nation". The plan to administratively and militarily reorganize the Sahara had already been developed by French explorer, hermit, researcher, soldier and spy Charles de Foucauld in 1912, before colonial domination of the area had been stabilized (Bourgeot 2000: 23–27). In devising the scheme, Foucauld's considerations were primarily politically, racially/ethnically, and morally motivated. He envisioned granting territorial autonomy to "the Tuareg", whom he saw as the "race" best able to quickly progress in the French colonial "civilization project".

The idea to unite the administratively separated regions of the French Sahara (the Algerian Sahara, the Sahara of French West Africa, and the Sahara of French Equatorial Africa) into one administrative territory became public in France in the early 1950s when the idea was first published in a French newspaper (Boilley 1993: 216). In 1952 a *Comité du Sahara Français* was formed, with several important French personalities nominated to bring the idea into public and political debates (ibid.: 218). Although the idea of a joint Sahara was first rejected in the French National Assembly in 1952, the idea immediately gained high currency after oil was found at Hassi Messaoud in 1956 (ibid.:37). However, in order to extract the oil, a whole governmental apparatus had to be installed. There was a need for new institutions, an entire regulatory body, a political entity suited to the new requirements, a territorial framework capable of accommodating capital investment by enterprises to which fiscal and financial stability had to be guaranteed, and the inalienable right of ownership to dismiss any possible threats that oil companies would become nationalized (ibid.). By assembling oil's heterogeneous elements into such a governmental apparatus, new connections were forged, while established relations – be they legal, political, economic, technical, discursive, or cultural – were transformed. I turn to that now.

By proclaiming an independent Sahara detached from the different nation states and assigned to the French metropolis, France aimed to maintain their sovereignty over the Saharan sub-soil, and to thereby control resource exploitation (Boilley 1993: 220/221). Indeed, a legal reordering was necessary to exploit the Saharan sub-soil resources: "The Saharan wasteland was technically not part of the French department of Algeria, or domestic French mining law would have regulated its minerals. De Gaulle actually had to create new administrative regions for the Sahara in order to grant oil concessions to SN Repal and CREPS [*Compagnie de Recherche et d'Exploitation Pétrolières au Sahara*]" (Yates 2009: 122).

Equally in 1956, the French *Loi-Cadre* had been passed in the French parliament to grant greater autonomy to the overseas territories (*Territoires d'Outre-Mer).* With the introduction of the French *Loi-Cadre,* the political project to adopt the OCRS needed elected representatives within the Assembly of the French Union who were in favor of the territorial reorganization. Opposed to the principle of OCRS, Djibo Bakary became a major obstacle for French nationalization of the Sahara. The OCRS was however supported by Bakary's main rival Diori Hamani, and by Tuareg leader Mouddour Zakara, *chef de canton* of Imanan, on the basis of the OCRS' Pan-Tuareg project (Bourgeot 2000: 39). These alliances again changed the political landscape in Niger.

Although the OCRS' project was highly debated and contested in the Assembly of the French Union, the territorial and political reorganization of the Sahara was adopted into law in December 1956. The OCRS was finally established on 11 January 1957. When De Gaulle visited Hassi Messaoud in December 1958, he named the Sahara "a 'large terrain for union and the rediscovery of our brotherhood' [and] concluded his speech by pronouncing the sovereignty of France over the Sahara – '*Vive notre Sahara*!'" (Yates 2009: 124). In doing so, of course, the project of OCRS also drew on and bolstered French nationalism.

The OCRS project to detach the Saharan regions from their nation states and to place them under French sovereignty was one of the main reasons for the prolongation and intensification of the Algerian war for independence (1954-1962). During peace negotiations between France and Algerian nationalists, "the French had tried to argue that the Sahara was a 'sea of sand' whose oil fields should be treated like 'offshore' discoveries – i.e., outside of Algerian sovereignty" (Yates 2009: 124). Unsurprisingly, the nationalist guerilla Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) dismissed the French claim. With the Evian

Accords in 1962 bringing the war to its end, the FLN became the Algerian government and "the de facto masters of the Sahara" (ibid.). The accords spelled the end for the OCRS.

In sum, in a context of an emerging development discourse, the legal construction of the OCRS was justified with the "social development of the Sahara", but also with a romanticized vision of Tuareg as autochthonic "white nomads" who would represent a minority within a "black African federation" (Boilley 1993: 221; Bourgeot 2000: 21/22). The French colonial administrations demarcation of OCRS gave rise to Pan-Tuareg politics, and the vision of a Tuareg nation (Bourgeot 2000: 27-41). Reading the Nigerien present through the past, the three Tuareg rebellions in postcolonial Niger also have their roots in colonialism. Initially marginalized during the French occupation of Niger due to their anti-colonial resistance, the Tuareg were denied access to education. At the beginning of the 1950s, however, ethnic and racial fantasies of these "brave white warriors" led the French to start privileging the Tuareg, integrating them into the army and vigilante groups to maintain order (Bourgeot 2000: 40). The ethnic conception of a Tuareg nation state in the Sahara later inspired their projects of rebellion (ibid.: 43). It is thus no surprise that shortly after the independence of the Nigerien nation state, the First Tuareg Rebellion took place. With its three pillars (identity, territory, and rule), the nation state is a highly ethnic construction in which "a people" has to be defined as the legitimate rulers over a given territory that fuels identitary (often ethnic or religious) boundary making (Wimmer 2013). This is typically so in the early years of state formation (ibid.). Thus, whereas the First and Second Tuareg Rebellions (1962-1964 and 1990-1995) strove for independence and autonomy respectively, the Third Tuareg Rebellion (2007-2009) focused rather on the equitable economic and the political treatment of northern Niger (Lecocq 2010).

3.6. Niger's independence process and the emergence of the authoritarian period

In 1956, following explorations in the Arlit area of Northern Niger, the *Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique* (CEA) confirmed the presence of uranium in the country. Exploration was later continued by the French parastatal *Compagnie Générale des Matières Nucléaire* (COGEMA). Around the same time, as a response to the Algerian War and the nationalist's claims for independence, the French Fourth Republic was abandoned in 1958 and the constitution for a French Fifth Republic drafted. By accepting or rejecting the constitution in a referendum in 1958, French overseas territories could decide to stay in or leave the French Community respectively. As van Walraven (2009) has shown, France considered

Niger's uranium reserves of geostrategic importance for their energy supply and in becoming a nuclear strike force. Thus, to achieve a "yes" vote for Niger to remain within the French dominated *Communauté,* instead of a "no" vote for immediate independence, the French forcefully intervened (through harassment, intimidation, repression, military deployment, propaganda and financial support). These interventions on behalf of Diori who supported a "yes" vote, and against Bakary who supported a "no" vote, proved crucial in securing Niger's electoral decision to remain in the *Communauté*, where it remained until 1960 when it finally became independent (ibid.). Backed by France, Diori then became the first President of Niger. Although the constitution provided for a multiparty system, Niger would soon become a one-party state. With continued French support, Diori suppressed political opponents, finally forcing Bakary into exile. Through their intervention, France had thus laid the foundation for the autocratic regimes to follow independence, profoundly shaping the Nigerien political landscape for years to come (ibid.). Perhaps unsurprisingly, France's desire to become a nuclear force built on African uranium would also produce a Pan-African struggle against "nuclear imperialism" as early as the late 1950's and early 1960's (Allman 2008).

Unlike uranium, oil did not play a significant role in Niger's transition to independence, although tentative explorations had started in 1958 and continued in the 1960s. Thus, in contrast to the key oil-producing states in Africa – Algeria, Nigeria, Gabon and Libya – where the first "Scramble for African oil" culminated in the era of decolonization (Frynas and Paulo 2007: 232–36), uranium rather than oil took center stage in Niger's transition to independence and its subsequent postcolonial transformation. One can therefore argue that the history of postcolonial Niger is deeply entrenched with its history of uranium exploration and production, and that a nation state emerged which has a strong content of uranium (Grégoire 2011). I will turn to that now.

France's agreement to decolonize Niger had only been achieved through the establishment of secret military arrangements, resource agreements, and special monetary zones which all served to secure France's energy security (Sharife 2010; Hecht 2012: chapter 4 & 7). First, concerning the special monetary zones, France uphold its influence after formal independence through its two colonial monetary zones, the *Colonies Françaises d'Afrique* (CFA) franc zones for West and for Central Africa, with fixed exchange rates to the French franc. Created in 1945, these special monetary zones remain in effect today, with the CFA franc tied to the Euro through a fixed exchange rate of 655.957 FCFA to the Euro. Second, concerning the secret military arrangements and resource agreements, Niger signed a defense treaty in 1961, one year after independence, which granted the former colonizing power priority access to uranium and other strategic materials. This treaty remains in effect, and has assured that the French retain a profound influence over Niger's military (Mahamane 2004) and which continues to shape the entire political landscape today (Idrissa 2004).

While Diori had dreamed of a nuclear power plant in Niger, his dream was neither viable nor enjoyed French support, and did not come to fruition, despite mining having commenced (Hecht 2012: 125). Founded in 1968, the *Société des Mines de l'Air* (SOMAIR) finally began mining near Arlit in 1970-71, while the *Compagnie Minière d'Akouta* (COMINAK) (founded in 1974) started uranium production from the Akouta deposit in 1978. These two companies were subsidiaries of French-based company COGEMA and its successor Areva (since 2001), which retains control over the two mines.[28] The mines are secured by the Nigerien military, the *Forces Armées Nigériennes* (FAN), which are trained and financed in part by France, and are counseled by French military advisors. Although the militaries of other countries such as China, the USA and Germany are now delivering arms and even building military drone bases in the "global war on terror" in the Sahel-Saharan region, France still provides the largest share of military assistance to Niger.

Political conflicts in Niger have always gone hand-in-hand with the political economy of the country (Robinson 1991). Due to colonial economic policy, groundnut production had increased from 9,000 tons in 1945 to nearly 200,000 tons in 1957, becoming the key earner in the postcolonial Nigerien political economy. This only changed with the commencement of uranium production in 1971 (ibid.). The period under Diori (1960-1974), the first Nigerien president, largely coincided with the phase of export-oriented groundnut production. Although the first postcolonial constitution (1960) provided for a multiparty system, by 1963 Diori had succeeded in consolidating a one-party state through the elimination and cooptation of political opponents. The boom in groundnut sales in the early 1960s gave Diori the financial capital to build clientelist networks and to consolidate his position within the party through the appropriation and distribution of state revenues among the political class (Robinson 1991: 5) – a process that the rentier state theory only considers to be a specific characteristic of an economic rent, and therefore not an attribute of productive activities like crop farming (see introduction).

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[28] Areva holds a 63.4 percent share in SOMAIR, whereas the Nigerien state has a 36.6 percent share. In COMINAK, Areva has a 34 percent share, the Nigerien state has 31 percent, Overseas Uranium Resources Development (OURD) from Japan has 25 percent, and Enusa Industrias Avanzadas SA from Spain has 10 percent.

From 1968 onwards, shrinking revenues from groundnut production led to the disintegration of Diori's clientelist base and internal conflicts within the PPN began to emerge (Robinson 1991: 8). Also in 1968, US broker Nuexco began publishing a spot-price for uranium. Although most international transactions fell under long-term contracts in which fixed prices remained secret, as specified in the French-Nigerien defense treaty signed in 1961, the (imagined) spot-price fluctuations constantly gave rise to questions about the distribution of profits between Niger and COGEMA (Hecht 2010: 14). When the spot price for uranium increased in early 1974[29], the impossibility of adhering to the high costs of clientelism, exacerbated by the drought of 1973, forced President Diori to start negotiations with France over the uranium price.[30] Before the negotiations had been concluded, Diori was overthrown in a military coup by Lieutenant-Colonel Seyni Kountché. Although new access to archive material shows that France was not involved in the coup, even today the dominant narrative among the Nigerien population is that the coup was planned and executed with French military support due to Diori's attempt to renegotiate Niger's share of uranium profits (van Walraven 2014). Unlike Diori, Kountché did not to push for greater revenues from sales, rather negotiating an agreement to directly and independently sell a proportion of uranium output equal to the percentage of Niger's capital holdings in the mining companies (Hecht 2010: 16).

The beginning of uranium mining in Niger in 1971 brought a radical change in the country's political economy. By 1975 groundnut production had come to a standstill after years of drought, with uranium revenues more than double the former peaks in groundnut revenue. In the following years, uranium mining generated previously unexpected financial resources for the Nigerien government. Nevertheless, the whole infrastructure of uranium production was designed exclusively for French economic development, and did not allow for so-called production linkages and the development of a significant infrastructure within Niger itself. As such, even today, only the first stage of uranium processing, the production of yellowcake[31] that follows the mining of the ore, is undertaken directly at the mining sites in Niger. This yellowcake is then loaded onto trucks and taken over a 600 km network of routes connecting the urban mining centers of Arlit with Agadez and the capital Niamey to the port at Cotonou in Benin. Developed between 1970 and 1980, this route is known as "*l'autoroute de l'uranium"*. From Cotonou, most of the yellowcake is shipped to Comurhex in France for conversion and enrichment. In this sense, the whole uranium infrastructure in Niger, and especially *l'autoroute de l'uranium,* was designed solely to export the yellowcake to France for conversion and enrichment to secure French nuclear energy production.

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[29] The Nuexco spot price for uranium increased from 7 USD/pound in 1974 to over 40 USD/pound in 1976.

[30] In accordance with the defense treaty signed in 1961, uranium negotiations were on the state-to-state level.

[31] Yellowcake is a concentrate uranium powder obtained in the first step of processing after mining. The residues from its production are radioactive and their long half-life have caused major environmental

It is interesting to note here that French exploitation is in accordance with classical economic theories such as the Ricardian model of comparative advantage in international trade, which does not envisage the establishment of so-called forward and backward linkages within the Global South. This model argues for free international trade to achieve economic growth by establishing capital intensive production in industrialized countries, and labor intensive production in so-called developing countries (Ricardo 2006[1817]). Without production linkages, the resources are simply exported to and processed within the industrial centers of the world, while the regions of resource extraction remain "black holes" (Innis 1995). This results in an enclave economy that divides Africa according to the former (French) colonial classifications. That is, most areas are considered economically worthless or *Afrique inutile*, while tiny, economically useful enclaves, from where the capital "hops" to the industrial centers of the world, are considered *Afrique utile* (Ferguson 2005). In other words, with extraction generating few flow on effects in the broader Nigerien economy, industrialization and energy consumption have never been significant factors in uranium production in Niger. As such, these factors have never been assembled into Niger's uranium-political configuration.

Having installed a military regime after coming to power, President Kountché used an unexpected increase in the uranium revenues to establish a *société de développement* and announced a series of ambitious development goals (Robinson 1991: 7-10). An important role in mediating these government programs to the population and in creating a national identity was played by two civil society organizations – a moderate Islamic organization and a national youth movement (*Samariya*). For this purpose, Kountché issued the first ordinance specifying and allowing the establishment of associations in Niger (*Ordonnance*

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problems in northern Niger, including widespread contamination of groundwater sources, as well as soil and air pollution, as the dust is carried long distances by the wind.

n° 74-1 du 22 avril 1974). The ordinance was however extremely restrictive, and did not allow associations to operate independently. The beneficiaries of Kountché's development programs were primarily civil servants, administrative chiefs, wage earners and traders – groups which would have to be appeased when the revenue from uranium exports suddenly collapsed in the 1980s. After years of the uranium spot-price falling, the agreement to independently sell a portion of Niger's uranium was renegotiated and once again left French parastatal company COGEMA in charge of marketing Niger's uranium (Hecht 2010: 18).

By the beginning of 1980, the first signs of recession were being felt in Niger. Economic growth had fallen from 13 percent in 1979 to 1.1 percent in 1981, and continued to decline by an average of two percent per annum over subsequent years (Robinson 1991: 11). At the same time, Kountché's ambitious *société de développement* locked the government into large spending and led to a growing budget deficit. In 1983, Niger was forced to apply for its first loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The loan was made conditional on the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), which was to begin in 1986. Since the early 1980s, the IMF and World Bank agenda had been dominated by the SAP – based on the neoclassical theory which had ousted Keynesian economics in Western economic thinking – as a means to solve the economic crises of the "Third World". Often referred to as the Washington Consensus, the SAP introduced a set of economic reform mechanisms including austerity, trade liberalization, balanced budgets, privatization and economic output based on resource extraction. In this context, the Nigerien regime of associations saw its first important modification in 1984, with the enactment of the *ordonnance n° 84-06 du 1er mars 1984*, which allowed the establishment of youth, school, sport, religious, cultural, foreign and charity associations. At the same time, under the SAP, the government was forced to make major cuts in state sector employment, which led to growing unemployment, as the state was – and is – the largest employer in Niger. With the mass dismissal of state officials, youth in particular began to feel a kind of hopelessness and started to organize in conversation groups or tea circles called *fada* (Masquelier 2013). Overall, the SAP and its austerity measures hit the beneficiaries of the *société de développement* hardest, leading to societal tensions which threatened the stability of the regime. Moreover, the economic and social impact of the SAP reinforced a feeling of bitterness toward the West.

This brief history of the political economy and the origins of political conflicts in Niger illustrate that these conflicts are not simply a result of fighting for the biggest piece of the resource pie (uranium), as the resource curse thesis suggests, but rather that their origins date back to the colonial era and are inherently intertwined with French (post)colonial policy. However, revenues from primary commodity exports (groundnut, uranium) were important resources in the country's authoritarian state-building processes. Both Diori and Kountché used revenues from groundnut and uranium production to legitimize their authoritarian regimes by building clientelist networks whose base threatened to collapse each time the financial leverage of the government shrank. The following history on the introduction of a multiparty system in Niger will show effects of a change in the "rules of the game".

3.7. The democratic transition: Changing the rules of the game in Niger

After Kountché's death in 1987, the Supreme Military Council elected General Ali Saibou to succeed him. His term in office was marked by measures to mediate critics and rivals to consolidate power. To do this, given his limited financial leverage, Saibou was especially eager to please international donors. After the end of the Cold War, the Washington Consensus was revisited and extended to include not only economic but also political conditions, including civil society engagement and processes of democratization. This was later coined the Post-Washington Consensus. In this context, Saibou introduced political liberalization measures allowing for the foundation of political organizations and the establishment of state political party, the *Mouvement National pour une Société de Développement* (MNSD-Nassara). Initially, however, no opposition parties were allowed. With this new commitment to political openness, Saibou sought to win the sympathies of international donors and to thereby compensate for the falling uranium export revenues. The structural adjustment measures, however, met resistance within Niger, especially from trade and student unions, which refused to pay the costs of austerity. Formed with independence in 1960, two large unions, the student *Union des Scolaires Nigériens* (USN) and the workers *Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Niger* (USTN) (known as the *Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Niger* (UNTN) until 1978), organized mass joint strikes and demonstrations on 9 February 1990, in which three protestors were killed and dozens were injured. These protests proved a turning point, and by the end of the year, Saibou finally agreed to the transition to a multiparty system and, following the example of other West African countries, the holding of a National Conference to determine the future of the country. The transition to a multiparty system and the 1991 National Conference therefore need to be understood against the background of internal pressures for democracy, as well as changes to international donor policy in line with the Post-Washington Consensus.

The economic crisis and the subsequent National Conference would fundamentally change power configurations in Niger (Gervais 1997). With their participation in the National Conference, the USN and USTN gained official recognition as legitimate countervailing powers to the state, as did political parties and civil society structures, which were allowed to form after changes to regulations in May 1991.[32] With this law, civil society associations proliferated, with more than one thousand having formed in Niger between 1991 and 2015, most of which have been relatively short-lived (Tidjani Alou 2015a: 138). While the intellectual Western-educated elite of the country (civil servants, teachers and university lecturers, trade unions and students) profited most in the wake of the conference, the rural population and the informal sector remained underrepresented, and the army was ousted from its dominant role on the political scene.

With the reintroduction of the multiparty system, a number of new parties emerged, but all faced the same fundamental problem, that they had little reach or popularity outside of the electoral base around the region of origin of the party president. The ruling MNSD thus had a great advantage because, after 30 years in power, they could build on large networks across the country. In particular, they could rely on the support of administrative chiefs that were created under colonialism and had played an important role in the *société de développement*. Held in February 1993, the first free elections saw the majority of the vote divided between four parties: the *Convention Démocratique et Sociale* (CDS-Rahama) led by Mahamane Ousmane, the *Parti Nigerien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme* (PNDS-Tarayya) led by Mahamadou Issoufou, the *Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (ANDP-Zaman Lahiya) led by Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye, and the MNSD led by Mamadou Tandja. Tandja had become leader of the MNSD after Ali Saibou and other key actors in his government were banned from competing in the first free elections.[33] Tandja won the first round vote, making the MNSD the strongest party. However, in an effort to prevent the former ruling party from once again seizing power, nine of the 12 approved parties united behind Ousmane as their presidential candidate in the second head-to-head round of the election. With this support, Ousmane became President of Niger's Third Republic.

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[32] Non-governmental and human rights associations were formally introduced by law in May 1991 (*Loi n° 91-06 du 20 mai 1991*).

[33] The *Parti Progressiste Nigerien* (PPN) of Diori Hamani and the *Union Démocratique Nigerien* (UDN) of Djibo Bakary, which had dominated the struggle for independence, were both founded anew. However, they were able to obtain only two seats each.

The reintroduction of a multiparty system in Niger also gave rise to a decade of experimentation and repeated breakdowns of the institutional order (Villalón and Idrissa 2005). Based on the constitution of the French Fifth Republic of 1958, the semi-presidential third constitution was passed in December 1992 and enacted in January 1993. Taking office on 16 April 1993, Ousmane's term as president was characterized by the burden of the SAP and "cohabitation" between a majority opposition and a minority government, resulting in institutional paralysis. Ousmane had been in power for less than three years when, in January 1996, Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara led a military coup that toppled the government. Baré introduced the constitution of the Nigerien Fourth Republic which granted greater powers to the president, legitimizing this step as essential to avoid future cohabitation in the parliament. When Baré won the ensuing election (which most national and international observers claimed were fraudulent) in July 1996, the four major parties (MNSD, CDS, PNDS and ANDP) united in a "movement for democracy", boycotting participation in government. In 1999, Baré was assassinated by members of his own guard, and Major Dadouda Mallam Wanké became head of state. He suspended the constitution of the Fourth Republic, and returned to a semi-presidential system that was virtually identical to that of the Third Republic. The top four presidential candidates from 1993 – Mamadou Tandja (MNSD), Mahamadou Issoufou (PNDS), Mahamane Ousmane (CDS) and Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye (ANDP) – once again competed for presidency, with similar results. This time however, Ousmane allied with Tandja, who thus became President of Niger's Fifth Republic. Tandja named Hama Amadou his prime minister.

Over time, the multiparty system has come to favor an emerging merchant class in Nigerien politics. Whereas the initial profiteers of the National Conference had been the Western-educated intellectuals who occupied most of the seats in the National Assembly of the Third Republic, their dominance began to erode, and they were increasingly replaced by major traders and merchants. By the time Niger's Fifth Republic came about in 1999, these traders and merchants were widely represented (Villalón and Idrissa 2005: 45). This process is due to the electoral logic in Niger. As the political parties had barely taken root outside the major cities and regions of origin, electoral campaigns could not be financed by mass membership of the party, and required instead external financing. To fill this void, wealthy traders and merchants would be called on to contribute large sums of money to electoral campaigns, and in return, demanded to be rewarded with political posts or the allocation of public contracts. In the 2004 national election, this logic of allocating public contracts became one of two major electoral issues in the "scandal denunciation strategy" of the political opposition, led by PNDS under Issoufou (Gazibo 2011: 331). The other scandal played up by the PNDS was the "Pakistani rice affair", in which members of the government majority were involved in the embezzlement of tons of rice given to Niger by the Pakistani government (ibid.: 332). Although the allocation of public contracts and the embezzlement of development aid and donor gifts are an inherent part of the political game in Niger (and beyond) (Gazibo 2011: 331), by making them public, actors can successfully transform them into matters of concern. Indeed, these political denunciation strategies are part of the logic of political competition, free press and civil society activism in the Nigerien multiparty system (and beyond).

3.8. Maintaining the social peace

Since their legitimization as a counter power to the state in the National Conference, civil society has had an ambiguous role in regime changes in Niger more generally. Elischer (2013) shows how Niger's trade unions were largely driven by economic demands, and thus contributed to both autocratic and democratic breakdowns of power. Under the new democratic constitutions, the state monopoly of radio and television had also been abandoned, guaranteeing the freedom and independence of the media (*Décrète législative 93-29 du 30 Mars 1993*). After years of silence under authoritarian rule, an emerging civil society and private media was able to publicly debate politics. They increasingly started to see their role as a counter-power to the state. After the integration of the USTN and USN into the transition to a multiparty system, these organizations agitated against the new democratically elected government of Ousmane, as they did not want to pay the costs of austerity measures enforced under the SAP. In doing so, they ultimately contributed to delegitimizing and paralyzing Niger's Third Republic (Gazibo 1998). Indeed, Nigerien political observer Adji (n.d.) goes so far as to argue that civil society and private media's active role in building public pressure against the government made them complicit in Ousmane's fall. The fact that civil society opposition to the military government remained subdued after regime change in 1996 supports this argument.

After a long civil society silence, the *Coalition équité, qualité et lutte contre la vie chère* "reinjected politics into public life" (Tidjani Alou 2007) in 2005 by protesting against an increase in value-added tax (VAT) from 15 to 19 percent. Focusing on rising food prices and the increase in VAT, the civil society coalition "against the high cost of living" organized demonstrations, general strikes and operations called "*ville morte*" (English: "ghost town") that became a major success. On 15 March 2005, 100,000 to 150,000 people are said to have participated in a demonstration in Niamey, the movement becoming a genuine threat to the stability to the government. When the coalition called for a further public demonstrations, the Tandja government arrested the five leading activists – Marou Amadou, Nouhou Arzika, Kassoum Issa, Moustafa Kadi and Moussa Tchangari – on charges of threatening the security of the state and organizing illegal assemblies.[34]

After the arrests, the government started negotiations with the coalition leaders. With newly gained financial leverage through external funding, especially development aid, Tandja was able to acquiesce to many of the protestors demands and calm the situation.[35] The government and the coalition reached a ten-point agreement, including the withdrawal of the increase of VAT (except for sugar), with the loss of government revenue to be made up through increases in business and the property taxes. To collect these taxes, the Tandja government – on the initiative of the *Coalition Contre la Vie Chère* – founded a *Comité d'Appui aux Services d'Assiette et de Recouvrement des taxes et Impôts Fonciers* (CASARIF), to which the coalition was allowed to propose six members, creating division among the leaders. Marou Amadou became the committee's vice-coordinator, while Moussa Tchangari publicly remained opposed to the idea of civil society entering governmental committees. Similarly, the *Syndicat National des Enseignants du Niger* (SNEN), Kassoum Issa's teachers union, had been demanding payment of salary arrears amongst other things since 2004, the Tandja government invited the union leaders into governmental decision-making processes to jointly solve these issues. In late 2005, Tandja finally started to acquiesce to SNEN demands, but did not fulfil the conditions when the union's position weakened over time (Charlick 2007a: 75/76). This is a typical example of how cooptation works in a Nigerien context, with governmental committees being created to include civil society members that are than offered certain privileges and financial benefits in these committees such as daily and travel allowances. In coopting civil society activists into governmental decision-making and by using public funds or intimidation to quell political opposition, Tandja was able to not only maintain social peace, but also to pursue his political projects for the years to come.

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[34] Amadou, Arzika, and Tchangari had been active members of the USN during the student protests on 9 February 1990, and had been representatives of the USN at the National Conference. At the time of the coalition, Marou Amadou, a jurist, was a member of several civil society associations, especially in democracy, transparency and human rights movements – the *Collectif des Organizations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie* (CODDHD), the *Coalition Démocratique de la Société Civile Nigérienne* (CDSCN), and most importantly, he was the founder and president of the *Comité de Réflexion et d'Orientation Indépendant pour la Sauvegarde des Acquis Démocratiques* (CROISADE). Nouhou Arzika, a manager, was the founder of consumer association OCRONI and president of the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple* (MPDNP). Kassoum Issa, a teacher, was general secretary of the teachers union *Syndicat National des Enseignants du Niger* (SNEN). Moustafa Kadi was member of Timidria, an organization to fight slavery in Niger and most importantly the coordinator of the *Collectif pour la Défense du Droit à l'Energie* (CODDAE). Moussa Tchangari was a journalist, founder and secretary general of the civil society association and radio station *Alternative Espaces Citoyens* (AEC).

[35] Tandja's reign (1999-2010) was characterized by debt relief and new economic stability (Dorlöchter-Sulser 2014: 137–49).

The social peace would again be threatened by the Tuareg rebellion in 2007 in response to uranium exploitation in Northern Niger. In 2004 Areva had signed an agreement with the Nigerien government to expand its uranium exploration, thereby restarting exploration of the Imouraren deposit in 2006. Discovered in 1966, Imouraren is the largest uranium deposit in Africa and its exploitation would have moved Niger from the fourth to the second largest uranium producer worldwide. However, two factors threatened the French monopoly on Niger's uranium and generated a scramble by foreign corporations. Firstly, with the world financial crisis, the spot-price of uranium skyrocketed from 45 USD/pound in mid-June 2006 to 136 USD/pound in June 2007, and secondly, as part of a diversification policy to triple uranium production within the next few years, Tandja's government granted new exploitation licenses to companies from the United States, South Africa, China, Canada and Australia (Keenan 2008a). In 2007, Tandja demanded that France increase the price for yellowcake laid down in the secret contracts, and to (once again) make some available for Niger to sell on its own. His demands created tension in Nigerien-French affairs, as Niger's uranium was (and is) vital for France's energy needs and nuclear arsenal. It was in this context that the Tuareg rebels launched their attacks.

In February 2007, the Tuareg rebel group *Mouvement des Nigérien pour la Justice* (MNJ) launched attacks on the Nigerien military and Areva, justifying them as protest against foreign exploitation of uranium. While the reasons for the Third Tuareg Rebellion (2007-2009) are more complex (see Keenan 2008), and as I have illustrated above, have historical roots in colonialism, the rebellion leaders' discourse focused on uranium. They argued that the Tuareg population had been forced to bear the brunt of uranium pollution of the water, air and soil, blamed the national government and Areva for regional marginalization, and claimed a larger share of the uranium profits.[36] Against the background of the US War on Terror, Tandja's government classified the MNJ as a terrorist group. This move received support from some civil society activists, especially Nouhou Arzika's *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple* (MPDNP), which argued against diplomatic efforts, and for a military solution to put down the rebels. Again, these groups' pro-government stance illustrates part of the political game in Niger, in that Tandja had successfully divided and weakened civil society by coopting some leaders into governmental positions.

At the same time, Tandja's government also accused France and Areva of instigating and financing the rebellion, and expelled Areva's head of operations in July 2007. This provoked the direct intervention of French president Nicolas Sarkozy. High level Franco-Nigerien talks calmed the situation and lead to an agreement between Areva and Niger on 1 August 2007. In order not to lose its largest uranium supplier, Areva agreed to both demands: to increase the price for yellowcake laid down in the secret contracts, and to once again make some available for Niger to sell on its own (Hecht 2010: 18). Areva increased royalty payments from 27,300 FCFA/kgU (42 Euro/kgU) to 40,000 FCFA/kgU (61 Euro/kgU), and provided 300 tons of uranium for Niger to sell on the open market, which Niger sold to Exelon in the US for 42 million USD (World Nuclear Association 2013). Some months later, Areva also agreed to develop the Imouraren deposit. An overall investment of 1.6 billion USD was planned for the project, as well as Areva supplying 7.8 million USD per year provided for social services – health, education, training and transport, as well as access to water and energy for local development in northern Niger (ibid.). At the time of the agreement, production was scheduled to start in 2012, but the project soon ran into delays, making it even unlikely to start in the near future. It was in this context that the Tandja government signed a production sharing agreement with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) in 2008, which I will turn to in the next chapter.

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[36] This form of discourse was relatively new, for it was only with political liberalization in the early 1990s that the topic of uranium exploitation could be publicly taken up and debated (Topçu 2013: 293). Established in 2000, the environmental organization *Agir in Man* (Tamascheq for "the protection of the soul") lists and records the effects of uranium extraction in northern Niger on the environment, health and poverty. *Agir in Man* primarily blames Areva for radioactive pollution in the area, and calls for an independent investigation into the pollution and its social and ecological effects, as well as demanding financial compensation for the rehabilitation of the uranium mines.

3.9. Conclusion: The making of the uranium-political configuration

In this chapter, I have looked at the political history of Niger together with its political economy to create a more holistic picture of what I call resource-political configurations. To claim ownership of any future Saharan oil and other sub-soil resources, Niger was territorially restructured under the new OCRS in 1957. However, this structure collapsed at the end of the Algerian war, and it was uranium which became inextricably entangled with postcolonial Niger. Indeed, uranium exploration and production shaped the Nigerien political landscape for the years to come. First, French interest in Niger's uranium not only prolonged the Nigerien independence process, but also allowed Hamani Diori to become the first president of the country, and to consolidate a one-party system with French support. Second, the beginning of uranium production in the 1970s enabled President Seyni Kountché not only to build his ambitious *société de développement*, but also to stay in power by building clientelist networks. Third, when uranium revenues collapsed, Niger was forced into a process of political opening which led to the emergence of a multiparty system and enabled a public debate to take place after years of authoritarian silence.

From the resources as money perspective, which the rentier state theory and the resource curse thesis suggest, there should not be a significant difference between the social, political and economic effects of resources as long, as they provide similar levels of external rents. Indeed, many political observers have noted that in boom phases of uranium, revenues in Niger were used to buy political loyalty and enabled the political elite to remain in power by building clientelist networks. These networks were threatened with collapse each time the government's financial leverage shrank, as it did in bust times. However, as I have shown in this chapter, successive Nigerien leaders used all kinds of resource revenues, be they tax revenue from groundnut export (Diori), or rents from uranium (Kountché) or development aid (Tandja), to buy political support and to co-opt political opponents. The first major change to the logic of the political game was to come with the reintroduction of the multiparty system in the 1990s. This changed the rules of the game in terms of civil society engagement, media pluralism and political competition in the formation of publics. The logic of cooptation and clientelism, however, remained.

Looking beyond the "resources as money" perspective, the historical and spatial entanglement perspective of the resource-political configuration was useful in mapping the constellation of the heterogeneous elements in Niger's political structures and resource production. The heterogeneous elements of uranium production in Niger included secret military arrangements, resource agreements and special monetary zones, yellowcake and radioactive dust, extractive infrastructures (*route de l'uranium*), spot-price fluctuations, neocolonial narratives, rebellion, political claims for fairer distribution of profits, civil society organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and (neo)classical economic theory. These elements emerged to form a relatively stable resource-political web of relations around successful uranium production in Niger. As the uranium deals still favored and favor the former colonial power, the historical incongruity of Niger as the world's fourth-largest uranium producer, and one of the lowest ranked countries on the Human Development Index, is highly salient in the national contemporary public discourse, and has led to Areva and French intervention being blamed for "underdevelopment". Aside from the Tuareg rebellions, however, few internal political demands have been addressed to the Nigerien government in relation to uranium exploitation, especially not in the capital Niamey, where only a few people are involved in the extractive infrastructure. In this (discursive) context, it is unsurprising that conflicts, negotiations and public disputes within the uranium-political configuration predominantly center on the distribution of profits between the Republic of Niger and Areva/France, and on accusations of French neocolonial exploitation, of a policy of underdevelopment, and of a history of brutal interference. In sum, the concept of the resource-political configuration enables us to look beyond "resources as money" to include diverse phenomena such as actor constellations, economic theory, extractive infrastructures and discursive formations that would remain unseen through the theoretical lens or sensitizing concepts of rentier state and resource curse.

To understand the socio-cultural and political transformations triggered by oil, we have to keep the uranium-political configuration that pre-existed oil production in Niger as a point of comparison, as it was in this social and political constellation that the oil project finally started in 2008. Indeed, even before the first barrel had been produced, oil was being put to use in political disputes which followed the logic of the Nigerien political game. With the short window of opportunity before the fluid relations of a resource-political configuration become routine and stable, the transformation of the entire Nigerien political constellation became open to change in 2008. With new elements being associated into, and old elements being substituted from the resource-political configuration in Niger, new political possibilities opened up. In the following chapters, I will look at the coming of oil in Niger, how oil was incorporated into the pre-existing uranium-political configuration, and what transformations oil induced.

4. Crude Awakening: The coming of oil and political conflict in Niger

In this chapter, I analyze the role of oil in Nigerien macro-politics between the signing of the oil contract in June 2008 and the refinery's inauguration in November 2011. I show how the signing of the oil contract was entangled with then president Tandja's project for constitutional amendment, his overthrow in a 2010 military coup led by Commander Salou Djibo, and the 2011 election of opposition leader Issoufou. To do so, I analyze the three president's political rhetoric in speeches for national and international audiences, and their practices in terms of political campaigns and programs. I make four main arguments. Firstly, that the oil refinery became political long before its materialization. From the outset, the decision to build the refinery and its construction in Zinder were entangled with theories of economic growth, visions of industrialization, desires for energy autonomy, political projects for constitutional change, and infrastructural developments in neighboring countries. Secondly, I argue that from the conclusion of the contract, oil acted as an idiom through which pre-existing conflicts were expressed. Significations of oil, including the resource curse idea, were produced to make claims to power and legitimacy, and thus framed political conflicts in the language of oil. Thirdly, I argue that macro-politics in Niger (as elsewhere in Africa and beyond) are generally characterized by a logic of code-switching between an "extroverted" game to secure international financial flows, and an "introverted" game to access power and political positions, public markets and bribes. Fourthly, I argue that in its immediate presence, oil has been incorporated into the logic of the political game in Niger, rather than instantly changing it, as the resource curse theory would suggest. At least in its fundamental structures, politics in Niger did not change significantly with the anticipation of oil, nor with the start of oil production. In the moment of oil production starting in Niger, the nature of politics can be most adequately analyzed by referring to the general literature on politics and the state in Africa rather than the resource-specific literature of the resource curse and rentier state models.

4.1. Politics and the state in Africa

Despite the conceptual variations and different causal explanations which I will turn to now, political and social science literature on the state in Africa agrees that many of what the resource curse and rentier state paradigms consider to be effects of oil – corruption, institutional deficiency, authoritarianism, conflict, violence, inequality – are rather general characteristics of African politics, both in resource rich and resource poor countries (Médard 1982; Jean-François Bayart 1989; Chabal and Daloz 1999).

Most commonly, academics have sought to explain these common aspects amongst African states using the neopatrimonial state model, which has become a kind of catch-all concept (Bach 2012; Erdmann and Engel 2007). While pioneered by Eisenstadt (1973), Médard (1982) was the first to use the model to describe the conflation of the private and the public in African political administration. The notion of neopatrimonialism draws explicitly on Weber's ideal types of authority, and refers to the coexistence of patrimonial informal logics and formal legal-rational bureaucratic logics. In other words, the neopatrimonial model portrays African politics as a deviation from idealized modern Western democracies, these deviations being caused by traditional African elements. Compared to Western states, it thus sees African statehood as "failed", "limited", or even a "façade". The prime reason for the differences between Africa and the West is thereby typically understood as lying in a somehow opaque notion of culture (see especially Chabal and Daloz 1999).

Most prominently articulated by Bayart (1989), the "hybrid state perspective"[37] starts from the premise that politics in Africa are not different from politics elsewhere in the world. Rather than focusing on culture as *an* or *the* explanatory variable, theorists adopting this perspective see history and the political economy as the most important factor in explaining social inequalities, clientelism and corruption. Rather than characterizing African states as failed, these theorists analyze the translation of a Western state model to the African context. For Bayart, one important historical trajectory of African political economy, which is said to have led to a criminalization of the African state in terms of political domination, economic accumulation and conflict is "a whole series of rents generated by Africa's insertion in the international economy in a mode of dependence" (Bayart 1999: xvi). These rents include colonial and postcolonial exploitation of natural resources such as uranium or oil, as well as external financial aid. Bayart (2000) has termed this outward oriented history of Africa in the world "extraversion", arguing instead of being dependent on the West *per se,* Africa has made itself dependent on access these rents.

Rather than adhering to the essentialization and generalization of African states often inherent in these theories, anthropologists have pointed to the heterogeneity, fragmentation, and multiple administrative layers within African states, trying to avoid normative classifications of African deviations from Western norms (Lund 2007; Olivier de Sardan 2011; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014). The contributors to the book “States at Work” edited by Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2014), for example, all looked at the concrete practices of state institutions, bureaucracies and bureaucrats, and how their practices of “doing the state” were interwoven with representations of “seeing the state”. Nevertheless, like the political science theorists mentioned above, anthropologists share an understanding of African politics as characterized by a plurality of norms – private and public, formal and informal – that coexist alongside one another.[38]

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[37] The term "hybrid state" is used by Chabal and Daloz (1999: 9) to describe Bayart's approach.

In this chapter, I focus on both practices and representations of Nigerien presidents and their inner circles, before examining micro-politics in Zinder in the following. To contextualize the political speeches and programs of presidents Tandja, Djibo and Issoufou, and to trace from the event of the inauguration back in time, I first provide a brief background on the history of oil exploration in Niger. In doing so, I attempt to decode the logics of the political game in Niger and the role oil – in its material, temporal and significatory dimension – have played in this game.

4.2. A short history of oil in Niger

By the time the oil contract between the Nigerien government and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was signed in June 2008, Niger already had a 50-year history of exploration. Conducted mainly by French and American based companies, this exploration started in 1958, two years after the first major oil discoveries had been made in neighboring Algeria. The oil potential of Niger was and is linked to two major sedimentary basins, the Western sedimentary basin and the Oriental sedimentary basin, which cover about 90 percent of the country’s surface. Despite this long history of exploration, many of the companies in Niger have not been especially active. While uranium exploitation began in the 1970s, commercial oil production would ultimately remain a long way off. Nevertheless, foreign interest in Nigerien oil increased, especially as the international price skyrocketed with the 1973 oil crisis. Companies such as Conoco, Shell, Global Energy, Sun Oil, Texaco, Esso and Elf acquired permits for various oil blocks, with the Agadem block in the country’s far east proving especially promising. Between 1970 and 1983, Esso, Texaco and Elf conducted seismic activities and drilled 12 wells in the Agadem block, stating that three of the 12 wells had traces of oil (Madama, Yougou 1 and Yougou 2), and that two were commercially viable (Sokor 1 and Sokor 2). As oil explorations and the first positive results became known to political circles and at least parts of the Nigerien public in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the oil remained in a "state of not-yet-ness" (Witte 2017): the discursive presence of oil's absence materialized in political circles and the public, and the expectation was that oil production would soon commence. However, this expectation would not be fulfilled for another three decades.

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[38] Different norms also coexist in Western states. The difference is a relative one.

This delay in production was not related to the quality or presumed quantity of Nigerien oil, with petroleum geologists adhering to the most widely accepted theory of oil's origins, the organic theory[39], have long considered the country promising for exploration activities (Genik 1992: 169–85; Harouna and Philp 2012). Nigerien oil is classified as petro-chemically "light" and "sweet", located on the scale between the two sweet light crude oils "Brent" and "Western Texas Intermediate (WTI)" used as benchmarks in international oil pricing. In practical terms, Nigerien crude's low viscosity and low sulfur content means that it flows freely at room temperature, and is therefore comparatively easy and inexpensive to transport, as pipelines do not need to be heated. As it produces a higher percentage of gasoline and diesel fuel when refined, a light sweet oil like Niger's therefore receives a higher price than heavy crude oil on commodity markets.

Despite the quality of the oil and the attractive exploration targets, Niger's oil potential long remained untapped, and still remains underexplored. Elf's 1981 announcement of positive results from the Sokor 1 and 2 oil wells in particular stimulated desires among the Nigerien political elite to not only become an oil state, but also to achieve energy autonomy through the construction of a refinery. To achieve this end, in 1984 the Kountché government commissioned the French *Bureau d'Études Industrielles et de Coopération de l'Institut Français du Pétrole* (BEICIP) to collect and summarize the results of oil operations completed in Niger thus far, to estimate a provisional budget for the mining and energy ministry, to evaluate Niger's Petroleum Code, and to calculate the costs of construction and operation of an oil refinery and a pipeline (BEICIP 1984a; 1984b; 1984c; 1984d). In doing so, Kountché sought to promote further oil exploration, to kick start commercial production, and to achieve energy autonomy. The estimate of construction and operation costs was made for a refinery at three possible sites: Niamey, Agadez and Zinder. With

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[39] According to the organic theory of oil, oil and gas are formed from remains of prehistoric plants and animals, making oil a depletable resource. Others, however, postulate theories of an abiogenic petroleum origin. According to these hypotheses, oil is not depletable but permanently reproduced near the earth's core, from where it sweeps through porous rocks into the upper rock strata (Kudryavtsev 1959).

Zinder judged the most favorable, Niamey and Agadez were abandoned. At the request of Niger's Mining Ministry, Diffa was also investigated as a possible site. Due to the shorter pipeline route (317 km versus 537 km to Zinder) and the lower pressure needed to pump the oil from the Agadem block, it proved to be the cheapest alternative (BEICIP 1984e).[40] However, a national refinery did not materialize at this time, as commercial oil extraction still proved to be not-yet profitable, and Nigerien oil consequently remained in a state of not-yet-ness. Weszkalnys (2015) calls this phenomena the "indeterminacy of First Oil", which is determined by the particular geology, potentiality, and speculation of oil reserves. I turn to that now.

The problem of kick-starting commercial oil exploitation in Niger was fueled by two particular material qualities of the oil – depth and connectivity. These result in high development costs prior to extraction. Ninety percent of Niger's hydrocarbon potential is in the Yougou-Sokor-1 system which is between 1500 meters and 4000 meters below ground (Liu et al. 2015). Moreover, Nigerien oil is jammed in small underground traps which are not connected to one another, thereby necessitating the drilling of numerous distinct wells. Finally, due to Niger's land-locked position and the location of its most promising oil reserves in the western Rift Basin (especially the Agadem block), oil exploitation in Niger depends on large extractive infrastructures, including more than 1000 km of pipeline to connect oil production sites with the harbor, and thus the world market. To ensure the oil's connectivity, huge investments in infrastructure – which would not have been profitable in the context of low oil prices and Western oil majors' extraction models – were necessary.

In the 1990s there was a renewal of oil activities in Niger, with new oil companies arriving. The renewal of activities is traced back by the Nigerien Ministry of Oil and Energy to the BEICIP study, and the creation of a documentation center and oil archives in 1996 (Sanda 2012). For a fee, interested oil companies could study the activities and findings of former oil companies in the country. The new oil companies to undertake exploration activities in Niger were Hunt Oil and T.G. World Energy, while the Agadem oil block remained under permanent license – first by Texaco, then Elf and finally Esso. In 2001, Petronas stepped in and formed a new consortium with Esso.

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[40] Nevertheless, the fact that about 80 percent of the national fuel consumption is concentrated within and around the capital Niamey in the West of the country was not considered in the study. Thus, the costs of transportation, infrastructural development, and maintenance were not considered.

With the beginning of commercial oil exploitation in Chad in 2003 and the construction of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, oil exploration in Niger became more economically attractive, as oil extracted in Niger could now be connected with the pipeline. It was in this context that the China National Petroleum Corporation and Sonatrach acquired new exploration licenses. Despite this new opportunity, in 2006, Esso and Petronas refused the government's demands to build a refinery in Niger, and abandoned the Agadem block. They estimated the Agadem block's reserves to be 324 million barrels of oil and 10 billion m³ of gas. In the context of low oil prices (about 30 USD/barrel in 2006), Esso and Petronas judged the block, in combination with the refinery, to be economically unviable. The desire of Nigerien authorities for a national refinery could therefore not materialize with these companies' business model that, in line with liberal economic thinking (such as by Adam Smith and David Ricardo), builds on labor intensive work in the Global South while capital intensive work such as an oil refinery is to be placed in the Global North for achieving comparative advantages and economies of scale.

The potential economic profitability of Nigerien oil was further fueled by rising prices on the international market. With the 2007 US subprime crisis and the 2008 financial world crisis, the value of one barrel of the sweet, light oil found in Niger had increased from around 30 USD in 2006 to 147 USD in July 2008 (Moussa 2012). Eager to finally kickstart extraction in Niger, in 2007 the Tandja government adopted a new Petroleum Code and launched an international call for tenders for the Agadem block. The construction of an oil refinery in Niger was included in the conditions of the tender. Twenty-three oil companies showed interest, with nine finally tendering. The CNPC won the license, and became the operator in the Agadem block. In June 2008, 50 years after exploration had started, Niger finally signed a production sharing contract to produce oil in the Agadem block and to build a joint-venture refinery. The Chinese agreement to develop infrastructure in Niger, along with the development of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline and the rising oil price had resulted in a major step toward petroleum development. After the CNPC had drilled 76 wells, 62 of which they judged productive, they re-evaluated Esso and Petronas' reserve estimates, raising them from 324 million barrels of oil and 10 billion m³ of gas to 744 million barrels of oil and 16 billion m³ of gas (Moussa 2012). They planned to export the crude through a connecting pipeline to the existing Chad-Cameroon pipeline.

The beginning of commercial oil production and the upward revision by CNPC attracted further oil companies and several new exploration permits were signed in 2012. In July

2012, under new Nigerien President Issoufou, nine permits were granted to five companies. However, at least some of these oil companies have not pursued any activities yet (in 2017). Indeed, a couple of them may lack the technical means and knowledge to carry out exploration activities, and may simply be speculators seeking to sell on permits acquired cheaply through relations with the incumbent regime. Two of the companies, Labana Petroleum and Advantica are owned by wealthy businessman Dahirou Mangal. Widely understood as having bankrolled Issoufou's election campaign, Mangal appears to have gained oil exploration permits in return (I will make sense of these developments in more detail in chapter 6).

Between 2008 and 2014, the CNPC made 93 discoveries from 124 exploration wells (a 75 percent success rate)[41] – with over 225 wells drilled in total – unlocking two billion barrels of oil and 2.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas on the original Agadem permit (Liu et al. 2015). In 2013, CNPC-Niger sold 20 percent of the Agadem license to CPC (state-owned Taiwan Chinese Petroleum Corporation) and mandatorily relinquished 50 percent of the license back to the Nigerien state. In 2014, Savannah Petroleum acquired the CNPC's relinquished license of 50 percent of Agadem oil block through a Production Sharing Contract with the Nigerien government, and also signed a Risk Sharing Contract[42] in 2015. Savannah planned to start the drilling phase in 2017, and envisioned developing a second pipeline via the Kaduna refinery in Nigeria (for a detailed list of all oil companies and their activities in Niger see the table on the history of oil in the appendix).

4.3. The rule of Mamadou Tandja (1999-2010)

For concluding the contract, the CNPC paid the Nigerien government a 300 million USD bonus. A few weeks later, on 27 October 2008, a cornerstone ceremony for the refinery in Zinder was held. Coinciding with the ceremony, President Tandja's campaign for constitutional change, *Tazartché* or "Continuation!"[43] was launched. *Tazartché* would alter the regime from semi-presidential to presidential, allow the president an extra three-year transitional term, and the possibility of putting himself up for re-election.[44] An impressive crowd had been mobilized to welcome Tandja, with a major youth contingent dressed in t-shirts bearing the "*Tazartché*" slogan. In his speech at the ceremony, Zinder governor Yahaya Yandaka asked the president, in the name of the Nigerien population, to complete the great construction sites (*grands chantiers)* that he had initiated: the Kandaji dam, a dry port in Dosso, a second bridge over the Niger river, a refrigerated warehouse in Niamey, the development of Imouraren, and most importantly, the oil wells, pipeline and refinery that were making Niger an oil producer (Pawlitzky 2009; Baudais and Chauzal 2011).

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[41] The discovery of oil still depends on trial and error, although knowledge gains and technological developments over the last century have increased the success rate of oil well drilling from about 10 percent 150 years ago to about 20-25 percent today. However, the success rate also highly depends on the risk level of oil operations and thus does not necessarily say much about the technological level of the oil company.

[42] Under risk service contracts an international oil company supplies services and know-how to the state in exchange for a fee or some other form of compensation. In risk service contracts, the international oil company bears all the exploration costs.

[43] The term *tazarce* comes from the Hausa language and is written *Tazartché* in French. It could be translated as "prolongation" or "continuation".

In making use of the resource curse scenario, long-time academic and political observers of Niger have come to the conclusion that *Tazartché* campaign was triggered by oil and uranium (the resource curse). After all, *Tazartché* was designed to alter the constitution and re-elect Tandja as president, thereby placing him in the best position to capture future oil and uranium rents (Grégoire 2010; 2011: 222–23; Gazibo 2011: 342–43). While this hypothesis may initially seem appealing, it does not withstand empirical scrutiny. In other words, a closer look at the emergence of oil, and its relationship to political conflict in Niger, undermines the clear-cut causal links predicted by the resource curse thesis.

4.3.1. The origins of *Tazartché*

On 7 July 2005, when the oil price was around 30 USD/barrel and extraction of Niger's reserves was still considered economically unviable, and one year before Esso and Petronas had abandoned the Agadem block, and two years before the Nigerien government decided to diversify its resource sector, and three years before the oil contract was signed with CNPC, the private Nigerien newspaper *Le Temoin* published an article about an underground war between Prime Minister Hama Amadou and President Mamadou Tandja due to rumors that Tandja would opt for a third mandate (Gaoh 2005).[45] Conflicts between Tandja and Hama[46] had arisen the previous year, when Tandja announced his candidacy for a second term. At that time, Hama had the image of Niger's strong man pulling the strings, while Tandja was seen as an old man only executing the office of the presidency symbolically. However, Tandja's announcement showed his willingness to continue in office, and he defeated Hama in the power struggle inside the party, the MNSD-Nassara.

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[44] Tandja's presidency officially ended in 2009 after two mandates, as specified in the Nigerien Constitution of the Fifth Republic.

[45] In a 2005 publication, Keenan (2005: 406) also already mentioned Tandja's attempt at constitutional change to prolong his presidency.

[46] In Niger, Hama Amadou is referred to as Hama and not Amadou. I therefore use Hama.

While Tandja had won the internal conflict and would stand for a second mandate in 2005, Hama remained the prime minister, and had clear intentions of standing for the presidency in the 2009 election, when Tandja would no longer be able to stand. However, rumors that Tandja would attempt to change the constitution so that he could stand for a third mandate fueled a conflict between Tandja and Hama's respective political camps. In December 2005, shortly after the first rumors of *Tazartché* had spread, Hama announced his candidacy for the 2009 presidential elections. In doing so, he made public his determination to fight any possible attempt by Tandja to instigate constitutional change and prolong his presidency. When embezzlement of international donor funds in the education and alphabetization ministry (*Ministère de l'Éducation de Base et de l'Alphabétisation,* or MEBA) became public in 2006, and the international donor community demanded answers, Tandja used the so-called "*affaire MEBA"* to target members of Hama's political camp. With the anti-corruption campaign "*opération mains propres"* ("operation clean hands"), Tandja finally removed Hama from office with a vote of no-confidence in 2007, imprisoning him along with some of his inner circle the following year.[47] Having eliminated his strongest political opponent inside the party, Tandja gained a wide range of powers, and was left virtually unopposed.

The Tandja government officially portrayed the *Tazartché* movement at the oil refinery's inauguration in Zinder as a spontaneous social movement initiated by the youth of Zinder because Tandja had chosen the region as the site of the refinery. However, I argue that *Tazartché* was a carefully organized and staged event. To make the strategically fabricated "will of the population" for him to remain in office a public fact, Tandja coopted popular civil society associations and labor unions to support *Tazartché* (Abdoul Azizou 2010). By its very proclamation, the Nigerien people's will would be made a political reality. Nouhou Arzika's *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple* (MPDNP) and Dan Dubai's *Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement* (MPPAD) became the leading lobbyists for *Tazartché*, who together with other actors from politics and civil society formed a national "*Tazartché* committee".[48] Throughout the country, Dan Dubai became widely regarded as the founding father of *Tazartché,* having founded the MPPAD in Zinder to speak on behalf of the *Zinderois*. He also became affiliated with Tandja's party, the MNSD-Nassara. Like the MPDNP and the MPPAD, the USN student union also became a vocal supporter of *Tazartché*. In return for their support, Tandja gave these civil society activists seats on the various governmental bodies which had emerged with political liberalization in the 1990s. One of these student unionists was Kassoum Moctar from Maradi and Zinder, who was even appointed spokesperson of the Tandja government in 2009. However, a number of other civil society organizations joined the political opposition in vocally opposing *Tazartché.*

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[47] I do not claim that Hama was innocent, but rather that corruption and embezzlement of public funds are part of the political game (Olivier de Sardan 1999a). In this sense, Hama could be understood as a political prisoner.

[48] I name the leaders of these civil society organizations as these organizations, like political parties and large businesses, are highly personalized. I turn to that in more detail in chapter 5 and 6.

To understand how Tandja was able to co-opt certain civil society organizations, and not others, we must look not only at these groups' political and ideological affiliations, but also at their sources of funding. As Bayart (2000) has argued, African states (and with it African civil society associations) have, over the *longue durée*, always been outwardly oriented (extroverted rather than introverted) to secure financial flows coming from the outside (mostly Western countries but increasingly today from China, India and other Eastern countries). In doing so, these associations make themselves dependent on their donors and must align to their agenda. At the time Tandja was seeking supporters for *Tazartché*, Nouhou Arzika's MPDNP was the only one of five major associations that had no significant international donors. As such, it was 'free' and willing to join *Tazartché,* especially as the campaign's patriotic and anti-imperial rhetoric matched well with the MPDNP's image. Although Moussa Tchangari's *Alternative Espaces Citoyens* anti-imperialist and nationalist rhetoric was also similar to Tandja's, they were not viable or able to support the campaign due to both their international partnerships, and their close relationship with Nigerien intellectuals who primarily supported the "socialist" PNDS-Tarayya party. As such, the organization refrained from taking a clear position on *Tazartché.* Moustafa Kadi's *Collectif pour la Défense du Droit à l'Energie* (CODDAE) was prevented from active intervention and declared itself neutral, as its main international donors (including the IMF) represented themselves as "apolitical". Kassoum Issa's *SNEN* teachers union also declared itself neutral; while Tandja had been able to quell or appease the unions and their members in 2005, the unions retained a traditional closeness to the PNDS, as the "socialist" party. Finally, Marou Amadou's *Comité de Réflexion et d'Orientation Indépendant pour la Sauvegarde des Acquis Démocratiques* (CROISADE) became one of the major voices against *Tazartché,* as the association focused on "the defense of democracy", and may have been pushed (or financially supported) by international donors to side with the political opposition.

After its launch, government supporters led demonstrations, and appeared in shows on state television and radio stations throughout the country to bring Tandja's message. The *Tazartché* campaign followed a tight script with three key messages: first, that it was the will of the Nigerien people that the constitution be changed so that Tandja could remain in office; second, that the development of Nigerien oil and uranium was intimately connected with the person of Tandja; and third, that a move to a presidential regime was better suited to Nigerien culture (Baudais and Chauzal 2011: 298). Tandja was presented as the father of oil production, whose "pragmatism" and "nationalism" had allowed Niger to become an oil producer: the "pragmatic" Tandja "first acts and then talks", in contrast to the main opposition leader, the "intellectual" Issoufou (and his PNDS party, which generally attracted the support of intellectuals) who "first talks and then (never) acts". Moreover, Tandja was a "nationalist", a strong anti-imperial and anti-neocolonial leader willing and able to resist Western interference. The campaigns fundamental message was simple, losing Tandja as president at this decisive moment of history would bring instability to Niger, threaten its oil project, and indeed its entire development.[49]

For the Tandja government, the Nigerien oil project was essential to achieve economic growth through industrialization, economic diversification and decentralization. The government claimed that oil production would kick start development in Niger in three ways. Firstly, with the construction of the Kandaji river dam, oil revenues would be used to finance the transition of Niger's subsistence agriculture to modern irrigated agriculture. Secondly, the construction of an oil refinery was expected to reduce the costs of energy imports (especially of oil products from Venezuela and water energy from Nigeria), secure the national fuel and gas supplies, and promote industrialization. Thirdly, the surplus fuel would be sold to the West African sub-region, where fuel prices were higher than in Niger.[50] Moreover, the idea of their development strategy was to boost Niger's economy by implementing industrial mega-projects or so-called "*poles de développement"* ("development poles") in every region of the country: uranium production in the North (Agadez), gold production and a river dam in the West (Tillabéri), oil extraction in the East (Diffa), and a cement plant in the center (Tahoua). Despite the extra costs, the Tandja government decided to build the refinery in Zinder, since the Zinder region had no development pole at the time. As the Diffa region borders Chad and Nigeria, which have both seen severe conflict in the past decades, and as a Tubu rebellion in the 1990s took place in the region, the government argued that Zinder was a safer region for development.

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[49] "Father of the nation" narratives are not only characteristic of authoritarian regimes (Franke-Schwenk 2014), but also hold true for authoritarian projects in a setting of multiparty politics, as the *Tazartché* campaign illustrates.

[50] Fuel prices in West Africa in September 2012 in FCFA: Benin 640, Burkina Faso 727, Ivory Coast 774, Mali 750, Senegal 847, Togo 597, and Niger 579.

However, apart from this official portrayal, it seems that Tandja had chosen Zinder as he wanted to bring Mahamane Ousmane into his project for constitutional change. Originating from Zinder, Ousmane was then president of one of Niger's largest parties, the CDS-Rahama, that was part of Tandja's government at the time. With the transition to a multiparty system, the CDS emerged as an eastern Nigerien and Hausa ethnic response to historical western Nigerien and Zarma ethnic dominance (Lund 2001). With its electoral stronghold in Zinder, Tandja was eager to win CDS support for *Tazartché*, a move that would have severely weakened opposition to his campaign for constitutional change. In this sense, several of my interlocuters equally qualified the choice for Zinder as the site of the refinery a political decision. Thus, I argue that Tandja's decision to construct the refinery in Zinder shows how the petro-infrastructure in Niger was political "before being technical" (Deleuze 1988: 39). In other words, from the very beginning of the oil project, its materialization and its location were an integral part of Niger's political game. Not only did the petro-infrastructure unfold in relation to economic theories of industrialization, Chinese commitments to production linkages in Niger itself, oil price fluctuations and infrastructural developments in Chad and Cameroon, the location of the refinery was also motivated by political projects for constitutional amendment, histories of political marginalization and strategic political maneuvers.

When the rumors about *Tazartché* started to spread, Tandja repeatedly met with opposition politicians to assure them that he was neither willing to change the constitution, nor searching for another mandate. Nevertheless, with concern growing that he would indeed seek a third mandate, in an October 2007 interview with the French newspaper *Le Monde*, Tandja made assurances that he would step down in 2009. After the start of *Tazartché* was signaled at the foundation stone ceremony in October 2008, the opposition parties first remained calm, with Issoufou writing a note to Tandja asking for reassurances that he would respect the constitution. Especially after Tandja had ousted Hama Amadou, Issoufou came to see himself as Tandja's most likely successor. To secure himself the best position to assume the presidency, he had even praised Tandja's good governance. With Tandja's party political opponents at least initially restrained in their responses, some civil society associations and labor unions (initially Marou Amadou's CROISADE) were the first to release declarations against any attempt for constitutional change (CFDR 2009: 12).

With the *Tazartché* campaign gathering momentum, Tandja himself kept silent in public until French President Nicolas Sarkozy's visit to Niamey on 27 March 2009, where Niger signed a new uranium contract with Areva. Sarkozy took the opportunity to pay tribute to Niger's "democracy", recalling that the only period of stability in 15 years of Nigerien democracy was that of the two terms of President Tandja. Presenting himself to a national and international audience, Tandja then proclaimed in French:

> President Tandja is able to fully explain and speak in the clearest possible manner, so that everyone may understand the situation in Niger today. I sincerely respect our constitution. I grew up with military regulations, I came to know the laws and regulations of my country as a soldier. I entered politics and I came to know what the constitution is. I love democracy and I have done a lot of things for it. Today, I am president of the republic, having won two mandates in accordance with the constitution. Here, I end my two mandates. Growing up for me is to leave with your head up. If the table is cleared, you have to leave. It is not about searching for another mandate. I have always been clear on this. I have never asked any Nigerien at any time if they can do this or that—never! And I will never do it—asking if they could change the Nigerien constitution for me or search for modifications to our constitution: I would keep it as it is, I prefer it like this until the end! Now, for the good of the Nigerien people, the regions raised in order to say: 'Allow President Tandja three more years to complete the great construction sites that he has started, for reasons of stability and for reasons to complete what is programmed.' It's the business of the people and of the assembly and not for Tandja. Tandja would neither talk to the assembly's president nor to anyone else in order to say to the assembly to take care of the issue. That's not my business, but it is up to them [*the Nigerien people and the assembly*] to know what to do. I'm ready to quit tomorrow. The 22nd of December, it's the end of my mandate. Goodbye, I retire and thank you![51]

National and international observers used the speech at the time to claim that Tandja was not seeking a third mandate. However, it needs to be well situated, for it was targeted not only at a national but also an international audience, and in a situation where he was seeking to tap international financial flows and maintain national social and political order. In this light, we can understand the speech in a more profound way.

On the one hand, Tandja's explicit awareness of the development and freedom discourses underlying Western political rationalities reminds us that the extroverted speech was clearly aimed at an international audience. Sitting next to Sarkozy, he presented himself as a democratic leader who could not do anything but follow the will of the Nigerien people and the assembly. In return, Sarkozy assured Tandja that France would continue its neutrality concerning internal Nigerien national politics (Grégoire 2010). Sarkozy's reassurance had bolstered Tandja's hand inside Niger. As I outlined in chapter 3, against the backdrop of the US War on Terror, Tandja's government had classified the Tuareg rebels MNJ as terrorists and bandits, and had accused France and Areva of instigating and financing the rebellion, eventually expelling Areva's head of operations in July 2007. These actions had led to Sarkozy's direct intervention, and a series of high level Franco-Nigerien talks, which calmed the situation and led to an agreement between Areva and Niger in August 2007, in which Areva acquiesced to the Nigerien government's demands.

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[51] Video recording by Radio Télévision Bonferey on 27.3.2009; own transcription and translation from French.

On the other hand, however, Tandja's understanding of democracy does not appear to revolve around the constitution (and the two-term presidential limit) but rather a desire to follow the people's will. As the extract shows, Tandja does not completely deny any constitutional change, but rather highlights that such a change is the responsibility of the Nigerien assembly and the population as a whole. Here, Tandja also reiterates the main themes of the campaign that only he and he alone could complete what he had started. Moreover, he reiterates that electoral change would bring instability and threaten the oil and uranium projects. In other words, Tandja's was trying to deny any personal involvement in the campaign for constitutional change to prove that *Tazartché* was the will of the people, and to maintain social and political order in Niger for as long as possible.

If extraversion is a common characteristic of the African state, so too is it's opposite, introversion. That is, the political reality of African states is characterized by "code switching" between an extroverted stance or hegemonic "meta-code", and an introverted stance or "cultural code", depending on the "bazaar situation" in which political actors find themselves at the time (Rottenburg 2005; 2009). In a bazaar situation to secure financial flows from the outside, Nigerien politicians change into the meta-code dominated by western political rationalities of good governance and a particular Western understanding of democracy (multiparty systems, and freedoms of the press, speech and human rights). However, in a bazaar situation of internal redistributions of rents, public markets and political positions, political actors switch into a cultural code, a vernacular understanding of democracy through which they try to address the needs and desires of their national population to acquire legitimacy. The spread of multiparty systems and democratic constitutions around the world therefore does not necessarily lead to the emergence of democratic principles. Rather, it should shift our attention to how the language of democracy has been translated by political authorities in different cultural contexts (Schaffer 2000). Here, the concept of vernacularization has been used to show how the concept of democracy has become subjectivized and embedded in social and cultural practices, not necessarily of political authorities, but first of all of ordinary people in the Global South (Michelutti 2007). I turn to these notions now.

On 4 May 2009, over six months after *Tazartché's* public launch, and a few weeks after his meeting with Sarkozy, Tandja finally confirmed his intention to change the constitution. To illustrate the importance of *Tazartché* in completing the *grands chantiers,* it was again at a foundation stone ceremon*y,* this time of the Imouraren uranium mine, that Tandja made the second public step toward *Tazartché*. In an interview with *France 24* and *Libération,* he said: "The people demand that I stay. I cannot remain insensitive to their requests" (Hofnung 2009). When the constitutional court declared *Tazartché's* proposals unconstitutional, Tandja dissolved parliament. In a speech to the nation he then declared a referendum set for August 2009.

As a reaction, the political opposition went to the constitutional court to block the referendum which was then invalidated. In response, Tandja called on the constitutional court to give him full powers. After the court refused, he first demanded the court withdraw their annulation of the presidential decree and then – after another refusal by the court – declared in a speech to the nation that he had granted himself exceptional powers to govern by decree, although this could have only be done by the parliament which he had dissolved two weeks prior (Gazibo 2011: 343). Tandja then sacked the entire court, and appointed new members to it, justifying this as the will of the people. Tandja also used state-sponsored public media to promote the referendum and persecuted journalists who opposed it. With an opposition boycott, *Tazartché* won 92.5 percent of the vote in the referendum. Given the overwhelming majority, it is not surprising that both the political opposition and the international community claimed election fraud. While the Tandja government claimed that 68.28 percent of eligible voters had taken part, a rate of participation never before achieved in Niger, the political opposition claimed barely five percent participation (Coordination des Forces pour la Démocratie et la République 2009). After the election, "[*t*]he new 'constitutional court,' entirely appointed by Tandja, rubber-stamped the outcome and the new constitution of the Sixth Republic effectively came into force." (Gazibo 2011: 344).

As should be clear from this outline, *Tazartché* was neither a spontaneous social movement, nor was it somehow triggered by the oil contract. While *Tazartché* long pre-existed the conclusion of the oil contract, the contract did, however, offer Tandja ideological and financial means for its realization. In other words, while Niger's oil project served as an ideological legitimization for *Tazartché*, *Tazartché* itself was a political conflict. The 300 million USD bonus payment from the CNPC may have provided important financial resources for the campaign, but the bonus payment should not be seen as the underlying cause that triggered *Tazartché*. Arguably, *Tazartché* can be taken as a key to understanding the present political process in Niger and the role oil plays in it. Let us therefore look at the political events that followed *Tazartché* to see how significations of oil were produced in and for political conflict in Niger.

4.3.2. Reactions against *Tazartché*

As it had done throughout the previous two decades of institutional breakdowns and regime transitions following the introduction of the multiparty system, the political elite firmly united against Tandja's attempt to centralize power (Villalón and Idrissa 2005). As constitutional change would have allowed Tandja to stand for re-election repeatedly, it posed a threat to the political class, who feared losing their access to state resources that had become accessible for them with the multiparty system. That is, multiparty politics have allowed a civilian political elite to stay in power in ever-changing alliances between different political factions and major merchants. In doing so, they have taken possession of state resources through political postings, systematic corruption, the embezzlement of funds, tax favors and the distribution of public markets (Olivier de Sardan 2016). Firstly, Mahamane Ousmane refused Tandja's attempt to co-opt him and his party, CDS-Rahama, for *Tazartché.* Instead, even risking its own electoral stronghold with Tandja becoming popular in Zinder, CDS-Rahama withdrew from the coalition with the government and joined with the political opposition, labor unions, and civil society associations to form a "movement for democracy", the *Coordination des Forces pour la Démocratie et la République* (CFDR). As such, CDS soon became one of the leading forces against *Tazartché*.

Rather than questioning Tandja's image of pragmatism and nationalism, the opposition decided to play the "democracy card" by speaking of a "*coup d'état constitutionnel"* (CFDR 2009). They accused "Tandja and his clan" of violating constitutional democracy, favoring clientelism and corruption, and being involved in "mafia practices" and "trafficking of all types" (ibid.).[52] Addressing the international community, the opposition organized pro-democracy demonstrations and called for sanctions against Niger. Mahamadou Issoufou even called for military intervention. The call for democracy seems to have evoked the idea of the resource curse to shape public sentiment: as Niger now had oil, the country was on the road to dictatorship. Political observers in Nigerien newspapers (Moumouni 2009), at least, quickly established a relationship between Niger developing oil production and *Tazartché*, as did some academic observers (Gazibo 2011; Grégoire 2011; 2010). The strategy worked, with international sanctions against the Tandja government soon announced: namely, the suspension of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and of economic partnerships by the European Union (EU), IMF, the World Bank and many Western countries. As it had signed the 2008 deal with Tandja for the development of the Imouraren uranium deposits, which included the agreement to stay out of Nigerien politics, France only tentatively condemned the constitutional change.

Tandja was backed by then Libyan president Muʿammar al-Qaddhāfī, who declared that the will of the people should dictate the maximum presidential term lengths in all African constitutions. Headed by al-Qaddhāfī at the time, the African Union (AU) also kept silent on the issue. Here, we should remember that attempts for constitutional change have recently flourished in Africa, in both resource-rich and resource-poor countries (including Senegal in 2012, Burkina Faso in 2014, Republic of Congo in 2015 and Burundi in 2015), and that hasty conclusions as those by Gazibo (2011), Grégoire (2010) and others drawn from the resource curse thesis should thus be taken with caution. al-Qaddhāfī also aided the project by mediating new efforts by the Tandja government to end the conflict with the Tuareg rebel group MNJ. With a military victory looking unlikely in the near future, and the MNJ opposed to the referendum, to pursue *Tazartché,* Tandja needed to de-escalate the conflict. Mediated by al-Qaddhāfī, the MNJ and the Tandja government finally signed a peace agreement in October 2009, with the MNJ formally handing over their weapons at a ceremony in Arlit in early January 2011.

Indicating his determinism to stay in power with the help of China, Tandja reacted to the international sanctions with a nationalist discourse, stating that "there are two strings to his bow, if one should break, there is always the other" (Grégoire 2010). In an introverted speech in the Diffa region on 18 December 2009, Tandja reacted to the political opposition and international sanctions by addressing the population in Diffa:

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[52] For the wider context of Sahel-Saharan politics see the special issue of Herodote "*Géopolitique du Sahara*" (Grégoire and Bourgeot 2011). The special issue discusses terrorism, illicit trade of drugs, weapons and goods, clandestine migration and sub-soil resources in the Sahara.

> My thanks to all those present here. Men and women, young and old, we got what we have wanted for 51 years. It is thanks to God that we have oil in Diffa and it is thanks to him that we have gathered here in Diffa [...] Currently there are many rumors circulating in our country. I would like to tell you what is really happening before leaving here today [...] I have played the same games that past presidents have played. Now it is time to work, because at my age I should react on the basis of calculation, to advance my country by implementing the projects that I have promised my people. This is my only goal. I want first of all to see our country actually produce oil. Like that, even after my death, you will say that this has been achieved in my era [...] In terms of uranium, we have always been given what *they* [*the French or 'the West' in general*] want – sometimes five billion FCFA, sometimes four billion FCFA. I said 'No' to that. I said that from now on both of us will have their fair share. Thus, I will review all uranium treaties and if they refuse, I will launch an international tender. For those reasons, the people who are responsible for this [*the unfair distribution of the uranium profits*] are those who tell the Africans to overthrow me if they find an opportunity. *You* [*the political opposition in Niger and ECOWAS*] tell the West that I became a dictator, but this is normal [*appropriate to become independent*] because it is my country and I am independent [...] Our brothers who seek to sabotage us with our enemies are wasting their time. Our constitution is ours. It is our opinion, our point of view [*the constitutional change*]. All the great men of this world [*leaders who opposed the West*] had problems [*with Western interference*], but let them do what they do [*independent decisions such as constitutional change*]. We have our independence and we do what we want […] Wherever there is oil, there are problems that you have to resist. All the inhabitants of Diffa, I entrust our oil to you. We must pay attention and everyone who is suspect to you – inform us in time. We are working with the Chinese and everyone knows them as soon as he sees them, doesn't he? When you see someone who is not Chinese you have to inform us to ask what he's doing. If he comes to Niamey we will interrogate him and he will remain in Niamey. You have to pay attention; we do what we want with our oil. Everyone manages his wealth and we too will do what we want. No man can keep his head up if he has nothing. This is not the time to blackmail us. Now is the time to work and we will do what is best for our country.[53]

In addressing the Nigerien population (and the political opposition) in this introverted speech in Hausa, Tandja drew on a neocolonial or anti-imperial narrative. Firstly, he referred to mining and contractual regimes dating back to colonial times (the secret military agreements) which had always favored Areva and France. In such neocolonial narratives, foreign companies and Western countries are said to be the very reason for "underdevelopment" in the Global South (cf. Rodney 1972). Translating this narrative to

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[53] Audio recording circulating via mobile phone; transcription and translation from Hausa with Ali Adam Maman Sani.

Niger's oil production, the oil endeavor has always been undertaken to exploit the former colonies and to ensure they remain underdeveloped and dependent. In the Nigerien context then, foreign oil companies and Western countries (especially France) had long known about the country's oil reserves, but had prevented development of them to keep them for their own future needs. According to this narrative, the problems associated with oil are therefore not the result of internal dynamics like bad governance and corruption, as the neoliberal version of the resource curse narrative suggests (see introduction), but rather the result of external exploitation, neocolonial interference and global warring.

Secondly, Tandja presented himself as a strong leader able to resist neocolonial interference by ending the unfair allocation of uranium revenues. As such, after 51 years of oil exploration in Niger, Tandja claims to have finally prepared the ground for oil production. In response to Niger signing the oil contract with a Chinese company, the West (France) was trying to prevent oil development to maintain Niger's dependence on them. One of those strategies was interference in national politics, which went so far as to include *coups d'états*. With the rhetorical rejection of Western neocolonial interference figuring prominently in the speech, and the establishment of close relations with China, Tandja broke discursively with Western neocolonialism, and heralded the beginning of a new era. In referring to the great men, Tandja attempted to align himself with (African) leaders such as Sankara and Lumumba, who were brought down by the West or with the help of their intelligence agencies, and who have (re)gained significant popularity in Niger (and in Africa more generally). With China focusing its diplomatic and ideological efforts on distinguishing itself from "Western paternalism", "exploitation" and "neocolonial interference" by proclaiming "equal partnerships", "pragmatism", "win-win relationships" and "non-interference" (Taylor 2006), Tandja (re)produced and politically exploited the difference between "China" and "the West" for his campaign. To legitimize constitutional amendment, Tandja's entourage portrayed him as the father of Nigerien oil production, a leader whose "pragmatism" and "nationalism" had finally allowed Niger to become an oil producing country. In denouncing France/the West and trumpeting his agreement with China, Tandja's pragmatism was portrayed as a perfect match for China's pragmatic reputation and non-interference. In other words, Tandja drew on the neocolonial narrative to justify the renunciation of France, his rapprochement to China, constitutional amendment to stay in power, and to denunciate the political opposition.

The speech is also a good example of the logic of code-switching in Nigerien politics. As long as revenues continue to come from the outside, weaker Nigerien political players do not question the hegemonic meta-code of the more powerful Western players, as their money brings material gains (Rottenburg 2002: 232). At the same time, however, Nigerien politicians should also avoid over-emphasizing links with the West. For, in the Nigerien vernacular understanding, the West in general (and France in particular) has always kept Niger dependent and "underdeveloped", as in the case of Areva and uranium extraction in the north. In this sense, the dominant narrative among the Nigerien population is that the military coup against Hamani Diori in 1974 was planned and executed with French military support, as Diori had attempted to renegotiate the Nigerian share of the uranium profits. With sanctions interrupting financial flows from the West, Tandja increasingly articulated and politicized external relations and the conditions of international flows, thus pointing to Niger's dependency on and exploitation by the West. In this narrative, which fits well into the broader Nigerien vernacular, the West intentionally leaves Africa underdeveloped. With narratives like this widely understood and accepted as fact, it is not surprising that Tandja's populist rhetoric seems to have been successful. At least, many of my interlocutors agreed that he was a pragmatist and nationalist leader who, in negotiating better terms for the uranium contracts with Areva and bringing oil production into life by engaging with China, worked towards the development of the country.

In short, I argue that Tandja's primary goal was to secure political power even before oil production had started. However, the new partnership with China and the 300 million USD bonus they paid provided invaluable financial and ideological resources for the production of meanings, and in acquiring the support and supporters essential for *Tazartché*, especially in light of international sanctions and powerful internal opposition. I have shown how significations of oil were produced by the government and the opposition alike to make claims to power and legitimacy. In other words, Tandja's constitutional change was not motivated by the future oil rent, but rather, the processual development of *Tazartché* points to the fact that politics are inherently about conflicts (Schlichte 2012), and that these political conflicts are always related to struggles over power and accessing state resources – be they tax revenues, development aid or resource rents. As I have shown, the future oil rent was entering into an uranium-political configuration that was already characterized by two important sources of rents: an uranium rent (although highly fluctuation according to the international spot price) and a prospering development rent under Tandja (at least until his *Tazartché* campaign). As such, in the moment of Niger entering oil-age, the logic of the political game in Niger was already one which showed characteristics of a rentier state.

4.4. The rule of Salou Djibo (2010-2011)

On 18 February 2010, nearly two years before the first barrel of oil would be produced, Tandja was overthrown in a military coup led by Salou Djibo, the commander-in-chief of the support company, the main artillery of the Nigerien Military Forces (FAN).[54] While Tandja and some of his ministers were arrested, the military junta immediately suspended the new constitution, dissolved Tandja's government and all the institutions of the Sixth Republic, and installed a transitional governmental body, the *Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie* (CSRD), which was headed by Djibo. In one of the junta's first official declarations, Djibo said, the junta was not interested in political power, but rather in transforming Niger into an example of democracy and good governance (Grégoire 2010). The junta's external communications were thus clearly aligned with and well adapted to western political rationalities.

Baudais and Chauzal (2011) have concluded that the coup was led by a coalition of political opponents of Tandja and middle-ranking military officers, and have argued that it was a necessary "corrective" to secure the trajectory of democracy. As they have shown, Tandja had favored senior military officers, granting them benefits including villas and allowances. In doing so, he had created a generational fissure within the FAN, which led the middle-ranking officers to rebel against senior military officers (ibid.). Importantly, the coup instigators did not seek to banish party politics or well-established political actors, rather they offered them the opportunity to re-enter the game after Tandja had monopolized power and threatened their future access to state resources. In this way, the main actors were all interested in regime change and the staging of new elections in a short space of time.

While official international reaction to the coup was both limited and restrained, most major actors verbally condemned it to some extent. Both the AU and ECOWAS temporarily suspended Niger's membership. France also condemned the coup, given that Sarkozy had still acknowledged Tandja for his contribution to Niger's democracy in late 2009. Behind closed doors, however, the international community seems to have been largely satisfied, and rather than sharply denouncing the coup, called for a quick transition to democracy.

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[54] Of Zarma ethnicity, Djibo was born in 1965 in Namaro, an area situated 40 km from the capital Niamey and bordering the River Niger. Trained in the Ivory Coast, Morocco and China, he had several posts in the FAN and also participated in several missions abroad.

Junta members were allowed to participate at an ordinary summit of ECOWAS, assuring the members that the transition to democracy would be quick. Moreover, an international delegation with representatives of the United Nations (UN), the AU and ECOWAS was sent to meet the junta in Niamey, where they were given the necessary guarantees of a restoration of democracy, a commitment that Djibo reassured later (UN News 15.10.2010). That the international response to the coup was in general muted, and that the junta was later invited to international meetings suggests that the denunciation was based rather on principle than in fact.

The CSRD soon began preparations for new democratic elections, pointing out that the transitional government – the military, para-militaries and ministers of the Sixth Republic – would not be eligible to compete. First, civilian and former minister Mahamadou Danda became prime minister of the transitional government in March, and a 20-member cabinet of technocrats, members of the diaspora and military personal was later appointed. As prime minister, one of Danda's mission was to reestablish ties with international donors, especially the EU, that had been cut due to *Tazartché*, and already in May, the EU decided to progressively resume budgetary support for Niger.

In April, a 131-strong *Conseil Consultatif National* (CCN) was created to assist and instruct the transitional government. Although leading civil society activists had not been included in the government itself, they were here assigned prominent positions by the military junta. Indeed, the most important spokesperson against *Tazartché*, Marou Amadou, was appointed president of the council. Moreover, a 19-member committee was appointed to draft a new constitution which turned back to a semi-presidential constitution similar to that of the Fifth Republic. Reducing the powers of the head of state and increasing those of the prime minister, the new constitution also clarified the competencies of the constitutional court and the use of referendums, and reasserted the right of revolution by any means. Moreover, it stated that natural resources such as oil belonged to the Nigerien population, and insisted on the publication of all future mining contracts.

At the end of July, the CRSD organized a "*mini-conférence nationale*", which was attended by about 200 representatives from Nigerien political parties and civil society. Djibo opened the session by addressing the public debates over the previous weeks. With its introverted character, his speech in French illustrates several important aspects of the Nigerien vernacular around democracy. First, in his introduction, Djibo addressed political opponents, accusing them of being absent at his speech, and using the media to denounce his regime instead:[55]

> I wanted to meet you this morning to talk to you in person. Since 18 February 2010, there are those who have seen me only on TV, so this is an opportunity to talk face-to-face. I do not see those here who normally talk too much on the radio – I wanted them to be here to speak in front of everyone. We will never hide or shy away from speaking. Once we leave here today, those faces will start screaming on the radio again. But why are they not here today? So, I think we are all grown-ups here, and we must be responsible for our actions.

This statement shows that Djibo sees a multiparty system, one with free access to the private media, not so much as a vehicle for a necessary pluralist public debate in a democracy, but rather primarily as a medium misused by political opponents to stir up opinion against the government and to incite social unrest. Indeed, those who publicly voiced opinions against the military government or demanded the liberation of Tandja were targeted by the police for "disturbing public peace" and "plunging the state into tension". Djibo's view of democracy is widely shared amongst Nigeriens who tend to see multiparty politics primarily as a dirty game with an infinite cycle of conflicts, rivalries and discord (Olivier de Sardan 2016). These political games produce a negative image of the political sphere in general, and have aroused a nostalgia for Seyni Kountché's military dictatorship (ibid.).

Second, Djibo turned to focus on cleaning up politics:

> Some people think that we should not engage in cleansing because everybody is rotten. Yes, everyone is rotten, but there are some who are more rotten than others. We began the cleansing, and we will complete the cleansing, *in schā'allāh*[56]. You cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs, and if it is required that we break them, we will break them – that is for sure.

He claimed that his critics were politically motivated, because everyone is more or less involved in corrupt activities. Indeed, in a country like Niger, where everyday corruption is deeply entangled within the social logics of negotiation, gift-giving, solidarity, predatory authority and redistributive accumulation (Olivier de Sardan 1999a), anti-corruption purges are often used as a political strategy to target opponents rather than to "cleanse" politics. In this sense, it was first of all Tandja's MNSD that was targeted in the anti-corruption campaign, with members publicly complaining about the arbitrariness of the charges. In contrast, most politicians from other parties remained silent, likely hoping to secure good positions for the upcoming elections.

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[55] Video recording circulating via mobile phone; own transcription and translation from French.

[56] *In schā'allāh* is an Arabic phrase commonly used in Niger. It means "if God wills".

Third, Djibo then turned to focus on both the proposed electoral code and constitution, which had been drafted by the committee he had appointed and still needed to be approved by the CCN and the CSRD:

> Now, for the electoral code: I am very surprised, very surprised that people talk to me about age and educational level. Age and educational level, who put that? It is you [*the political class*] and not the CSRD. […] As you are in a hurry to have the power, you are in a hurry to make the electoral code before the constitution which is not normal. That is our problem in Niger.

Under the new electoral code and constitution, candidates would have to be aged between 35 and 70, and have a minimum educational level (secondary school certificate plus some higher education). Djibo addressed critics of the code, which claimed it was elitist and did not take the socio-economic realities of the country into consideration, arguing that the drafts were not the responsibility of the CSRD but of an independent committee, and accusing the political class of only aiming at having the power as soon as possible, which he saw as a general problem in Niger. Some of the proposed constitutional changes were indeed rejected by the CCN and the CSRD, including the four-year presidential term and some of the eligibility criteria (age limit and minimum educational level). Most interestingly, however, was the fact that the CCN and the CSRD did approve other important conditions which did not become public issues, such as the 10 million FCFA (15,245 Euro) deposit needed to stand for president, a rule privileging merchants and well-established politicians.[57] In effect, the electoral code and the constitution privileged and protected the small politico-economic class of Niger. They had been educated in the same schools and all knew each other, had all emerged during the National Conference in 1991, had aged together over the last 25 years, and all belonged to the "big families" of Niger (Olivier de Sardan 2017: 120).

Fourth, Djibo focused on nepotism in the distribution of political and administrative posts in Niger and refuted critics who argued that his political appointments were clearly based on the infamous PAC (*Parents, Amis et Connaissances*):

> The third point Nigeriens are worried about, the majority of politicians, you are talking about the PAC concerning my appointments. You have to tell me, who has appointed someone he does not know? You have to tell me! You should tell me which among the three P, A, and C – help me to add another word. But most importantly, the people who are appointed must work responsibly.

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[57] With financing from France, a referendum to approve the constitution was held on October 31. With more than a 90 percent turnout, the new constitution won nearly 53 percent of the vote, and was finally approved by Djibo in November.

The notion of PAC is frequently evoked in Niger, for it is common knowledge that it is essentially impossible to find a job without connections through family, friends and acquaintances. However, Djibo also points to the criteria of responsibility in the distribution of positions. Djibo's argument thereby rests on the assumption that responsibility and close relationships are intimately intertwined, that only through personal relationships can we know if someone will work responsibly. This illustrates the "normative double-binds" in African states (Bierschenk 2014) that tie state bureaucrats both to official norms such as responsibility and the meritocratic distribution of positions, and to social norms like gift-giving, solidarity and redistributive accumulation within social networks.

Finally, Djibo turned to discuss the detention of Tandja and his interior minister Albadé:

> People talk about the detainees like Albadé Abouba, I say the name. I have nothing to hide to say 'Interior Minister' because it is Albadé and Tandja. But why do you ask, why we are detaining them? If we had failed the evening of 18 February, where would we be now? Those who scream that we have to release Tandja, we have to release Albadé – we are more humane than the people who talk like that.

Tandja's continued detention had started to raise international concerns, especially with ECOWAS in July agreeing to examine a complaint lodged by Tandja's entourage. Djibo disputed criticism of the detention by asking what would happen to him and his colleagues if the coup had failed. His statement points to the situation of postcolonial Nigerien politics that have been described as a "*culture de coups d'état"* (de Haas 2012: 119), with coups often attempted to reestablish the previous political order. Indeed, when relations between Djibo and his permanent secretary Colonel Abdoulaye Badié deteriorated, rumors of a second coup soon began to circulate. On October 16, Badié and three other officers were arrested and charged with planning a new coup, although it is rather doubtful that they were (van Walraven 2011). As this intrigue shows, and as Djibo alludes to in his speech, organizing a coup is a high risk endeavor, and argues that continued detention is therefore necessary. Towards the end of 2010, the junta responded to the ECOWAS examination by lifting Tandja's immunity and formally prosecuting him.

In short, rather than conforming to the diplomatic standards common in extroverted politics performed for an international audience, Djibo's speech sheds light on the dynamics of introverted Nigerien politics. In analyzing the speech, we come to see how democracy, elections, corruption and military coups can be interpreted and understood inside Niger, an understanding that does not conform to the demands of external donors or political powers, and is therefore not on show in extroverted displays and rhetoric. With the advent of democracy in Niger in the 1990s, a new political elite was able to establish and secure power for itself. Playing with and (re)defining the rules of the new multiparty politics (Herdt and Olivier de Sardan 2015), this elite was able to capture state resources. In this context, anti-corruption purges and military coups are part of the introverted political game. Nevertheless, as state resources also come from the outside, let us take a closer look at how Djibo played the extroverted political game.

In contrast to international sanctions against Tandja, the fact that Djibo was invited first to the Franco-African summit in May and then to the UN Millennium Summit in New York in September rather points to tacit approval of the coup. On 23 September 2010, as Niger's head of State, Djibo spoke at the General Debate of the 65th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York. After welcoming listeners, Djibo spoke first about the political situation in Niger, arguing that the military had the obligation to intervene to stop President Tandja's anti-constitutional behavior (*Présidence du Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie* 23.9.2010). He repeated the position of the CSRD, that they were not seeking power but wanted to preserve the unity and integrity of the country, underlining that the coup had been welcomed by the Nigerien population. Supporters of the political opposition against Tandja had attended public demonstrations immediately after the coup that were interpreted by some as "spontaneous outbursts of joy" (Maccatory et al. 2010: 355). According to Djibo, the four primary objectives of the CSRD were to restore democracy, to "cleanse" the political elite, improve the economic situation, and to achieve national reconciliation. He presented a roadmap for the transition to democracy and called for urgent international support in the transition process, a call that France and other donors would answer, before emphasizing the CRSD's democratic actions: setting up an anti-corruption commission and a high-level authority for reconciliation, working to consolidate democracy, and making a commitment to "universal values of peace, security, good neighborly relations, human rights, the rule of law, democracy and international solidarity".

After attempting to legitimate the military regime to the member states in his speech, Djibo then set about outlining a set of crises that could only be addressed with financial aid from the member states. Djibo first turned to another key issue of the time: food insecurity in Niger. Djibo argued that the former authorities had downplayed the gravity of the situation, and that Niger was in fact in a food crisis, and demanded to gather 30 million USD to address the situation. Turning to terrorism, drug trafficking and the proliferation of arms in the Sahel-Saharan region, Djibo called on the international community to immediately strengthen development cooperation, warning that poverty and despair would only serve to fuel terrorism in the region, before stressing that Niger would need substantial financial support from the international community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Djibo then turned his attention to natural disasters, environmental degradation and climate change, once more calling on international funding to implement counter-measures. Finally, he emphasized his government's commitment to and achievements in the name of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

As we can see, in contrast to the introverted speech for a national audience in July, Djibo's extroverted speech at the United Nations was clearly well adapted to western political rationalities. The topics were chosen according to an international agenda of development, democracy, terrorism, climate change, human rights and gender equality. After stressing Niger's commitment to "universal values", he underlined the need for international funding and support. As a whole, extroverted speech and action in Nigerien politics highlight the centrality of external financial flows in the functioning of the Nigerien state. To capture these flows, Nigerien leaders (as possibly all political leaders to some extent) play the game of code switching by addressing an international audience in a fundamentally different manner than they would address a national audience. While Djibo's introverted speech was characterized by vernacular notions of democracy and corruption, representing the former as disorderly and the latter as an inescapable element of the social fabric, his extroverted speech addressed a western political understanding of democracy and good governance.

About one year after seizing power, Djibo held new elections in early 2011, with PNDS receiving 36.1 percent at the polls in the presidential elections, the MNSD receiving 23.2 percent, MODEN-FA receiving 19.8 percent, and CDS receiving 8.3 percent. While former permanent opposition party PNDS won the largest number of council seats, Hama Amadou, who had founded the *Mouvement Démocratique Nigérien pour une Fédération Africaine-Lumana Africa* (MODEN-FA Lumana) after his release from prison in 2009, came third. With PNDS becoming the strongest party after the local elections, the CFDR coalition that had formed against *Tazartché* broke. Hama united with Mahamane Ousmane (CDS), this time alongside the MNSD under new party president Seyni Oumarou to form a new alliance, the *Alliance pour la Réconciliation Nationale* (ARN), against the PNDS. The alliance members agreed to support the strongest candidate from the parties in an eventual run-off ballot against Issoufou for the presidency. However, breaking the agreement with the other ARN members, on February 9 Hama Amadou declared his support for Issoufou rather than Oumarou. This move stunned political commentators and the general public, with rumors soon emerging that wealthy businessman Dahirou Mangal, who was financing Issoufou's election campaign, had arranged a meeting between the two leaders at his compound in Katsina in Nigeria (Mato Mai Roumbou 11.9.2014). Several other prominent politicians also supported Issoufou, including CDS-Rahama vice president Abdou Labo and some of his followers, in defiance of the parties' official position.[58]

Issoufou finally won the head-to-head ballot against Oumarou by 57.9 percent to 42.1 percent. While voter turnout was only 48 percent and the balloting suffered from administrative shortcomings, the elections were internationally deemed free and fair. Before Issoufou was inaugurated into power, on 2 March 2011 Djibo left his legacy in Niger, with the country being declared compliant with the internationally acclaimed (neoliberal) Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to turn the resource curse into a blessing through the implementation of good governance mechanisms. In doing so, Djibo had aligned Niger's resource governance with the agenda of international donors, thereby helping to secure external financial flows for Niger and reestablish its reputation internationally.

4.5. The rule of Mahamadou Issoufou (from 2011)

Mahamadou Issoufou was inaugurated as President of Niger in April 2011. The main program of the new Issoufou government was self-sufficiency in food production. To achieve this, Issoufou soon announced "3N" ("Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens"), an ambitious program to develop agriculture, irrigation, water supply and livestock improvement. To finance the program, Issoufou needed to re-establish the old economic partnerships with international donors that had been suspended under Tandja, and to create new ones. Moreover, he needed a projected seven percent economic growth rate to finance the program. Oil played a vital role in this. While the beginning of oil production was projected to boost economic growth by about 13 percent per annum, oil was also understood as a "curse" that could only be balanced out by mechanisms of good governance. Let us therefore take a closer look at how Issoufou addressed the potentiality of oil in his inaugural speech by addressing Western political rationalities and the Nigerien population.

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[58] Indeed, this decision triggered a leadership conflict within the CDS, which finally led to Ousmane being ousted and Labo taking over the party's presidency.

National and international guests, including a number of African presidents as well as international representatives of states and international organizations, attended President Issoufou's inauguration in the *Palais du 29 Juillet* in Niamey on 7 April 2011. In his speech in French, which was also broadcast on Nigerien state television, Issoufou described the relationship between the exploitation of natural resources and national development as follows:

> Our ambition is the cost reduction of the two most important production factors for a landlocked country: transportation and energy […] For the second factor, we will exploit all energy sources in our country: water, coal, solar power, wind, oil and nuclear power […] Niger has enormous natural resources that we have to exploit in the interest of our present and future generations. We are open to all foreign investors without any distinction, given that they respect our interests, and are willing to establish win-win relationships with us. (own translation from a transcript published on *perspective monde* 7.4.2011)

In arguing that the exploitation of natural resources is essential to the nation's development, and that this exploitation cannot be achieved without foreign investors, Issoufou is seeking to portray himself as a beneficent and therefore legitimate leader to the Nigerien population and the international community. As legitimate rule cannot be built on the perpetuation of terror and fear in a democratic setting, Issoufou has to portray the country's resource exploitation as beneficent or "the right disposition of things" (Foucault 1991: 93). In a Foucauldian sense, "the right disposition of things" is to be seen as a heterogeneous ensemble of relations between "things" such as populations, territory, natural resources, wealth, development and so on that entail a strategic function. In a democratic setting, rightly arranging these elements means that they are presented as contributing to public welfare (ibid.). According to this conception then, Issoufou argues that "the right disposition of things" can only be achieved by foreign investments: the financial and technological demands of much natural resource exploitation, especially oil exploitation, means it cannot be achieved by the Nigerien state alone. Indeed, Niger is not only dependent on foreign investment and expertise for its oil exploitation, but also for less capital-intensive and less technological projects such as the second bridge over Niger river built by a Chinese company. The president's condition for such an engagement is therefore a "win-win relationship". Indeed, Issoufou's use of the term "win-win relationship" is not casual, but rather an important rhetorical illustration of Niger's alignment with Chinese oil diplomacy, as I show below.

Issoufou then draws parallels to negative significations of resources as “curses”, curses that can only be overcome by good governance.

> Good governance, particularly transparency, in the resource exploitation sector will be essential. If other countries can finance their industrial development through agricultural surplus, Niger inversely has to finance its economic and social development through surpluses from its mining and oil industries. As a curse in other countries, especially causing wars, I also see how well-distributed oil revenues can bring development for Niger in terms of access to schools, health and water. (own translation from a transcript published on *perspective monde* 7.4.2011)

Here Issoufou demonstrates his awareness of international political rationalities, addressing these rationalities to demonstrate his commitment to the neoliberal ideal of “good self-governance” (Foucault 1991; Anders 2005). Eager to reestablish the economic partnerships suspended under Tandja and to develop new ones, Issoufou is demonstrating his willingness to implement the forms of governance that Western donors (the EU, IMF and World Bank in particular) make conditional for funding. To illustrate this commitment to transparency and good governance, Issoufou would soon create anti-corruption institutions. An anti-corruption hotline, the *ligne verte,* was set up in August that year. In October, the government inaugurated the *Bureau d’Information de Réclamation contre la Corruption* responsible for fighting corruption in the legal system, and the *Haute Autorité de Lutte Contre la Corruption* (HALCIA) to fight corruption in the public sector. Critics, however, point out that these initiatives were not practically implemented, leaving these institutions ineffectual.

However, the fact that these institutions were toothless was effectively irrelevant, their existence was enough to once again allow foreign powers to legitimize their involvement in the name of development. In this sense, Issoufou’s extroverted strategy was extremely effective. In continuity with what Djibo had started, this was a line that they were following together to (re)gain international legitimacy, and again allow international donors (and international companies) to access the country. Indeed, after coming to power, foreign aid once again started to flow into the country, with a number of international donors resuming the suspended economic partnerships or creating new ones: the *Banque Ouest Africaine de Développement* (BOAD) granted loans for road construction, irrigation projects and energy programs; the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) financed rural development programs; a Chinese company agreed to construct a second bridge across the Niger River in the capital; the World Bank’s International Development Association granted assistance for social safety; the EU granted budgetary support; the IMF provided assistance for farmers hit by poor harvests; and Niger's membership in ECOWAS and the AU were also restored (van Walraven 2011).

In his inaugural speech, Issoufou also addressed the Nigerien population, promising fair distribution of resource revenues to provide better access of education, healthcare and water. In doing so, Issoufou employed a distributive concept of development that promises material acquisitions, a concept much closer to the Nigerien vernacular than the neoliberal good governance discourse. The "distributive state" had long been successful for al-Qaddhāfī in Libya (Vandewalle 1998), who enjoyed popular support through extensive fuel subsidies and social programs. Similarly, with the beginning of oil production, the population in Niger was starting to demand a share of national wealth. Unlike the occasional distribution of gifts prior to national elections or at commemorative events, the Nigerien population demanded that this wealth has to be delivered as fuel subsidies.

From a governmentality perspective (Foucault 1991), the manipulation of significations of resource exploitation can be qualified as a governance technology. Thus, Issoufou's inaugural speech can be viewed as what Apter (2005) calls a "politics of illusion". Looking at neighboring Nigeria, Apter outlines how political actors manipulate signs and symbols of oil to promote nation building and to manufacture the consent of the population. Like these political actors, Issoufou also links resource exploitation to the promise of concrete material rewards, thus creating hope, expectation and ultimately illusion among the population. This creation of hope, expectation and illusion can be understood as constructing a myth around resource-led development. In this myth, the state attributes itself almost magical powers to ultimately and profoundly change the fate of the people, and of the nation itself (Coronil 1997). In line with the introverted character of the game, such myth-making primarily takes place on the national level. If these promised future material achievements do not eventuate, the signs and symbols become increasingly discrepant with social reality, leading to disillusion and despair. With this instability of the significatory order, local grievances and resistance may emerge, resulting in the creation of new orders and disorders. This is an important idea, one that I will turn to when I look at the production of disorder around the oil refinery's inauguration in the next chapter. At this point, however, it is fair to say that while oil was still in a state of not-yet-ness, the significations of oil and oil-related development were already at stake. In this sense, issues around the coming of oil production – the fuel price fix, the construction of an export pipeline, the distribution of new exploration permits – became major issues in Issoufou's first month in office.[59] It was in this context of anticipation that the refinery was inaugurated in late November 2011. I turn to that in the next chapter.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to answer whether the political dynamics around oil production in Niger display transformations induced by the oil itself, or if they rather display general features of an African state. Particularly in the international media, many political observers and commentators supported the military coup and the political opposition to Tandja, who they viewed normatively as an autocrat and corrupt leader, sometimes even attributing his behavior to the coming of oil in Niger. While I do not wish to trivialize Tandja's autocratic project *Tazartché*, my aim has been to conduct a systemic analysis of Nigerien politics in times of oil. Such a systemic analysis does not seek to explain individual's political behavior by placing a normative blame on them, but rather seeks to understand actors within the logic of the political game they are playing. As I pointed out in the introduction, the logic of the political game is essential in understanding how oil becomes political. Moreover, adopting such a focus ensures that I analyze and point to the historically accumulated patterns within politics and society. Building on my historical chapter *Crude Beginnings,* I am here seeking to understand the logic of the political game in the *longue durée* (Pierson 2004). It thereby becomes apparent that opportunistic alliances have played a crucial role in Nigerien politics since the early 20th century, if not beforehand. Nevertheless, at different critical junctures, especially independence and the reintroduction of the multiparty system, the rules of the game have changed more or less abruptly and profoundly.

In this chapter, I have also illustrated how oil was received as a new element of power in an already well-structured national political arena. Tandja's attempt to change the constitution dated back to a political conflict which began in 2004, when he and Prime Minister Hama Amadou began fighting for control within the MNSD party. Instead of simply following the logic of the resource curse thesis and assuming that oil was the root cause of *Tazartché*, it seems more appropriate to understand this as part of a broader, more complex and ongoing power struggle.

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[59] Other issues following the inauguration in April 2011 were an amnesty to the military junta which had paved Issoufou's path to power. Moreover, in accordance with the new constitution, which was designed to prevent politically motivated cases against former leaders, an appeals court dismissed all corruption charges against Tandja. In May, he was released from prison. Issoufou's first month in office was also characterized by security concerns. First, in July, several military officers were arrested and charged with planning a coup and to assassinate Issoufou. Second, there were numerous issues around the Libyan crisis, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the north, and Boko Haram in the south.

Tracing the development of the political conflict around *Tazartché* highlights the inextricable mixture of ideological and material exploitation in politics. Firstly, it becomes apparent that the opposition forces – as in the previous institutional breakdowns after the emergence of multiparty politics in Niger – formed a united democracy movement against the government when their political positions and shares of state revenues became threatened. Secondly, the monetary aspects of politics are coupled with the strategic maneuvers of signification. In this case, oil was signified either as the achievement and future task of a glorious Nigerien statesman, as Tandja's campaign had sought to represent him throughout *Tazartché*, or as a curse that transforms a democratic president into a dictator, as his opponents and political observers sought to portray him. Signifying oil in one way or the other became one of the very acts through which the struggle for state power was played out; signifying oil, loading crude with sophisticated and locally understandable meanings, became one form that political acts took in shaping Niger's political reality. Oil thus acted as an idiom in which political power struggles were framed, rather than being the sole cause or determinant of these conflicts.

Close analysis of the conflict also shows that oil provided well-established political players with new financial and ideological means to achieve their political projects. In this sense, even in a state of not-yet-ness, oil acted as a catalyst, fueling, accelerating and escalating already existing political conflicts. In the next chapter, I will thus look at whether or not powerful political actors were eventually able to quell these conflicts by the same financial and ideological means and political logics established in pre-oil Niger, namely cooptation, corruption and bribery.

This analysis also speaks to the academic debate on the African state. In analyzing the political game in Niger, I have shown the importance of understanding its introverted and extroverted characteristics. Such an analysis questions the long standing culturalist paradigm of neo-patrimonialism in African studies, a concept which has three main problems: ethnocentrism, empirical weakness, and a national-container model that ignores questions of political economy (Hauck et al. 2013; Olivier de Sardan 2014; 2015a). First, based as it is in Weber's ideal types of "Western realities" and "African deviations" of these types, the neo-patrimonialist paradigm is fundamentally ethnocentric, as it fails to acknowledge that clientelism, corruption and cronyism are also part of politics in the West although in a different form, not so much in its petty appearance but as high-level politico-economic entanglements. Second, the paradigm lacks an empirically grounded concept of culture, explaining the mechanisms behind clientelist structures instead of black-boxing them. Rather than assuming that some kind of traditional behavior was the cause of clientelist structures, I showed that such behavior is related to the economic situation and was also brought about by clientelist colonial politics. Finally, the concept pursues a methodological nationalism that is blind to translocal entanglements of unequal political economy (Hauck et al. 2013). In analyzing introverted and extroverted presidential speeches, I have indeed shown that the political game is deeply entangled in translocal power relations and financial flows. These relations make code switching depending on the bazaar situation a major characteristic of the political game. Placing Niger in the asymmetric web of transnational relations of the world economy and politics, we should not adhere to absolute viewpoints: not by overemphasizing the claim that African states have foregone their agency by making themselves dependent on international financial flows (Bayart 2000), and not by arguing that African agency has been left null and void by Western domination and dependencies (Rodney 1972). Rather, as African states and their leaders are always inextricably entangled within material, economic, political and symbolic networks, agency is invariably deeply relational and multicentric. In this sense, while African states are dependent, and indeed make themselves dependent on international financial flows by handing over agency to international donors and financial institutions, in doing so they are also attempting to and do indeed acquire agency by enlarging their (financial) room for maneuver, especially in internal politics.

5. Crude Moves: Making Zinder's oil refinery political

While Tandja had used the oil refinery's 2008 foundation stone ceremony in Zinder to launch his campaign for constitutional change (chapter 4), the 2011 inauguration ceremony (chapter 2) would became the theatre in which political conflicts were played out. Building on the analytical framework of "making oil political" that I developed in the introduction, in this chapter I trace the work and the affect that made the oil refinery political: that is, the mobilization practices and the emotional and bodily attachments that first turn events into contestation, protest and violence, and later back to social peace. In particular, my ethnographic data enables me to explore the significatory framing of the inauguration, the ordering technologies that enabled and restricted the mobilization of protestors, the chain of time- and place-specific events, and the violence that emotionally and physically brought heterogeneous elements together into collective action. Building on collective action theory to understand the role of mobilization, protest and emotions in "making oil political", I argue that the notion of "contentious assemblages" is best suited to grasp the heterogeneity, contingency and relational processuality of contentious politics. Secondly, I argue that in oil's immediate presence, pre-existing political disputes are played out in and through the language of oil. In this process, oil-age Niger is not only made a social and political reality, but political difference is also reconstructed and patterns of domination are reinforced. I start this chapter by sketching dominant collective action theories and briefly outlining my contentious assemblages approach, before describing and analyzing the protest cycle around the oil refinery in detail, particularly the actor's positioning, talk, action and conciliation practices.

5.1. Contentious assemblages and collective action theory

In sketching theories of social movements or collective action more generally, I here follow the comprehensive overview given by Buechler (2011). Classical approaches date back to Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. These three schools can be briefly summarized as follows: Marxist approaches focus on class formation and the socio-economic base of a movement; Durkheimian approaches adopt strain and deprivation models that focus on protest action as a form of social breakdown, as growing tensions and problems of integration within society; and Weberian approaches look at authority and legitimacy, focusing on the internal and external dynamics of social movements to understand how effective protests lead to the development of formal movement organizations, which in turn make the leaders easier to co-opt, separate from the mass base, and thus tame the protests (Piven and Cloward 1979).

Coming out of these traditions but taking different theoretical foci, several influential schools of social movement theory emerged in sociology and political science between the 1960s and 1980s. The resource mobilization school shifted the emphasis to the entrepreneurial character of movement leaders, envisioning them calculating the personal costs and benefits of protest participation before engaging in it (see most prominently McCarthy and Zald 1977). This perspective urges us to look at the interests of diverse social and political actors mobilizing for and investing time, effort and money into protest, but neglects the cultural, structural and emotional elements of protest. Framing and social construction approaches (see most prominently Snow and Benford 1988) take the (cultural) processes of mobilization and significatory framing (through the media) as their point of departure. However, these approaches largely overlook the macro-level conditions of political systems that enable or restrict the development of protest movements. Political process theories (see most prominently Tilly 1978 and Tarrow 1994) focus on exactly these macro-level conditions. In doing so, these approaches typically point to opportunity structures such as access to political institutions and the cohesion and fragmentation of political and economic elites, as well as the state's capacity for repression and cooptation. In focusing on the macro-level, however, these scholars often lose sight of micro-level dynamics. Rather than looking at such opportunity structures, the neo-Marxist "new social movement theories" which first emerged in Europe in the 1980s (see most prominently writers such as Castells, Touraine, Habermas, and Melucci) analyze how historical transformations in the capitalist order trigger new collective identities, values, and organizational forms such as climate, transgender, or animal rights movements. The emphasis on historical transformations towards post-industrialism, late modernity or advanced capitalism is however highly context-specific or Eurocentric, and does not easily translate to societies in the Global South, which may never have been industrial capitalist societies.[60]

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[60] Largely ignoring the theories of new social movements until the late 1980s, scholars in the US typically focused on the new variable of collective identity to add to an empiricist approach, rather than on historical transformations of the capitalist order (Buechler 2011: 173). In doing so, they asked how (new) collective identities shape interests, strategies and movement outcomes (for such an understanding see Polletta and Jasper 2001).

Eclectic attempts to synthesize these theories have been made since the late 1980s, the most recent and influential of which has been the so-called “contentious politics” approach (McAdam et al. 2001). This approach seeks to integrate aspects of resource mobilization, political process, and framing by incorporating cultural aspects into analysis, and moving from structural factors of the socio-political context to relational and dynamic causal processes of state-society interactions. However, in the analysis of social movements, the gap between established structuralist approaches and an emerging cultural and emotional focus such as the “passionate politics” approach (Goodwin, et al. 2001) has yet to be bridged.[61]

Taken together, established social movement theories all shed light on different aspects of contentious politics, yet they remain insufficiently holistic to explain movements in their diverse manifestations and dimensions. More fundamentally, most of these social movement paradigms seem to understand social movements as a (single) actor with a collective identity, set of beliefs, or shared normative orientation. My empirical findings, however, will illustrate that this is not necessarily the case. Rather, I argue that protests in Niger were characterized by networks and situational intensities which brought together heterogeneous elements to act in concert with each other without sharing collective interests, solidarity, or beliefs. To grasp this heterogeneity, contingency and relationality, I therefore adopt the notion of assemblage.

Only recently have scholars started to use assemblage theory as a useful lens to understand the effectiveness, temporality, and spatiality of social movements (Davies 2012; Featherstone 2011; McFarlane 2009). Seen from an assemblage theory perspective, social movements are not to be understood as homogenous and static entities, but rather as temporary and spatial aggregates of human and non-human elements that emerge at specific times and places through specific sets of translocal relations, before dispersing once again (Davies 2012: 276). Indeed, seeing social movements as assemblages helps to grasp several important aspects of collective action: the heterogeneity, performance, and relational processuality of contentious politics, the distributive agency across the socio-material formation, the agency of the grouping itself that is never finished but always in flux (being therefore more or less stable and durable at specific times and places), and the event character and contingency of a movement.

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[61] Seeing affect and emotion as irrational and pejorative, scholars of social movements neglected to incorporate them into their analysis or theories for decades. However, with the so-called “affective turn” in the 2000s, a new group of scholars has started to foreground affect and emotion in their theory.

In adopting this approach, it is nevertheless crucial to avoid seeing assemblages as autonomous machines that tie heterogeneous elements together. As Davies (2012: 277) argues, we “need to explore how these relations are actually produced and held together in more or less stable ways – who are the actors that hold assemblages together for a period of time and what are the processes of connection and disconnection that they are involved in?” In this chapter, I therefore focus on the whole protest cycle to show not only how mobilization and framing produce the relations for the protest event to emerge, but also how more powerful and wealthier actors use redressive politics to appease the situation, leading to the breakdown of a movement by cutting relations between heterogeneous elements. In addition to focusing on how relations between heterogeneous elements are produced or cut off, I also draw on the passionate politics approach to look at the affective dimensions of protest, thereby including the emotional and bodily reactions of actors, in this case to messages they received or violence they experienced. Combining the notion of assemblage with the contentious politics approach into “contentious assemblages” offers a more holistic view of the processes of dynamic interactions towards heterogeneity, non-humans and affect. Seeing protest movements as contentious assemblages therefore provides an analytical resource to illustrate how issues and events (the oil refinery’s inauguration), opportunity structures (multiparty system, fragmentation of political and economic elites), matter (stones, tires and fuel, radio, mobile phones and urban infrastructure), framing (significations of oil and youth mobilization) and affect (experiences of violence, desires for attaining social markers of adulthood, frustrations of youth, solidarity networks and hopes for a better future) produce dis/connections into a temporal aggregate of collective action.

In trying to spell out an anthropological approach and a conceptual contribution to the study of contentious politics, especially in the Global South, the chapter can also be seen as one answer to the call for an “anthropology of social movements” (Escobar 1992; Gibb 2001). Nash’s (2005: 22) anthropological reader on social movements shows that a holistic analysis is the hallmark of anthropological studies, which are characterized by the way in which they seek unveil “the interlinked effect of gender-class-race-ethnicity in the context of growing wealth gaps and concentration of political power”. In this chapter, I seek to provide such a holistic anthropological analysis of contentious politics. To do so, two important assumptions in an anthropological study of social movements or collective action more broadly need to be addressed. Firstly, influential theories of social movements from political science and sociology should be taken as a starting point for anthropological analysis (Gibb 2001). Secondly, empirical data can best be collected using an ethnographic field research approach. I propose that an anthropology of social movements should concentrate on concrete practices, episodes of protest, and dynamic processes of interaction in context. To do so, researchers should employ a classical participant observation methodology, which in the context of my work meant involvement in civil society committees, youth groupings, and the protest events themselves. The extended case method, as developed by the Manchester School to analyze political events and then later rethought in contemporary social theory, offers a tool kit for studying social movements in a holistic manner by analyzing protest episodes, practices and affects in real time, and then extending out from these observations in time, space and theory (chapter 2). With such a holistic and empirically grounded perspective on collective action, the conceptual exchange not only between anthropology and social movement studies, but also between "Northern theory" and "Southern protest" (Boudreau 1996; Engels and Müller 2015; Fadaee 2016), should be furthered.

The following case study of the protests around the oil refinery's inauguration demonstrates the protest cycle or successive phases of a political drama: from the mobilization of political capital, to a showdown, into a crisis, to mechanisms of redress, and then to the restoration of peace (Swartz et al. 1966a). Such a focus on episodes of dynamic interaction can illuminate the hard work of mobilizing actors and the affect, the contingency, and the chain of time- and place-specific events that translate heterogeneous parts into urban riots. The different phases of the drama also illustrate how significations of oil, politics and development in Niger became part of the everyday micro-political game.

5.2. Crude Positioning: Engaging on the public political stage

In late 2011, everyday politics in Zinder turned around the November 28 inauguration of the oil refinery. Social and political actors including Zinder's regional and municipal councilors, government representatives, opposition politicians, businessmen and civil society activists released media statements, organized debates on private radio stations, and sent out mass mobile phone messages. By engaging in public debates about the (anticipated) impact of the oil refinery in Zinder, diverse individual and group actors positioned themselves within the political arena, thereby drawing on particular narratives of Zinder’s colonial and postcolonial history to gain legitimacy and to mask their own, typically politically and class-based, interests. In the following subsection, I take a closer look at these actors and their political positions to better understand the first phase of the drama: the mobilization of political capital.

5.2.1. The *élus locaux* in Zinder

On 24 October 2011, regional and municipal councilors – most of whom were from the CDS-Rahama and MNSD-Nassara that formed the opposition at the national level but who held the majority in Zinder – released a press statement about the risk of a social explosion around the refinery’s imminent inauguration (recoding of radio Anfani 24.10.2011). Shortly before the press statement, the government had announced the nomination of the nine SORAZ (*Societé de la Raffinerie à Zinder*) directors, none of whom originated from the Zinder region. Fearing that few (if any) of the 300 highly desirable posts to become available at SORAZ would go to local people, the regional and municipal councilors saw the social equilibrium of Zinder in danger. They argued that high youth unemployment had already contributed to the creation of the male-dominated youth gangs (*palais*) notorious for crime in Zinder, and if western Nigerien belonging and Zarma ethnicity were favored in the recruitment process, they predicted that these young gangs would provoke further social unrest. To combat this danger, the councilors established a regional committee to observe the recruitment process.

With the construction phase nearing completion, those local, unskilled laborers who had been recruited to build the plant would no longer be needed. Indeed, by the time of the press release, these local laborers (primarily young men) were already complaining about being laid-off en masse. In the operational phase, only about 300 highly qualified young university graduates in petro-chemistry and mechanics would be needed for maintenance, surveillance and refining; and as education, especially university education, is primarily a matter of financial resources, these workers would necessarily come from the country’s elite. In other words, those young men in Zinder qualified to work at SORAZ would have had little connection with the *palais* street gangs, so it seems unlikely that the regional committee created to supervise the recruitment process had any actual intention to ensure that youth gang members found employment there. Rather, by claiming and guaranteeing the recruitment of *Zinderois* in the name of the local population, councilors primarily created the supervisory committee to ensure that their own children and their extended families would have access to employment opportunities at SORAZ. In a similar vein, the distribution of directorial positions in Niger is a matter of political affiliation, with party members being recompensed with influential positions and other spoils after the accession to power (Olivier de Sardan 2016). In this context, claiming these posts for *Zinderois* is therefore claiming these posts for themselves, the local elected representatives (*élus locaux*). Rather than seeking to calm threats of violence or social disorder by directly appeasing local youth, the committee was operating within the political logic of postcolonial Niger to guarantee their own – and by extension their families' – participation in the oil industry. However, by extending their own exclusion and loss of opportunity to the entire Zinder population, they labelled the distribution of directorial positions a collective injurious experience, thereby masking their own class and personal interests in the language of regional and ethnic belonging. Moreover, in framing their own interests in ethnic and regional terms, and with the means to employ networks of financial distribution, the committee had delivered the government a (veiled) threat, that they would seek to unleash youth violence and social disorder should their demands not be met.

The regional and municipal councilors' media release quickly had an effect, with the first directorial nominations at SORAZ annulled, and the directorial positions redistributed. Three posts were given to people originating from Diffa region (the site of the oil field), and three others were assigned to members of the majority government from the Zinder region (the site of the refinery), with a member of the MODEN-FA Lumana in Zinder becoming Deputy Managing Director at SORAZ (*DG adjoint* SORAZ), and the regional president of PNDS-Tarayya becoming the Public Relations Manager (*Directeur de Relation Publique* SORAZ). The opposition *élus locaux* also profited from regionalized job distribution, with their children the first to occupy the 300 highly qualified positions at SORAZ. As one agent of SORAZ observed:

> Locally elected representatives made a press statement and organized several debates on radio and TV Gaskia to protest against the non-recruitment of young people from Zinder. The Chinese understood and took their children. Since then, the Chinese have had their peace. (Agent of SORAZ, June 2013 quoted in Harouna (2014), own translation)

In a nutshell, the press statement illustrates how the primary importance of youth in public political disputes is discursive, as a "generation at risk" that is both threatened – facing unemployment and an uncertain future – and threatening, due to "the correlation between young men and violence" (Masquelier 2010: 236). For *élus locaux,* purporting to represent unemployed youth in press statements, radio debates and televisions shows is primarily an ideological tool to mask their own individual interests as collective injury or political projects for the common good, and to thus legitimate their political positions. Political representation thereby reinforces structures of inequality and subordination (Spivak 1988), with the first to profit from the oil industry being well-established political actors and their families, rather than socially deprived groups like unemployed youth.

5.2.2. Dan Dubai and the MPPAD

One week later, the civil society association *Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement* (MPPAD) also released a statement about the upcoming inauguration. The declaration celebrated Tandja as "the father of oil" in Niger. In the MPPAD's narrative, it was Tandja's "vision, insight, selflessness, and pragmatism" that had transformed Niger into an oil producer (MPPAD 2011: 1). In this narrative, to keep the Nigerien oil as a reserve for future exploitation, western oil companies had always tried to prevent Niger from becoming an oil producer. More than anything, it was Tandja's pragmatism that made oil exploitation possible. The MPPAD accused the current government of hypocrisy, as it was Issoufou who had once said "everything is false, there is no drop of oil, there is only water", but was now taking the leading role in the process of Niger becoming an oil producer.

Having established a historical narrative, the MPPAD press release then followed the logic of "naming, blaming and claiming" (Felstiner et al. 1980-1981). According to Felstiner, Abel and Sarat (1980-1981), disputes develop through three stages: a perceived injurious experience (naming) is attributed to the fault of another (blaming) and is used to then ask for some remedy (claiming). Firstly, the MPPAD named a series of grievances based around oil, including corruption and (anticipated) damage to the environment and the population's health. They accused (blamed) the newly elected government authorities of breaking the promise to develop health infrastructure, and of poor governance, political patronage and the marginalization of the Zinder region with respect to possible oil benefits. The statement also harshly rejected the initial recruitment process to fill leading positions at SORAZ, which it judged "sectarian", "ethnic" and "politically motivated", and demanded (claimed) that the oil minister recall the appointees (MPPAD 2011: 3). By doing so, the MPPAD primarily developed grievances to blame the incumbent government, saying "those who will do harm, rob and plunder are not Chinese, they are Nigerians" (MPPAD 2011: 4). The declaration ended with the MPPAD calling on the population to mobilize against the new government. In other words, apart from demanding that Issoufou and Minister of Oil and Energy, Foumakoye Gado, recall the directorial nominations at SORAZ, the MPPAD did not make any concrete claims. Rather, they appealed to the public to mobilize against the government and shipwreck the regime. To understand this appeal, let us briefly turn to the background of the MPPAD.

The president of the MPPAD was Aboubacar Mounkaila, an extremely wealthy businessman who was publicly known as Dan Dubai,[62] and who claimed to have made his fortune as a broker in the Dubai oil business. Claiming to be of eastern Nigerien belonging and Kanuri ethnicity, Dan Dubai told me that he had represented West African migrants in Dubai looking to make connections by organizing meetings and business relations for a commission. After living most of his life in Dubai, he had returned to Niger in 2007 when Tandja's government was looking for new commercial partners in oil exploration and production; that is, after Esso and Petronas had abandoned the Agadem oil block in 2006, but before the government had reached the 2008 production sharing agreement with the CNPC. In Niger, Dan Dubai is regarded as the founding father of *Tazartché*, having founded the MPPAD to speak in the name of the Nigerien population by supporting Tandja's bid to remain in office. With his financial power, Dan Dubai was able to mobilize the *Zinderois* population to give Tandja a glamorous reception at the foundation stone ceremony. Dan Dubai also became an affiliate of MNSD-Nassara. In understanding the electoral logic of postcolonial Nigerien politics, his strategy appears clear. In this political game, wealthy businessmen provide financial support for electoral campaigns, and are reimbursed afterwards with posts or public markets (Olivier de Sardan 2016). Had *Tazartché* succeeded, Dan Dubai would almost certainly have been recompensed with either a foothold in the Nigerien oil business or a position within the government. The military coup, however, had left him empty-handed. After former opposition leader Issoufou came to power in 2011, Dan Dubai became a member of the political opposition, while those who went on to form the oligopoly of the Nigerien oil and transport business were said to be supporters of Issoufou's electoral campaign.

MPPAD's statement is therefore to be seen as part of a personal (and broader) political project to undermine the government's legitimacy and to find a position for Dan Dubai in Nigerien (oil) politics and business. Indeed, whether it was realistic or not, MPPAD's political project may even be interpreted as the overthrow of the incumbent government by popular uprising, and preparation for Dan Dubai's own candidature for the presidency. To pursue this goal, the MPPAD engaged in organizing resistance on the public stage in the weeks around the refinery's inauguration. They organized urban youth into so-called *comités de défense* in every quarter of Zinder city. The leader of each group was given direct orders by the MPPAD, which he was to pass down to his subordinates. Through this urban anchoring, Dan Dubai was able to mobilize the *Zinderois* population against the arrival of Issoufou, which I will elaborate on later. In pursuit of his ultimate goal, the presidency, Dan Dubai wanted to create *comités de defense* not only in Zinder but in all cities, villages and departments across the country. To finance an extension of his organization MPPAD through *comités de defense* all over the country, Dan Dubai also asked me to help him find Western resource companies to sponsor his campaign, in return, he would offer exploration or production permits should he win the elections.[63][64]

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[62] Meaning the "Son of Dubai", the name Dan Dubai can also be seen as a celebration of wealth and success.

5.2.3. CRAS

On 11 November 2011, some civil society organizations and labor unions from Zinder met for the first time to discuss working together on issues around oil. In the following days, they tried to assemble as many Zinder civil society associations as possible to create a new umbrella organization. On 16 November 2011, 12 days before the opening ceremony, a kickoff meeting was held for the new umbrella organization which they would later call CRAS (*Comité Regional des Associations et Syndicats de la Région de Zinder).* However, CRAS did not include all of the important civil society associations in Zinder, with several others working closely with the government or trying to stay neutral.

Before the first CRAS meeting in Zinder, I met a well-known civil society activist from the *Réseau des Organisations pour la Transparence et l'Analyse Budgétaire* (ROTAB) out front.[65] Earlier that day, I had interviewed him about his vision for the role of civil society in the country's oil future. There he had explained that the task of civil society was to cooperate closely with government authorities to guarantee social peace and stability, to appease the population, especially violence-prone youth and the expropriated rural population, and to ensure that oil exploitation becomes a "blessing" and not a "curse". Throughout the interview he had stressed the good relationship between civil society and the government authorities, pointing out that he was heavily involved in several governmental committees, including the organizational committee for the oil refinery's inauguration ceremony, and therefore often visited the governorate. Seeing him at the meeting place, I asked him if he would be participating, to which he sharply retorted: "These are the people of *Tazartché.* We don't do politics. We are not involved. In no way!"

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[63] Being from the German middle-class, I explained that I had no access to these large companies. Apart from my uneasiness with Dan Dubai's demand, his question points to an interesting aspect of Nigerien capitalism compared to Western capitalism, namely the ownership structure of large companies. Whereas large companies in the West are almost invariably owned by shareholders, Niger's largest companies are owned by individual businessman, making entanglements between business and politics more personal and direct than in the West, where lobbyism is the main form of brokerage.

[64] Dan Dubai would later abandon his plans to stand in the elections. By early 2012, rumors had started that he lacked sufficient funds and was in a difficult financial situation. In March 2014, one of Dan Dubai's closest intimates told me that they were preparing to switch to support the Issoufou government. Some months later a newspaper article reported on the change (Mallan 2014), with Dan Dubai noticeably refraining from the public politics of naming, blaming and claiming. In the 2016 presidential elections, however, Dan Dubai surprised everyone by declaring his support for Mahamane Ousmane who, after his exclusion from the CDS, ran for the *Mouvement Nigérien pour le Renouveau Démocratique* (MNRD-Hankuri).

[65] ROTAB is one of the best-known civil society organizations in Niger working on the topic of extractive industries. The national coordinator of ROTAB in Niamey, Ali Idrissa, is publicly known to have close ties with the Lumana party which was part of the government at that time.

During the meeting, the CRAS committee members were already naming the negative (travelling) ideas of oil production, including environmental pollution, conflict, and the lack of infrastructure and social development projects, especially in terms of better access to healthcare, water, and education. Whereas the activist at the entrance had emphasized his good relationship with the government authorities, the meeting attendees were accusing the government of corruption and incompetence, though oil production was still yet to start. Attendees also claimed that they should become members of regional government committees, like the committee to supervise the oil worker recruitment process created by the *élus locaux* and the governor, or the central government committee created to fix the future oil price, or the organizational committee for the refinery's inauguration in Zinder – in short, some of the positions the other activist claimed to occupy. Whereas that activist had claimed to speak in the name of the entire civil society, one meeting attendee said that the absence of some civil society associations such as his was because they were "unjust people who had betrayed the civil society of Zinder". From its formation then, CRAS' stated objective was to counteract what they saw as infiltration and sabotage of civil society by the state, saying that those civil society activists who were members of governmental committees were only there to enjoy good food and drinks, and then to give their blessings to everything the government proposed. In contrast, these now CRAS members portrayed themselves as the only civil society defending the interests of Zinder region against the national government and their regional representatives, such as the governor.

To understand these divisions, it is important to remember that Tandja's campaign had largely split Niger's civil society associations into supporters of *Tazartché* (so called *Tazartchists*) and opponents, who had joined the political opposition in their international call for democracy. Tandja's strategy had been to garner civil society support, rewarding those supporters with posts on governmental committees or with envelopes of money. However, when he was overthrown and the former opposition came to power, those civil society associations who had supported *Tazartché* were removed from political positions, and replaced by those who had supported Issoufou. Like Dan Dubai, most civil society associations in CRAS had supported *Tazartché*, and had therefore been left empty-handed after the 2010 coup. CRAS members were therefore using the inauguration as an opportunity to be reincorporated into the political game by seeking positions on regional government committees, where daily allowances are paid, and good food and drinks served – positions which are especially attractive for members of low and middle income groups facing pressing demands for financial redistribution within their social networks. By voicing popular grievances, CRAS members also saw the inauguration as an opportunity to deliver their list of concerns and demands to President Issoufou, hoping to do so in a face-to-face meeting, where he would be expected to hand-out envelopes of money. In short, using the inauguration as a stage which brought regional and national attention, oppositional civil society organizations regrouped as CRAS to once again become politically relevant and visible, to press for a renewed incorporation into government power structures, and to receive money.

5.2.4. Non-publics

Unlike CRAS members, representatives of Zinder civil society groups with close relationships to the government such as ROTAB and others did not participate in public political disputes. Few made open statements supporting the government in the media, focusing rather on organizing workshops for rural or youth populations about oil, food security and other topics, as well as participating in regional governmental committees related to these issues. As I show in the following subsection, these civil society organizations were heavily attacked by CRAS members, who accused them of focusing on personal profit and well-being.

Like these organizations, the Sultan only engaged with the public via radio when the violent protests around the inauguration erupted. Here, he did so only to calm the protests (see subchapter entitled "Crude Action"), as his own political situation was somewhat precarious. The sultan has maintained an important role in the political arena of postcolonial Zinder, although the position had been reduced to merely symbolic power under the French. In 2001, under President Tandja, Sultan Aboubacar Oumarou Sanda was deposed and sentenced to two years imprisonment for fraud, receipt of stolen goods, and drug trafficking. Local political observers assert that the then sultan's dismissal was purely political, as he was associated with Issoufou's PNDS-Tarayya. Tandja replaced him with El Hadji Mahamadou Kakali Moustapha who was associated with CDS-Rahama, the political party of then President of the National Assembly Mahamane Ousmane, the then government coalition partner of Tandja's MNSD-Nassara.[66] Only months after coming to power, however, President Issoufou reinstated Aboubacar Oumarou Sanda. With the inauguration, the sultan had a difficult balancing act, maneuvering between regional politics, through which he aimed to maintain popular support despite Zinder being the opposition stronghold (especially of the CDS-Rahama), and politics in favor of the government (to whom he owed his reinstallation). To do so, he tried not to take sides too clearly for the PNDS, but rather refrained from the public politics of oil. When speaking publicly, he tried to keep a moderate position and to speak in the name of Zinder region.

Unlike the sultan, religious authorities, including the increasing number of Salafi-oriented groups, tended not to show any political involvement at all, as it was difficult to claim a connection between a pious lifestyle and the overwhelmingly negatively loaded notion of politics in Niger (Sounaye 2016). Moreover, access to the religious sphere in Niger is heavily regulated by the *Conseil Islamique du Niger* (CIN) – a state institution charged with the supervision of the daily practice of Islam (Elischer 2015). This state influence on Islamic associations in Niger may equally effect their public positioning, admonishing them not to openly support the political opposition.

In looking at the positioning of social and political actors in Zinder, it becomes evident that for all political players, the first step in the mobilization of political capital and support was the appropriation of the current, sensitive subject of oil. Each player signified oil in particular ways to make claims to political power and legitimacy, especially by framing oil within narratives on youth violence, regional marginalization and the oil curse. Although the conflict played out around the inauguration ceremony, the political constellation had its roots in *Tazartché.* The opening ceremony thus became the stage on which this conflict was played out. I therefore argue that oil did not profoundly restructure political constellations in oil-age Niger, but rather fueled pre-existing political conflicts by offering political players new resources and opportunities to voice grievances, build alliances, gain negotiating power, find recognition as interest groups, compete for position and a share of state revenues, formulate visions of the future and to thereby (re)claim political power and legitimacy. In this sense, oil acts an idiom that frames political conflicts. I turn to this in more detail now.

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[66] From 1993-1996 Moustapha was a CDS member in the National Assembly.

5.3. Crude Talking: Talking politics in the language of oil

With widespread poverty and illiteracy, the latter especially among the older generation, radio is a significantly more important medium than television and newspapers in contemporary Niger.[67] With regionally limited transmitter range, the radio stations in Zinder only cover the greater boundaries of the city. Nevertheless, many radio stations also have a presence in other regions and exchange data files with other stations in other cities. Given its importance, it is not surprising that as the inauguration approached, political actors such as the regional and municipal councilors, government representatives, opposition politicians, businessmen and civil society activists began broadcasting interviews, releasing press statement and holding debates with increasing frequency on private radio. Civil society activists typically paid for airtime. CRAS members, for example, were charged 500-1000 FCFA (0.76-1.52 Euro) to broadcast interviews, 2000-3000 FCFA (3-4.6 Euro) to read out press statements, or 15,000-20,000 FCFA (23-30 Euro) to organize debates, which lasted up to several hours. Consequently, those social actors who lacked formal recognition as members of political parties or civil society associations, and who did not possess the financial power to buy broadcasts were typically denied broadcasting access.

The radio debates generally lasted between one and two hours, took place either in French or Hausa, and were often repeated and broadcast in the other language the following day. Below I will outline two debates held in the lead-up to the inauguration: one between political players organized by radio station *Anfani*, and the other between civil society activists broadcasted by radio station *Alternative*. These debates illustrate how actors used the idiom of oil to frame their political projects and thereby actively constructed the social and political reality of contemporary Niger. This "talk" also demonstrates how the anticipation of oil, even in a state of not-yet-ness, profoundly affects political practices (Weszkalnys 2014; Witte 2017). In looking at these debates, I employ critical political discourse analysis to understand language use as social practice, thereby revealing how such practices of oil talk “arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power” (Fairclough 1995: 132).

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[67] With limited access at the time, the internet had not yet developed into an important news source in Niger.

5.3.1. Anticipating the fuel price fix

The following radio debate between a group of civil society activists was held two weeks prior to the refinery’s inauguration.[68] In one sense, this debate was not a debate as such, with the featured activists all from the civil society organizations and labor unions from Zinder that had fused into CRAS. In the “debate”, they discussed what the government fixed fuel price would be. At the time, fuel smuggled from Nigeria was being sold in the streets of Zinder for about 350 FCFA/liter (0.53 Euro/liter), while the official fixed fuel price at the petrol stations was about 679 FCFA/liter (1.04 Euro/liter). Moreover, rumors had already begun to circulate that the Issoufou government would announce a fixed price of more than 500 FCFA/liter (0.76 Euro/liter), whereas Tandja had promised a fixed price between FCFA 200 and 250/liter (0.30-0.38 Euro/liter).

I here present excerpts of the actors’ statements[69] to illustrate how their positions within the political arena shaped the way they framed the topic of oil, and how their statements were related to their political projects. The debate was hosted by Ali Djibo, a moderator on the most important associative community radio station in Zinder, *Alternative*. The guests were Sadat Elhadj Illia from the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple* (MPDNP), Secretary General of the Transport Union in Zinder Issaka Elhadj Sani (aka Askia), sociologist and co-founder of the development organization *Mieux Vivre Sans la Fonction Publique* Abdoul Madjid, and Secretary General of the MPPAD Abdoul Kader.

Ali Djibo: Sadat, we are one step away from the inauguration of SORAZ. The people are worried about the national fuel price. We want to know if you have any ideas about this after your investigations. What is the vision of your civil society association? What should the fuel price be, so that the country and its people benefit?

Sadat: As the oil is for Niger and it is refined within Niger, we see no leeway to sell it very expensively [*…But*] the government will try to prevent our youth from selling [*smuggled*] fuel in the streets, and then sell it [*the fuel from Niger’s refinery*] to us very expensively […] As the government has said they will involve civil society […] I fear that they have worked with civil society groups that know nothing about how people live here. These groups are in Niamey and have never left it: we know them [*the civil society groups in Niamey*] well [...] The government must stop playing with the people, and work with the civil society associations that are on the ground, fighting for the welfare of the people, and not actors that make civil society a ‘dairy cow’ [*paid to support the government*]. We do not agree with that process because those people have always been corrupt and have always claimed to speak on behalf of the population. If the government fixes the fuel price with those people, I swear it will come to nothing, and no one will be able to stop us from consuming the smuggled fuel.

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[68] Recording of radio Alternative 13.11.2011.

[69] The debate was held in Hausa. My friend and research assistant Ali Adam Maman Sani and I translated them into English.

Ali Djibo: Askia, you are the secretary general of the transport union. We consume the smuggled fuel. If the fuel price increases, the transport fares also increase. We would like to hear your point of view. How much should we sell the fuel for so that the transport business and the owners of private vehicles benefit?

Askia: Our transport union has clearly indicated to the government that if we are not consuming at the petrol stations, it is because the fuel is too expensive. Just next door [*in Nigeria*], where our vehicles travel to, the fuel is sold at about 180 to 200 FCFA. We cannot buy Nigerien fuel for 700 FCFA. We understand that if the government is not yet expressing itself on the price, we can assume it is because of their lack of transparency. If they really worked for the people, they would have announced it months ago.

Ali Djibo: Abdoul Madjid […] as a sociologist you listened to our questions concerning the oil. Until now there has been no official announcement on the fuel price in Niger. Could you say something about this?

Abdoul Madjid: The day before yesterday the minister of oil gave a press conference […] He said that they had installed a committee in Niamey with experts and civil society activists to deliberate on the fuel price. I am not against such a committee […] However, at the committee in Niamey, they will only eat, drink and applaud, that's all. And then they'll disperse. But as the civil society of Zinder, we will make demands. We are not here for discord but to make propositions to the government in order for everyone to benefit. We even proposed a fuel price as Sadat said: we said it should not exceed 200 FCFA.

Ali Djibo: Abdoul Kader, you represent the MPPAD. You listened to the others' points of view […]. What fuel price do you think will benefit the population?

Abdoul Kader: All civil society organizations in Zinder got together to say the fuel price should not exceed 200 FCFA per liter […] Everywhere where oil is exploited, the government subsidizes the price to support the population, because it is the only way the people can benefit. But they [*the Nigerien government*] do not do any politics in favor of the population […] They said they will install a committee on the question of the fuel price, but the committee will only meet to eat and drink: it will impose a price on us that is exorbitant, a price beyond our capacity. As a result, the price will create a problem in our country […] We are in the 21st century and everyone knows that the population will react if you mistreat them.

As the quotes make clear, not only did each of the activists demand a fuel price lower than the price of the smuggled fuel from Nigeria, but each also strongly criticized the government for neglecting the population, especially of the Zinder region. The activists also demanded the opportunity to participate in the political decision-making process, and accused those civil society associations which occupied seats on governmental bodies of cronyism and complicity with the incumbent regime. To better understand the four activists' backgrounds and motivations, in the following, I set out to situate the actors' claim-making according to their positioning within particular political constellations and power games, thereby revealing their own political projects. By highlighting the contextual factors that shaped the participants' mediatized oil talk, I will demonstrate how the political, regional and ethnic "politics of belonging" in Niger are central to understanding democracy and the media's role in promoting it (for the media and democracy in Africa in general see Nyamnjoh 2005). Two days before the debate, the activists had met to elaborate on ways to collaborate. Several days after the debate, they finally formalized their alliance in the *Comité Regional des Associations et Syndicats de la Région de Zinder* (CRAS), with Sadat elected president, Abdoul Madjid vice president, and Askia head of communication. The MPPAD's Abdoul Kader did not opt for a formal position on the committee, but occasionally attended meetings to coordinate collective action between CRAS and the MPPAD, especially with the arrest of its leader Dan Dubai several days prior to the inauguration.

Sadat was the president of the civil society network MPDNP in Zinder, most commonly referred to as the *Mouvement Patriotique*. He became involved in politics at school in Zinder, where he joined the *Union des Scolaires Nigériens* (USN). While studying at the Abdou Moumouni University in the capital, he continued his activities within the USN. Indeed, many of Niger's leading civil society activists studied at the university, where they became involved in important socio-political networks and acquired the necessary legal-political knowledge and rhetorical skills to engage in the public sphere. In Niamey Sadat joined the *Mouvement Patriotique* network. Led by one of Niger's best-known civil society activists Nouhou Arzika, in 2008-09 the network became one of the main public voices for *Tazartché.* During this time, Sadat and his comrades occupied seats on the government committees which had been established for civil society associations with the introduction of democracy such as those to address recurrent food crises. However, with the military coup and the regime change, they were replaced by members of civil society associations that had supported the opposition CFDR "democracy movement". Like Dan Dubai, the *Mouvement Patriotique* was left empty-handed after Tandja was ousted. At the time of the debate then, Sadat and his comrades were considered part of the political opposition. As such, Sadat and the *Mouvement Patriotique's* goal was to regain influence, power and spoils by once again being included on regional governmental committees.

As secretary general of the transport union section in Zinder, **Askia** defended the interests of the transporters, whose profits were directly linked to the fuel price. Less known than Sadat as a civil society activist, Askia was rather known as a CDS-Rahama militant. As

Zinder is the stronghold of the political opposition and the CDS in particular, the other CRAS committee members suspected Askia was gathering and delivering information to the CDS' Bachir Sabo, the mayor of Zinder. He was thus first of all a political opponent of the central government and a defender of transport union interests. His political project was said to be to support CDS politicians, and to benefit personally from their sponsorship.

A trained sociologist, **Madjid** also studied at Niamey University, where he campaigned for the USN and later co-founded the development organization *Mieux Vivre Sans la Fonction Publique* in Maradi. Madjid became the organization's secretary general. Although the association received funding from international donors, like most of the approximately one thousand civil society and development organizations formed since Niger's democratization two decades prior, the association became inoperational after its first phase of funding ended. Moving to Zinder where he became a lecturer at the medical school, Madjid tried to establish himself as a civil society activist. As he had collaborated with the MPPAD, which he released the main declaration with on 2 November 2011, the other CRAS members saw him as working for Dan Dubai. His position as vice president of CRAS was thus seen as an attempt to guide Zinder civil society to favor the MPPAD, and his personal project was said to be to benefit from Dan Dubai's wealth.

Kader was a school teacher prior to becoming the secretary general of Dan Dubai's MPPAD during the *Tazartché* campaign. Like the others, he stressed the importance of a low fuel price and criticized the government. However, Kader's emphasis on the population's reaction to maltreatment in the context of the 21st century distinguished his rhetoric from the others. This was a (veiled) reference to the "Arab Spring", which had taken place only months prior in the countries on Niger's northern border. This aligned closely with the MPPAD's strategy, which was the organization of political opposition in Niger by assembling youth into *comités de defense*. Kader did not opt for a position on CRAS because the MPPAD wanted to stay independent, and did not share CRAS' objectives: whereas the MPPAD's ultimate aim was regime change, leading members of CRAS wanted to again be granted places on government committees. From the MPPAD's perspective then, CRAS was said to be a structure of "*prébendiers*"; a term frequently used in Niger to denote those seeking any form of income from politicians, either through positions on committees (cooptation) or by accepting informal envelopes (bribery and corruption). As such, the MPPAD only cooperated occasionally with CRAS to coordinate public action and to pressure for the release of Dan Dubai.

In short, all four civil society activists framed their blames and demands in the name of the population, but their positions were in fact closely aligned with their own political projects. I now turn to the politicians and their projects.

5.3.2. Debating the prospects of the oil refinery

Held about a week prior to the inauguration, the following radio debate in French was hosted by Lawan Boukar, a moderator on a leading private Zinder radio station, *Anfani*.[70] Three guests featured in the debate about the future of the Nigerien oil refinery: member of the incumbent national government party MODEN-FA Lumana Mahamandou Dan Buzuwa, member of the opposition CDS-Rahama and city councilor in Zinder Abdoulrahim Balarabé (aka BABI), and head of the civil society association *Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement* (MPPAD) Dan Dubai. Their opening statements follow:

Lawan Boukar: In a few days we will proceed with the inauguration of Zinder's oil refinery. How is civil society fighting for Zinder to benefit from its refinery?

Dan Dubai: At the moment we can't speak about benefits. Let us first of all talk about the health of the people […] Did you know that the water that will be used in the refinery will be sent to us for drinking? Who will come to treat the water so that it won't be detrimental to our health? [*...Second,*] The oil refinery should not only serve one political clique. We know that they [*the government*] have politicized the case [*in distributing directorial posts at the refinery to party members*]. [*…Third,*] Where do they discharge their waste? [*…Fourth*,] The fire brigade is forced to camp near villages around the refinery: we need to equip them with all necessities. [*…Fifth*,] Where is the major hospital that they promised us? […] What is important is not the refinery's inauguration: We really want to know where everything that we asked for is? […] If they [*the government*] really won't change their behavior, you know that Niger will face the same problems as other [*oil exporting*] countries in the world.

Lawan Boukar: Abdoulrahim Balarabe, you occupy a position of responsibility in Zinder. In a joint declaration last week, the town and regional councils [*which Balarabe was a member of*] rejected the nomination of certain personalities at the top of SORAZ. What is your position regarding this case?

Abdoulrahim Balarabe: Let me tell you what pushed us to publish the statement […]. We are counting on the refinery to reduce unemployment in the region. We have so many unemployed young people in Zinder who don't have anything to do. […] This is what made us furious when we heard about the nominations [*to the board of directors, none of which originated from the Zinder region*], so we were forced to do everything possible to correct this decision.

Lawan Boukar: Thank you Abdoulrahim Balarabe, before we continue, Malam Mahamadou Dan Buzuwa, what is your position in regard to all this?

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[70] Recording of radio Anfani 20.11.2011.

> **Mahamandou Dan Buzuwa**: There are many countries in the world that count on their oil refineries, because they profit a lot from the refinery's financial revenues […] We, the people of Zinder, have the heavy burden of responsibility and we have to stand above it [*ethnic and regional loyalty*] and be sincere […] We want someone capable of doing his job. It is the person's capacity we are looking at, not his origin. We don't care where he comes from […] We want the whole of Niger to profit from its oil in an absolute state of peacefulness. You are aware that once you find oil, how white people say, there is a 'curse', because it is always a source of conflict.

In the statement, the MPPAD's **Dan Dubai** anticipated the negative effects of oil production in Zinder before the first barrel of oil had even been produced. In doing so, he made some outlandish claims, including that the refinery's used industrial water would be pumped directly into the drinking water system.[71] Dan Dubai claimed that this negative outlook for Zinder and indeed Niger's oil future came from the knowledge he had acquired overseas, especially through his involvement in the Dubai oil business, implicitly warning of the resource curse eventuating by accusing the newly elected government of poor governance and political patronage. As his fugleman told me, Dan Dubai's ultimate goal was the Nigerien presidency. His argument is thus to be seen as part of a personal (and broader) political project to undermine the government's legitimacy. To pursue this goal, the MPPAD engaged in organizing resistance for a resource curse scenario of oil-induced conflicts to materialize at the refinery inauguration.

Zinder councilor **Balarabe** first argued that the oil sector was crucial for economic development and the reduction of local youth unemployment. He also worried that employment would only be given to people from Niamey and members of the government, and that the region would thereby be geographically and politically marginalized. In doing so, he was attempting to label the nomination of the directors, and the employment of young adults from outside Zinder, as a collective injurious experience. However, as I outlined above, while ostensibly claiming the posts at SORAZ for the people of Zinder, *élus locaux* like Balarabe were in fact claiming them for themselves, their networks and especially their families.

Member of the Zinder government majority **Dan Buzuwa** also counted on the refinery's financial revenues. However, he rejected Dan Dubai and Balarabe's claims that the government was ethnically and regionally marginalizing Zinder, and rather that they were both being ethnocentric and regionalist. Buzuwa argued that a person's origin was not important, rather it was the knowledge and skills that were the important criteria in selecting personnel. Finally, he explicitly referred to the resource curse narrative to demand the population remain calm and allow oil production to become a blessing. In contextualizing his statements, it is important to remember that Issoufou and Gado drew heavily on the neoliberal version of the resource curse in their speeches. Building on the idea that "bad governance" is the root cause of resource conflicts, the government therefore sought to reassure an international audience of their commitment to "good governance" and "transparency" in the resource sector. In referring to the resource curse narrative, Buzuwa also questioned his political opponents' legitimacy by implicitly accusing them of ethnic and regional populism, attempting to make them responsible should the "curse" eventuate.

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[71] Of course, pollution of the drinking water is possible, but his claim that the used industrial water would be directly pumped into the drinking system seems far-fetched.

The radio show illustrates how the emergence of a multiparty system has allowed debate to take place in a setting of political competition which is about the negotiation of disputes in the public. In this setting, the speech acts of "naming, blaming and claiming" (Felstiner et al. 1980-1981) are political moves. In this particular context, political players named oil related grievances, which they blamed on opponents, in order to claim political legitimacy and power for themselves and their political groups. It is striking how the resource curse thesis became integrated into these political disputes, and was there translated from an analytical model into a political rhetoric carefully put to use in the political game. Depending on the actors' interests, the threat of the curse either served to delegitimize the government by accusing them of making the resource curse a reality, or to delegitimize the political opposition by making them responsible for the very production of the curse itself.

As Mamdani (2007) argues, "naming" an object in a certain way has powerful political consequences, justifying interventions, reconstructing social and political difference, and thereby reinforcing patterns of domination. In the case of oil production in Niger, oil is named a "curse" to emphasize its negative effects, or a "blessing" to emphasize its positive effects. Naming oil in one way or another sets the scene for further stages of blaming and claiming. Drawing on Aristotle's concept of epideictic oratory, Church's (2010) heuristic analysis of the rhetoric of "blame" identifies three main strategies: the establishment of place, the creation of ethos, and the use of ekphrasis. The establishment of place enables the interaction of orator and audience, the creation of an ethos defines an epistemic and moral authority for the self and the other, and the use of ekphrasis rhetorically unveils an event to effect a call to action in the audience (ibid.). Building on Church's identification of these three strategies, we might first say that the establishment of place is related to media technologies. Diffused by private radio stations with transmission ranges extending only to the greater urban area, the oil talk targets a regional, mostly urban audience. Second, epistemic and oral authority is constructed around oil knowledge and notions of good governance, creating at least a discursive ethos, especially for well-established political players. Third, the oil talk which unveiled the event of Niger entering oil-age closes with calls to (non)action; either to rally against the government, or to stay calm to allow oil production to become a blessing. The translation of concepts like the resource curse into the local political arena through epideictic oratory is thus used for the politicization of every aspect of oil production. One may therefore argue that oil talk has become politics in the language of oil, or what I call "crude talking".

5.3.3. Unaired voices

In contrast to well-established players like the civil society representatives who occupy seats in governmental bodies and voluntarily refrain from the public sphere, the subaltern lack access to the radio landscape and the public. Although private radio stations broadcast press releases and organize debates, non-established political actors who lack formal recognition as civil society activists or politicians, as well as financial resources, legal-political knowledge and political rhetoric, are largely excluded. Their voice is limited to talk-back radio or to paternalistic representatives from politicians, civil society activists, lawyers and so on.

The most popular and notorious talk-back show among youth in Zinder is *planète reggae*, which is broadcast Fridays from 11 pm to midnight on the private station *Shukurah*. Between reggae songs, youth call-in to talk about political and other issues in Zinder. Here, they regularly blame the political authorities for their "bad governance", especially the non-distribution of the country's resource wealth to the population (of Zinder), and articulate threats of violence if the political authorities do not address unemployment and police harassment. As I will show below, violence is indeed one of the few means through which youth can make their voices heard.

Farmers whose land was expropriated for the oil refinery have even less of a voice than youth in the public political game. As such, they depend on lawyers and civil society activists to defend their cause or voice their concerns on radio shows about their situation. This is rare: I know of only one radio interview with expropriated farmers in 2011. In the interview, the two farmers discussed their suffering, stating that they had lost their fields and with it their "joy and hope had turned to fatigue and despair".[72] They appealed to the president for help, saying they had been told compensation payments had already been transferred by the government, but not who was to hand the payments over to them. In several focus group interviews with expropriated farmers that I conducted in villages close to the oil refinery in 2011 and again in 2014, they complained that after the construction phase of the oil refinery in 2011, their children (young men) had been laid off, some of whom had then migrated to Libya in search for work. With their children now out of work, the farmers did not see any positive impact from the oil refinery. Instead, they claimed a loss of soil fertility, as well as smoke and air pollution, and problems with security forces, as the Chinese had repeatedly accused their children of stealing scrap from the refinery area. Moreover, the farmers complained that none of the promised improvements to the health, water or educational infrastructure had been delivered. Finally, they criticized the government and civil society, as no representatives had ever visited them, or shown any real interest in understanding their situation.

Although government representatives had come to identify the affected farmers and measure the size of their expropriated fields, the farmers claimed that they had been told neither the results of the survey, nor how much compensation they were entitled to. They had been told only to wait. As the rural farmers had no financial means, two lawyers took up their case for compensation in 2011 on the condition of receiving 17 percent of any final indemnity payments. One of the lawyers had been a well-known civil society activist during the "movements against the high costs of living" in 2005, and had close relations with the CRAS leaders. During a CRAS meeting in Zinder in 2012, one of the members received a message that one of the expropriated farmers was in the city, so a committee member was sent to pick him up. The man was asked to report on the situation of farmers near the refinery. After completing his report and being released from the meeting, CRAS members discussed if and how they could use the information in their political struggle. Although members appeared to agree that the farmer's grievances more or less fitted in with CRAS' political agenda, they did not air his grievances in public. When the expropriated farmers received their second of three compensation payments in 2014, only some of the money actually arrived. The lawyer with close relations to CRAS was soon accused of embezzling the money and arrested. Instead of defending and supporting the farmers who had accused the lawyer, CRAS members claimed the lawyer's arrest was political, and demanded his immediate release. Throughout the conflict, the expropriated farmers did not have a voice.

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[72] In total 176 fields were taken by the state from eleven different villages situated near the oil refinery.

Women appear to have even less of a voice than male youth or farmers in the public sphere in Zinder. Nigerien society is highly gender segregated, a trend exacerbated by an increase of "wife seclusion", especially in southern-central Niger, in which women are kept in the private sphere inside the house/compound (Henquinet 2007).[73] As we have seen, none of the political actors in these public disputes were women. All CRAS members were men. Whereas members of civil society and the political opposition were claiming directorial positions for regional residents at SORAZ or a regional quota for oil workers, these were inherently male roles. Male political players in Zinder claimed to speak in the name of the entire regional population, but implicitly spoke only for (elite) men. Thus, with the existing structures of domination in a patriarchal setting, gender remains unspoken and invisible in the public political game in Niger today. Indeed, save for a few extroverted civil society associations with Western donors, women's voices are essentially absent in Zinder's political arena. I turn to that again in more detail in the next chapter.

As I have shown in the speeches and press statements of various political actors in Zinder, the concept of naming, blaming and claiming in legal disputes translates well into a political setting, so I reformulate and extend this concept as "the politics of naming, blaming and claiming". While Felstiner, Abel and Sarat (1980-1981) argue that legal disputes emerge out of an injurious experience – such as environmental pollution – which then translates into blaming and claiming, this is not necessarily the case in political disputes, as this case study illustrates. Rather, politically named grievances are anticipated, invented, and paternalistically ascribed and expressed; players stage, transform or discard these grievances to serve their own political agenda. Moreover, not everyone can participate in politics of naming, blaming and claiming. Whereas the expropriated rural population around the refinery, young men, and women, irrespective of their age, were too marginalized to voice their oil related grievances in the public political game around the inauguration, powerful actors like politicians, businessmen and civil society activists acted as paternalistic representatives who staged significations of oil in the name of the subaltern. This is related to the media technologies with which voices are made public and political.

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[73] A relatively recent phenomenon now spreading amongst Hausa in particular, wife seclusion first emerged among the Alhazai as a marker of class and religious status. But with devastating droughts in the Sahel, population growth, increasingly scarce arable land, the fall of uranium revenues, and the introduction of the SAP, Islamic movements increased and with them, wife seclusion spread to rural households of varying economic status and with differing labor needs (for more on this see chapter 5).

Indeed, these debates demonstrate how important private radio has become as a device in political player's tactical repertoire since its emergence and incorporation into the political arena in Zinder in 1997. As the debate has shown, radio is primarily used by established players to engage in the public political game, while generally ignoring subaltern voices who lack the financial and political resources to broadcast their narratives. Oil talk is thus enacted in a double sense. Firstly, actors talk oil through the logic of their political agendas, which in turn shape their articulations of significations of oil. I have shown how the positioning of actors within the political arena shapes their agendas and thus frames oil accordingly in political debates. Secondly, to enact oil talk, political players need access to radio broadcasting. Thus, radio allows some actors to articulate their political views, while leaving others without this means of engaging in the public. Acknowledging socio-economic inequalities, I have shown that groups like unemployed youths, dispossessed farmers, and women were inhibited from gaining significant access. I have thus illustrated how access to the media is a critical condition for participation in the public, and how privileged access to the media is a means of domination for the most well-established and powerful actors. The double-layered enactment of talk and access to radio required to be an effective actor has produced a specific political logic in oil-age Niger. Understanding the particular character of the political dynamics of oil therefore only becomes possible by considering how radio and politics in Niger articulate. In this sense, radio has not only become an important device in the political players' tactical repertoire, but also shapes the way politics are played in Niger. I develop that further in the next chapter.

In the following subchapter, I turn to the production of violent protests around the oil refinery's inauguration as the second phase of a political drama: the showdown. This phase directly emerged out of the first phase: the mobilization of political capital. In this section, I focus particularly on mobile phone text messages as ordering technologies, as their immediacy, freedom to control the message, and the apparently organic or grassroots nature made them particularly important during the "showdown". Moreover, I show how an affective dimension, one which bodily and emotionally attached smaller and disconnected parts through a chain of time- and place-specific events into larger movements, is also inherent in contentious politics.

5.4. Crude Action: The production of disorder in Zinder

As mentioned previously, two weeks before the refinery's inauguration, the government announced a new official Nigerien fixed fuel price of 579 FCFA/liter. Although this was a significant reduction on the former fuel price of 679 FCFA/liter, it was not only still much higher than the 200-250 FCFA/liter that CRAS had been pushing for (and which appeared to have been widely hoped for amongst the population), but also than the fuel price on the black market, which was around 350 FCFA/liter at the time. The announcement led to unrest among the population, particularly among youth. Indeed, youth in Zinder were particularly affected by the fuel price, with many working as *kabou kabou* (motorcycle taxi drivers), selling smuggled fuel from Nigeria on the streets, or smuggling contraband themselves. This unrest was fueled by short, mass text messages in Hausa and French that voiced oil related grievances and called on the population to resist and fight the government, and to boycott the president's arrival in Zinder. Messages such as these helped build collective action frames:

> WE DO NOT AGREE – WHERE IS THE QUOTA FOR ZINDER PEOPLE IN THE RECRUITMENT? WHERE IS THE AIRPORT AND THE HOSPITAL TO PROTECT US FROM RADIATION AND POLLUTION? WHERE ARE THE TARMAC ROADS, THE CONGRESS CENTER? WE DON'T ACCEPT THE NOMINATIONS OF THE 9 ADMINISTRATORS OF SORAZ MADE ON AN ETHNOCENTRIC AND REGIONALIST BASIS. (SMS sent on 21 November 2011, translated from French)
>
> They have officially declared war on us. We are at war, we need to unite to combat the enemy. And I remind you that at war the victors will be those who are the brave, and that is us. (SMS sent on 15 November 2011, translated from French)
>
> Dear Nigerien brothers and sisters. Do you know that our leaders don't care about us, about our difficult lives, do you know that? And that Nigerien oil belongs to the Nigeriens? And not to the leaders! Together we say no! No to the plunderers, thieves, cheaters, to those who work for their own profits and not for the profit of the Nigerien people. Imagine that we are obliged to pay the subsoil resources of our ancestors at a colossal price (576 FCFA). Please, my dear compatriots, this price, is it affordable for us Nigeriens? If not, let's mobilize together, hand in hand, and say NO!! PLEASE PASS ON THE SMS. (SMS sent on 15 November 2011, translated from French)
>
> We call on all Zinderois to avoid assisting the reception of President Issoufou for the ceremony of selling the fuel at the oil refinery of Zinder. Please pass this SMS to all Zinderois. (SMS sent on 23 November 2011, translated from French)
>
> Your attention! We inform you: do not go out and welcome the president of the republic at the inauguration to show him that we disagree with the price. (SMS sent on the morning of 28 November 2011, translated from Hausa)

To avoid police persecution, these short messages (which I was sent either directly by one of the text organizers or collected later from youth leaders), were initially sent from unregistered SIM cards. Although SIM cards must normally be registered with the distributers when purchased, this is often not the case due to two main reasons: First, approximately not even one half of Niger's population possesses identity cards. With births often occurring at home without any notice, registration takes place voluntarily afterwards and needs a stamp of 500 FCFA to acquire a birth certificate. An identity card is even more expensive with a fee and stamp of together 2100 FCFA (3.20 Euro) plus potentially corruption money to facilitate the issuing process in a country where petty corruption is part of the everyday (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006). Therefore many Nigeriens don't have any documents to register and the mobile phone companies would seriously limit their customer recruitment if insisting on a registration. Second, the mobile phone companies promote their SIM cards also in rural areas where there are no electricity grids to allow for an electronic registration. But even in urban areas, with recurrent power cuts, electronic registration can become difficult. It is thus easy to circumvent a SIM card registration by simply stating that you don’t possess any documents. Moreover, unregistered SIM cards can also be bought informally at the market outside of distributors’ shops. Taken together, the infrastructural assemblage that exists in the West from which the technology of the mobile phone travelled to Africa, is at least partly missing in Niger where infrastructures of birth certificates, identity cards and electricity grids do not have a nationwide coverage.

As a result, the police failed to track the source of the messages. It was, however, obvious that at least some had been strategically placed by political opponents – especially as the messages’ contents were nearly identical to political opponents’ media statements. The texting was the coordinated action of a small group of people: with one of the masterminds later telling me that five of them had written the texts together, a statement backed up by the fact that some messages had identical contents but different spellings. The strategy of the political opponents was thereby two-fold: on the one hand, they wanted the wider public to refrain from attending the opening ceremony, and on the other, they were attempting to mobilize certain groups to stage violent protest.

On Friday 25 November, three days before the inauguration, Dan Dubai was arrested for defaming the government in statements made during the radio debates and in the MPPAD press release. That evening, several youths called talk-back show *planète reggae* to discuss the arrest and government injustice in general. Similarly, short mobile phone messages called on the population to protest the following day.

> ELHADJI DAN DUBAI IS IN JAIL AND HIS COMPANIONS ARE ON TRACK TO BE ARRESTED: THIS IS TO FRIGHTEN OTHER NIGERIENS WHO REACT AGAINST THE EXCESSIVE FUEL PRICE: APPOINTMENT TOMORROW AT 9 AM IN FRONT OF THE BUS STATION TO DEMAND THE RELEASE OF DAN DUBAI AND TO ENGAGE OUR LEGAL RIGHTS AS CITIZENS: SEND ON TO OTHERS. (SMS sent on 25 November 2011, translated from French)

The following day, November 26, about 200 youth reputedly gathered at the bus station, but were immediately dispersed by the police who had heard about the calls to protest. However, near the city's central tribune[74], school pupils marched against the fuel price and the arrest. Police attempts to disperse the crowd devolved into a violent cat-and-mouse game between the protesters and police. Blowing a whistle, one student would gather the protestors together again and again, while police forces would rush along the streets, firing tear gas missiles at them, leaving the students to flee into schoolyards where they would immediately spread and hide. Part of a crowd of onlookers across the street, on police instructions I left the scene for my safety. Some of the others in the crowd claimed that the pupils had been mobilized by the political opposition to protest, something one of the organizers confirmed to me later, saying that he had worked to fuel the protests.

On the morning of November 27, the day prior to the inauguration, CRAS members met to debate a memorandum about the situation in Zinder in the oil-age. The following day, the memorandum was to be delivered to the governor and to the president. Abdoul Kader from the MPPAD attended to explain the reasons for Dan Dubai's arrest, with CRAS then publicly calling it a "political arrest". While Abdoul Kader and CRAS vice president Abdoul Madjid (also aligned to the MPPAD) demanded the organization take protest action, other CRAS members were reluctant, as they wanted to steadily increase pressure on the governor – from debate to declaration to demonstration – before resorting to protest action. Arguing that demonstrations often turned violent because powerful political players had a hand in them, the other CRAS members saw street protests as a last resort, and wanted to first release a memorandum on the radio. The debate resulted in a leadership conflict, with Madjid resigning the vice presidency.

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[74] Every major city in Niger has a central tribune where public holidays and special events are celebrated.

On November 28, the inauguration was held. Here, the mobilization strategy of political opposition groups was by-and-large effective, although some people – mostly collected from nearby villages – also came out to support the president. That day, urban youths demonstrated violently against the president's arrival. They built tire street barricades and set them alight, clashed with police, and attacked Issoufou's festive procession as it made its' way to the refinery. After the inauguration, short messages glorifying the riots as resistance against Issoufou, and a profession of faith in former President Tandja, were circulated (see chapter 2).

In the days following the inauguration, more short messages aimed at mobilizing protesters against the government were sent out.

> Down with the 7th Republic, down with the vampire government, down with the power of the Nigerien pharaohs, down with the fuel price of 578 FCFA and those who buy it, down with all those who don't send the SMS to 30 or 60 persons, they are not real citizens. *That Allah avenges us* (SMS sent on 29 November 2011, translated from French)

Similar text messages also circulated in Niamey and other Nigerien towns. The system of chain messages was largely facilitated by a promotion by mobile phone provider Airtel that allowed users who sent a message with "BONJOUR" to any number to receive 100 free SMS until midnight that day. Established in the country only shortly before in 2011 via an acquisition of Celtel (Netherlands), and later Zain (Kuwait), Airtel has reached today a majority 68 percent market share. Generally, the Nigerien government has limited the number of telephone providers to four: Orange (France), Moov (Ivory Coast), Sahelcom (Niger state-owned; today Niger Télécom) and Airtel (India). With a SIM card costing 500 FCFA (0.76 Euro) in 2011, Nigeriens mostly possessed SIM cards of all four or at least of three companies because the widely distributed Chinese mobile phone fabrications in Niger have three plug-in positions and thus allow communicating (short messages or phone calls) between the same provider which is substantially cheaper then communicating between different providers. At that time, for example, sending a short message between Airtel clients was only 1 FCFA (0.0015 Euro) but between different providers it could have easily been 10 FCFA (0.015 Euro) or more. In sum, because of the high capital cost but very low operating costs of mobile networks, infrastructure providers try to attract customers to their respective network with special offers to raise their market shares and thereby not only turn mobile phones inadvertently into devices for mass communication but also facilitate protest organization.

At the same time, the main focus of the messages and public debate in Zinder remained dominated by Dan Dubai's arrest. In press statements and radio debates, civil society associations demanded his release. CRAS met several times during the period to debate events and devise a plan. Abdoul Kader also attended, providing CRAS members with updates on Dan Dubai's imprisonment, and arguing that CRAS should demand President Issoufou's resignation. While many CRAS members viewed the governor as the "first enemy to fight", and wanted to demand his resignation, because he had denied them an audience with the president, others wanted to avoid such a hard stance against the governor, as rumors in Zinder suggested that President Issoufou was furious after the protests, and had not given anyone an audience. The members then agreed to first organize a radio debate on *Shukurah* to increase their visibility, to gauge popular support for protests against the regime, and then to negotiate directly with the governor. To do this, they sought a total of 20,000 FCFA from members. Abdoul Kader did not agree on the strategy, arguing that "we will not negotiate, we have the mass on our side, the governor must come to us". Instead, Abdoul Kader claimed that the governor had underestimated the power of the MPPAD, and that the governor would soon have to resign from office, as would President Issoufou, after what had happened in Zinder. Abdoul Kader would prove wrong on both counts.

In Zinder there was widespread public disagreement about who was responsible for the violent youth protests. For some, the media was responsible, claiming that the radio debates incited the youth to violent action. For others, it was the short messages that mobilized youth, while others again suspected that the political opposition, especially the CDS-Rahama and the MPPAD, were behind the protests. Indeed, rumors circulated in Zinder that opposition politicians had paid youth and well-known criminals to protest, and that they had also distributed them sling shots. While this may have been the case, I could find no evidence of it. Through my enquiries, I found out that dozens of sling shots had been sold on the market just prior to the inauguration, but that all had been sold to individual youth, and not to intermediaries in larger quantities.

After the protests, the number of attendees at CRAS dropped markedly, from over 30 to about 15. When I asked one of the members why, he told me that not all of the civil society associations and labor unions had had the same objectives, leading to some leaving the group. While some were focused on unemployment and the recruitment process at SORAZ, some were focused on the fuel price, while some had a much broader take on politics in Zinder and wanted to include numerous aspects of regional governance beyond simply oil production. At that time, however, he was still positive about CRAS' future, as he thought it was still fighting collectively, and that was what the authorities feared the most. He said the loss of some members was inevitable, as politicians would always be able to divide civil society by bribing and coopting some members, stating that "if you offer a hungry person something to eat, he will take it, even if he trembles while doing so".

On December 2, CRAS president Sadat received a phone call during the meeting from the chief of the gendarmerie, demanding that all participating associations provide their official documents (*arrêtés)* to prove their legality. To participate in the public sphere and thus play the political game, civil society groups must be legal, formalized associations recognized by the state. Two days later, CRAS members held a general assembly to pass a memorandum on the political situation in Zinder. About 50 people attended the meeting, with Sadat and other board members giving radio interviews afterwards. In one of these interviews, a *Shukurah* reporter asked Sadat if CRAS was already showing fractures, claiming that he had received information that some committee members were displeased by the decision-making process. Sadat sharply rejected the suggestion. Off-air, immediately after the interview, he complained about the question, asking who had told the reporter that. By that time, however, gossip had already started in Zinder that CRAS was becoming increasingly personalized and thus losing legitimacy amongst its members and followers, especially those who were less experienced in civil society activities, and who felt neither heard nor represented by the committee, nor saw any means of profiting from it.

The trial of Dan Dubai: An emerging political crisis

Ten days after the second act in the political drama that was the showdown at the inauguration, politics in Niger turned to the third act, namely "the crisis" following Dan Dubai's trial. An important element in the emergence of this crisis was the chain of time- and place-specific events that translated heterogeneous groups, people and technologies into urban riots. I will now explain and analyze the events chronologically, thereby illustrating how they built off and related to one another.

On December 5, the day before the trial, text messages calling on the public to attend the court case at the Zinder Tribunal were circulated. While sitting with members of a motor-taxi drivers' union at a *fada* drinking tea and discussing the protests around the oil refinery's opening, the union secretary general told me that many of the *kabou kabou* supported Dan Dubai's MPPAD. The MPPAD had opened the *kabou kabou's* eyes, he said, by showing how the government would pocket the profits from the exorbitant fuel price. Selecting the calculator function on his mobile phone, the secretary general calculated the refineries turnover per day by converting an oil price of 144 USD/barrel to FCFA, and multiplying that by the oil refinery's capacity of 20,000 barrels/day to come to a total of about 1.7 billion FFCA/day (2.6 million Euro/day). With this "profit" (turnover) per day, as he said, there could be no valid reason for the government not to fix a lower fuel price. When I asked him whether he had heard about the court case the next day, he replied "of course" and added "everyone" would be there. He explained that militant youth followers of Dan Dubai's *comités de défense* – many of which were *kabou kabou* – had (been) organized through text messages indicating the date, time, and place to meet. That evening, I also received the following message:

> DEMOCRACY OR DICTATORSHIP – THE MAN OF THE PEOPLE WILL BE JUDGED TOMORROW TUESDAY 6 DECEMBER AT 9 O'CLOCK. COME TO ATTEND THE TRIAL OF A MAN UNJUSTLY ARRESTED BY THE COWARDS IN POWER. THE ADVOCATE OF THE POOR, ELHADJI DAN DUBAI RAISED TO THE LIEUTENANT GENERAL OF THE OPPRESSED. RENDEZVOUS NOT TO MISS – CIRCULATE THE SMS. (SMS sent on 5 December 2011, translated from French).

Following the messages' call, over 200 youths (mostly young men) had gathered in front of the court on the day of the trial. A political supporter of Dan Dubai approached me as I stood in the crowd, proudly telling me that they had mobilized the *kabou kabou*, students, and local youth to attend. He told me that he had visited Dan Dubai in prison the day before to inform him about the mobilization and his support, which Dan Dubai was grateful for. Moreover, he claimed that the arrest was a serious mistake by the authorities because now, like Nelson Mandela, Dan Dubai would become president after years of imprisonment. Referring to Gandhi, Martin Luther-King and Krishnamurti, the supporter claimed to favor non-violence, saying that "the people of Niger would stand up like those in the Arab Spring and overthrow Issoufou's regime". His claims of mobilization and support for Dan Dubai were however exaggerated: many of the youth at the courthouse were not militant supporters of the MPPAD (though they may have harbored sympathies for Dan Dubai). Rather, a number of youths, many carrying their exercise books, were there to support a private school boy facing trial that morning for assaulting a teacher. Nevertheless, many of these youths would also become involved in the violent clashes with police afterwards. It was therefore coincidence that heterogeneous and formerly disconnected elements were attached in the time- and place-specific event of the court case and emerged together to form a contentious assemblage: these protestors were not a single unit, having neither a collective identity, nor necessarily shared interests.

As the courtroom was already crowded, many youths were refused entry by security guards brandishing batons. The youths gathered in front of the court. As the trial started, Dan Dubai's supporters became louder, the noise interrupting proceedings, and forcing his lawyer to go outside several times to calm them. In the meantime, two police vans had arrived, each carrying about 10 members of a rapid deployment force. They began dispersing the crowd onto the streets, where *kabou kabou* then started to perform stunts on their motorbikes. Coincidentally, at the same time, the governor of Zinder was returning from an AIDS conference outside Zinder. When his cavalcade passed in front of the court, youths threw stones at it; and when more police arrived, the youths threw stones at them. The police immediately retaliated by firing tear gas into the crowd.

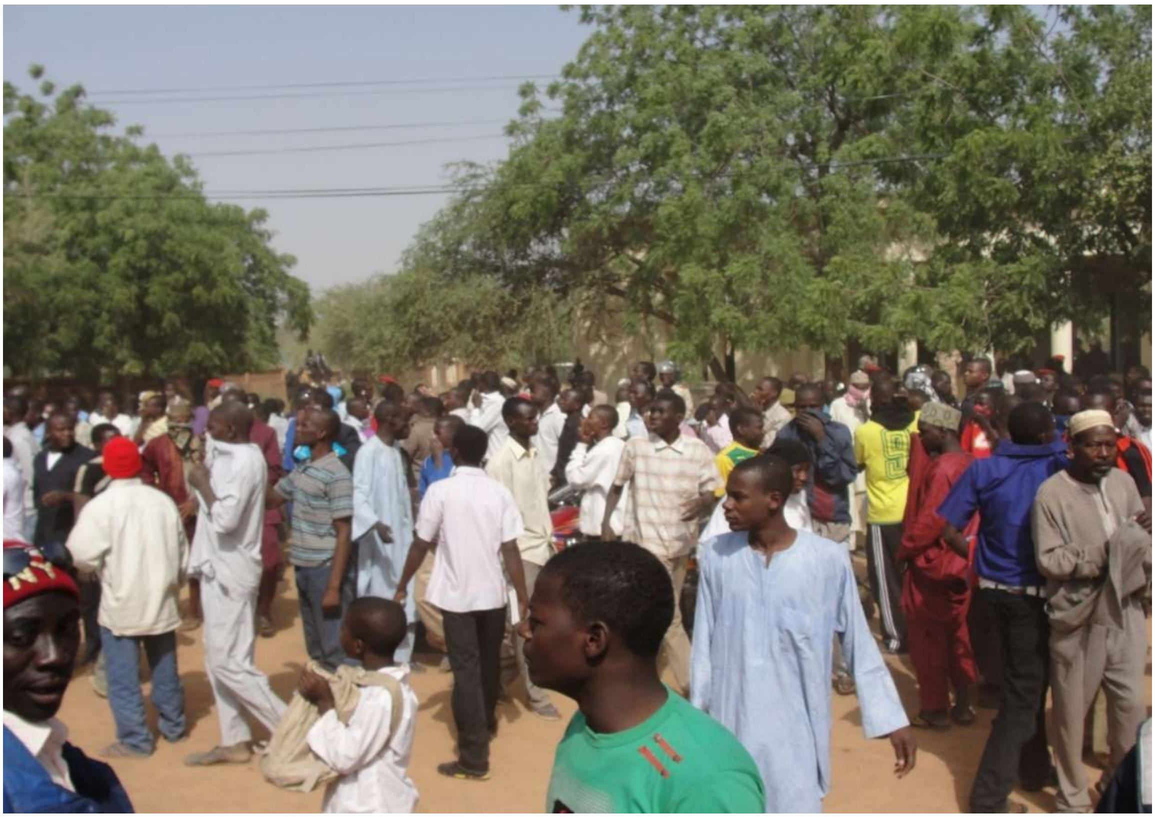

Figure 7: Inside the courtyard with only a part of the crowd. By this stage, the police and youth had started fighting in the streets. Photo: Jannik Schritt

Finding myself in the middle of the crowd, with tear gas canisters flying over my head from one side and stones from the other, was a terrifying experience. Knowing how it can affect an adrenaline rush from my experiences of police violence in Germany, this situation in which I saw myself first and foremost as an academic observer affected me differently: I became, quite simply, paralyzed. After several seconds which felt like an eternity, and unsure of what to do, I finally put up my hands and walked toward the police, who let me pass back into the courtyard which they had just driven us out of.

Shortly after the trial commenced, I was able to take the place of a CRAS member inside the courtroom. I listened to the allegations about several statements Dan Dubai had made in radio debates, in the MPPAD's media release, and even statements he had made during the Tandja regime. When Tandja had announced that Niger would soon become a new oil state, Dan Dubai had claimed that Issoufou had said that "everything is false, there is no drop of oil, there is only water". This claim against Issoufou took center stage. The prosecution also referred to statements Dan Dubai had made during *Tazartché*, who admitted that Tandja had asked him to host a glamorous reception at the oil refinery foundation stone ceremony. Dan Dubai claimed that he agreed on the condition that Bakin Birgi, the area of the oil refinery, was not to be destroyed by waste and water pollution. He then referred to Niger as a "democracy governed by the rule of law". His acquittal was greeted with rapturous applause inside and outside the courthouse. Afterwards, his lawyer gave interviews to private radio stations, and Dan Dubai released a press statement honoring the integrity of the judiciary.

Throughout the trial, I was relieved to have found a safe place inside the courtroom, with the police continuing to attack the youth outside. One school student hit by a tear gas canister died later that afternoon in Zinder hospital, and several others were injured. Another message immediately spread the news and continued to call on the population to resist.

> New information from Zinder. This Tuesday, 6 December, the man of people Elhadji Dan Dubai was declared innocent by the fair and honorable Nigerien justice. What a shame for the dictators in power! The same day, the national police intentionally hurt innocent school students at C.E.S Birni in their own class. There was 1 death and lots of severe cases of injuries. Is it just? Then stand up to against the police's evil acts that allow them to kill humanity. You have the right to send this SMS to others. It is freedom of expression! The burial of this poor pupil already took place this evening at about 6 o'clock at the Muslim cemetery Birni. Pray God will grant clemency to martyrs. (SMS sent on 6 December 2011, translated from French)

That evening, Dan Dubai was again arrested. This time he was taken directly to Niamey to face charges of inciting social unrest. In response, the *Union des Scolaires Nigériens* (USN) ordered all school and university students to demonstrate against the loss of their comrade the next day. Such an order was highly effective, as school pupils gathered after the break for a general assembly, and were expected to march collectively, creating powerful social pressure on the pupils to follow the USN order.

On the morning of the following day, December 7, pupils, students and other youth blocked the arteries of urban Zinder life – building and burning barricades of tires at the squares, intersections, and main roads. They marched towards the criminal investigation department. As one of the participating youth would proudly say to me later, their aims were to burn down the police station and to kill policemen. When they did attack the commissariat with stones, however, a police officer in front of the station fired three shots into the crowd, killing an uninvolved woman passing-by. During and shortly after the protests, short messages continued coming through, some spreading misinformation to add fuel to the fire.

> Late-breaking news, more than 100 police and army vehicles are on their way to Zinder. They are nearing Konni [*474 km west of Zinder on the road from Niamey*] and are coming to massacre the Zinderois. Circulate the sms. (SMS sent on 7 December 2011, translated from French)
>
> What will be the reaction of the Zinderois towards the killing forces that are on their way to Zinder. (SMS sent on 7 December 2011, translated from French)
>
> There is a police inspector called ANMANI who said this morning at the bus station in front of 2 policemen that 'even if you shoot at 100 Zinderois nothing will happen'. Be careful. Circulate the message. (SMS sent on 7 December 2011, translated from French)

I was at an emergency CRAS meeting when a member there first received one of the messages. Reading the message appeared to evoke mixed emotions in him, which I interpreted as both shock and delight. First expressing surprise by saying "oh" and so on, he then passed the phone to his peers, who reacted with similar amazement and almost exultant laughter. These reactions are significant because they make explicit that apart from being political, these messages also transport emotions aiming to affect. Most interestingly, the messages also harked back to a collective regional identity – of being *Zinderois* – to arouse emotions of historical political marginalization and rebellion. Importantly, this emphasis on shared identity and persecution, and the atmosphere of violence, appears to have played an important bodily/emotional role in the transformation of the pupils, students and youth into a rioting mob. As I have shown, affected by the violence and the atmosphere, the crowd turned into a youth mob that rioted in the streets, destroyed traffic lights and burnt down the police station at the main market.

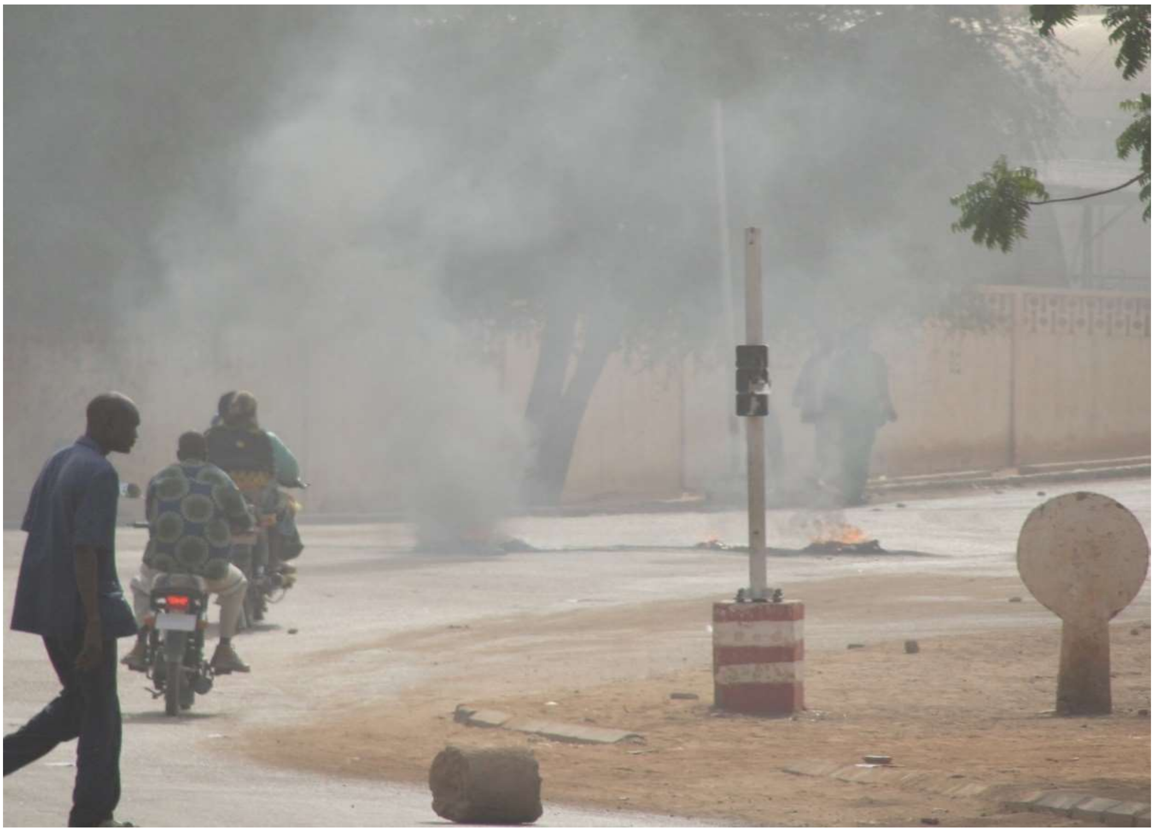

Figure 8: Destroyed traffic lights and burning tires at a major junction in Zinder. Photo: Jannik Schritt

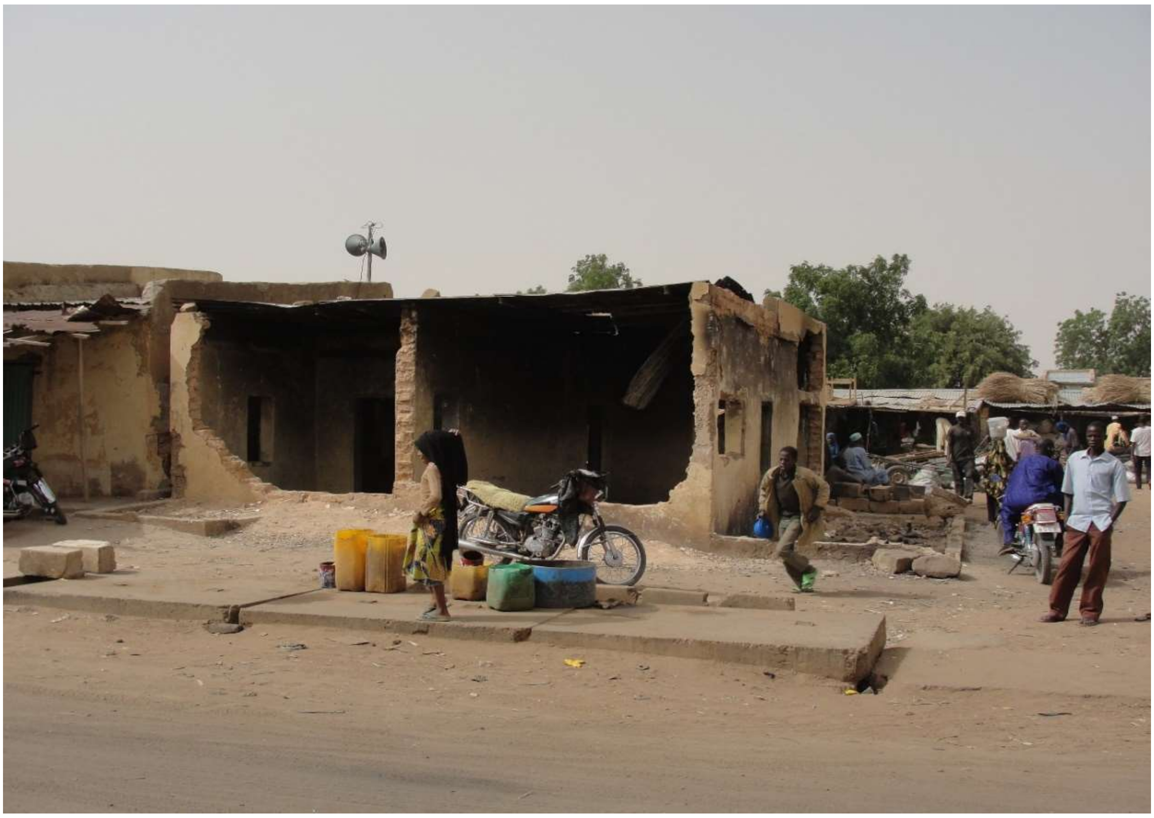

Figure 9: Burned-down police station at the main market. Photo: Jannik Schritt

That evening the regional and municipal council, the *Comité de Gestion Scolaire* (COGES), the *Conseil des Sages,* the *Syndicat National des Enseignants du Niger* (SNEN) teachers' union, and the *Association Nationale des Parents d'Élèves* (ANPE) parents' association held an emergency meeting at the city hall. Afterwards, they released a joint press statement noting that two people had been killed in the protests, four had been seriously injured, and 21 more people taken for emergency medical treatment. They condemned the police violence, saying it was an elementary violation of order which deprived students the right of personal freedom and protest, and an attempt to humiliate peaceful citizens. As the representative of the incumbent regime in Zinder, they held the governor responsible for events and demanded not only an independent investigation into the violence, but also his immediate resignation.

Similarly, CRAS members as well as student representatives held the governor responsible for the violence and demanded his immediate resignation. Like USN representatives, CRAS president Sadat compared the protests to those of 9 February 1990 which had paved the way for the transition to democracy. Blaming the political authorities, Sadat underlined that the *Zinderois* were ready to die for justice. The USN said the police violence was a barbaric and unprofessional act, and demanded that justice be done. Clearly affected by the events, private radio shows were charged with emotion that evening, with announcers and callers yelling and shrieking. This intensity was matched in words, with some even accusing the governor of having personally killed the two victims. Although some USN members wanted to continue the demonstrations, in light of the tragic events, the union decided not to demonstrate the following day, instead suspending school for three days. The governor Elhadji Oumarou Seydou Issaka also made a press statement. Also affected by the violence, he shrieked that he had not given the order to shoot, and that the policeman who had fired the deadly shots had been arrested. Claiming that the cause of the violent riots was an affair between the youth and the police, and was therefore not related to the (regional) government, he said investigations had already begun in Niamey.

That same evening, former civil society leader and Minister of Justice Marou Amadou made a press statement in Niamey about the protests. He called on the population and the authorities in Zinder to restore calm and order, and to respect the rules of democracy. After expressing his sympathy for the families of the victims, he said that those responsible would be held accountable, that the police chief had already been stood down, and that the two police officers accused of the shootings had been arrested.

Again that evening, more messages were sent to coordinate riots planned for the following day. In these short messages, places in Zinder were renamed after places made famous by the Arab Spring and other events such as the genocide in Rwanda (*Hôtel de Mille Collines*).[75]

> Rendezvous at Tahrir Square tomorrow in the center of the city of Mille Collines DAMAGARAM. Combatants from all sides. Merchants be careful. (SMS sent on 7 December 2011, translated from French)
>
> A big march will take place in all regions on Thursday 8 December. Teachers, students and parents of pupils mobilize to rescue your school. Pass the message on to all students. (SMS sent on 7 December 2011, translated from French)
>
> A massive violent march has been organized for the whole Zinderois crowd (pupils, students, teachers, motor-taxi drivers, merchants, salesmen, workers…) to reclaim justice for the death of two pupils targeted and killed by tear gas canisters, to reclaim justice for an innocent girl killed by a bullet from the barbaric, criminal and murderous police. Dear brothers and sisters, come to assist this big march tomorrow at 9 am. Meeting point roundabout Total. Pass the info to the whole Zinderois population to allow them mobilize and arm themselves (arrows, sling shots…). Please circulate the message. (SMS sent on 7 December 2011, translated from French)

Having placed tires and fuel at strategically important places like junctions and crossroads in the city center during the night, youth gangs *(palais)* spearheaded the protests on the morning of December 8. Given the events of the previous days, the police were said to have been instructed by the mayor of Zinder not to march out and to only secure strategically important points like the central police department and the governorate. The youth were thus unchallenged. Taking a motorbike through the city, I observed the protests from a relative distance. The gangs built and set alight street barricades of tires and fuel, destroyed traffic lights, and looted and burned down an ECOBANK branch at the Total roundabout. The bank was literally emptied, with the people taking everything they could carry – money, computers, tables, chairs, even paper. Only when the military was deployed around noon was the city finally brought under control. In contrast to the police, which is detested due to everyday harassment and petty corruption, the military is respected and feared as patriots and highly trained combatants. After the area had been calmed, I took another ride through the city to take photographs and see and feel the damage for myself.

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[75] Literally thousands of large pieces of rock are spread throughout Zinder city.

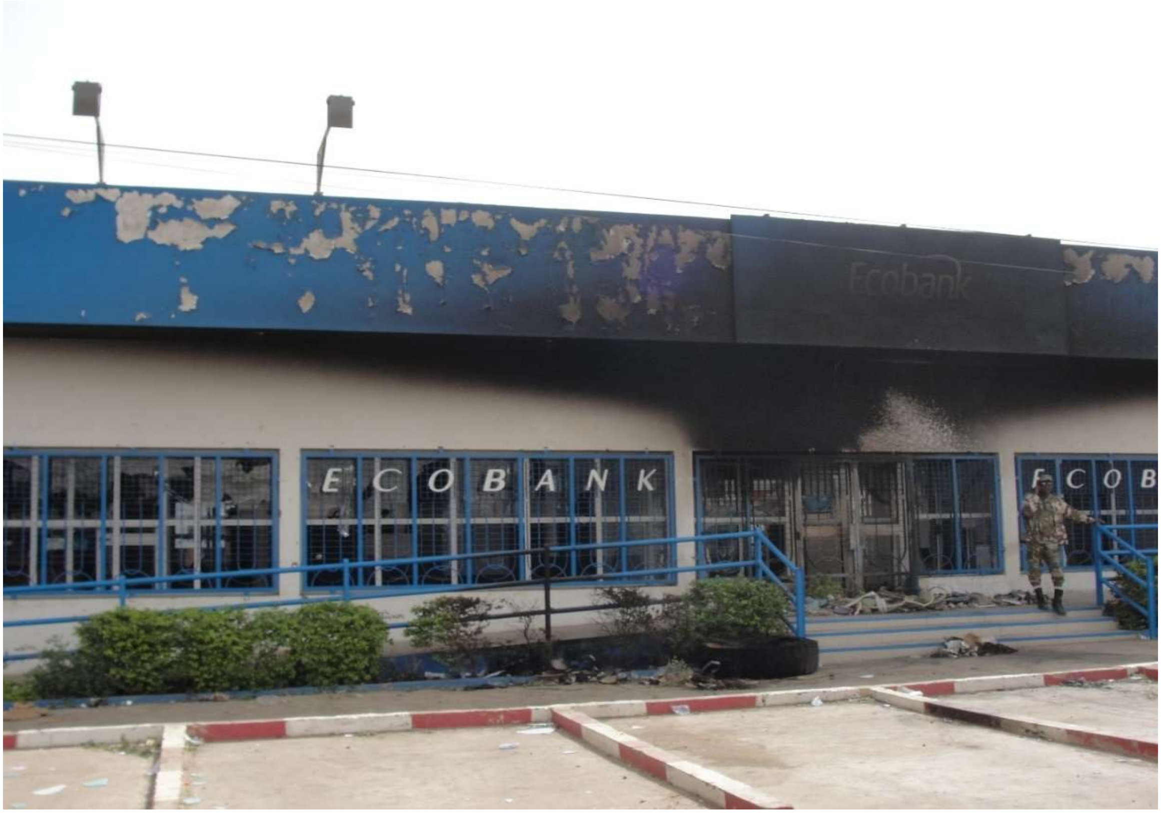

Figure 10: Burned-down ECOBANK at the Total roundabout in Zinder. Taken on the afternoon of December 8, after the military had been deployed to secure the city. Photo: Jannik Schritt

Some of my friends and informants suspected that the national government's political opponents – especially Mahamane Ousmane's CDS-Rahama and Dan Dubai's MPPAD – were behind the riots, having reputedly hired well-known criminals and *palais* leaders to create havoc. According to this theory, the goal was to incite a new military coup that would again bring regime change. While the political opposition indeed funded and organized these protests to some extent, this mobilization alone cannot explain their emergence. As my description of the protests made clear, by experiencing police violence and the death of uninvolved bystanders, smaller and disconnected protests culminated in larger urban riots, as heterogeneous elements were affected into mass action in a concatenation of time- and place-specific events. We saw how political opponents, civil society activists, school pupils, students and *kabou kabou* all attended the trial of Dan Dubai which coincided not only with the trial of a school pupil, but also with the governor passing by. Only after the crowd had attacked the governor, and the subsequent arrival of more police to disperse them, was a school pupil killed. The killing led to more student protests, which then caused the death of a passing woman. After the violence of December 7, the police were ordered to avoid confrontation, allowing youth gangs to riot in the streets uncontested, and to loot a bank. In this sense, there was no single factor that caused the chaos in Zinder, but rather the culmination of mobilization, affect and coincidence.

Moreover, the production of disorder in Zinder shows that aside from radio, the mobile phone has also become an important instrument in political agitation, one which has changed the nature of the political game in Zinder. Whereas social media like *facebook* did not play a significant role in organizing the protests, as internet access in Niger was still too limited for widespread usage at the time, mobile phones took center stage. In particular, the anonymity of texting via unregistered SIM cards allowed for new forms of organizing, mobilizing, and leading masses. Whereas access to the radio is restricted and controlled by journalists and financial flows, texting offers a more unrestricted and spontaneous form of dissemination. However, instead of celebrating texting for offering a new form of democratic activism, as some academics, journalists and activists may do, it seems that the same applies for mobile phones as for radio: it is not at all clear whether and which social and political actors will be able to translate the new media into their political programs. I turn to that again in the next chapter.

5.5. Crude Conciliation: Redressive politics and the restoration of peace

After Dan Dubai's trial had become a political crisis, the final phase of the political drama was characterized by the government's deployment of "mechanisms of redress" that eventually led to the "restoration of peace".

As a response to the riots, the government shut down the entire SMS network in Zinder until December 11. It also used the state television channel ORTN to announce a series of initial measures, including the dismissal of executive police officers and the convening of a commission to identify and prosecute the masterminds of the riots. On the evening of December 8, after the military had restored order, the prime minister arrived in Zinder to meet the sultan, the governor, student representatives, the teachers' association, the parents' association, and religious authorities. After the meeting at the sultanate, a joint statement appealing for calm was released. To ensure the peace, the military also maintained patrols of the city overnight and throughout the following day.

Following the appeal, the situation in Zinder remained calm but tense. After a dispute within the USN about how to divide their share, it soon became public that the prime minister had distributed money at the meeting. USN members who had not received any of the money reported that the religious authorities and the parent and teacher associations had each received one million FCFA (1,524 Euro), while the USN had received 300,000 FCFA (457 Euro). Despite this, there was no public criticism of "the fact" that the government had bought off the different representatives to subdue the tensions. When one member wanted to release a press statement at a private radio station about the conflict within the USN, the moderator denied him access, arguing that it was not of public interest.

Having kept silent and avoiding the public political game in the run-up to the inauguration, the religious authorities of Zinder would first become vocal after the prime minister's visit, appealing to the population for calm. In the name of the entire population, they forgave the youth gangs, calling it a one-off event, an accident, stressing that the uproar was over, and demanding that the population be patient so that everyone might enjoy their share of the oil benefits. A narrative, of course, that blended well with the government's, that the population wait for the oil to turn into a blessing.

Several key actors had not been included in the meeting, and had thus missed out on payments. These included members of CRAS and of the *palais*, who both continued to push for further protests. Having neither been granted an audience with the president at the refinery's inauguration, nor been appointed to the regional government committee, nor invited to the meeting, CRAS members were extremely disappointed. In the days following the pacification of Zinder, a CRAS member approached me to ask for help to find an international donor, as they felt the need to make the committee a more significant civil society player. Until then, CRAS had had to operate on small, sporadic contributions from its members to finance its activities. Although I had also made contributions as a member, I agreed to help search for an international donor. I did this for several reasons. Firstly, as a white middle-class researcher from Germany, to become an acknowledged member of the committee I was expected to contribute more than other members – something that I was able but not especially willing to do. Secondly, I saw immense research value in observing and being directly involved in the negotiations around potential donor funding, particularly as an opportunity to better understand the workings of civil society in Niger.

The following day, I wrote emails to political and social foundations in Germany, one of which requested CRAS submit a proposal specifying the planned activities and the money required for start-up funding. In early January, I called the member to discuss the possibility for funding. We made an appointment to talk prior to a regular meeting on 3 January 2012. When I arrived, several other members were already present. He then told me he did not want me to talk then, as he said that the other members were not to be trusted. After the meeting, we met together with one of his closest colleagues in CRAS, who was also from the same sub-organization. Here, they repeated the claim that there were "spies" within

CRAS, as it was rumored that the governor was always up-to-date on the organization's activities, a problem they did not have within their own organization. Therefore, they suggested we meet at a bar later. Here, I insisted that we make the plan transparent within CRAS, to which they finally agreed. At the next meeting, two days later, I presented the aims and the funding possibilities of the donor institution. I insisted on a transparent course of action in the form of a collective vision of CRAS before a written proposal could be submitted.

The next day, one of the two members I had met beforehand privately called to meet me so that we could write the proposal together. When I arrived, only the two CRAS members were present, as was a man who I had never met before, the president of an NGO whose organization I had never heard of. The meeting was about how to write the proposal and what CRAS wanted to ask for. With his experience writing funding proposals, the NGO president was there to help guide the process. I was there to once again outline the donor's funding guidelines, especially in the form of so-called start-up funding. The discussion soon centered on what CRAS wanted and needed to organize. Their demands centered almost exclusively on materials, including two motorbikes, as well as office equipment (desks, office chairs, computers, laptops, printers, cameras, and electricity converters), tables and chairs, an internet connection, and rent, as well as, on my suggestion, funding for publicity, especially radio debates. In total, they applied for 4,560,000 FCFA (6,952 Euro) in funding. It soon became apparent that the whole application process was neither about a common vision for CRAS, nor a knowledge transfer among its members, but rather the appropriation of the funding opportunity by a small inner group. I translated their original proposal into German without adapting the contents and demands to the logic and guidelines of the donors, knowing that the proposal was most likely to fail. Indeed, the proposal was rejected some weeks later, and the opportunity to find an international sponsor was lost.

Without international donor funding, CRAS remained introverted throughout the following months, and continued to sharply criticize the government. In doing so, they were attempting to mount pressure on the government in the buildup to a mass demonstration they had set for March 2012. Shortly before the demonstration was to take place, two of the committee's most influential members said they had received information that opposition politicians were planning to hijack the demonstration by distributing tires and fuel to encourage youth gangs to turn them into violent riots. After CRAS decided to cancel the demonstration, another member claimed to have proof that those who had pushed for the cancellation of the demonstration – the same members who had wanted me to help find an international donor – had been paid-off by a wealthy businessman on behalf of the governor. Debate among CRAS members following the accusations did not focus on "the fact" that their comrades had accepted bribes from state officials, but rather, that the accused had not shared the money with the other members. One committee member, for example, expressed his disappointment that the accused lacked solidarity, and referred to their former collective support for *Tazartché*. He said he had always shared contributions from the Tandja government equally among the other group members, and demanded that other CRAS leaders did the same. CRAS stopped functioning after the dispute.

The *palais* leaders were the second important group which was not invited by the sultan to meet the prime minister, and did not feel represented by the USN. Not only were youth excluded from representation at the meeting, they were (and are) also effectively locked out of public opinion making on radio, as they lack formal political recognition and the financial means to buy radio programs. As such, youth voices on radio are limited to talk-back shows. In the first emission of *planète reggae* after the riots, youth callers blamed the unrest on the political authorities and their bad governance. Others called for violence and even threatened the political authorities, saying that they would "make *Boko Haram*", a call with important connotations. As I have already shown, youth violence has become an increasingly important public political concern. This violence is fueled not only by cooptation through wealthier, more powerful actors, but also by Nigerien youth's increasing dissatisfaction with both the political establishment (Olivier de Sardan 2016), and also with their own position and role in society (Souley 2012; Honwana 2013). In response to the dissatisfaction and threats of violence expressed on *planète reggae*, a wealthy Zinder businessman (who was part of the governmental clientelist network) attempted to coopt the moderator. To do this, he approached a CRAS member (a close friend of the moderator) asking him to pass on the message to stop broadcasting youth statements. The member of the committee said he took the money (20,000 FCFA, 30 Euro), but did not pass on the message to the moderator, because he too was a youth leader who felt that youth deserved a voice. Thus, *planète reggae* continued to broadcast.

Recurrent water shortages in Zinder, especially during the hot dry season from March to May, became a rallying point for youth protest. Although all city quarters were hit by water shortages, the most populated and poorest city quarters were hit hardest, pushing the price for a 20-litre jerry can of water to 100 FCFA (0.15 Euro). Increasing numbers of school pupils, especially young girls, were unable to attend classes as they were being sent long distances outside the city to look for water, where some claimed to have faced sexual harassment. In response to these cases, on 9 April 2012 youth demonstrated against the shortages. The protestors built street barricades, burned tires and fuel, threw stones at security forces, and tried to burn down the two parastatal companies for electricity and water, the *Société Nigérienne d'Electricité* (NIGELEC) and the *Société d'Exploitation des Eaux du Niger* (SEEN).

Three weeks later, International Workers' Day celebrations in Zinder also turned violent. As usual, May Day was celebrated in front of the national tribune at Zinder's main road. That year however, as the Zinder governor was finishing his speech, youth started throwing stones in the direction of the tribune, where the authority figures were seated. The representatives were forced to flee, with fights breaking out between youth and police. Several people were injured. In an interview published in *Le Damagaram* (the only regional newspaper in Zinder) on 16 May 2012, Sultan Aboubacar Oumarou Sanda stated that the government and SORAZ needed to revisit their fuel price policy to make it affordable for the population, and to make employment opportunities for the youth of Zinder a priority. He also emphasized that they had just started training a number of youth leaders to carry out awareness raising campaigns in the different city quarters to guarantee social peace. The sultan also claimed that the youth demonstration was manipulated by the opposition. In response, the political opposition labelled the sultan an *homme politique,* a man playing the political game for the government instead of representing the interests of the region.

Having been at the forefront of the riots, Zinder youth gained political leverage and became addressees of government policies. On the initiative of local political authorities and the sultan, the *Mouvement de Fada et Palais pour la Promotion des Jeunes* (MFPPJ) was established in May and June 2012. Shortly afterward, the MFPPJ declared their support for the government and President Issoufou, and dissociated themselves from the MPPAD, blaming Dan Dubai for organizing the December demonstrations in a "political anarchist way". When the president came to Zinder a second time for the foundation stone ceremony of the Zinder-Guidimouni road on 15 May 2012, he was joyously received by a huge crowd. While I had already left Zinder at the time, some of my friends and informants told me that the crowd had been even larger than the one for Tandja's 2008 foundation stone/*Tazartché* launch ceremony. My interlocutors told me that Issoufou's visit had been such a major success this time because politicians from the PNDS and businessmen close to the party had gone to great pains to mobilize youth leaders, like those of the MFPPJ, to support the regime. Following Issoufou's visit, however, a conflict within the MFPPJ erupted over the contributions they had received from the government (which aside from monetary contributions, also apparently included a car and free fuel), resulting in a leadership split which left it inoperational.

The course of events illustrates how civil society associations were able to establish themselves as political players in a multiparty system only when they were able to act as significant, potentially destabilizing counter-powers to the government. When such groups emerge, the ruling party coalition attempts to either appease or repress them by employing political maneuvers such as bribery, cooptation, intimidation, or political arrest. As the course of events also shows, the riots endowed the dissenting youth with new instruments of power in the political arena. As in other postcolonial African states, urban youth in Niger have little opportunity for formal employment or economic production. For youth, then, the political order and life more generally is characterized by marginality, irregularity and militancy in and through which they move, navigate or circulate to make ends meet (Vigh 2008; Honwana 2012; Roitman 2005). With over 75 percent of the Nigerien population under 25 years of age, and the potential for violence they bring, youth have become an inescapable force in Nigerien politics. As such, youth have become targets of both government and opposition mobilization politics. In this instance, to avoid further riots or threats to their control, the government addressed the youth by creating formal structured groups which they could negotiate with and govern more easily.

As in the case of big politics and power struggles at the national level (chapter 4), this case study also demonstrates that the coming of oil does not simply determine the constellations of power and the outcomes of political confrontations on a local political arena. Rather, oil flows into an already well-established political arena, giving the existing political games a new, discernible stimulus. Through participant observation in the protest cycle, I was also able to illuminate several dimensions important in understanding how oil became political (see introduction). These dimensions could be highlighted by drawing on established social movement theories, such as mobilizing strategies, collective action frames, financial incentives, collective identities, and emotions and affect.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to do two things: firstly, to provide a fresh, empirical look at the micro-level workings of politics in oil-age Niger, and in doing so, it reveals important aspects in the emergence of an African oil state, aspects often overlooked by proponents of the resource curse thesis; and secondly, to look at how political mobilization, affect and a coincidental chain of events made the inauguration, the refinery and indeed oil itself, political.

Firstly, through participant observation over time, I have shown that oil was not the root cause of the disorder around the oil refinery's 2011 inauguration. Rather, the ceremony became the stage on which conflicts related to the politics of *Tazartché* were played out. When oil came to Niger, it was quickly appropriated by various strategic groups who put it to use in the political games they had already been playing. We saw, for example, how Dan Dubai and the civil society associations which had supported *Tazartché* were left empty handed after the regime changed from Tandja to Djibo and then to Issoufou. These actors tried to use the inauguration as a public stage to build new alliances, gain negotiating power, find recognition as an interest group, and thus to reengage in the political game. Or, as in the case of urban youth, oil and later water and a national holiday offered a stage to gain public and political presence through the performance of violence, and therefore to require cooptation into the political projects of more powerful players.

With political liberalization and the emergence of a multiparty system in Niger in the early 1990s, the rules of the game were transformed from authoritarian silence to a formally defined system to allow for political competition and civil society activism. It is within this political context that oil production in Niger started. Here, before the first barrel had even been extracted, oil was being politically exploited by powerful strategic groups in the speech acts of naming, blaming and claiming. I have shown how these actors used oil in political discourse to question the legitimacy of political opponents and to formulate political claims. In contrast, women, farmers and the subaltern more generally were effectively locked out of the political game. Subaltern youth were able to gain a small foothold, but only through the performance of violence and through new media formats with limited barriers to entry like talk-back radio, and through avenues outside the official news media – texting, rumor and gossip.

Using the concept of signification to study the political arena in oil-age Niger, I have extended the notion of the resource curse from an explanatory model to a model of political rhetoric. In doing so, the case study illustrates how various players in Niger use the resource curse narrative itself to become an instrument of discursive power. This again illustrates that the production of meanings of oil is not of secondary importance to its exploitation for financial gain. In politically signifying Niger's oil, actors name stakes, create blames, make claims and thereby establish lines of conflict. Seeking to frame and control oil's meanings is thus an important goal in actors' public political games. Indeed, through their significations of oil, actors become aligned with one or another strategic group, and thereby establish its source of power. Oil money might be invested into the organization of signifying practices and the stages and technologies needed for their dissemination but it was not the root cause of the protests. In the Nigerien case, these include pro-*Tazartché* demonstrations, television shows and radio broadcasts on a macro-political level, or protests, rioting, text messages or radio programs at Zinder's micro-political level. Looking at oil's political workings thus means looking at cyclical processes of conversions: oil money is used to pay for signifying practices, and the meanings thereby produce orders and disorders that define various actors' political, and consequently monetary, power.

As such, oil not only provides various political players with financial means or potential spoils, but also endows actors with a symbolic field, a repertoire of meanings within and through which the struggle for political participation or domination can be fought. By appropriating fields of oil as fields of meanings, political players acquire a new language through which they can appeal to supporters, attack opponents, make claims, and legitimize a particular course of action. Oil thus appears as an idiom within which Niger's current political and social processes are framed. Such a proposition undermines the simple causality and inherent determinism of the resource curse model, because oil can be used not only to exacerbate but also to smooth over conflicts played out in the political game.

This case also vividly demonstrates that to make predictions about the socio-political effects of oil, context is essential: the pre-existing political conflicts in which oil production emerges and in which it is incorporated have to be thoroughly examined in each, individual case. As long as it is not looted as a material resource, oil is primarily at the disposal of the incumbent government in a number of rent forms: taxes, royalty payments, revenue from sales on the world market, contract signing bonuses, sales of refined products, and so on.[76] The government in power may use the revenue to buy political loyalty and thus stabilize the regime. As an ideological resource, oil is essentially at the disposal of all political actors, depending on the degree of the freedoms of speech, press and associational life in the country, and access to the public. In a semi-presidential multiparty system and electoral democracy like Niger, the significations of oil thus become an important instrument of power, adopted by political actors both to legitimize and delegitimize positions within existing power structures. Oil may be a curse, but it is not inevitably so – oil is not simply a "one-way street". Rather, oil should be seen as a catalyst which typically accelerates, but may also quell, pre-existing tensions and dynamics. Research on oil-induced socio-political dynamics should therefore pursue a symmetrical analysis of both the material and the ideological aspects of oil production, considering both equally, and taking their mutual translation processes into account.

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[76] On numerous occasions, pipelines in Nigeria have been cut open to extract the oil and to sell it on the black market.

Secondly, in looking at how political mobilization, affect and a coincidental chain of events made the inauguration political, my analysis of the protests shows the heterogeneity of contentious politics in its various manifestations and dynamics. The riots at Dan Dubai's trial and in the following days took place in the context of a particular contentious assemblage of elements which included political competition and civil society activism after democratization, the historical political and social marginalization of eastern Niger, Issoufou's election and the subsequent transformation of Zinder into the opposition stronghold, increasing youth violence, and new ordering technologies such as mobile phones and commercial radio. Moreover, an affective dimension, one which bodily and emotionally attaches smaller, disconnected parts through a chain of time- and place-specific events into larger movements, is also inherent in contentious politics.

Of course, the social movement theories discussed at the start of this chapter do shed light on interesting aspects of contentious politics in Niger. The situation of youth and the phenomenon of youth violence is most often explained by strain and deprivation models. These models point to the breakdown of a society in which youth can no longer perform or attain the roles defined as desirable or appropriate by society; a social condition that has, for example, been widely captured with the concept of "waithood" (Honwana 2012). However, while such a perspective can explain forms of everyday violence well, it faces difficulties when looking at mobilization patterns. In addition, from a (Neo-)Marxist perspective, neoliberalism (which materialized in the Global South particularly through the introduction of the SAP) is said to have produced a new class – the precariat – which is a growing number of people living and working precariously without stable jobs, social protection or protective regulations who produce new instabilities in society because they are increasingly frustrated, dangerous, and have no voice in the public sphere (Standing 2011). However, as the analysis of protests movements in Niger has shown, the youth did not only form and mobilize themselves against the country's political and economic class. Rather, they were first of all organized and coordinated by exactly the same class which they are said (from a Marxist perspective) to be mobilizing themselves against. I turn to these structural factors again in more detail in the next chapter.

The empirical findings could partly be explained by the resource mobilization school that emphasizes the entrepreneurial character of movement leaders – opposition politicians, businessmen or civil society activists – pursuing personal interest and gain, especially through inclusion into networks of redistribution. This school of thought could be complemented by a Weberian perspective that nicely illustrates the centrality of authority and legitimacy for movement leaders' mobilization success, whose cooptation left civil society and youth associations inoperational and thus tamed protest, at least for a time. Nevertheless, these theories are blind to the contextual factors – political, social and cultural – that made the protests possible in the first place. Such a perspective is provided by political process theory which is able to show that the introduction of a multiparty political system in the 1990s fundamentally changed the game by allowing political competition and rivalry, civil society activism, and media pluralism (which I turn to again in the next chapter). However, this approach loses sight of the micro-level dynamics around the oil refinery's inauguration. Here, a framing approach allows us to see the role texting and radio releases and debates played in establishing collective action frames and in successfully mobilizing support. In this framing process, collective identities equally played a role, especially in terms of ethnic and regional belonging. In contrast to "new social movement theories" that point us to newly emerging identities that result from the historical transformations of global capitalism into the fluid categories of postmodernity, the identities at play here were rather related to the historical political marginalization that came with French colonialism and persisted until democratization in the early 1990s, if not beyond. The contentious politics approach comes closest to explaining the dynamics of contention in the chain of time- and place-specific events that brought formerly disconnected actors together at Dan Dubai's court case, 10 days after the inauguration ceremony. Finally, my empirical findings also show the role of affect in emotionally and bodily drawing together heterogeneous parts into collective action, as emphasized by the passionate politics approach.

In other words, these established social movement theories, developed mainly in the Global North, also deliver explanatory force to protest movements in the Global South (Engels and

Müller 2015), as this case study in Niger illustrates. However, these theories seem to be neither sufficiently holistic to explain protests in their diverse manifestations and dimensions, nor do they account for the protests in this case study, which cannot be characterized as the actions of a collective with a shared ideology, nor a feeling of solidarity, nor even a common interest. As these theories are inadequate to explain the empirical evidence in this case study, I have proposed the concept of contentious assemblages. From this perspective, protest movements are temporary and spatial constellations of heterogeneous elements that emerge and come together at specific times and specific places through specific sets of trans-local and affective forces, before dispersing once again. Such a focus, I believe, is better suited to grasp the heterogeneity, contingency, and relational processuality of protest movements.

Taken together, to understand how the oil refinery's inauguration turned political and spurred the production of disorder, the notion of contentious assemblages is essential in pointing to mobilization, matter, affect, opportunity structures, dynamics of state-society interactions and coincidence. In other words, this chapter showed the importance of a *Realpolitik* approach to complement a *Dingpolitik* approach in the analytical framework of "making oil political" (see introduction).

6. Crude Dis/order: Oil, power and politics in Niger

Although the government did manage to restore peace after the December 8 riots through the cooptation and bribery of potential rivals in Zinder, this peace would prove short-lived. As I have described in the previous chapter, violent youth demonstrations reoccurred only four months later, first against water shortages, and then on International Workers Day. In September that year, further violence erupted after Friday prayers, when hundreds of youth gathered to protest against the anti-Islamic movie "Innocence of Muslims". In 2015, even larger religiously framed protests took place "against Charlie Hebdo" (for more on these protests see Schritt (2015b), Mueller (2016) and Olivier de Sardan (2015)).

In this chapter, I analyze the dis/order of oil-age Niger as I observed it through the political drama around the refinery's inauguration and the violent protests that followed it. With the notion of "crude dis/order", I describe the socio-political configuration of Niger as it became visible in the moment of the country entering the oil-age. In particular, I illustrate the various dimensions, mechanisms and logics of Nigerien politics and society that the different phases of the political drama and the recurrent patterns of protest helped me to identify. From the outset, empirical observation made it clear that this was not simply random violence, but rather carefully orchestrated and executed urban riots, in which mainly disaffected male youth were mobilized through social media – especially text messages.

To better understand these recurrent patterns of violence, I identify and detail the most significant heterogeneous elements in Niger's socio-political configuration. Following the idea that the context of the political situation lies within the situation itself, I look at those elements that became particularly visible during the protest cycles in forming the assemblage of state-society relations. In other words, applying the methodological framework of the extended case method, in this chapter I extend out from the events described previously to look at the broader context of Nigerien politics and society, and to highlight the structural factors or socio-political preconditions which made the protests possible and political in the first place (see introduction on "making oil political"). Based on the findings presented up to now, I holistically describe the socio-political configuration in the moment of Niger entering oil-age. In the following two chapters, I then look at how oil production became associated with this constellation to form what I call a "petro-political configuration". Together with the heterogeneity, contingency and relational processuality of the protest movement outlined in the previous chapter, the broader structural factors examined in this chapter form equally important elements of what I term "contentious assemblages" in Niger. Before I turn to look at the socio-political configuration of Niger, I will briefly turn to the conceptual inventory of dis/order (in Africa).

6.1. Socio-political dis/order (in Africa)

In the introduction to their 2007 edited volume "Order and Disorder: Anthropological perspectives", Benda-Beckmann and Pirie (2007a) argue that the concepts of order and disorder need to be reconsidered in anthropological studies after a new emphasis on globalized phenomena has shifted the focus of earlier anthropological studies away from order in small-scale societies to global flows and local appropriations, inequality, domination, and conflict.

As Benda-Beckmann and Pirie (2007a: 12–14) point out, classical paradigms of order in sociological and anthropological theory focus on the role of shared norms in a Durkheimian sense, the legitimation of power in a Weberian sense, and the significance of ritual in a Turnerian sense (see also Roberts 2007). In a sense, the political drama around the inauguration was a classic example of disorderly order, in that these and later protests illustrated patterns of organized violence and political mobilization. Moreover, in line with the historical precursors of collective action theory that I outlined in the previous chapter, we might add a Marxian perspective on order. Such a perspective would see the "mode of production" as the underlying order of society and politics; a perspective made famous in earlier anthropological approaches (Meillassoux 1976; for a review see O'Laughlin 1975). The overlaps between the two theoretical themes, order in this chapter and collective action in the previous, are no coincidence. We might say that the questions of order and collective action are two different perspectives on the same phenomena: one on stability, continuity, and structure (order) and one on change, rupture, and practices (collective action) that may lead to (temporary) disorder.

However, instead of using the concepts of order and disorder in normative ways and seeing them as mutually exclusive, as either displaying order or disorder, I understand order and disorder with Strathern (2005) as mutually constitutive and as being simultaneously created in emerging situations. In this sense, whereas the protests in Niger first seem to expose pure disorder, they reveal both ordering practices that produced the disorder, and a dynamic and historically emerging order in Niger in general. I therefore use the term "dis/order" to highlight that they are inextricably entangled, that they are simply two sides of the same coin.

Building on Strathern's ideas, the chapters in "Order and Disorder" analyze state-society relations to understand the production of dis/order (Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2007b). To do so, they look not only at the role of the state, but also of non-state actors, as well as different actors' perceptions of the production of dis/order (ibid.). In this sense, several contributions focus on how dis/order within the state and dis/order within society act upon one another, how historical narratives, cultural significations and idioms are interwoven into this dis/order, and how dis/ordered state-society relations create the arena in which dis/ordering practices are creatively established by various actors or actor groups (Meeker 2007; Spencer 2007; Just 2007; Roberts 2007). Other chapters focus more on the establishment of dis/order despite or beyond the state, be it through vigilante groups (Grätz 2007), Islamist Salafiyya groups (Turner 2007), nomadic groups (Pirie 2007), or gendered age groups (such as male youth) (Ventsel 2007). These studies show the conditions for the creation of dis/order in particular localities, the different notions of dis/order, and the thin line between acceptable and unacceptable (violent) behavior. Understanding when the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior has been crossed, or a breach of shared norms has occurred, and is consequently addressed by authorities or state institutions to adjust and control these behaviors, is an important aspect of the creation of dis/order. The chapters, like this thesis, all follow a processual approach which focuses on the becoming, emergence, settlement, and disappearance of dis/order, the cycles of a political drama, and the multiple creative ways involved in creating dis/order.

In adding a practice theory perspective to the processual approach, order then becomes seen primarily seen as the active process of normative, legal, political, economic, and epistemic ordering in an attempt to establish rules, regulations, and a predictability of action (Thévenot 1984; Rottenburg and Engel 2010: IV). In the previous chapter, I focused on dis/order by looking at the dis/ordering practices of individuals and collectivities in real-time. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that practices and order mutually determine each other. In contrast to individualist, structural or holistic accounts, with Schatzki (2002) I understand the "site of the social" as a contingent and continually becoming and transforming mesh of practices and orders. With actors' drawing on situational resources and lived rules, through improvisation they break apart and recombine features of the existing order, thereby creating novel combinations (Berk and Galvan 2009). Therefore, this chapter focuses more on the structural dis/order of Nigerien politics and society as it became visible through the political drama of the inauguration, as well as the similar dramas which followed. In doing so, I do not understand dis/order by looking at the underlying structural base of society, as one would in the classical paradigms of order in sociological and anthropological theory following Durkheim, Weber, Turner, or Marx. Rather, I focus on dis/order as historically sedimented and fragmented (Bierschenk 2014), and which thereby continually emerges and transforms.

This is in line with my understanding of assemblage theory. From such an assemblage theory perspective, we need to look at the outcome of the active processes of dis/ordering in terms of the historically established patterns of society. In other words, we need to look at them as emerging rather than as given phenomena. Assemblage theory (like ANT) entails a "flat" (Latour 2005b), or better, a "relational historical ontology" of processual becoming and coproduction (cf. Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 15). This contrasts to the sort of "deep ontology" inherent in the classical Marxian understanding of "base and superstructure", in the "structure versus agency" debate which long dominated sociological theory (Berard 2005), or in the primary contemporary theoretical adversary of ANT and assemblage theory, "critical realism" (Elder-Vass 2008; 2014). By looking at emerging and heterogeneous elements like actors or actor groups, institutions, discourses, scientific statements, infrastructures, artifacts, and so on, assemblage theory understands dis/order as emerging phenomena or forms of connectivity and complexity that exceed the sum of the single components. I thus ask with Behrends, Davidov and Yessenova (2013: 7) "how heterogeneous elements that exist in different places [*such as Niger*] are connected in the social, political or economic orders that oil production creates", "how (new) orders and disorders are created through the assembling and reassembling of different combinations", and "how power and domination are mediated in these practices"?

From the resource curse and the rentier state theory perspectives, oil itself is said to create disorder by creating rent-seeking behavior, economic decline, authoritarianism, violent conflict, and gender inequality, and therefore adversely effecting society, economy, and politics (see introduction). Such deterministic and linear theories are largely blind to the historical and contextual elements that impact on the causal effects of oil production in a particular setting. In employing econometric approaches, many of these studies assume a closed system of nation states, where it seems to be possible to isolate the object of inquiry, and to then identify single factors of cause and effect, as if it were a laboratory experiment.

In contrast, assemblage theorists act on a profoundly different assumption, that the world is an open system in which multi-directional and complex relations of causality exist between seemingly unrelated phenomena (Marcus and Saka 2006).

Across the disciplines, African politics have been described as inherently disorderly. Chabal and Daloz (1999), for example, state that elites in Africa instrumentalize disorder as a political instrument for personal enrichment, a "fact" largely attributable to rational calculation in a context of "African culture" (ibid.). Similarly, the "failing states" perspective prominent in African studies portrays a weak African state, or even a completely absent state, as the root cause of disorder and instability. This school, at least implicitly, contrasts these weak African states to apparently strong Western states able to guarantee order.

However, as the anthropological studies in Benda-Beckman and Pirie's edited collection all illustrate, the state in all parts of the world can be the source of both order and disorder. Thus, in contrast to normative classifications of "Western order" and "Southern disorder", in this case study, I look at the historically sedimented and fragmented dis/order emerging out of the interplay of state and society, and the multiple notions, indeterminacy, fragility, and creativity that this order involves. From a comparative perspective, African political order (as political order elsewhere) entails numerous elements including ethnicity, land-related conflicts, political institutions, economic institutions, electoral cleavage, class politics, patron-client relations, mobilization, and violence (Boone 2014). In this sense, I identify a number of heterogeneous elements existing at the moment Niger entered the oil-age, connecting them with the heterogeneous elements of the oil assemblage (more on this in the following two chapters). In this chapter, I look at new media and politics by proxy as well as the political setting of Niger after democratization, before historicizing civil society dynamics and looking at collective identities. I then outline and analyze the legacy of Françafrique, and the religious dimensions of protests, before finally analyzing the situation of (male) youth and women in contemporary Niger.

6.2. New Media and 'politics by proxy' in Niger

The protest events show that politics are played through media technologies, especially mobile phones and radio. It was with the adoption of the multiparty system in 1993 that the state monopoly of the press, radio and television was abandoned and the freedom and independence of the media legally guaranteed.[77] In the political sphere today, television and the press (which is mainly limited to the capital Niamey, with only one monthly regional newspaper in Zinder, *Le Damagaram*) play a much less significant role than radio. The emergence of the radio as the primary medium of mass communication is perhaps not surprising given that information in Niger has traditionally been transmitted almost exclusively orally, as well as the fact that illiteracy is widespread, incomes are low, and the country's territory is vast (Dan Moussa 1971). While the role of the internet is increasing today, especially with the development, distribution and increasing affordability of smartphones, the role of social media like *facebook* or *WhatsApp* had remained marginal in the organization of the protests but might become more important in the future.

The development of classical media in Niger such as the radio started with colonialism. The first station to broadcast was the French colonial state's Radio-Niger in October 1958. Created in 1967 and broadcast from Niamey, the *Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision du Niger* (ORTN) had a complete monopoly in postcolonial Niger until the end of autocratic rule in 1990. During this time, ORTN mainly used radio as an instrument of government propaganda. With the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, a regionalization, diversification and proliferation of radio took shape in Niger. With funding from the German development organization *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ)[78], ORTN launched its first local station, the public service *Voice of Zinder* network in 1992 as part of a broader "Regionalization of radio in Niger" project (Ceesay 2000: 102). As Ceesay (2000) shows, this regionalization triggered debates between the central government and the regions about the use of radio. Whereas the central government and civil servants wanted to use radio for propaganda and the "development education" of the rural population, after three decades of authoritarian silence under one-party rule and military domination, the regions and ethnic groups were eager to use radio to have their own voice (ibid).

With deregulation of the media in 1993, foreign broadcasters *Radio France International* (RFI), the *British Broadcasting Corporation* (BBC), the *Voice of America* (VOA), *Deutsche Welle*, and *Africa No.1* either set up stations in Niger, or had their programs re-broadcast on a commercial-private radio. In 2010, *Radio China International* (RCI) also began broadcasting. However, with the first station opened in Niamey in 1994, it was not foreign broadcasters but rather local private commercial stations that soon came to dominate Niger's radio landscape. In 1997, *Anfani* became the first private station to open in Zinder. Several others followed, including *Shukurah*, *Radio Télévision Ténéré* (RTT), and *Gaskia*. Associative community radio stations also began operating in 1999. These are usually small radio stations supported and financed by international organizations and NGOs, and used as communication technologies for "development", "democratic awareness", and "education". The only associative community radio station which has a nation-wide presence is *Alternative*. Today, people living in Niger city are thus able to listen to a variety of radio stations.

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[77] *L'ordonnance n° 93-29 du 30 mars 1993.*

[78] In 2011, the GTZ merged together with two other German development organizations into the German Corporation for International Cooperation (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ)).

Generally, as Barber (2007) argues, the proliferation of media technologies has created, multiplied and transformed publics into audiences that are not known to the speakers, but who nevertheless try to imagine and address their needs and desires. Since the democratic transition, private-commercial radio stations have thereby become the most important resource in Zinder's political arena. In "agenda setting", the media plays an important role in affecting the public by influencing the topics to be discussed (Rössler 1997). As such, some Nigerien politicians have directly invested in media stations to diffuse their political programs.[79] In Niger, however, not only is private radio in part directly owned by the political elite, but political players can also attempt to frame public debate (set the agenda) by paying relatively small fees to release statements or organize on-air debates. Consequently, those social actors who lack formal recognition as members of political parties or civil society associations and who do not possess the financial power to buy broadcasts are typically denied broadcasting access. Thus, radio not only diffuses significations (of oil), but has also itself become a crucial element in how political negotiations and power struggles proceed, how social and political difference is reconstructed, and how patterns of domination are reinforced.

In a review article on the anthropology of radio, Bessire and Fisher (2013) show that radio is most often either celebrated as a democratizing vehicle with the potential to empower and emancipate the subaltern, for "giving voice to the voiceless", or as a disciplinary instrument used by the state to consolidate power. The debate about whether radio can be seen as a democratizing vehicle holds especially true for African contexts, where a plurality of actors and radio stations emerged with the “wave of democratization” in the 1990s (Fardon and Furniss 2000; Frere 1996; Schulz 1999; Hydén et al. 2002; Nyamnjoh 2005; Wasserman 2011). My case study shows that radio represents a contested social field (Bourdieu 2005) with different social and political actors trying to use it for their political projects. This is in line with observations made by Stremlau, Fantini and Osman (2015: 1511) who argue that radio programs in Somalia can be “understood as ‘staged events’, shaped by power, political interests and economic agendas, rather than simply as opportunities for citizens to make their voices heard”. Moreover, these events reproduce existing power structures, albeit in new forms (ibid.). In Zinder’s public political sphere, radio has rarely given voice to the voiceless: the subaltern have minimal access to broadcasting, with their interests typically mediated by paternalistic representatives who employ their grievances to pursue their own political projects, and thereby tailoring these grievances to suit their own agendas. Subaltern access to the media is limited, but does exist in newer media formats like talk-back radio, or avenues outside the official news media like texting, rumor, or gossip (Ellis 1989; Besnier 2009).

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[79] At the same time, the government may choose to close down opposition media voices, some of them owned by opposition politicians. Tandja, for example, forced *dunia tv* and several newspapers to close after negative coverage of *Tazartché*.

However, radio is more than a simple resource that is absorbed into a pre-existing political game. Rather, it has diverse material qualities and cultural possibilities that enable and transform public political life in sometimes unexpected ways (Larkin 2008). The proliferation of private radio broadcasting offers a new means of public representation, and has led to the emergence of new forms of charismatic authority (Vokes 2007). In Niger, for example, Dan Dubai successfully used radio (and mobile phone messages) to present himself as a folk hero daring to speak in the name of the poor. In addition, radio has spurred new forms of cultural organization in Niger, such as the Zinder *fada* initiated at least in part by a radio moderator to perform charitable work. New forms of cultural organization have also arisen through associative community stations, and especially through the nationwide *Alternative*. In allowing civil society organizations a platform to express their views and organize, *Alternative* played an important role in the 2004-05 “protests against the high costs of living”. Indeed, offering this access has made it a vital player in the growth of Nigerien civil society. In other words, it is only by considering the interaction between radio and politics in Niger that we can develop an understanding of the specific character of the local political dynamics (of oil). In this sense, radio has not only become an important device within political players' tactical repertoire, but also plays an important role in shaping the "how" of contemporary Nigerien politics.

In more recent times, the media technology to have had the most profound new influence on Nigerien politics is the mobile phone (at least at the time of writing). Indeed, the mobile phone has revolutionized the lives of millions of Africans (Etzo and Collender 2010). In Niger, as in other African contexts, it has also become an instrument of political agitation that has changed the nature of the public political game. This case study has shown that texting allowed for the emergence of "smart mobs" (Rheingold 2002) or "people who are able to act in concert even if they don't know each other" (ibid.: xii). The anonymity possible when texting via unregistered SIM cards allowed for new forms of organizing, mobilizing and leading massed groups, and in general, a more uncontrolled form of dissemination. In contrast, access to radio as a mouthpiece is more restricted, as it is controlled by journalists and requires greater financial flows. However, rather than celebrating the accessibility of new media forms for enabling democratic activism, as has often and most prominently been the case in the "Arab Spring", it seems the same applies for mobile phones as for radio: that is, it is not fixed whether and which social and political actors will be able to translate the new media into their political programs. My case study shows that at least some, if not the majority, of the text messages promoting protest and violence were, in fact, designed by influential political players to mobilize the population against the government. In doing so, I illustrate that what at first appears to be "politics from below" was also "politics from above". Nevertheless, the case study also reveals politics from below, in that transmission and dissemination of the messages required youth to forward the messages to as many people as possible. Thus, technologies should neither be understood as liberating nor enslaving in and of themselves, but rather as embedded into social, economic and political structures which enable and restrict their potentials.

Taken together, it was with the emergence of democracy and new and deregulated media spaces (television, radio, newspapers, internet, mobile phones), that new publics sprouted up after years of authoritarian silence. Thereby, politics in Niger in recent years has come in various guises, with a series of somewhat similar violent protests having taken place, but for different reasons on different occasions – oil, water, May Day, an anti-Islamic movie, President Issoufou's decision to join the "*je suis Charlie*" solidarity march in Paris. In all these events, the politics of naming, blaming and claiming were apparent, with protestors and politicians from both sides accusing one another of creating the reasons for protest or organizing the protests. In the new publics that sprouted up with the democratic transition in Niger, the politicization of issues and events takes place “by proxy” (Kaarsholm 2005: 152; 2009: 416). That is, while oil framed politics at the time of the refinery’s inauguration, at other times, politics were framed in the idiom of other events, a national holiday, Islam, the Françafrique, or water shortages. In other words, political actors exploit pertinent issues and/or occasions to pursue their own projects in a politically competitive environment.

Nevertheless, not every topic or event is necessarily suitable as a proxy. “Politics by proxy” does not mean that one topic can arbitrarily replace another. Rather, to successfully mobilize people, the topics need to produce powerful contextual significations that are loaded with high aspirations and hope (such as oil), be inextricably entangled with personal identities (such as religion), have an existential dimension (such as a water shortage) or already be a well-established public holiday (such as International Workers Day on 1 May) where the population routinely gathers, and so on. However, as I explained in the previous chapter, significatory framing processes are an important but not the determining factor for political mobilization in Niger where monetary incentives and patterns of authority equally play a role. I turn to that now.

6.3. Nigerien political machines

Asked if he had ever voted, one of my informants in Zinder told me:

> I have never voted. I am not interested in politics. I do not have any brothers or friends who do politics so that I can vote for them. Perhaps I will now begin voting, as I have a neighbor who is with Lumana. If he wants, I will vote for him. But the problem is, when they leave for Niamey, they will forget you. They don’t even know you. They won’t give you anything back. There are no politicians who are morally good. There is no one among them who has worked well except Tandja. If Tandja campaigned tomorrow, I would perhaps vote for the first time. I would vote for him. Because, even if he has embezzled, he has nevertheless done something. (male, late 30s)

His statement illustrates four important aspects of Nigerien politics, which I will now elaborate on in detail. Firstly, one’s vote is understood as a personal favor that is to be compensated once the candidate has been elected. Indeed, generally speaking, elections in Nigerien politics are not fought or won along ideological lines, but rather primarily based on patterns of redistribution. A recent study on the political economy of voter engagement in Niger reinforces this point by showing how the clientelist electoral system functions, with political parties mobilizing voters mainly through the distribution of an electoral rent (McCullough et al. 2016). Although the larger parties have formal hierarchical structures linking the national level with the administrative levels of the department and the commune via regional bureaus and coordination offices, local activists' loyalty to a particular candidate is typically and primarily based on his ability to provide material benefits, rather than on an ideological loyalty to a particular party or its program (ibid.: 2). This in turn produces an "activist market" with so-called "'pop-up activists' – that is, activists who are willing to mobilize people to attend political meetings in return for small envelopes of cash and goodies during election season" (ibid.: 3). In turn, parties select activists – especially well-known opinion leaders like student and youth leaders or musicians – based on their presumed ability to mobilize valuable groups. A friend of mine, who was chairman of a Zinder youth committee and a student youth leader, for example, received a one-time payment of two million FCFA (3049 Euro) during the 2016 election campaign from foreign minister and PNDS-president Mohamad Bazoum to mobilize students, pupils and youth in support for Issoufou. After Issoufou's successful re-election, my friend started to prepare Bazoum's presidential election campaign for 2021.

Candidates and parties may employ strategies to ensure that the distribution of electoral rents actually materializes at the ballot box. Outside the urban centers, the administrative chiefs are largely responsible for the distribution of electoral cards, through which they maintain control by facilitating or impeding access to the voting box (Younoussi 2015). Having ruled the country for over 30 years, Kountché's *société de développement* and its successor in the democratic era, the MNSD, was able to build up a large network of chiefs who could be relied on to deliver at the ballot box. As one informant told me, it was not uncommon for chiefs to take "their village" to vote, and even to check their voting cards. The success of the PNDS, however, illustrates that the MNSD's control over the chiefs has diminished, as has the chiefs' influence amongst the younger generation, which have become the key voters in elections. Another strategy that some candidates adopted was to reward voters who could prove that they had voted for them (McCullough et al. 2016: 7–8).[80] I was told that voters would then be paid about 1000 FCFA (1.52 Euro) if they could show the ballot cards for all candidates, except the one for the candidate, thereby proving they had voted for him.

Second, my interlocuter's statement reveals how social solidarity is based on personal, mostly family networks, but also on networks of friends and neighbors. These infamous networks are typically referred to as PAC (*Parents, Amis et Connaissances*) or FAC (*Famille, Amis et Connaissances*), as shown in Salou Djibo's speech in chapter 4. These networks are crucial for finding a job, asking for a favor, or receiving support. As such, they have an existential dimension: in an economic situation that is (especially in rural areas) often characterized not by a relative but rather by an absolute lack of means (Verne 2007) and with no state guaranteed social security system, the population depends on mutual assistance to survive. However, these networks also place significant pressure and demands on employed people with a good position, for they are expected to redistribute their earnings, provide favors, or to misuse their power to benefit their PAC or FAC. These demands are often exacerbated by the fact that those who have a good position are likely to have obtained it through the network, and are therefore indebted to it. Examples of the pressures networks exert are manifold – from a teacher who needs to let a child graduate, to policemen requested to turn a blind eye, or to managers responsible for hiring staff. Therefore, when a man (rarely a woman due to strict gender divisions of labor and ideals of masculinity and femininity) finds paid employment, he is expected to redistribute his earnings within his networks.[81] With their earnings consumed by their networks, many employed Nigeriens are unable to save or invest money. For example, when my research assistant started working for me, not only was he immediately expected to make contributions and give presents to his uncle's family with whom he was living, but friends and neighbors also started to visiting him regularly to ask for money or credit. When he felt forced to reject requests because he did not have enough money to meet them, he was viewed suspiciously, and treated as if he were dishonest and greedy (especially as he was working for a white man believed to be paying high wages).[82] This example highlights that status, morality and personal integrity are closely tied to gift-giving and redistribution (Olivier de Sardan 1999a), and that networks of friendship and neighborhood depend heavily on a socio-spatial intimacy that requires regular visits and the sharing of everyday spaces. That is, once elected for a position in Niamey, the capital and administrative center of Niger situated in the West and about 900 km away, my interlocutor's neighbor's spatial separation would allow him to neglect his obligations of redistribution in Zinder more easily. Similarly, youth often see moving away as a chance to “grow”, “progress” and “become someone”, because the spatial distance allows them the distance from their networks needed to hide their real earnings, escape demands, and thus to save, spend and invest money for themselves.

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[80] This has been possible up to now as voters are given a separate card for each candidate. However, as of the 2021 elections, voters will have to leave their ballot papers in the voting booth.

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[81] The husband is ideally viewed as the "breadwinner" of the family. As such, he is the first person asked for redistribution, especially for money or help with establishing connections. However, this does not mean that women are not caught in the same socially embedded logics. I turn to the different gender conceptualizations below.

[82] He earned 170,000 FCFA/month (259 Euro) compared to a wage of about 100,000 FCFA (152 Euro) for teachers.

Third, my interlocutor’s statement exemplifies a negatively charged moral discourse on politics. With the introduction of national elections in 1993, structural “rivalries of proximity” within a small national political elite emerged (Olivier de Sardan 2017). These rivalries have not been primarily programmatic or ideological in nature, but rather personal attempts to gain privilege, bribes and postings, something which has led to widespread disappointment with democracy among the Nigerien population (ibid.). As in Africa more generally (van de Walle 2003; Carbone 2006), Nigerien political parties are dominated by their founding leaders, and have somewhat underdeveloped electoral programs (Gazibo 2011: 345). His statement also echoes Djibo’s speech outlined in chapter 4 in which he stated that all politicians were immoral and embezzled funds. “Doing politics” (*Faire la politique*), as it is generally referred to in Niger, is seen paradoxically as both acting outside the moral and ethical values of the community, and as the only way to find employment or to be included in redistribution networks. Indeed, the words *politik* in Zarma or *dan ubanci* in Hausa signify conflicts, rivalry, disputes, and disunity, and evoke a nostalgic view of the “stability” of former military regimes (Olivier de Sardan 2016: 1; 2017: 120).

Finally, my interlocutor’s statement shows how *Tazartché* has polarized society. Tandja is said to have been a pragmatic leader who gained popularity through symbolic acts of redistribution, with numerous stories circulating praising him for small-scale development projects like the construction of wells or gifts of animals and seeds. The stories also illustrate that within the ethical and moral framework of the Nigerien electorate, a distributive state is desirable. However, most Nigeriens complain that they only experience the state through forms of taking (tax collection) and harassment (police controls and petty corruption), rather than forms of giving (e.g. systems of social security). Hence the nostalgic view of Libya under al-Qaddhāfī, who operated a distributive state that took care of the citizens through a free health system, free electricity, high fuel subsidies and so on. In a sense, in becoming a topic of everyday debate and thereby politicizing society, Tandja’s anti-democratic project ironically appears to have had a somewhat democratizing effect on Nigerien society, albeit as a direct confrontation between two opposing blocs. In the case of my interlocutor, it had encouraged him to at least consider voting in the future.

Looking at how Nigerien elections and politics function more generally, it is fair to argue that they are characterized by "four prisons of power": the prison of big merchants, the prison of militants, the prison of bureaucrats, and the prison of international experts (Olivier de Sardan 2016). Without any established catch-all parties financed by mass membership, political power in Niger is built on the support of wealthy businessman – what Olivier de Sardan refers to as the prison of big merchants. Olivier de Sardan's second prison of power, "the prison of militants", refers to the activists, militants and allies who have campaigned for a particular political party, and then need to be recompensed with jobs, favors, and privileges. Likewise, the state bureaucracy is caught within the same prison of favoritism, privileges and petty corruption, or the third prison of power, "the prison of bureaucrats". With "the prison of international experts", the fourth prison of power, development aid has become a rent to capture. The country's elite, and to some extent an emerging middle class, are actively creating new development associations in response to current trends and international agendas. Moreover, electoral candidates use development money to prove their commitment and bonds to their home regions (Tidjani Alou 2015b).

These four prisons are better understood through the notion of political machines than through the ethnocentric and culturalist notion of neopatrimonialism. Similar to those that flourished in the United States around the turn of the 20th century (Clifford 1975), political machines emerged in Niger with the reintroduction of a multiparty system and electoral competition in the early 1990s. These political machines are characterized by urban reward networks in which particularistic, material rewards are used to extend control over personnel and to maximize electoral support, thereby favoring patronage, spoils, and corruption (Scott 1969). As the examples of elections and protests in Niger have shown throughout, mobilization takes places through material rewards, especially in urban settings. Such mobilizations also build on an urban-rural divide by enrolling rural populations into publicly staged events such as the refinery's opening, as I described in chapter 2. This rural-urban dualism, however, was not created by oil production as the rentier state and resource curse model would suggest (Yates 2012: 87), but pre-existed it (of course, oil production may aggravate this divide in the future). Importantly, in applying the concept of political machines, I do not intend to follow a US-centric or even evolutionist perspective by assuming African history will follow the same path as US history. Rather, I am aiming to investigate and highlight the contextual conditions for particular socio-political phenomena to emerge, be they in the Global North or the Global South. From a comparative perspective, political machines appear to primarily occur in a political arena featuring elections, universal suffrage and a high degree of electoral competition, but in a social context that is considered to favor patronage, spoils, and corruption (Scott 1969). Indeed, the "wave of democratization" that triggered the emergence of political machines in Niger did so in the context of a "moral economy of corruption" (Olivier de Sardan 1999a). That is, in a society in which the logics of negotiation, gift-giving, solidarity, predatory authority, and redistributive accumulation are embedded (ibid)..

In contrast to the neopatrimonialist paradigm which qualifies African states both as national cultural containers and negative deviations from the West, I see political machines as both extroverted and introverted (see chapter 4). The functioning of political machines highly depends on monetary flows from international donors and national businessmen, and the acceptance of this money by militants, activists and voters in exchange for support. In Niger, this has not only triggered the emergence of a merchant class in politics, but ultimately produced the political economy of elections I have described above. It is therefore no surprise that economic and political power are deeply intertwined in Niger. Politicians are amongst the wealthiest citizens in Niger, not only because personal wealth greatly aids one's political aspirations, but also because these positions allow for embezzlement of public markets, tax evasion, and receipts of favors. In turn, wealthy businessmen are able to quickly rise in the political hierarchy by investing their economic power into political parties and campaigns. However, rather than qualifying African states as corrupt and Western states as sound, I rather see a relative difference, with corruption in the West more restricted to an politico-economic elite, whereas African countries such as Niger are also characterized by a petty corruption due to an existential dimension and moral obligation of social networks as a form of social security and survival. In this sense, it is not so much "traditional culture" which brings forth the phenomena of corruption and cronyism, as the model of neopatrimonialism would suggest, but rather economic (social networks of subsistence and survival) and political realities (competition in multi-party systems) which favor the emergence of political machines. I will now turn to the role of civil society in these political machines.

6.4. A hybrid civil society

In understanding the role of civil society in Niger, it is essential to focus on state-society relations. Throughout the thesis, I employed the emic definition of civil society in Niger, considering only legal formalized associations and organizations recognized by the state.[83] According to this definition, there is also a distinction between more introverted civil society associations such as CRAS and extroverted development organization labeled NGOs (for NGOs in Niger see Spies 2009). In using the emic definition, I showed that there is only a weak differentiation between civil society and the state in Nigerien political machines.

While labor unions and some quite restrictive civil society associations mediated government programs to the population and thus had close ties to the ruling party during the authoritarian phase of Nigerien politics, the reintroduction of the multiparty system soon highlighted how the rules of the game had changed. From that time on, political competition and strategic conflicts between the opposition and the government majority became an integral part of the game. This also had implications for the role of civil society organizations. With their ability to act as counter-powers to the state in a multiparty system, civil society organizations become themselves matters in dispute. They thus had to be appeased, repressed or incorporated into government by political maneuvers such as bribery, cooption, intimidation, and political arrest. I have already shown how civil society groups are incorporated into the state's administrative body, as some were during *Tazartché*, or into the opposition, and as others who played a central role in the ousting of both President's Ousmane in 1996 and Tandja in 2010 were.

As I showed in chapters 4 and 5, in political machines like Niger we observe episodic civil society engagement in the political game, with phases of high activity when they are seeking to pressure the government, and phases of low activity or invisibility when they have become coopted, or simply calmed down by informal redistribution (Waal and Ibreck 2013). This result is due to the entanglement of the logic of competition in a multiparty system and the social logics of redistribution and gift-giving. In such hybrid political systems, one aim of a "hybrid civil society" seems to be inclusion in the clientelist political redistribution system. However, the success of this strategy depends on the dynamics of an association's external as well as internal relations. I turn to that now.

For associations, effective external relations are characterized by the ability to gain political leverage. To gain this leverage, an association has to be able to create pressure on political authorities. Only with sufficient leverage can an association seek and achieve a form of profitable cohabitation with the authorities, either through positions on governmental committees, or through cash. This political leverage is achieved through a web of relations, with opposition politicians and wealthy businessmen on the one hand, and media on the other hand. For example, some influential CRAS members received politically sensitive information and payment from opposition politicians and businessmen for publishing and/or broadcasting it. Through the media, especially radio, civil society (re)creates and strengthens its political leverage by threatening to mobilize the population against the political authorities. In doing so, civil society effectively demands the political authorities include them in the political decision-making processes by creating new governmental committees and assigning them places on them, or replacing no longer threatening members on existing committees. If their demands are not heard, they increase their threats by, for example, organizing a public meeting and inviting the media, thereby demonstrating their potential to mobilize the population. If their mobilization potential is sufficient, they could then proceed to the highest threat level, the organization of a mass demonstration. With their potential to turn violent, mass demonstrations are especially feared by the political authorities, and typically provoke them to take prevention and calming measures. As I have shown, the coming of oil offered the perfect opportunity to form new strategic groups or reform existing ones to appropriate the sensitive subject of oil as a public issue. We also saw how significations of oil became part of the politics of naming, blaming and claiming with the logic of the political conflicts dating back to *Tazartché*.

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[83] This contrasts to a Gramscian definition, for example, which would include the entire population and media outside state institutions.

As we have also seen, an association's internal dynamics are crucial not only for its effectiveness, but also its very survival. Playing the internal political game is therefore about building relationships among a small inner circle of intimates or insiders who together channel the association's activities and share the positions of power and the envelopes of cash. Individual members are therefore motivated to build and become part of a small inner circle to receive and maintain a large share of the spoils. Attracting bribes and committing corruption are therefore best understood as an economic strategy, the spoils of which are to be distributed within solidarity networks and to be consumed by several members. However, as bribes also often come as lump sums (or as items rather than cash), they are also desirable as members may more easily invest them directly in items (such as motorbikes, cars, and computers) typically too expensive to purchase, especially with demands to distribute public payments (such as salary) among their solidarity networks. Looking at the internal organization of CRAS, it became obvious that the committee members jockeyed for positions within the inner circle through rhetoric and communicative skills, specific political and legal knowledge, and the possession of secret information. Only in these leadership positions would they ever have the opportunity to participate in governmental committees, conducting missions in the name of CRAS, and receive envelopes. Indeed, the inner circle of CRAS had all studied in the capital, and had long been active in civil society associations and politics. In doing so, they had learnt the necessary rhetoric and communicative skills, as well as political and legal knowledge. Moreover, these leading activists were always well informed, and often presented information during the meetings that other members had not been aware of. Clearly, these members were also well connected, having acquired the information mainly through social networks with opposition politicians and journalists, using it to strengthen both their own position on the committee itself, and to broadcast it to intensify the threat posture of the committee as a whole against the government.

These internal and external dynamics can explain the six strong tendencies that Tidjani Alou (2015a) identified amongst civil society organizations in Niger: proliferation, professionalization, regrouping, political intervention, personalization, and an urban anchor. Political intervention is the first means to introduce oneself as a new negotiating party, to gain political leverage, and to be rewarded with spoils. An urban anchor is needed for successful political intervention, as urbanization processes assemble political power in a dense space that enables acts of infrastructural sabotage (such as demonstrations, ghost town operations, burning barricades, strikes, meetings) which can stop the flow of urban life and the economy. In contrast, rural resistance in Niger is characterized by passivity or non-movements, involving strategies of non-compliance and tax boycotts (Spittler 1983). Professionalization is the result of governing techniques, either through cooptation in the state's administrative body, or through external funding from local or international donors, as well as status politics within organizations and committees to claim leadership positions. Personalization is the result of getting access to state resources with political liberalization, through which membership of a civil society association becomes an important source of income, be it through external funding, daily allowances for work on governmental committees, or informal contributions from political parties. Finally, the very results of episodic civil society engagement, proliferation and regrouping are necessary to (again) acquire political capital after processes of personalization and cooptation have either hampered the association's negotiating power or led to its disintegration.

Taken together, the case study illustrates how the very concept of civil society as a realm separated off from the state is an ideal deeply rooted in European political thought (Seligman 1992), and is therefore profoundly Eurocentric (Hann and Dunn 1996). In numerous (Western) studies which blur the line between academia and policy recommendation, civil society following the end of the Cold War has been seen as a model for democratization processes in the Global South. However, these simplistic models are deeply problematic, as they entail an evolutionist thinking which typically assumes linear development based on observations of European history – a form of thinking that Mamdani mocks as "history by analogy" (1995a: 608). Like other African states, Niger has not followed this linear pattern of development, and displays rather "blurred boundaries" between state/society, organized/unorganized, political participation/political autonomy, community-based/class-based, popular/elite, social movements/social forces, and social/political (Mamdani 1995b). The concept of civil society is thus characterized by "its very incoherence, its polysemy, its slippery opacity" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 25). In short, my case study shows that the Eurocentric dichotomy between the state and civil society cannot simply be transferred to the Nigerien context. This dichotomy's normative and moral framework entails positive connotations of political progress, legitimate grievances, and a better social order that is misleading (Mamdani 1995a; Macamo 2011). Rather, civil society engagement is embedded into the same structures that shape other political actors, including their opponents. In this way, the values and language of contemporary democracy – transparency, good governance, human rights – are primarily appropriated to acquire political legitimacy, and do not signal the development of emancipatory politics *per se*.

In the next subchapter, I look at why the protests mainly occurred in Zinder, and investigate the significance of ethnic and regional identities in Nigerien politics.

6.5. Collective identities in Nigerien politics

Niger is composed of several ethnic groups. According to the 1988 census, the population was 21.2 percent Zarma-Songhai (dominating western Niger), 53 percent Hausa (dominating southern Niger), 10.4 percent Tuareg (dominating northern Niger), 9.9 percent Fulani (which are spread throughout the country), 4.4 percent Kanuri (dominating south-eastern Niger), 0.4 percent Tubu (dominating the area along the Niger-Chad border), 0.3 percent Arab (mostly in northern and eastern Niger), 0.3 percent Gourmantché (living in western Niger) and 0.2 percent other groups (INS-Niger 2011). This official ethnic breakdown did not and does not necessarily translate into ethnic politics. As revealed in an Afrobarometer[84] study, national identity is stronger than ethnic or regional identities in Niger, which as a whole, was found to display a relatively strong nationalism. Although I also observed a strong nationalism, especially among educated urban male youth, such identifications not only differ widely amongst the population, but are also highly situational. As all people have multiple identities – ethnic, religious, regional, and political ones (to name but a few) (Sen 2007) – situational factors/interactions trigger the articulation of different identities.

In any case, successive regimes have sought to weaken ethnic and regional identities in Niger. Since the formation of the First Republic of Niger in 1960 it has been against the constitution to form political parties based on an ethnic, regional, or religious character. When second President Seyni Kountché (1974-1989) allowed for associations, he prohibited any organization with an ethnic or regional character (*l'ordonnance 884-6 du 1er Mars 1984,* article 2), and even forbade references to ethnicity in public debates. To further break down ethnic identities by promoting interethnic and interregional marriages, and to counteract corruption based on networks of kinship and solidarity, Kountché also started to post state bureaucrats outside their native regions.

Nevertheless, in a comparative study of political parties in West African countries, Basedau and Stroh (2012) found ethnicity to be more politicized in Niger and Benin than in Burkina Faso and Mali. They concluded that the differences could be explained by historical legacies, sociocultural relationships, and rationalist voting behavior. In this sense, the role of ethnicity in politics appears to depend on the mobilization strategies of elites, rather than on the collective interests of identity groups (ibid.). The results for Niger are ambiguous, with one major political party having a strongly ethnicized support base (ANDP), and another with a relatively ethnicized support base (CDS). Nevertheless, as a group Zarma-Songhai, for example, also vote significantly less for CDS or PNDS, and mostly prefer ANDP and MNSD. Looking at other demographics, it becomes apparent that voting is significantly more regional than ethnic. Indeed, as all regions are multiethnic, it is clear that ethnically non-dominant groups also often identify with their region of origin. In the 2004 elections, for example, the MNSD took 12 of the 17 available seats in Tillabéri, and the

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[84] Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in more than 35 countries in Africa. It is funded by Western donors and research institutes (www.afrobarometer.org).

ANDP took four of its total five in Dosso. Meanwhile, Zinder is dominated by the CDS, although its leader Ousmane claims to be of Kanuri ethnicity, not the dominant ethnic group there but in Diffa (Gazibo 2011: 345).

Looking at the recurrent protests in Niger, it is striking that they have mainly occurred in regions such as Zinder and Agadez which claim historical political marginalization. However, the fact that Niamey became a stage of violent protests against Charlie Hebdo in 2015 illustrates another aspect, the importance of political opposition strongholds for protest action. Niamey is the electoral stronghold of MODEN-FA Lumana and Hama Amadou, who had been part of the coalition government. In 2013, however, Hama opted out of the coalition when Issoufou fundamentally undermined the strength of the opposition parties by coopting members into his government of national unity. Two of the other politicians arrested following the protests against Charlie Hebdo in Niamey, Soumana Sanda and Youba Diallo, had also been members of the Issoufou government until 2013, but stepped down out of loyalty to Hama. In August 2014, Hama fled to France after his wife was accused of baby trafficking from Nigeria, and he himself was accused of complicity. On 14 November 2015, he returned to run in the presidential election set for February 2016. However, he was arrested at the airport and detained in Filingué prison, which again spurred violent protests among his supporters in Niamey. Finally losing the elections from his cell, in March 2016 Hama was evacuated to Paris for medical treatment, where he has remained in exile (for more on the 2016 elections in Niger see Mueller and Matthews 2016).

In sum, although there is a strong nationalism in Niger, regional and ethnic collective identities are also deeply entangled with histories of political marginalization. In the next chapter (chapter 7), I look at regional and ethnic identities in Niger more closely, showing how the dispersion of the petro-infrastructure over different administrative regions reinforced and in part newly produced regional identities.

6.6. Françafrique, rhetorics of neocolonialism and conspiracy theories

The presidents of the former French colonies Mali, Niger, Togo, Benin, Gabon and Senegal attended the "*Je suis Charlie*" demonstration in Paris on 11 January 2015, triggering resistance in each country. This resistance illustrates the immediacy of the history of *Françafrique* in public national discourses in the former colonies. This is especially the case in Niger for two reasons (where the demonstrations turned particularly violent). First, the economy of Niger is closely tied to Areva/French exploitation of uranium. As I have previously noted, while Niger is the world's fourth-largest producer of uranium, it is frequently ranked last on the Human Development Index, an incongruity that is highly salient in the national public discourse, and has triggered protests against Areva and the "French neocolonial system" (BBC Afrique 2013). Second, as I showed in chapter 4, when the international community enacted sanctions against his regime, Tandja powerfully (re)produced the rhetoric of neocolonialism in Niger, blaming "the West" and its meddling in Nigerien politics for the country's underdevelopment.

In contrast to the widespread support Tandja had received in his portrayal of himself as a strong leader able to resist Western neocolonial interference, Issoufou was widely insulted and abused in social media outlets for taking part in the "*Je suis Charlie*" demonstration. On the *facebook* group "*15000 nigerien sur facebook*", for example, users called Issoufou a puppet of Western regimes. One post, for example, caricatured French president François Hollande holding a monkey resembling Issoufou on a leash, who in turn had a baby monkey resembling Colonel Salou Djibo on his back. The caricature refers to a widespread suspicion that France orchestrated the military coup against Tandja in 2010 to install a president loyal to French interests. Similarly, France is still widely seen as responsible for the 1974 military coup against Niger's first post-independence president, Diori Hamani, although new access to archive material confirms older analyses (Higgott and Fuglestad 1975) that France was not involved in that coup (van Walraven 2014).

Looking more closely at the posts on "*15000 nigerien sur facebook"* reveals a number of popular discourses about *Françafrique*, neocolonialism, and the world order. Aside from posts from Nigerien press outlets and risqué or controversial comments, anti-imperialist and/or anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are plentiful. In these posts, "France", "the USA", "the West" or "the Jews" are said to be behind all the evils in Africa and the world. Many of the conspiracy theories involving colonialism, Zionism, superpowers, oil, and the war on terror have travelled from the Arab World, and are perpetuated through terrorist propaganda such as by Al-Qaeda, but also through popular media outlets like *Al-Jazeera* and social media such as *facebook*, *twitter*, and *WhatsApp* (Gray 2010). The high currency of these conspiracy theories needs to be situated in the context of global capitalism that, on the one hand, produces enormous wealth and, on the other, renders large parts of the population in the Global South redundant, thus fueling a general feeling of global marginalization. This perception of marginalization has multiple effects. In the specific context of Niger, it is entangled with historical precedents of French colonial intrusion and

Tandja's appropriation of neocolonial narratives for *Tazartché*.[85] As such, while many Nigeriens shared the youths' disgust at the caricatures in Charlie Hebdo, they distanced themselves from the youth rioters, who they denounced as "gangsters" and "hooligans". Moreover, from *facebook* posts and the reaction to them, it appears that many youths in Niger admire any acts qualified as resistance against the West, at times extending to include acts by Islamist militant movements such as the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda. After 9/11, for example, Osama bin Laden became a kind of hero in Hausaland for standing up to Western domination (Charlick 2007b: 33).

This admiration for Islamist militant terrorist acts can perhaps best be understood as what I call "a romanticism of resistance from a distance". Not having been exposed to the brutality of IS and Al-Qaeda themselves, and having barely any knowledge of life on the ground in Iraq and the Levant, many young Nigeriens do not admire these distant Islamist militant organizations as such, but rather their acts, which they romanticize as resistance against the West. In contrast, none of the youth I spoke to expressed sympathy for Boko Haram, whose terror in Northern Nigeria they had experienced more intimately. Moreover, knowing that Boko Haram was opposed to Western education also seemed to contradict their own aspirations for upward mobility, making the organization even less worthy of support. Indeed, conspiracy theories were circulating in social media that Boko Haram was a creation of the West – or, more particularly, of Mossad, the CIA or France – to destabilize West Africa in order to secure its natural resources. As evidence, newspaper articles were posted on *facebook* claiming that white (western) fighters had been arrested, or that Boko Haram had been provided with weapons by the United Nations. These conspiracy theories also illustrate another important point, by connecting and to some extent conflating regional (the West versus the Global South) with religious identities (Christians/Jews versus Muslims), notions of Western imperialism become entangled with a general feeling of Judeo-Christian world domination over a marginalized Muslim world (with the Israel-Palestine conflict typically taken as the case of reference). I now take a closer look at religious identities in Niger, as these were an important dimension in some of the protests.

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[85] Although political elites in Niger (and elsewhere) exploit neocolonial rhetoric, this does not mean that there is no truth to it, as the early history of decolonization in Niger in particular illustrates (van Walraven 2013). Surely this rhetoric is partly effective because French (post)colonial interference in Niger has been prolonged and intense. In such a situation, it surely becomes difficult to distinguish between fact and non-fact, as claims that the French were behind the coups all seem highly plausible.

6.7. Islam, Islamic reform movements and religious coexistence in Niger

A politically secular nation, Niger is a predominantly Muslim society. Approximately 94 percent of the population identify as Muslim, with the other six percent following African religious traditions or Christianity. In an overview of Islamic reform movements in Africa, Loimeier (2016: 199–210) identifies an Islamic historical legacy for Niger that is both pre- and post-jihadist, combining local religious traditions such as the Bori spirit possession cult with Islamic practices introduced by a jihadist movement in the early 19th century. Niger has a strong presence of Sufi brotherhoods of Sunni Islam, especially the dominant Tijāniyyah, which are known for combining African traditions into Islamic practice (ibid.).

With the advent of democratization in the 1990s, a Salafi-oriented reform movement called Yan Izala blossomed, and began to contest the "pagan", "supernatural", and "unwritten" Islamic practices of the Tijāniyyah on a national scale. Started in Nigeria in the late 1970s, Yan Izala began as a movement in Niger in Maradi in 1987. Combining religion and business to create a new individualism that frees citizens of social obligations such as redistribution in social networks, adherence quickly became a sign of social distinction for wealthy traders like the Alhazai, who became the major donors to the movement (Grégoire 1992; 1993). After democratization, the *Association pour la Diffusion de l'Islam au Niger* (ADINI-Islam) was formed to spread the movement, which it did effectively. ADINI-Islam was recognized by law, and became a major player in Niger's public sphere, triggering changes in fashion and lifestyle, including the adoption of shortened trousers by men (Masquelier 2009a). Initially an urban movement of wealthy traders and youth, over time the Izala doctrine also expanded into rural areas, where wife seclusion also became increasingly common place (Henquinet 2007). In short, Masquelier (2009b: xvi) argues that the movement spread in Niger as "Islam is now equated with status, power, and *arziki* (a word evoking notions of wealth, prosperity, and well-being)".

According to Charlick (2007), the success of Yan Izala should not simply be attributed to a backlash against globalization. Rather, he argues that Yan Izala fills a need amongst certain societal segments to modernize on their own terms, rejecting both Western-dominated modernization and the traditional social and normative constructs of their own society. Indeed, Yan Izala was supported in great numbers by wealthy traders and powerful merchants, for whom membership became a sign of social distinction (Grégoire 1992), and by youth, for whom membership was an opportunity to challenge tradition and customary authorities, and for whom the ideology of Yan Izala matched best their aspirations of upward mobility. In 2000, however, the movement split and effectively became paralyzed. At the same time, youth supporters had started to reject the pious lifestyle the movement demanded, and were turning away from it (Masquelier 2009a). Interestingly, many educated youths I met sympathized with such Salafi-oriented movements for two main reasons. Firstly, these movements rationalized religious practice, with interpretation based on written sources, as well as rejecting "pagan" customs. Secondly, the movements challenged traditional and customary authorities, ideas which fitted well with their aspirations and the popular ideology of development.

The growth of new Islamic movements in Niger has seen the development of violent factions. In public discourses, the protests against Charlie Hebdo displayed a new level of religious violence against Christians in Niger. During three days of protests, ten people died (five in Zinder and five in Niamey), 177 were injured, and 382 were arrested (including 90 members of the political opposition). In addition, 45 churches, 36 bars and restaurants, and five hotels and hostels were burned and pillaged; streets, cars and schools were set on fire; and several offices and homes of PNDS party members were attacked. More than 300 Christians in Zinder were forced to seek refuge in military camps. The public discourses that such a violence against Christians was new were not strictly correct: although the scale and intensity of the violence was new, religiously framed violence itself was not.

The rise of Yan Izala had first triggered religious conflicts with the Tijāniyyah. These conflicts turned particularly violent in 1992 and 1993, flaring up at different times, before calming down by the early 2000s. As a growing movement, Yan Izala had had a profound effect on public discourse, intensifying resistance to government policy in the name of the Islam. Most significantly, they pushed for an Islamization of the state and society, and lead public resistance and protest against the Structural Adjustment Program (especially new family planning policies in 1992 and against a new family code in 1993); the institutional implementation of women rights (the *Convention pour l'Elimination des Discriminations à l'Egard des Femmes* (CEDEF) in 1999); "pagan" customs like the Bori cult; and the "Westernization" of Nigerien culture (the *Festival International de la Mode Africaine* (FIMA) in 2000 and "lewdly dressed" women). While African religious traditions had long been decreasing, it was the rapid growth of evangelical Christianity in particular that invoked Muslim resistance (Cooper 2006). In 1998, violence against Christians began, rising sharply the following year, and culminating in urban riots in Maradi and Niamey on

8 November 2000 against the second annual International Festival of African Fashion. During the riots, bars, churches and signs of Bori spiritual culture were attacked and burned down (Cooper 2003).

Although Cooper (2003; 2006: 31–60) analyzed the violence in 2000 mostly in religious terms, she concluded that the riot itself was a carefully orchestrated and targeted event. In this sense, my empirical data illustrates how the bumpy road to democratization, the religious revival of monotheism, the perception of Western imperialism, and masculine domination in Niger produced the context in which certain actors took advantage of disaffected young men to stage the violent protests. In contrast to the 2000 protests, only some of the protestors in 2015 were dressed in white Islamic clothing, and most of the protesting youth led a relatively secular and western-oriented lifestyle, dressing in western clothes, drinking alcohol, and enjoying the nightlife and music in bars. Indeed, I heard on several occasions that the same youth who had burned down the bars had also helped themselves to the drinks. It is therefore no surprise that although the vast majority of the Nigerien population shared the grievances against the caricatures of Charlie Hebdo, they saw the protesting youth first of all as "gangsters" who were either mobilized by politicians, or as opportunistic free-riders who used the opportunity for personal gain by looting, pillaging and plundering.

Since independence, all Nigerien governments have not only defended the principle of *laicité* to preserve their privileged access to state power, but have also made use of Islam to ideologically foster their political legitimacy. All seven constitutions have maintained the religious neutrality of the state, and prohibited the formation of ethnic, regionalist, or religious parties. After violence between different religious sections of the society had increased with democratization, the Nigerien state resurrected religious control with the establishment of the *Conseil Islamique du Niger* (CIN) in 2003. As Elischer (2015) argues, this state regulation has been successful in maintaining peaceful and apolitical domestic Salafi associations and in containing the emergence of a "Political" or "Jihadi Salafism"[86] in Niger, which is significantly more prominent in neighboring West African countries.

The spread of Salafism in Niger, thus, does not necessarily indicate a greater probability of support for terrorism (Elischer 2014). Today, one third of Niger's Muslims attend mosques controlled by Salafists, but there is currently no evidence that violent Salafi organizations have taken root (ibid.: 5). Indeed, with its emphasis on written sources and reform, the Yan Izala movement stands for "development" in the Nigerien public imagination, an image that contrasts sharply to the "backward" image of Boko Haram, with its rejection of western education. Although Yan Izala was the ideological forerunner of Boko Haram in Nigeria, the two groups now have major differences, with the former consciously adopting Western secular education to enable Muslims to effectively fight the Western enemy (Loimeier 2012). Nevertheless, due to its long and porous border with Nigeria, Boko Haram members appear to be seeking refuge in Niger. Hiding from the Nigerian police in Diffa, and to a lesser extent in Zinder, Boko Haram members have also begun to successfully recruit members in Niger.

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[86] In Islamic studies, a distinction is made between peaceful "Quietists", "Political Salafists" and violent "Jihadists" (Elischer 2015: 583).

With the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria in the early 2000s, concerns arose that a similar movement could take hold in Niger. However, the violent situation in northern Nigeria seemed to serve as negative example for Nigeriens, who appeared to almost unanimously reject the Boko Haram ideology, typically classifying it as backward and viewing it as incongruent with their own aspirations. Talking with a wide cross-section of Nigeriens about the coming oil production, and comparing it to neighboring Nigeria, many told me that Niger would remain peaceful as it was a predominantly Muslim society, and that Islam was a "religion of peace". Nevertheless, in response to a joint counter-terrorism operation led by Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria, Boko Haram operations, including bombings and assassinations, started in Diffa in early 2015. On 27 January 2015, the mayor of Diffa expressed concerns about Boko Haram's popularity among youth. Despite these attacks and the mayor's statement, however, Boko Haram appeared to enjoy little public support. After the bombings in Diffa, large protest marches against Boko Haram and in support of the Nigerien military were held in every major Nigerian town, including Diffa, on 17 February 2015. As such, the group's ability to recruit members (typically petty criminals, thugs, or members of youth gangs) in Diffa and beyond appeared to be mostly based on financial reward, rather than on ideological conviction (Fessy 2014).[87]

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[87] According to the International Crisis Group (2014: 25) report on violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in Nigeria, the group's border crossings in Niger are favored by shared Kanuri ethnicity in Diffa as leader Aboubacar Shekau is from the Kanuri ethnic group. However, the proximity of Diffa to the federal states of Yobe, Borno and Adamawa in Nigeria seem to explain best Boko Haram's foothold in Diffa. As such, an ethnic reading should not be overstated. As Mahamidou Aboubacar Attahirou, who conducted fieldwork with youth in Diffa in 2014-15 told me in a personal note, the dominant narratives among youth there state that Boko Haram is a solely Nigerian affair, and successful recruitments are said to be rare, and motivated only by money.

To understand the seeming contradiction in popular discourses between admiring IS and Al-Qaeda, and ideologically criticizing Boko Haram, we have to look more closely at the situation of youth in Niger.

6.8. Waithood, violent masculinity and patriarchy

Niger has the highest birth rate of any country in the world, with 6.89 children born per woman, and an annual population growth of 3.3 percent. With a median age of 15 years old, 70 percent of the population is under 25, with 63 percent living below the international poverty line. Due to youth mass unemployment[88] and low-paying jobs, urban youth have to wait increasingly longer for marriage, found a family, and become contributing members of the community (Honwana 2012). Those *Zinderois* youth, for example, who do find income opportunities are mostly *kabou kabou* or small street vendors, or are directly or indirectly involved in smuggling across the Niger-Nigerian border. These activities are heavily controlled by police, who harass youth for motorbike documents, helmets, and contraband goods. As they lack the money to buy helmets or register their bikes, *kabou kabou* are often stopped by police looking for petty bribes. This situation fuels aggression against the state in general, and particularly against the police. Indeed, with youth seething with frustration and resentment against a police force lacking in credibility amongst the broader population, it is perhaps not surprising that protests may turn violent.

This frustration and violence is most often explained by the breakdown of a society in which youth can no longer attain or fulfill socially prescribed roles. Honwana (2012: 19) refers to this as "waithood", or "a prolonged and uncertain stage between childhood and adulthood that is characterized by their inability to enter the labor market and attain the social markers of adulthood". Despite the connotations of the term, Honwana admits that for many youth waithood is not a transitional stage, but rather an "undeviating reality in their lives" (ibid.: 31). In other words, waithood becomes an endemic, every day waiting or a sort of chronic crisis, rather than an episodic experience or transitional stage (Vigh 2008). In such a situation of "waiting", especially young men organize themselves into informal "conversation groups" called *fada* or *palais* (Masquelier 2013).[89] *Fada* are effectively conversation groups that meet for tea ceremonies that last up to several hours, and in which youth assemble to socialize and exchange information. Like assemblies of men elsewhere in Africa, *fadas* are "cosmopolitan settings" in which people listen to world news, discuss politics, exchange information, talk about all kinds of problems, socialize, and network (Loimeier 2008). In *fada*, youth from the neighborhood discuss their everyday preoccupations, debate politics, gossip, talk about job opportunities, play cards, and listen to the radio or cassettes. In other words, *fada* make time, which is otherwise experienced as boredom, meaningful (Masquelier 2013). Many of the grievances members voice in *fada* are directed against the government, who they blame for a lack of employment opportunities.

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[88] There is no reliable unemployment rate available. According to the World Bank, the youth unemployment rate in Niger was only 4.7 percent in 2016 and thereby one of the lowest in the world. These statistics are absurd, and appear to be based only on officially registered youth at the employment office (*Agence Nationale pour la Promotion de l'Emploi,* ANPE). Unskilled youth, however, don't register there because there is normally no corresponding labor demand.

[89] "*Fada* literally means 'the group of people attending the judgements at the leader's palace'" (Lund 2009, 111; own translation). As the Hausa leader was traditionally the sultan, judgements took place in his palace.

Fada slowly emerged in Niger with the democratization process in the 1990s and the rise of unemployment fueled by the SAP. Lund (2009: 103) describes how, in the early stages of private radio in Zinder, an *Anfani* presenter encouraged young people to organize themselves in *fada* to perform their responsibilities as "modern citizens", and to do charitable works such as tree planting and neighborhood clean-ups. Most of these charitable activities have since ceased, and some of the *fada* have morphed into youth gangs called *palais*. *Palais* are a more recent phenomenon, having started around 2007. According to a study on youth violence in Zinder, there are approximately 320 *fada* or *palais*, of which 73 percent are men only, 10 percent are women only, and 17 per cent are mixed (Souley 2012: 10). These conversation groups and youth gangs typically name themselves in Hausa, French or English. Many of them, especially the *palais*, have chosen English names based on (imagined) American gang names like "Capital King", "City Boys", "Big Money", "Gang Boy", or "Style Gang". In contrast to *fada*, the activities of *palais* center more on drug consumption, street fights, crime, violence, and sex. Their violence has been a matter of growing public concern for several years, especially in Zinder. Whereas the *fada* are mostly non-hierarchically organized, affirming a spirit of egalitarianism and comradeship, the *palais* are highly hierarchical organizations with a leader often referred to as *chef*, *boss*, *président*, or *shugaba*. According to my informants, since 2007, Zinder has been experiencing an increase in gang violence, organized robbery, and gang rape. In city quarters like *Kara Kara*, traditionally an area for lepers in Hausa society and particularly affected by poverty, there are an especially high number of *palais*.

Therefore, *fada* is translated into French as *palais*. Nevertheless, the usage of the two terms evinces a qualitative distinction.

Souley (2012) attributes *palais* violence to the breakdown of society – poverty, erosion of traditional family life, school dropout, everyday food insecurity, and a weak state. Indeed, many of the youth protestors are either unemployed or have informal and unstable work, conditions fueled by the neoliberal SAP and PRSP, and barely have a voice in the public sphere. While youth have primarily become significant discursively as a threat to society due to increasing violence, they are also aware of this discourse, and many appropriate this narrative, threatening, for example, government authorities "to make *Boko Haram*" (as I showed in the previous chapter). For young men then, violence offers one of the few effective channels to make their voices heard. Again, however, this protest and violence should not necessarily be understood as organic. As my case study analysis illustrates, youth did not form and mobilize themselves against the political and economic class in Niger, but were rather organized and coordinated by exactly the same class against which they claimed to be mobilizing themselves.

Due to the country's changing demography, male youth are increasingly becoming a force to be reckoned with in Nigerien politics. They are the "critical mass" that has to be governed and controlled, becoming targets of the different political machines that rally behind either the government or the opposition. The *palais* are particularly easy prey for political machines that reward youth leaders for mobilizing their followers. As one *palais* member stated:

> They [*politicians*] often come to see us if they organize demonstrations in which they want us to take part. In return, we receive sums of money. Also, they put in a good word for us in case of arrests. (quoted in Souleymane (2013), own translation)

As Mbembe (2001) writes, the postcolonial state uses its capacity to play off different parts of the population against each other, thereby coopting diverse people into the political game, a political game which is always about some form of personal enrichment. With desperation levels of unemployment in the post-colony, youth are "constantly available to be put to use for virtually any form of labour" (Hoffman 2011: 53). In this context, male youth groups offer violence as a form of labor available to the highest bidder on the market, rather than as a political act performed along ideological lines (ibid).

As the protests have shown, while young men were at the forefront of the riots, young women were largely absent in the public. Here, it should be noted that the markers of adulthood vary according to gender roles within a society. The traditional ideals of Nigerien male adulthood, however, are similar to those described by Honwana (2012: 28) for Africa in general: being a provider and a person of some authority, a worker, a husband, a father, and a contributing member of the community. In contrast, female adulthood is attached to marriage, motherhood, and care giving (ibid.). Hausa hegemonic masculinity is moreover connected to Islamic views on marriage and masculine domination, and has thus been constructed as protective of female weakness (Salamone 2004), and a man's duty to provide everything for his wife or wives (Gronsdal 2002). As I have shown above, gender segregation and the lack of prospects for young men in Niger has led to a "culture of masculine waiting" (Masquelier 2013: 473). Young men's inability to perform socially desirable masculinity also has major repercussions for women's performance of femininity, as Honwana (2012: 24) argues: "[W]omen's ability to attain the social status of adulthood depends on men's moving beyond waithood". As marriage is closely related to wealth, young women may seek older, wealthier husbands, something which has also been observed in other African contexts (Langa and Kiguwa 2013; Schubert 2016), but may be aggravated in polygynous contexts like Niger. For young men, the fact that their potential partners were being taken by "rich sugar daddies" often led to further bitterness and frustration. For young adults stuck in a perpetual state of waiting, the old notions of adulthood – although still valued as an ideal – appear to be incompatible with the new socio-economic realities. As such, these young adults are forced to invent and carve out their own models of what it means to be mature, to become a man or to become a woman, in their own concrete circumstances (Honwana 2012: 29).

As Langa and Kiguwa (2013) have demonstrated for the growing number of "service delivery protests" over access to basic services such as water, electricity and housing in post-apartheid South Africa since 2004, "violent masculinities" were imagined and re-imagined by economically and politically deprived young men to deal with their sense of disempowerment and emasculation. In this sense, violent youth masculinity cannot only be seen as a political manipulation but also as form of double empowerment, firstly, against the dominant masculinity of political and economic elites, and secondly, as a means to make their political voice heard in public. In this sense, the violence in Zinder can also be seen as an expression of male youth frustration that they cannot achieve the normative standards of ideal masculinity: founding a family, being the bread-winner and a contributing member to the community etc.

While employment opportunities for men are limited in the formal sector, for women they are virtually non-existent. Women are thus typically left to resort to the informal service sector for work, where they may, for example, sell food to construction workers or carry out sex work. Given the gender-based labor market in Niger, and significantly lower rates of school education and literacy among women, women are effectively locked out of the oil labor market. This marginalization is exacerbated by the lack of a voice in a public sphere in which women are given no genuine opportunity to express their needs or priorities as a group. This situation is even more dramatic in rural areas. Women's participation in the public is therefore mainly restricted to NGO forums or quota positions in national politics financed and encouraged by international measures for gender equality. In the political games around the oil refinery in Zinder, all the actors were men, and all groups were either exclusively male, or male dominated. And as I have illustrated, these groups drew heavily on oil as an ideological resource in the politics of naming, blaming and claiming to get either access to political posts or to jobs in the oil sector (construction, security, and administration). Yet for these groups in the public sphere, the politics of difference were not about gender, but rather about regional and ethnic marginalization, as complaints about the distribution of positions at SORAZ made clear. Similarly, civil society activists claimed political posts for themselves in regional governmental committees to, for example, oversee the recruitment process. At the same time, government members and supporters blamed the political opposition and civil society for inciting social unrest. In other words, in the public political game in Niger, gender remains unspoken and invisible, simply ignored in a patriarchal social and political setting. Like white skin in world society, which becomes unspoken and invisible due to the position of power and allows white people to speak in the name of the human race against all other voices, which are in turn marked and colored (Dyer 1997), male political players in Zinder speak in the name of the entire region's population – although they are only implying (elite) men – against which female voices are marked and gendered, if existent at all.

To legitimize and maintain their positions of power, and to prevent women from accessing male-dominated spaces – public, political, and economic – in everyday life, men draw heavily on religion and religious discourses. In subsistence farming, for example, labor is heavily related to access to land. While officially women and men have equal legal rights to land, in practice (rural) women's access is dependent on their relationships to male family members (for land rights in Niger more general see Lund (1998)). Indeed, both customary law and the recent phenomenon of wife seclusion (kubli in Hausa) privilege men's access to land. More broadly, wife seclusion greatly inhibits a married woman's economic opportunities, as a secluded wife is not allowed to work, nor spend time outside the home without her husband's permission. Thus, with increased competition for access to land and work, wife seclusion appears to be a strategy to exclude women's access to both. In this regard, Islamic values have become an ideological resource deployed to maintain masculine domination. The politics of wife seclusion can thus be understood as a result of power struggles, both for men to gain status among men through notions of ideal masculinity, and between men and women to exclude the latter from public, economic and political spaces, thereby perpetuating patterns of patriarchy in Niger.

However, Islam and Islamic values should not be seen solely as a resource drawn on by men for legitimation, be it public, economic, political, social, or sexual. In performing ideal femininity according to Islamic notions of piety, women can preserve their moral integrity in an Islamic society while simultaneously breaking the social norms around the gendered private/public distinction and thereby gaining greater agency (see also Mahmood (2004) work on Muslim women performing piety in Egypt). For example, the president of one of the civil society associations working on the extraction of gold, uranium and oil in Niger is a woman. When I met her for the first time, I was surprised to see a veiled woman dressed in dark colors and refusing to shake hands. Although her refusal to shake a man's hand was normal for many women, her dress and behavior belied my expectations of a woman in such a position. I interpreted this as a conscious means to navigate and negotiate her access to the public sphere by following social norms by performing appropriate Islamic womanhood. In this sense, veiling is not only a sort of portable seclusion (Masquelier 1999: 239), but also a relational asset in everyday power struggles between and among genders. According to Masquelier (2009b), the revival of Islam in Niger is a "mixed blessing" for women. In this sense, public debates over Islamic piety have allowed women to gain new understandings and new rights, but also resulted in the loss of some autonomy and sources of value. Women thus navigate their places in a society in which men frame and control the debates and claim themselves to know Islam better than women, while the spiritual practices so central "to women's martial and reproductive lives have been increasingly dismissed as 'superstition', a product of ignorance and confusion" (ibid.: xx).

In sum, violence in Niger is primarily the domain of young men who dominate the public sphere, while young women are often effectively locked away in the private sphere. Moreover, (educated) men are also those who may find employment in the oil industry, while women often try to participate through informal economic opportunities such as food sales or sex work.

6.9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have abstracted from the ethnographic data presented in the previous chapter to create a broader picture of the general dis/order in oil-age Niger. As I have shown in the thesis thus far, the resource curse and rentier state theories fall short in trying to explain the political configuration of oil-age Niger, as they cannot adequately explain how resource productions entangle with the pre-existing political, economic, and social context. In short, these theories suggest deterministic and clear-cut developments toward authoritarianism, corruption, conflict, economic decline, and patriarchy which are undermined by the empirical evidence. Whereas these theories would have it that oil was the cause of political disruption and violence in oil-age Niger, the fact that similar patterns of violence occurred in response to various events – the inauguration of the oil refinery, water shortages, International Workers' Day, and a film and cartoons that negatively depicted Islam – suggest that these protests can be better explained in terms of politics and socio-economic exclusion. As long as the youth in Niger (and elsewhere) continue to be economically and socio-politically largely excluded from the unequally distributed riches of capitalism in a globalized world, political decision-making processes and public debates, political machines will find henchmen for their political projects, and Islamist (or other) militant movements will find easy prey for their brutal war economies, not necessarily due to recruits' ideological commitments, but rather due to shared grievances about the West, their own national governments, and for material incentives.

An analysis of the elements that emerged as protest events during and after the refinery's inauguration illustrates the heterogeneity of contentious politics in its various manifestations and dynamics. Both time- and place-specific, this particular socio-political constellation and the ensuing riots emerged through the coming together of numerous elements, including political machines, politics by proxy, a hybrid civil society after democratization, a strong rhetoric of neocolonialism in public debate, the spread of Salafism, Issoufou's coming to power and the subsequent emergence of Zinder as the opposition stronghold, a culture of masculine waiting paired with increasing youth violence, and new forms of ordering technologies. Of course, this is not to say that riots in one form or another could not have happened if the constellation had come together in other ways, but rather that this historically sedimented dis/order provides the fertile ground on which protest action in Niger prospers.

With a focus on the structural factors of "making oil political", I do not, however, intend to reduce society and politics to a static socio-political system, or what Elias (2009) criticized as *Zustandsreduktion*. By showing that state and politics in Niger have changed over time, among others, Idrissa (2009) criticizes the literature on African politics that derive explanations based on Weberian ideal state formulations, and African cultural deviations from these ideal-types, such as neopatrimonialism. In adopting a processual practice and assemblage approach throughout the thesis, it should be clear that I am drawing on and extending Elias' notion of human-centered *Figuration* into material-semiotic configurations to analyze society not as it *is,* but rather "as it *becomes – has become* in the past, is *becoming* in the present, and *may become* in the future" (Migdal 2001: 23). In this sense, what I describe here and throughout the thesis as "crude dis/order" is what has emerged over time, and becomes visible at a specific moment in time, and whose contingent nature will processually and continuously transform into new dis/ordered entities through the association and substitution of heterogeneous elements. To highlight my argument of oil's catalysis, I turn to transformations of the Nigerien dis/order in the next two chapters.

7. Crude Controversies: Disputes along Niger's petro-infrastructure

In this chapter, I extend out from political dynamics in Zinder, the site of the oil refinery, to the administrative regions of Diffa, the site of oil extraction, and to Niamey (and its surrounding regions Tillabéri and Dosso), the site of the national administration and majority of fuel consumption. In doing so, I examine the transformation processes spurred on by the materialization of the oil infrastructure (the oil wells and the refinery) across these regions, as well as by the transport and consumption of fuel, and the administrative institutions. The event of Niger becoming a new oil producer triggered violent youth protests at the inauguration in late 2011 in Zinder and in Diffa in 2012 and 2013, while peaceful demonstrations and strikes led by civil society activists and labor unions paralyzed the capital in 2012. These acts of resistance and political contestation differed not only in time, form (peaceful, violent) and composition (youth, civil society and labor unions), but also in regards to the narratives and public controversies that accompanied them.

In this chapter, I discuss the different forms and contents of political contestation in Niger in the context of the implementation of the petro-infrastructure: that is, the infrastructure for extracting, producing, refining, transporting and consuming oil essential in the very process of oil becoming a resource. These forms of resistance and contestation show how the development of the seemingly purely technical and economic infrastructure also became political. I argue that with a specific oil assemblage becoming entangled in a pre-existing state-society configuration in Niger, "infrastructural publics" (Collier et al. 2016) emerged. In other words, building on the previous chapter about sedimented and fragmented dis/order in oil-age Niger, I describe disputes along Niger's petro-infrastructure and show how the infrastructure's materialization triggered processes of territorial and symbolic reconfigurations. It is through these processes that political, regional and ethnic differences became newly articulated. Specifically, I argue that the political decision to disperse the oil infrastructure over different administrative regions triggered processes of "territorialization", in which temporally and spatially separated histories of marginalization were stitched together to reproduce collective identities. Before I develop this argument in more detail, let me first turn to the concept of infrastructural publics.

7.1. Infrastructural Publics

As I laid out in the introduction, I draw on the pragmatist assumption that people are connected to each other by objects and issues rather than by shared values, norms or culture

(Latour 2005a: 4). Drawing on Dewey, Marres (2005a) captures this pragmatist understanding of politics with the slogan “no issues, no public”. For her, publics are “sparked into being” by issues that affect people to engage in its politics (Marres 2005b), with publics therefore emerging by being “affected” through problems or events. More specifically, publics might be called into being by infrastructures. Instead of “examining infrastructures as systems meant to serve a pre-constituted public – as in the traditional formulation – we might ask: What collectives are gathered by the materiality of infrastructural connections, the spatiality of infrastructural flows, and the definition of technical standards” (Collier et al. 2016). Thus, instead of imagining the public as a fixed, prefigured, homogenous and passive mass, I assume that there are multiple (counter)publics or collectives “involved in contesting and making (differential) claims on the state” (ibid.).

From this point of view, the implementation of the petro-infrastructure in Niger – the oil wells, the pipeline, the refinery and the petrol stations – called (counter)publics into being by affecting a particular set of actors and actor groups. These publics emerged through their implication in the petro-infrastructure, and engaged in its politics by forming themselves into political units – youth groups, civil society associations, labor unions and political opposition. In this sense, social and political actors in Niger should not be understood as given or constructed around a stable essence based on presupposed shared interests. For example, we cannot presuppose a group interest amongst the population in Niamey against those in Zinder or Diffa. Rather, collective identities are socially constructed in everyday negotiations around issues or infrastructural connections. As Barry (2013) shows in “Material Politics”, the materiality of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in the Caucasus became an integral part of political disputes through its entanglements with diverse actors and discourses on ethics and transparency. Barry ethnographically illustrates how infrastructures and political disputes are inextricably entangled in material-semiotic assemblages, rather than materials being the passive, stable and inert foundations on which disputes emerge (ibid.).

On the other hand, we also cannot assume that the social and political actors that form publics around the petro-infrastructure emerge from a void. Instead, publics are inseparable from the movements that brought them into being (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 362). Clearly, these emerging groups have a historicity built on pre-existing foundations. As Barry (2013: 8) argues, analysts of “making things political” need to “attend to the historically and geographically contingent ways in which diverse events and materials come to be matters of public dispute". In this sense, the groups forming the publics increased their political potency, and with it, the possibilities to make their voices heard (see also chapter 5). In the same way, collective identities are formed in everyday practices that are nevertheless part of historical processes which themselves equally have to be taken into consideration (Cooper and Brubaker 2010).

To account for these synchronic and diachronic processes, I have followed Barry's (2012) suggestion for an ethnography that analyses political situations as contested events and as material-semiotic assemblages in which different knowledge controversies or historical narratives are stitched together (see chapter 2). To analyze political events, it is not enough to simply be there at the right time, as I serendipitously was in the case of protests around the oil refinery's opening (see chapter 5). Rather, an analysis of political situations also requires multi-sited research to trace the forces, relations and flows of knowledge between different sites. As such, to analyze the forms of contestation that emerged out of the materialization of the petro-infrastructure in Niger, I completed around six months fieldwork in the capital Niamey, six months in Zinder near the refinery site, and, due to events beyond my control, only several days in Diffa, the region of oil extraction.[90]

Building on the concept of political situations outlined in chapter 2, I employ an ethnographic perspective to show that the event of Niger becoming a new oil producer in 2011 was highly contested in regard to questions of territoriality, ownership and the effects of oil production. I demonstrate that the implementation of the petro-infrastructure produced territorialized claims around three different sites: the site of oil extraction, the site of oil refinement, and the site of oil's political power and consumption, Niamey. More specifically, I illustrate how each region's claims were based on varied understandings of resource ownership, and on the (anticipated) positive and negative effects of oil production. These claims were triggered by the Tandja government's strategic political decision to construct the refinery in the Zinder region, 400 km west of the extraction sites in Diffa, and about 1000 km east of Niamey. While the push for fuel price subsidies in Niger's capital for the entire Nigerien population to benefit from the oil can be characterized as "oil nationalism", at the sites of extraction and refinement, political actors claimed regional marginalization by relating the new oil reality to historical narratives of repression, resistance and rebellion. These regions called for particular regional benefits, such as compensation for environmental pollution, a share of profits, or a lower regional fuel price. In triggering (counter)publics, the infrastructure of oil thus stitched together several otherwise spatially and temporally separated narratives of historical marginalization. In other words, the construction of Niger's petro-infrastructure spurred a process that I call "territorialization", or a coproduction of a new petro-infrastructure and "governable spaces" (Watts 2003; 2004). By reconfiguring the relations of territory, identity and rule inherent in governable spaces, such a territorialization not only materializes and stabilizes but also modifies pre-existing assemblages in new and unpredictable ways. Just as the nation state is built around the idea of an ethnonational population, of "a people" who rules over a territory whose boundaries confine to the boundaries of the group, I show that lower administrative units in Niger like the region are also built on these three conceptual pillars – territory, identity and rule. In this context, the dispersion of the petro-infrastructure over different administrative regions in Niger can be seen as a nation building project to help foster a national Nigerien collective identity, or as an "attempt to turn infrastructural connectivity into a new form of collectivity" (Opitz and Tellmann 2016). However, as "infrastructures are key sites where diverse political issues intermingle: the ecological with the geopolitical, the fabrication of a common with economic concerns" (ibid.) and so on, infrastructures may also produce unintended effects, including the (re)iteration of regional identities. As Park and Donovan (2016) argue, especially in Africa, "the reach of infrastructures often maps onto ethnoregional patterns of stratification", thereby becoming an integral part of stratification processes and, with it, ethno-regional political terrains. I turn to that now.

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[90] When I presented myself to the governor of Diffa with a mission order from a private research institute and not an official research permit as I was required to do, I was expelled from the region (for more on this issue see Schritt (2015a)). Although I was allowed to return once I had acquired an official research permit, I decided not to due to rising security concerns, first with the extension of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) in the Sahel-Saharan region, and later with the spread of Boko Haram to Diffa. Due to my early expulsion, I had to rely on the few interviews that I had conducted in Diffa, interviews with Diffa *ressortissants* in Niamey, newspaper articles, policy documents, a review of the literature, and research done in the region by two colleagues from the *Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local* (LASDEL) in Niamey, Hadiza Moussa and Mahamidou Aboubacar Attahirou (see subchapter on Diffa).

7.2. Collective identities and contestation along the petro-infrastructure

To understand regional contestation over Niger's petro-infrastructure, we first need to look at how these different regions emerged over time. Only in doing so is it possible to understand the historical and socio-political preconditions out of which the infrastructural publics emerged (see introduction).

During and following the colonial regime, the country's rulers implemented different means to decentralize power. In 1964, the government created departments (*départements*) according to ethno-linguistic criteria.[91] The department of Agadez was designated for a Tuareg majority, Diffa for a Kanuri majority, and Tillabéri (that surrounds the capital Niamey) and Dosso for the Zarma-Songhai. Meanwhile Nigerien Hausaland was split into three administrative zones with approximately equal populations: Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder. In 1998, the department (*département*) was abolished as administrative pillar to make way for the region (*région*). The districts (*arrondissements*) were transformed into departments (*départements*), and the *chefs-lieux des arrondissements* became urban municipalities *(communes urbaines)*, while the administrative posts (*postes administratifs)* were transformed into rural municipalities (*communes rurales)*. However, it was not until the Fifth Republic under Tandja that decentralization began in earnest. The *Schéma 2000 de Décentralisation* envisioned the creation of 265 *communes*, as well as 213 rural and 52 urban municipalities. For the first time, municipal elections were held in 2004 (for more on decentralization politics in Niger see Olivier de Sardan and Tidjani Alou (2009)). Following the 2010 coup and the creation of a new constitution, Djibo once again restructured Niger's administrative landscape, creating the regional council (*conseil régional*).[92] At the rural and most local level, the state translates into the *groupement* for nomadic and the *canton* for sedentary groups. Each of these units is led by administrative leaders or *chef traditionnels* – the *chef de groupement* and the *chef de canton*, respectively. These higher-level leaders command lower-level leaders, the *chef de tribu* for nomadic groups, and the *chef de village* for sedentary groups. The political power of these leaders rests on ascribed state authority (such as the right to collect taxes) on the one hand, and on the generally accepted, although somewhat weak legitimacy of aristocratic inheritance on the other.

As the following map shows, the petro-infrastructure in Niger is constructed across different administrative regions. Whereas the oil is extracted in Niger's eastern most administrative region Diffa, it is refined more than 400 km to the west in the administrative region of Zinder, which is itself 1000 km east of the country's metropolis Niamey, where around 80 percent of inland consummation takes place, and which is also the center of political administration. Here, we should remember that the decision to build the refinery in Zinder was a political rather than practical decision, with Diffa proving the cheapest alternative in the 1984 BEICIP study (see chapter 4).

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[91] *Loi 64-023 du 17 juillet 1964.*

[92] *Ordonnance 2010-54, du 17 septembre 2010, portant code des collectivités territoriales.*

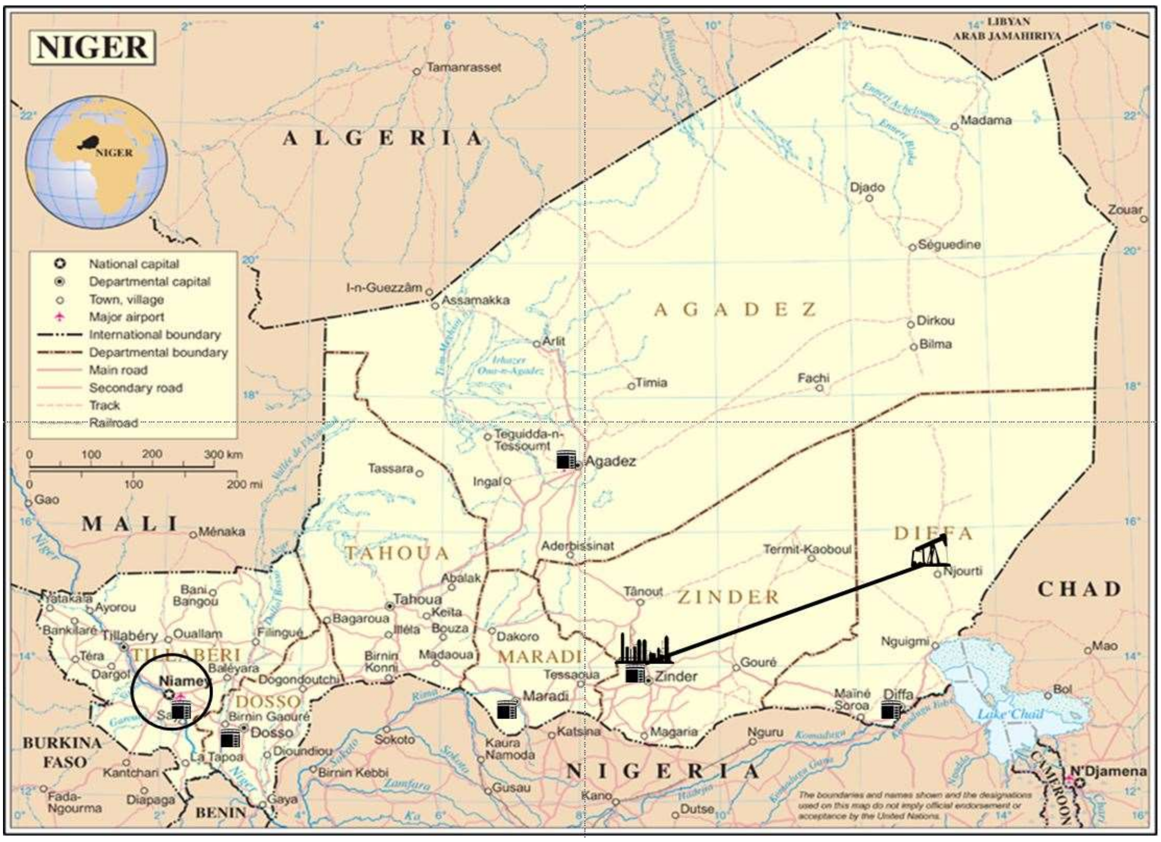
NIGER
LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA
A L G E R I A
M A L I
CHAD
N I G E R I A
BURKINA FASO
BENIN
CAMEROON
A G A D E Z
TAHOUA
ZINDER
MARADI
DOSSO
TILLABÉRI
DIFFA
National capital
Departmental capital
Town, village
Major airport
International boundary
Departmental boundary
Main road
Secondary road
Track
Railroad
0 100 200 300 km
0 100 200 mi
Tamanrasset
Madama
Djado
Zouar
Séguedine
I-n-Guezzâm
Assamakka
Arlit
Dirkou
Bilma
Timia
Fachi
Teguidda-n-Tessoumt
Agadez
Tassara
Ingal
Gao
Ménaka
Aderbissinat
Termit-Kaoboul
Njourti
Abalak
Tânout
Tahoua
Keita
Bouza
Bani Bangou
Ayorou
Yatakala
Bankilaré
Tillabéry
Ouallam
Filingué
Bagaroua
Illéla
Dakoro
Nguigmi
Mao
Téra
Dargol
Niamey
Say
Baléyara
Dogondoutchi
Birnin Konni
Madaoua
Tessaoua
Zinder
Gouré
Maradi
Mainé Soroa
Diffa
Bol
Lake Chad
Birnin Gaouré
Dosso
La Tapoa
Dioundiou
Sokoto
Kaura Namoda
Katsina
Magaria
Nguru
Kantchari
Birnin Kebbi
Gusau
Kano
Dutse
N'Djamena
Fada-Ngourma
Diapaga
Gaya
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Figure 11: The oil infrastructure in Niger showing the wells, the refinery, the center of consumption (circle) and the six fuel depots in Diffa, Zinder, Maradi, Dosso, Niamey and Agadez. Source: own illustration based on UN map of Niger, found at www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/niger.pdf

In the 1970s these three profoundly different parts of Niger – the capital Niamey with the neighboring regions Tillabéri and Dosso in the far west, Diffa in the far east, and Zinder in the center – were connected by the construction of the main Nigerien national road, the *Route Nationale 1* or the *route de l'unité* ("unity highway").[93] The route reaches from the country's south-west along the Sahel belt to the east, symbolizing "in a very physical way, the *hyphen* which is supposed to produce the Nigerien *nation-state*" (Idrissa 2009: 185, own emphasis). However, prior to oil production, large sections of the road, especially in the east, had been left to deteriorate. In the east, the state was said to be quasi-absent at the administrative level in N'gourti (spelt Njourti on the map), the lowest level of direct state administration at that time, and the locality closest to the Diffa wells (Moussa 2009). Before oil production, the N'gourti administration was chronically underfunded, had limited financial autonomy, lacked infrastructure, and political representatives were disconnected from the population. Moreover, due to its strategic geography as an international border region and a region of former conflicts and rebellions, N'gourti was dominated by military and security personal (ibid.)

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[93] By 1980, the second Nigerien national road had been completed. Running from Niamey to Arlit in the far north, the *Route Nationale 2* is often referred to as the "uranium highway" (*l'autoroute de l'uranium*).

With the commencement of oil production in the region, this situation would soon change. Article 152 of the constitution of the Seventh Republic and article 146 of the Nigerien oil law (*code pétrolier*) prescribed that the central state had to redistribute 15 percent of the revenues from oil production to the municipalities (*communes*) of the affected *région* for local development. Moussa (2013: 5) notes that the transformation of the old administrative post of N'gourti into a *commune* under the decentralization program was justified entirely by oil production, which was envisioned as a means to finance local development and solve the areas problems. However, the *code pétrolier* from 2007, which adopted the regulation for the redistribution of the resource revenues provided by the mining laws, only envisaged compensation for the extraction zone, Diffa, and not for the zone of refinement, Zinder. In fact, the *Société de Raffinage de Zinder* (SORAZ) is legally considered one of the *grandes industries*, and therefore has to transfer their taxes and fees – more than 4 billion FCFA/month (6,097,960 Euro) – to the *Direction Générale des Impôts du Niger* in Niamey. This legal framework and the subsequent reinvestment in Diffa but not in Zinder became a major political issue, not only between the national government and the national assembly, but also between various population groups of the two areas. This illustrates how diverse actors and actor groups emerged as publics that associated the infrastructure's dispersion over the different administrative regions with the (anticipated) positive and negative effects of oil production.

In the following subchapter, I set out to explore Niger becoming a new oil producer as a political situation or contested event, and in doing so, trace the emergence of a material-semiotic assemblage. I illustrate how the petro-infrastructure became "matters of concern" (Latour 2004) that affected publics and thereby (co)produced and (re)produced collective identities. In highlighting politics as emerging from associations between heterogeneous elements, the notion of a resource-political configuration that I laid out in chapter 3 also illuminates how the implementation of Niger's petro-infrastructure became inextricably entangled with particular administrative spaces, revenue laws, oil's (anticipated) material effects, and histories of marginalization. I argue that the dispersion of the infrastructure of oil over different regions thus triggered processes of territorialization by re-configuring the relations of territory, identity and rule.

7.2.1. The reproduction of a rebellious *Zinderois* identity

In chapter 5 I explored resistance and political contestation around the inauguration in Zinder. As I showed there, diverse social and political actors – including regional and municipal councilors from Zinder, government representatives, opposition politicians, businessmen, civil society activists, and youth – used the inauguration as a stage to talk and text oil politics. They argued that the Zinder population would not reap the benefits of the refinery, and would be left to bear the brunt of its development through environmental damage and land expropriation. Furthermore, they linked this perceived (future) injurious experience to the historical political marginalization of the Zinder region, and accused the Issoufou government of favoring western Nigerien belonging and Zarma ethnicity. In doing so, they demanded compensation and benefits for the Zinder region and its population.

While I mainly focused on the political logic of contestation in the previous chapter, I here want to shortly summarize the different actors' regionalist narratives and link them to the particular history of the region. First, criticizing the use of oil workers from western Niger and of Zarma ethnicity, CRAS claimed that a quota of oil workers (60-70 percent) should come from the Zinder region. They also called for changes to the oil laws, so that Zinder would be included in the retrocession of oil revenues in compensation for its negative effects. In a radio debate about the future Nigerien fuel price that they organized on *Shukurah*, CRAS members not only argued for a fuel price of about 200 FCFA/liter, but (as one panelist argued) that the Zinder region should have its own, lower fuel price. He proposed a regional fuel price that had a base price in Zinder, and was then augmented in relation to the costs that incur with the transportation from the refinery to the other depots:

> For example, we propose to sell the fuel in Zinder at 200 FCFA. Once the tanker trucks have carried it to Maradi, it is sold in intervals from 210 FCFA to 225 FCFA until Tillabéri. Thus, it rises progressively. In Tillabéri it should not exceed 250 FCFA. You see, everyone can profit in this way.[94]

Second, Zinder regional and municipal councilors established a committee at the governorate to supervise and ensure that *Zinderois* were given preferential treatment in the recruitment process. Third, Dan Dubai's MPPAD accused the newly elected government authorities of marginalizing the Zinder region with respect to possible oil benefits. Government politicians responded by accusing opposition politicians, businessmen, and civil society activists in Zinder of inciting social unrest and fueling regional and ethnic separatism. Here we have to remember that groups, associations or federations based on regional or ethnic identity have been officially banned since the 1960s, as have political parties based on ethnicity since 1991. Moreover, since Kountché had prohibited any reference to ethnicity in public debates, those references are always framed as accusations against other groups. That is, it is always the political opponent who is pursuing ethnoregionalist politics, whereas the speaking party is only naming their practices.

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[94] Recording of radio Shukurah on 2.12.2011.

Fourth, when the Nigerien oil minister announced the fuel price of 579 FCFA/liter on 16 November 2011, citizens' reactions were collected and broadcast on private radio stations in Zinder. As one interviewee said:

> We all know that the negative consequences of oil hit first the area where it is refined. Even where the oil is extracted, there are not as many negative consequences as where it is refined. Thus, even if there is a national fuel price, there should be a local price for the Zinder region. That has not happened, and that is not what the rulers intend to do. This is perhaps due to the fact that the people in power do not pay a lot attention, if I may say so, to our region, to the regions of Zinder, Diffa and Maradi. This, according to my calculations and impressions, is caused by or reflects the image of the elections, because these two or three regions were not favorable to those in power.[95]

Here, the interviewee argues that Zinder should have a lower fuel price because the region will pay most for the negative impact of the refinery, and oil in general. Additionally, he accuses Issoufou and his government of punishing the Zinder population for supporting the political opposition. Moreover, the *Zinderois* interviewee claims to speak on behalf of Maradi and Diffa as well, as if they shared a common history and identity. However, as I will illustrate in the next subchapter, this eastern Nigerien collective identity is not necessarily shared by, or is even outright rejected by other Eastern Nigeriens, especially by *Diffalais*. The statement discursively (re)produces the relative positions of power between Zinder and Diffa, with the *Zinderois* often assuming the right to speak as representatives of an apparently collective eastern Nigerien identity.

Fifth, the violent youth protests on the day of the inauguration and in the weeks that followed were glorified in mobile phone messages as resistance against Issoufou and a profession of faith in Tandja. More specifically, in the aftermath of the inauguration, text messages harked back to a collective *Zinderois* identity which is deeply entangled with Islam, the history of Zinder as a sultanate, and the region's glorified resistance against French troops.

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[95] Recording of radio Anfani on 16.11.2011.

> Throughout the history of Zinder, Damagaram has never been beaten – so cry out loud and clear 'victory', and that the struggle continues with the help of ALLAH (SWT)[96] and the prayers of our devoted marabouts. (SMS sent on 7 December 2011, translated from French)

Although Zinder was actually beaten and conquered by the French in 1899, the message glorifies the *Zinderois* resistance. In Niger, Zinder is considered a city of rebellion and revolution which always fought against outside forces, be they French troops, or the regimes in Niamey. Moreover, as I showed in the previous chapter, violent protests in the name of the region and/or Islam have become a recurrent phenomenon in Zinder. After the riots around the refinery's inauguration, Dan Dubai and others saw the protests as a success, as the political powers in Niamey "would have felt the presence of Zinder". Here we need to remember that the historical political marginalization of Zinder began with the battle following the murder of French captain Marius Gabriel Cazemajou and his interpreter. After a short period of resistance, Zinder was captured and occupied by the French colonizers in July 1899, serving as the capital of the Niger Military Territory from its creation in 1911 to 1926. As highlighted previously, in moving the capital to Niamey, France began a program to systematically favor western belonging and Zarma ethnicity. By the time of the National Conference and the transition to democracy in 1991, Zarma had become dominant in higher education, the administration and the army, and constituted the political elite of the country (Ibrahim 1994), a discrimination that – at least in the perception of *Zinderois* – continues today.

As a response to western-Zarma hegemony, a regionalist-cultural association with the innocent name *Association Mutuelle pour la Culture et les Arts* (AMACA) was formed in 1989 in Zinder, the center of Hausa resistance (Lund 1998: 94).[97] AMACA's objectives were to protect Zinder-Hausa civil servants against Zarma favoritism in the state apparatus, and to favor the region in terms of national development. Composed of intellectuals and financed by wealthy businessmen, AMACA soon recruited large numbers of non-intellectuals, morphing into the CDS-Rahama party in early 1990s. The CDS' strategy was to win the support of the Hausa majority by underlining an injustice which Damagaram had suffered since the colonial period, a persistent water shortage. This shortage was blamed on insufficient infrastructure due to a lack political will on the national level in Niamey, as well as government officials abusing power. To solve this problem, the people needed justice, and for that to happen, power needed to shift from the west back to the east (Lund 1998: 94; Danda 2004: 323). The strategy worked, with CDS-Rahama leader Mahamane Ousmane becoming the first democratically elected President of Niger in 1993 (although power shifted back to the West with his ousting in 1996).

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[96] SWT is an abbreviation of *Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala.* A glorification of Allah which roughly translates into "the most glorified, the most high".

[97] However, Ibrahim and Niandou-Souley (1998: 152) write that AMACA was formed in 1982.

The historical political marginalization of Zinder is vividly remembered in present-day narratives, and has contributed to what some refer to as a "rebellious *Zinderois* identity" (Danda 2004). According to narratives of historical political marginalization that I noted in numerous informal conversations, whereas France had claimed the decision to move the capital to Niamey was due to groundwater shortages in Zinder, the actual reason was a French fear of resistance from the "rebellious *Zinderois*". This narrative is taken as proof that the French always favored Zarma ethnicity and western Nigeriens over Hausa ethnicity and eastern origin. When the capital was transferred, Niamey was said to be a small village, whereas Zinder was a highly organized, hierarchical large town with a proud sultanate. Moreover, even today many of my Zinderois interlocutors considered themselves to be the most pious Muslims and therefore the most civilized citizens of Niger (see also Charlick 2007; Danda 2004). In all, these narratives construct a dichotomy between an ancient and proud "Zinder/Hausa civilization" on the one hand, and an "uncivilized" Niamey/Zarma ethnicity on the other.

As the text message I cited above illustrates, the *Zinderois* identity is also entangled with a strong Islamic dimension. This became pertinent during the inauguration ceremony, with public outrage that the *marabou* Issoufou chose came from Niamey rather than Zinder (see chapter 2). This outrage was tied to a crucial element of the *Zinderois* identity, that the region became the first in today's Niger to become Islamized. Here, Islamization began in the 15th century, albeit slowly. Today, orthodox Islamic organizations like the *Association pour la Diffusion Islamique au Niger* (ADIN-Islam), the *Association pour le Rayonnement de la Culture Islamique* (ARCI) and *les jeunes musulmans* are particularly strong in Zinder. Zinder (and Maradi) have typically also been the first regions in Niger to import religious developments from Nigeria, such as the recent trend to Salafi-oriented ideologies. Indeed, Zinder is widely considered the stronghold of orthodox Islam in Niger. For example, most political observers did not appear surprised that the protests against Charlie Hebdo erupted first in Zinder in January 2015, but rather that similar violence also took place in Niamey the following day (Idrissa 2015).

However, for Danda (2004), the "rebellious *Zinderois"* is primarily a territorial identity related the historical Damagaram sultanate. Although the historical Damagaram sultanate and the contemporary Zinder city and region were and are multiethnic, and although I never came across public political internal ethnic differentiations about Zinder identity, not only are the majority of *Zinderois* ethnically Hausa, but the *Zinderois* identity is also implicitly Hausa.[98] The organizational structure and wealth of Damagaram sultanate, which was based on a trans-Saharan trading economy, taxation of agricultural production and investment into military conquest and slave labor (Baier 1980), spurred a process of "Hausaisation" (Haour and Rossi 2010). This process involved the assimilation of non-Hausa groups through the adoption of the Hausa language, Islam and the exertion of urban influence over surrounding regions (ibid.: 21). Thus, although the overarching identity is not ethnic but regional, and although it is also accepted in rural area, the *Zinderois* identity is not only implicitly Hausa, it is also strongest in the city of Zinder.

The unequal development of urban and rural Hausaland which had produced wealthy, walled, Islamic and widely renowned Hausa towns such as Zinder on the one hand, and little developed countrysides on the other, remains apparent today (Charlick 1991: 124-127; Haour and Rossi 2010: 23). In line with this historically constructed rural/urban divide, the inhabitants of Bakin Birgi, the site of the refinery, argued in several focus group interviews that the profits and advantages of the refinery primarily go to people from Zinder city, located 50 km to the south. Indeed, after the construction phase, the mostly uneducated local workers were laid off, with the jobs at the now operating refinery going to educated urbanites. In addition, people from Bakin Birgi argued that whereas they suffered the effects of the refinery – land expropriation, air pollution, a military presence that restricts their movements at night, incrimination for theft of unwanted materials, and an influx of "foreigners" in the search of making a living – the people and the city of Zinder were receiving all the benefits. Not only was the new oil workers' residential center built in Zinder city and not in Bakin Birgi, but the promised health care center had not been built, so they still had to go to Zinder city for treatment. Moreover, in these focus group discussions local residents also complained that life had become more expensive, especially land and house prices, as well as transport fares.

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[98] The ethnic makeup of the region is as follows: 68.6 percent Hausa, 13.1 percent Kanuri, 9.4 percent Fulani, 7.5 percent Tuareg, 0.7 percent Tubu, 0.5 percent Zarma-Songhai, and 0.2 percent Arab (INS-Niger 2011).

The *Zinderois* rebellious identity is not only a self-ascription, but also ascribed them by outsiders from across the country. As such, the political violence in Zinder did not surprise political observers. Moreover, instead of showing solidarity with the protestors in Zinder, newspapers and civil society associations in Niamey accused the *Zinderois* of undermining national unity and fueling regional and ethnic separatism. These accusations were based on the reputation for "hot-headedness" and "violence" that Zinder had acquired in Nigerien public discourse over the years (Idrissa 2015).

In short, in assembling petro-infrastructures, histories of marginalization, governable spaces, revenue laws and socio-cultural conditions, the historical identity of the rebellious *Zinderois* has been reproduced and reinforced in the process of Niger becoming a new oil producer. In other words, together with the fact that the oil refinery was constructed in Zinder region, that the Issoufou government did not deliver on Tandja's promises, and that petroleum laws (at least initially)[99] did not incorporate compensation for a region that has both a long history of political marginalization and apparently increasing youth violence, served to strengthen and stabilize the three pillars of governable spaces in Zinder: identity (Hausa/*Zinderois*), territory (Zinder region/Damagaram) and rule (decentralization/management of oil revenues).

7.2.2. The coproduction of a new collective *Diffalais* identity

Located on Niger's eastern border, the Diffa region is numerically dominated by the Kanuri ethnic group.[100] In the region, labor has traditionally long been divided along ethnic lines (Bovin 1985: 57–58), a division which broadly continues today: the majority Kanuri dominate southern Diffa and are mostly farmers; the Fulani are typically agropastoralists with herds of sheep, goats and donkeys; the Fulani subgroup of Woɗaaɓe are highly specialized transhumant Zebu cattle pastoralists (Schareika 2003b; 2003a) who arrived in the Lake Chad area around 1910 (Schareika 2004); the Tubu, who have a caste-like internal hierarchy of noblemen (*daza*), captives (*azza*), and blacksmiths and artisans (*aggra*) are mostly camel-rearing specialists (Baroin 1985); as are the Diffa Arabs, who also engage in the long-distance camel trade; the Hausa are mostly market brokers and often work as butchers and tanners, occupations Kanuri generally refuse as impure; and the Zarma-

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[99] On 8 May 2015, the council of ministers approved a change to the oil laws to compensate the Zinder region with 15 percent of the fiscal revenues from the oil refinery.

[100] The ethnic makeup of Diffa is as follows: 60.2 percent Kanuri, 24.6 percent Fulani, 6.2 percent Tubu, 4.5 percent Hausa, 2.4 percent Arab, 0.9 percent Zarma-Songhai, 1 percent Tuareg, and 0.2 percent other (INS-Niger 2011).

Songhai typically work in the administration and the army (Bovin 1985: 57–58). Although the ethnic division of labor is not always clear-cut, it has (co)produced a region which is built along strong ethnic identities rather than a collective regional identity. However, as I show below, oil production has changed this, at least to some extent.

The two administrative units most affected by oil production are the Tubu *groupement* Tarduga in Atrouna and a *groupement* of *Awlâd Suleyman* Arabs in Melec. Atrouna and Melec are water wells located several kilometers south of the CNPC's main base *Djaouro.*[101] *Djaouro* itself is 67 km north of the administrative post of N'gourti, and about 200 km north of Diffa city, the regional capital and the site where most of the oil worker recruitment offices are located. An environmental and social impact assessment carried out by the Nigerien consultancy agency *Ingénieurs Conseils Associés* (ICA) in collaboration with the CNPC found several possible negative and some positive impacts around the extractive zone. According to the report, the zone of oil extraction would be severely affected by the construction of oil wells, vibrations of seismological activity, interconnecting pipelines between oil wells, and the construction of three camps and an airport (Ingénieurs Conseils Associés 2009: x–xi). The negative impacts on the pastoralists would include restricted access to land, soil erosion and pollution, the collapse of traditional wells, overexploitation of hydro-resources, degradation of ground water and air quality, the destruction of vegetation, loss of natural wildlife habitat, accidents and health risks, acoustic pollution, the degradation of morals, and the transmission of sexual diseases among the population (ibid.). As positive impacts, the study named the creation of jobs, the development of the private local sector, the improvement of the local and national economy, and the improvement of local socio-economic conditions (ibid.). Local authorities as well as ordinary inhabitants of the *commune* of N'gourti, however, complained that the authors of the study held only one public hearing with local representatives prior to the report's release, and demanded a more transparent process that involved the mostly nomadic population (Attahirou 2012: 41/42 & 45).

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[101] Formerly known as *Tantammerdé*, the CNPC changed the name of the site to *Djaouro* (Attahirou 2012: 43). Oil companies often change the names of oil zones to avoid land claims from neighboring communities (Magrin and Maoundonodji 2012). In this instance, however, I also heard accusations of ethnic appropriation in the name change. According to this version, the area was first inhabited by Fulani, who drilled the pastoral water well, and who accused Tubu and Arab groups of changing the name to claim their autochthony over the region. Based on the etymology of the words, however, it is difficult to verify these claims.

Earlier studies on the impact of oil exploitation on pastoralism and the creation of the future national nature reserve Termit Tin-Toumma had also been conducted.[102] These found that pastoral groups were enthusiastic about the developments, as they believed that modern pastoral wells and socio-economic development according to the Libyan model – free healthcare, access to free housing spaces, and an amelioration of social and economic life more generally – would be included (Meynier 2009; Aboubacar 2010; van Sprundel and Anderson 2010: 102–5). However, these studies also emphasized the negative impacts of the developments (limited access to pastures, the disturbance of herds, blocked transhumance routes, and unknown animal diseases) rather than the positive ones (small-scale trade, new transport opportunities, and the proliferation of national passports because the CNPC demanded these documents for recruitment).

Both the Tubu and the Arab *groupements* are said to have close relations to the Nigerien state. The Tarduga of Atrouna have historically been loyal to the state in exchange for territorial negotiations in their favor (Musch 2013). From the 1920s onward, in exchange for good relations with the French, the Tarduga received the administrative chieftaincy and French military support against rival groups, while their loyalty to recent governments has seen them hold the administrative status of a *groupement*, thereby maintaining a level of political and economic power (ibid.). Often economically significantly stronger than the Tubu, Arab pastoralists in Diffa are eyed suspiciously by other ethnic groups, especially as many are relative latecomers to the region. Aside from the *Shuwa* Arabs who started arriving in Kanem-Borno in the eighth century (Braukämper 1994), the first small group of *Awlâd Suleyman* Arabs came from the Fezzan (today Libya and Chad) to the Diffa region in the mid-19th century (Zeltner 1980; Braukämper 2004). A second, much larger migration of *Mohamid* Arabs took place following the 1974 Sahelian drought, the Chadian civil war (1965-79), and the Chadian-Libyan conflict in the 1980s. While there were around 4000 nomadic Arabs in eastern Niger in the 1970s (Decalo 1989: 30), today there are around 150,000. Most are involved in the international camel trade and are respected by the state as good taxpayers in their districts (Idrissa and Decalo 2012: 64). Thus, although latecomers, many members of the Arab community have been issued national identity cards by local authorities, and have acquired land rights which their ethnic neighbors typically attribute to their financial power, political connections and corruption. Indeed, the Arab community is said to have a profound political influence in the new Issoufou government, especially through PNDS-President and former foreign minister Mohamed Bazoum, who comes from the Arab minority in the area.

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[102] The official application to make Termit Tin-Toumma a nature reserve was made in 2006. It was finally established in 2012.

Prior to oil production, interethnic tensions between Arab, Fulani, Kanuri and Tuareg communities in the area were mounting. In response, in October 2006, the Tandja government announced that it would deport *Mohamid* Arabs to Chad, but suspended the plan shortly after the operations had started (IRIN News 2006). In 2011 however, with the launching of oil activities, interethnic relations improved. According to a member of the Arab community in Melec, this improvement was due to oil activities, which he claimed had led to the forging of a stronger *Diffalais* identity against Western Nigerien belonging on the one hand, and Zinder regional belonging on the other. To understand the production of a new regional identity that – at least to some extent – put aside former ethnic rivalries, let us first look at the impact of oil extraction in Diffa and the narratives it produced.

Unlike the victims of land expropriation around the refinery and along the pipeline, none of the groups in the oil extraction area officially received compensation payments. In contrast to sedentary farms, which are considered to belong to a person or group, communal pastoralist land in the semi-desert region was considered “empty”, and was therefore not subject to compensation, either from the state or the CNPC (Attahirou 2012: 44; Musch 2012; Moussa 2013: 7). In 2010, people in Atrouna started discussing resettling in areas that had been previously unusable due to a lack of water access, but where the CNPC had reputedly promised to drill a deep well and to set up infrastructural projects, including a school and infirmary (Musch 2012). However, although the pastoral groups were not compensated and the resettlement project has been repeatedly postponed, both groups act as important consultative partners for the Nigerien state, showing that they not only have some share in the political decision-making process, but also that they seem to coexist well with oil extraction, especially the Arab group (email communication with Tilman Musch on 2.12.2016).

With oil production, the CNPC has also completed some healthcare, education and water infrastructure projects, including a health center at Bédouaram (about 50 km north of N’gourti), several class-rooms in different villages, and the construction or amelioration of modern water wells (Attahirou 2012: 58–66). Oil production has also been described as leading to *désenclavement* – the opening up of the region from isolation through new road infrastructure such as the “oil highway” *(l’autoroute du pétrole),* which saw the reconstruction of the "unity highway" between Diffa and N'guigmi, as well as public transport and business opportunities (Attahirou 2012: 76–88). However, many of the risks outlined in the ICA impact assessment mentioned above also seem to have materialized, or at least outweigh the population's perceptions of the positive impacts of extraction (Attahirou 2012: 58–88). Indeed, it was these risks rather than the possible benefits of oil production that were emphasized in the politics of naming, blaming and claiming to attract public attention, and to build political pressure in order for government attention and redress. I turn to that now.

Reflecting on the problems created by oil extraction in Diffa (particularly the Manga area in the Agadem oil block), the Tubu *Collectif des Cadres et Représentants des Organisations de la Société Civile du Manga* (OSC Manga) wrote the following in May 2011:[103]

> It is important to note that the start of oil explorations has generated real hope among the population, who see it as the solution to the pervasive poverty and underdevelopment plaguing Niger in general, and the area of Manga in particular [...] Unfortunately, this climate of understanding is likely to deteriorate quickly, leaving a widespread feeling of deep bitterness and frustration among local actors […] Warning signs are becoming apparent to the public: a looming and unprecedented ecological disaster, poor working conditions often involving exclusion, humiliation, underpayment, and favoritism, as well as unhealthy and degrading behavior toward the land and wildlife […] Given the highly explosive nature of oil production, and facing the particularly volatile situation prevailing in neighboring countries like Libya, it is necessary to take into account the reality of the people who live in the area affected by oil. Most young Nigeriens from the Manga area, having lived in Libya, were enrolled in the Libyan army and underwent high level military training. If for some motivations stem from the need to find a job, whatever its nature, for others, by contrast, it is purely subversive inclination. (OSC Manga 2011)

In the pamphlet, the OSC Manga portrayed the population of Diffa, especially the indigenous population of Manga[104], as the actual bearers of the negative effects of oil. First, expressions of hope often referred to oil developments in al-Qaddhāfī's Libya, which many herders migrated to on a regular basis. Based on these experiences, they expected oil-age Niger to follow the example of the Libyan "distributive oil state" (Vandewalle 1998) and not of conflict-ridden Nigeria (Attahirou 2012: 49). In a long list of bullet points, the authors then cited oil's negative effects, a list nearly identical to that in the environmental impact assessment study. Amongst others, they noted the following impacts: chemical waste deposits, land degradation, water, vibration and noise pollution, the loss of livestock, wildlife, and grazing land, and even the death of two young herders who drank chemicals left behind by oil workers. After naming oil's negative effects, they blamed former President Tandja, whom the OSC Manga committee met in 2009, for turning a deaf ear to their concerns, and having personalized the oil affair. Then they made recourse to President Issoufou's message to the nation, in which he stressed the need for oil production to take place in a setting of national peace and security. They argued that measures were needed to sensitize and help youth, and that the whole population must profit from the oil. If not, "chauvinism", "xenophobia" and "egoism" would develop further, which in turn would threaten the unity, stability and social peace of the nation (OSC Manga 2011).

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[103] The eight-page pamphlet was leaked to the media, with an abridged version published on 6 June 2011 in the private newspaper *Le Temps* under the initials M.I.

[104] Manga normally denotes a southern area of Diffa which borders Nigeria and is dominated by Kanuri. However, the authors of the pamphlet, themselves all of Tubu origin, seem to relate Manga to the oil extracting region around N'gourti.

To emphasize the urgency in addressing their rights, aims and claims, like the municipal and regional councilors' narrative about unemployed youth gangs in Zinder, OSC Manga argued that a social explosion was imminent. They intensified the threat by referring to then current instability in Libya and the former Tubu rebellion in Diffa. Starting in 1993, the rebellion leaders, the FARS (*Forces Armées Révolutionnaires du Sahara*) had demanded that the Nigerien state finance development in the Kaouar[105] and Manga provinces. Allied with the Tuareg rebels against the state of Niger, the joint rebellion ended with the Algiers peace agreement in 1997. However, the threat from FARS never really disappeared. Indeed, just after the signing of the oil contract between CNPC and Niger in 2008, FARS released a statement on the blog of Tuareg rebel group MNJ in which they "warn[*ed*] the Chinese company against all exploration during this period of insecurity in the Agadem block" (Energy Daily 2008).[106] At the time, the Third Tuareg Rebellion (2007-2009) was still continuing, and FARS was an allied group. On the blog, FARS also said that it is "absurd to refine oil, extracted in the east, in a plant in the south", insisting that the oil refinery in Zinder would deprive Diffa of its resources. Finally, FARS also said it had planted landmines in the south-eastern zone of Kaouar to hamper the work of foreign companies, and that it would hold "the government of Niger and the Chinese society responsible for any failure to heed this warning" (ibid). The period of insecurity ended with the peace agreement between the MNJ and the Tandja government in 2009. FARS did not attack the

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[105] Kaouar is located north of Manga. About 150 km long, this north-south escarpment cuts through the Ténéré desert along the dunes of the Erg of Bilma.

[106] The blog has now ceased to exist (http://m-n-j.blogspot.de/2008/04/communiqu-des-forces-armes.html).

CNPC, and in 2016 their leader, Barka Wardougou, died.[107] Claiming that they lack the powerful political representatives that the Arab groups have, OSC Manga thus adopts a different approach to make their demands heard at state level: they refer to but rephrase the historical threat of FARS' violence and rebellion in the region.

In the OSC Manga narrative, disaffected and desperate young men who had had military training and had worked in Libya were now being forced to return to Niger (and especially Diffa) with the fall of the al-Qaddhāfī regime. These young men – about 200,000 across Niger – now found themselves jobless, not only lacking the means to support their families, but even living on their families' little resources. According to local narratives, in this situation, the non-recruitment of oil workers from the resident population created conflicts (Attahirou 2012: 49–57). With the arms used in the Tubu rebellion in the 1990s reportedly still in circulation, OSC Manga argued that these men could easily join subversive movements if the hope and expectations related to oil production were not fulfilled. Internally divided into two groups (Teda and Daza) who speak mutually comprehensible dialects (Baroin 1997), the Tubu have long been noted in travelers' accounts, colonial sources and the academic literature for their "anarchy" and "unruliness". Similarly, in popular Tubu discourse, they also often describe themselves as dangerous and proud warriors (Baroin 1985; Scheele 2015). As one of the authors of the OSC Manga pamphlet told me: "if even Igbo in Nigeria are able to cut the oil pipeline, how should the state in Niger be able to protect the pipeline against battle-tested warriors like the Tubu"? Indeed, some of my interlocutors supposed that the decision to construct the oil refinery in Zinder and not in Diffa was related to the threat posed by this "Tubu warriordom".

Near the end of 2011, rumors began to spread that the law determining the redistribution of 15 percent of oil revenue would be amended, so that Zinder would also profit as the site of the refinery. With rumors starting that the amendment would mean sharing revenues between Diffa and Zinder,[108] a group of youth in Diffa city feared that this would mean a loss of revenue and issued a declaration on 26 December 2011. In the declaration, they: rejected the proposition of the Council of Ministers to modify the petroleum code to divide the 15 percent of oil revenue between Zinder and Diffa, calling it a provocation for the *Diffalais*; claimed such a change threatened social peace, and called on the governor to maintain order; called on the members of parliament to vote against such an unjust law, demanded deputies from Diffa region hand in their resignations, and that the Diffa population fight a law change; and finally, called on the *Zinderois* not to turn against the interests of the Diffa region. In response, local politicians in Diffa issued a declaration against any changes to the law, and threatened to withdraw their regional representatives (deputies) from the National Assembly.

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[107] In September 2016, a Tubu man named Adam Tcheke Koudigan claimed to succeed Barka Wardougou and the FARS (*Forces Armées Révolutionnaires du Sahara*), launching a rebel group called the *Mouvement pour la Justice et la Réhabilitation du Niger* (MJRN). The MJRN claimed to be taking up arms against the CNPC for the environmental pollution caused by oil production. However, the rebel group is said to be a one-man organization that does not (yet) have any followers.

[108] Some rumors even had it that the 15 percent would be split according to the population size, which would have further benefited the Zinder region.

This dispute was built on the general consensus in the Diffa region, which appeared to be against the decision to build the refinery in Zinder. For many *Diffalais*, "their oil" was literally being "pumped away" and appropriated by the *Zinderois* (Moussa 2013). Moussa (2013: 12) cites people from N'gourti comparing the petro-infrastructure with a water tower built in the desert where the population is dying of thirst, while the tap is located in Zinder, where the people drink the water abundantly. Irrespective of the ethnicity and political affiliation of my interlocutors, I heard this shared *Diffalais* narrative in several informal conversations and interviews. In it, the oil refinery was placed in Zinder to boost the region's economy through the creation of jobs and trading activities envisioned in the Tandja government's "development poles" program. They argued that the construction of the oil refinery was a political decision to appease the *Zinderois,* but one that deprived the *Diffalais* of the benefits of oil production. As former president Tandja himself was a Fulani-Kanuri from Mainé in Diffa region, his decision in favor of Zinder was seen as a betrayal of his people. Through such narratives, Moussa (2013) concluded, the decision to build the refinery in Zinder had united the different ethnic groups in Diffa under a collective *Diffalais* identity which defined itself in opposition to the *Zinderois* and western Nigeriens.

As in Zinder, the most contentious oil-related issue in Diffa became the recruitment of oil workers and where they came from. As Attahirou (2012: 49–57) describes, several formal and informal criteria were important in the recruitment process, most of which were said to favor non-local residents. First, experienced and educated applicants were sought, criteria which inherently favored the urban population over nomadic people, who rarely possessed school certificates or had formal work experience. Second, applicants were selected on physiological criteria such as strength and build, criteria also said to favor sedentary and urban youth who lifted weights to "pass time" and "become men", with nomadic youth apparently often looking rather skinny in comparison. Third, only applicants aged between

20 and 35 were considered, a criterion said to discriminate against heads of a family and thus creating generational conflicts. Finally, PAC relations were also said to be indispensable, thereby favoring those families and ethnic groups with political influence (ibid.).

On 25, 26 and 27 April 2013 violent protests erupted in Diffa, with local youth claiming ethnic and regional favoritism (especially of western belonging and Zarma ethnicity) in the recruitment process. In the protests, youth barricaded the streets with burning tires, and vandalized cars and buildings. Three protestors were seriously injured, while several others suffered more minor injuries, when police used live ammunition. Following the protests, civil society activists called on the state to restart the recruitment process, while opposition politicians blamed the government for marginalizing the region and distributing positions based on political loyalty. Government politicians, however, blamed "manipulators" for cultivating their own egoistical and regionalist interests. As in Zinder, the prime minister was sent to Diffa to calm the situation, which he did.

Unlike in Zinder, prior to oil exploitation, there had been little or even no narrative or expression of a collective *Diffalais* identity. Instead, residents of N'gourti often complained that their political representatives in Niamey lacked regionalism, and pursued only their own political ambitions and their families' interests (Moussa 2009: 292). To understand why a collective *Diffalais* identity had not emerged, despite a long history of settlement in the area, we need to trace the history of rule and domination in this area. Slices of today's administrative region of Diffa were first part of the Kanem-Bornu Empire that emerged in the ninth century, which in its most powerful period (the beginning of the 13th century) stretched over large parts of today's Chad, southern Libya (Fezzan), eastern Niger, northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon. Founded by nomadic Tubu around 300 AD, the Kanem Empire was conquered around 1380 by the Bornu Empire, which was ruled by aristocratic clans of Kanuri. The Kanem-Bornu Empire shared several characteristics with the Damagaram sultanate in terms of organization. Islam was slowly introduced in the 11th century, articulating with the pre-existing hierarchical structures and forming the ideological superstructure. Nevertheless, over the next nine centuries, the state would remain split into ethnically distinct sectors (Bovin 1985: 55). The power of the Bornu Empire was based on long distance trans-Saharan trade, especially of slaves, which composed the core of the army. With warriors of Fulani Jihad conquering parts of Bornu, the Empire had already been in decline from the early 19th century, and was finally conquered by Rabeh, who invaded it from eastern Sudan in 1893. Seven years later, Rabeh himself was defeated by colonial forces. Whereas the most northern areas became part of French West Africa and later postcolonial Niger, the largest part of the state was colonized by the British, and became known as Nigeria. Within Nigeria, a remnant of the old empire – the Bornu Emirate – maintains a ceremonial rule. Thus, in contrast to the sultanate of Damagaram, the center of the ancient Bornu Empire does not lie in Niger, but in northeastern Nigeria, where the Kanuri have their political center today.

Consequently, despite the historical legacy of the Kanem-Bornu Empire, a collective *Diffalais* identity never emerged, with identities remaining most strongly bound to ethnic and subethnic belonging. Although both frequent contact and trading relations between the different ethnic groups in Diffa exist, and Islam is the common religion, ethnic particularisms are reproduced in cooperative and conflictive interactions. Bovin (1985) showed, for example, how in Kanuri – Woɗaaɓe interactions ethnic particularisms were maintained through markers of appearance – tattoos and/or scarifications, hairstyles, clothing and ornaments, domestic objects and tools, and habitat and lifestyle. Looking at more recent history, intra- and interethnic relations have periodically become hostile. After the democratization of Niger in the early 1990s, conflicts within the Tubu and with other groups erupted. Internally, these conflicts centered around lower Tubu castes increasingly vocal demands for equal rights (Idrissa 2009), while externally, the Tubu's (Daza) moral order of camel thievery (Baroin 1985: 89) spurred conflicts with other ethnic groups, particularly the Fulani, but also with *Mohamid* Arabs. The Fulani claimed that these thefts were stopping them from acquiring larger camel herds (Moussa 2009: 293). In retaliation, both groups organized themselves in anti-Tubu militias during the Tubu rebellion (ibid). Moreover, there have also been recurrent conflicts between pastoral Fulani and sedentary Kanuri about the extension of farmland onto common property pastures on the one hand, and the destruction of crops by pastoral herds on the other hand. Taken together, while there is a history of cooperation and frequent contact between ethnic groups in Diffa, there is also a parallel history of intra- and interethnic conflicts which have inhibited a regional identity from emerging.

However, as every person has multiple identities based on religion, nationality, ethnicity, political affiliation, regional belonging and so on (Sen 2007), the ethnic identity only comes into play as a distinct category through self and external ascriptions in interactions with group outsiders (Barth 1969). Outside of interactions with other ethnic groups, the clan is, for example, the most important internal political decision-making entity for Woɗaaɓe (Schareika 2010). Moreover, Woɗaaɓe (probably like all pastoral groups practicing trans-territorial transhumance) are first of all cosmopolitan, as they move across national borders into Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria. It is only when it comes to interactions with "latecomers" like *Mohamid* Arabs from Chad, who have acquired land rights in Niger through political networks and financial power, that Woɗaaɓe display a national Nigerien consciousness and demand priority and support from the state against these "foreigners" (personal communication with Nikolaus Schareika 1.12.2016). Here, the construction of the nation state with its three pillars – identity, territory and rule – through which "a people" has to be defined as the legitimate rulers over a given territory, fuels identitary boundary making (Wimmer 2013).

Moreover, collective identities shift over time. With economic diversification, Woɗaaɓe lifestyles, for instance, have changed, and are today translocally entangled with processes of sedentarization and labor migration into cities (Köhler 2016). Many urban Woɗaaɓe have also adopted more rigorous and orthodox forms of Islam that are predominant among sedentary people in the city, and often criticize or reject so-called elements of nomadic culture deemed un-Islamic or *asabiyya* (ibid.). In other words, particular identities only become pertinent in specific practices or during specific times, places or events, and in specific interactions or relations. In this context, we can see how the entanglement of the petro-infrastructure with different administrative regions and the revenue law gave rise to a narrative of a unified *Diffalais* identity. As Attahirou (2013: 46) argues, the beginning of oil production led to the emergence of a more powerful regional identity, which in its presence sidelined existing intra- and interethnic conflicts, and united different ethnic groups in Diffa in their grievances and in the quest for the oil rent against other regions, namely Zinder and Niamey (Tillabéri and Dosso). In this sense, greed and grievances do not simply spur conflicts as the resource curse thesis predicts, but can also lead to cohesion.

This new regional identity did not eradicate but rather coexisted with other identities. Some of my interlocutors spoke of a solely interest based cohesion among the different groups in Diffa, a cohesion that existed only in relation to the *Zinderois* and/or western Nigerien belonging and Zarma ethnicity. Within Diffa, conflicts also persisted along political and ethnic lines – for employment, political power, or access to oil revenues. Attahirou (2013: 51–52) describes a conflict between Tubu and Arabs about a recruitment office for oil workers called *Agadem Conseil*. As the office was controlled by Arabs, Tubu lobbied against it being allowed to recruit in the name of the whole population of N'gourti, and establishing another recruitment agency which was managed by (and therefore for) Tubu. Moreover, Attahirou (2013: 51) and Moussa (2013: 5) cite two *chefs de groupement* from Atrouna and Agadem who formulated territorial claims by relating the ownership of oil not to the population of the Nigerien nation state as a whole, or as it is written in the constitution, but rather to their particular territories and their grazing land, pastoral wells, ancestral graveyards or trees. In doing so, the *chefs* claimed that it was "their land" and "their oil", and that they should therefore profit most from it. Other ethnic groups in Diffa often accuse Arabs (less than 1.5 percent of the Nigerien population) of profiting most from oil extraction, at the expense of Tubu, Fulani and Kanuri. In these narratives, because of their financial power and their political representation through Issoufou's close associate Bazoom, Arabs are able to find employment and powerful positions within the industry. Indeed, these groups accuse Issoufou himself of favoring Arabs, with rumors even circulating among the Tubu that one of Issoufou's children is from Bazoom, as it reputedly has lighter skin (telephone communication with Tilman Musch 6.12.2016). According to other rumors, the Arab community gave Issoufou his second wife, Lalla Malika, and she now controls Issoufou's political decision, which all favor the Arab minority. Irrespective of the veracity of these rumors, they demonstrate that the Arab community is eyed suspiciously by its neighbors, and that Issoufou's regime is said to favor them.

Although accusations of Arab favoritism are also leveled against Issoufou by other ethnic groups in Diffa, this has not resulted in the emergence of anti-Arab cohesion. Rather, there is also animosity between the other groups. For example, Fulani *ressortissants* told me that they were the most marginalized and the least influential group in Diffa. They claimed that while the Kanuri dominated the leading cadres of the regional administration and the Tubu were at least politically represented at the national level with a minister (at that time the minister of livestock farming), the Fulani had no minister. Moreover, public accusations that politicians had personally profited from oil were widespread, regardless of their ethnic or political identities. The mayor of N'gourti, for example, was said to have purchased a four-wheel drive for 30 million FCFA (45,735 Euro) on credit, in anticipation of the distribution of the 15 percent fiscal revenues on oil to the *commune*. He was also said to rarely be in Diffa, preferring to spend his time in Niamey. Similarly, the Atruna *chef de tribu,* the administrative leader for nomadic groups, was said to have negotiated a Corporate

Social Responsibility (CSR) position with the CNPC, with a monthly salary of 1.8 million FCFA (2,744 Euro).

Looking at the narratives in Diffa, we see how Moussa (2013:12) concludes that "the oil always flows for the others". Within a group like the Tubu for example, the poor and former slave caste sees the rich Tubu profiting most from the oil. Looking outside the immediate group from a collective Tubu identity, they might argue that the Arabs profit most from the oil. From a N'gourti identity perspective, Diffa profits most from the oil, and from a Diffa regional identity perspective, Zinder profits from the Diffa oil due to the refinery. From a Zinder perspective, Niamey and western Nigeriens profit from *their* oil. Thus, each individual, group or region sees their own, current identity as the real victim in relation to other collective identities. Moussa (2013: 25) thus concludes that oil production in Niger has spurred irredentist and identitarian claims. One such claim, however, brought forth the narrative of a Diffa regional identity, an identity which did not exist before, at least not in that potency, and one which fostered cohesion.

In short, a new *Diffalais* collective identity emerged due to the entanglement of the presence as well as absence of certain infrastructures of oil with particular administrative spaces, revenue laws, oil's (harmful) materiality and histories of rebellion. The construction of the oil refinery in Zinder rather than in Diffa promoted the emergence of a *Diffalais* identity and the claim that Diffa suffered from oil's negative effects, while the positive effects materialized only in Zinder. The negative effects of oil were connected to narratives of marginalization and histories of rebellion in the region, while the administrative space of Diffa as a region also became pertinent in public consciousness due to the law to retrocede 15 percent of the revenue from oil production to the region. In doing so, with the dispersion of the petro-infrastructure, a new collective *Diffalais* was thus coproduced alongside the reproduction of the *Zinderois* identity.

7.2.3. Niamey's oil nationalism

In contrast to "oil regionalisms" in Zinder and Diffa, oil talk in Niamey could be qualified as "oil nationalism". Political contestation in the capital focused nearly exclusively on the fuel price fix of 579 FCFA/liter. Although the new price was indeed a reduction from the previous 679 FCFA/liter, it was still significantly more than what appeared in Niamey to be a widely expected price of 400-450 FCFA/liter. This expected fuel price was based on a three-fold argument. Firstly, in 2009, nearing what was to be the end of Tandja's regime, when fuel was imported from Venezuela and fixed at 479 FCFA/liter, Tandja was said to have promised a fuel price below 400 FCFA once Niger's refinery was operating. Secondly, with the regime change to Djibo in 2010 and then to Issoufou in 2011, the fuel price had been incrementally increased, from 479 FCFA/liter to 506 FCFA during 2010, to 561 FCFA in January 2011, to 619 FCFA in June, to 649 FCFA in July and to 679 FCFA in August. Announced only a couple of weeks prior to the refinery opening in November 2011, the new fixed price was to take effect in January 2012. Seen in this light, although the price was a reduction of 100 FCFA/liter, it was also still 100 FCFA/liter higher than under Tandja. The progressive price increases were subsequently judged by the broader public as a government strategy to allow them to announce a reduced price with the beginning of the oil production. Thirdly, with the construction of the refinery, the material substance of oil was linked to its refined product, fuel, making it (in contrast to uranium) a good of the population's everyday consumption. As one of my interlocutors in Niamey said: "fuel passes through the people's hands". In other words, the people in the cities especially were reliant on cheap fuel, as fuel was the lifeblood of urban activities. Thus, a link between a high fuel price and rising prices for basic foods like rice, millet and sugar was quickly established by the public, with a high fuel price seen as imposing a double burden on the population.

The Nigerien government bore the brunt of public blame for the new fuel price. In public discourse, the Chinese were simply doing business, while it was the Issoufou government's responsibility to negotiate good terms for the Nigerien people, just as Tandja had with Areva for a new uranium contract. Moreover, the government could still subsidize fuel, as was done in neighboring Nigeria. Civil society associations and labor unions in Niamey argued that the government should ensure that Nigeriens benefit from "their oil", and as such organized protests and strikes, held radio debates, and released press statements. The three most prominent civil society organizations constituting this public were: the *Réseau des Organisations pour la Transparence et l'Analyse Budgétaire* (ROTAB), a member of the international transparency network Publish What You Pay (PWYP); the *Groupe de Réflexion et d'Action sur les industries Extractives* (GREN), a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI); and the country's largest associative radio network, *Alternative*. Together with the political opposition and taxi driver, taxi holder and oil transport unions, these civil society associations were instrumental in mobilizing the population against the new price fix. Aiming to relieve the social pressure it found itself under, Issoufou's government openly criticized the CNPC/China, accusing them of undervaluing Niger's oil resources.

In May 2012, the executive office of the oil transport union, the *Syndicat des Transporteurs d'Hydrocarbures du Niger* (SNTHN) accused the state-owned *Société Nigérienne des Produits Pétroliers* (SONIDEP), which was in charge of stocking, distributing and marketing oil products, of "mafia-like practices". SNTHN accused SONIDEP of informally selling delivery notes and of distributing delivery notes to businesses which were loyal to and had financed Issoufou. Although SNTHN did not officially state what "mafia" meant, in informal conversations, they accused wealthy Arab and Tuareg businessmen of controlling 90 percent of the transport business, and of using these businesses to launder money made through rebellion and the trafficking of drugs, arms and cigarettes in the Sahara. To prove this, one union member gave me a list registering all the tanker trucks that had passed a checkpoint on the road from Zinder to Niamey (with some tanker numbers occurring more often than others), which he claimed proved systematic favoritism in the distribution of delivery notes. Through the anticorruption authority, the *Haute Autorité de Lutte contre la Corruption et les Infractions Assimilées* (HALCIA), the transport union also pressed charges against the General Director of SONIDEP.[109]

With increased competition and less work than estimated, the transport industry was growing increasingly concerned about their futures. From 1963 until market liberalization in the early 1990s, the state-owned *Société Nationale des Transports Nigériens* (SNTN) had had the monopoly of the transport business. With liberalization, the size and number of tanker trucks increased markedly, from about 300 in the early 1990s to about 1050 in 2012, while the average truck size also increased from around 35,000 liters to around 50,000 liters. Today, some tankers can carry up to 70,000 liters. Prior to the beginning of oil exploitation in Niger, fuel had been imported to Niamey from Venezuela via the harbors of Lomé in Togo and Cotonou in Benin. For a trip from the port of Lomé in Togo to Niamey, transport companies were paid 52 FCFA (0.08 Euro)/liter, and 46 FCFA (0.07 Euro)/liter from Cotonou to Niamey. With the construction of the refinery in Zinder, however, the distances became far shorter, with fuel only having to be transported from the refinery to the six depots inside the country: Sorey/Niamey, Dosso, Maradi, Zinder, Agadez, and Diffa (see figure 11 at the beginning of the chapter). With these shorter distances, transport firms also received less per round-trip. For companies then, the most attractive route was that from Zinder to Niamey, which was the longest and paid 45 FCFA (0.069 Euro)/liter. To cover their costs, transport unionists claimed in interviews that lorry drivers needed to make at least two trips per month, with most drivers however getting less than one a month, and breaks of sometimes up to three months. Although the truckers were paid a monthly salary by the transport companies, they feared losing their jobs or being forced to become temporary workers, if the low demand persisted. With the transport industry excited about the future of oil production, companies had purchased more, larger tankers. This, in turn, had led to an over-supply and, according to those in the industry, had left them ultimately worse off than before. Finally, with so many tankers going backwards and forth, the already poor roads were deteriorating, which in turn damaged the tankers themselves.

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[109] However, the HALCIA neither have the powers of a judicial police officer, nor of an investigating judge or a prosecutor.

In August 2012, the *Collectif des Syndicats du Secteur des Transports du Niger* (CSSTN) and the *Syndicat National des Conducteurs Routiers du Niger* (SNCRN) announced a joint strike notice for the end of August and September 2012. After a series of negotiations with the government, the unions agreed to lift the strike notice in return for an agreement which included the creation of a committee to review the conditions for a fuel price decrease, fewer road check points, more warning markers and signs for bumpy roads, lower vehicle taxes, and the fair distribution of delivery notes. Nevertheless, in October 2012, the SNCRN went on strike with two owners' unions, the *Syndicat des Transporteurs d'Hydrocarbures du Niger* (SNTHN) and the *Syndicat des Transporteurs Marchandises du Nig*er (STMN). The unions complained about the high fuel price, declining transport orders and access privileges, and favoritism in the distribution of delivery notes. They also complained that foreign transport companies (especially from Burkina Faso and Nigeria) were being allowed to load their tankers at SORAZ, demanding that only Nigerien companies be allowed to export fuel. With a refining capacity of 20,000 barrels per day (bpd), and a national fuel consumption of 7,000 bpd, the export of the remaining 13,000 bpd to the West African subregion was highly lucrative and sought after by transport companies. To protect their market, the unions argued that foreign transport companies should only be allowed to load their tankers at SONIDEP (the fuel depot in Sorey/Niamey), and not directly at the refinery site in Zinder.

The transport unions strike had widespread popular urban support, as well as from a significant section of civil society. This reflects the national character of the oil debate in

Niamey. Only five days after the strike commenced, the entire fuel supply had been cut, petrol stations were forced to close, and the price rose to over 1000 FCFA/liter (1.52 Euro) on the black market. This happened despite a law that SONIDEP must hold enough fuel to supply the area for at least 50 days, and rumors quickly circulated that SONIDEP had sold its security stocks to neighboring countries. In any case, two important reasons for the lack of security stocks were underproduction at SORAZ, which in 2012 was not yet operating at full capacity (producing 11,000 of its 20,000 bpd capacity), and a halt in production to clean the oil installations. Rumors circulated that the CNPC had stopped production to pressure the Nigerien government into closing SONIDEP, so that SORAZ could take control of marketing the fuel (I turn to this in more detail in the next chapter). Whatever the reasons for the lack of oil reserves, in striking, the unions could effectively bring the region to a halt, and hit government revenue hard by stopping the distribution of oil from the state-owned SONIDEP.

The government responded to the fuel shortage by demanding that certain businessmen (especially those with government affiliations) provide tankers to deliver fuel to the market. When Gérard Delanne, the Secretary-General of the STMN owner's union (himself allied with the political party MODEN-FA Lumana which was part of the government majority at the time) responded positively to the government's call, a leadership battle erupted inside the union. Delanne was suspended by union's executive office, but started legal proceedings. He won, and was reinstated several weeks later. Most importantly, Delanne's suspension meant that STMN continued striking with the other two unions, thereby interrupting virtually all urban economic activity, and forcing the government to negotiate. On the tenth day of the strike, an agreement was reached. The agreement included a daily limit on the number of foreign tankers to be loaded at the various fuel depots of Niger: five a day at the Zinder depot, five at Dosso, and 20 at Sorey. However, as SONIDEP was a relatively small depot and therefore could not provide a sufficient supply to the foreign market, foreign transport companies with special government authorization were still allowed to pick up fuel from SORAZ. The agreement also included a review around three months later, on 20 November 2012, and government repair and maintenance of the poor roads.

Starting in May and resuming in October that year, a joint strike of taxis and *faba faba* (minibuses) against the fuel price also paralyzed the city. Demanding a free market, the joint union strike of taxi drivers (*Syndicat des Conducteurs de Taxi*, SYNCOTAXI) and owners (*Collectif des Propriétaires de Taxi*, CPT), and minibus drivers (*Syndicat des conducteurs de minibus*, SYNCIBUS) all raised their fares: from 200 FCFA (0.30 Euro) to 300 FCFA (0.46 Euro) per taxi trip, and from 100 FCFA (0.15 Euro) to 200 FCFA per minibus trip. Unlike the transport unions, these strikes and fare hikes received little public support, with a common discourse that everyone had to bear the high fuel price, and raising prices therefore imposed a double burden on the population. Moreover, in the media and in public discourse, the strikes were widely portrayed as against the interests of the population, and rather as political projects of the union leadership.

The widespread public and media rejection of the strikes was based on two main factors. First, one year prior, taxi drivers had received a so-called *ticket modérateur,* a state subsidy providing them about 35,000 FCFA[110] (53.36 Euro) per month until the beginning of oil production in January 2012, a subsidy which was costing the government about 180 million FCFA a month (274,408 Euro). Despite rising fuel prices in the buildup to oil production, the subsidy had ensured that the taxi fare remained at 200 FCFA.[111] But with *ticket modérateur* ending in July 2012, taxi unions started demanding a lower fuel price, before ultimately raising the fare to 300 FCFA in October 2012. The unions argued that whereas the cost of living and the on road costs for taxis (purchasing price, transit, customs, registration) had increased significantly, fares had remained unchanged for several years. However, with the fixed fuel price dropping, and having benefited from the *ticket modérateur* for a year, the taxi fare increase was widely seen as opportunist, with many negative comments about the unionists to be found in newspaper articles or informal conversations. In these comments, the taxi labor unions were also suffering a lack of credibility among the population because one part had been coopted by the Tandja regime and another by the Issoufou regime. After the existing taxi unions had embezzled the first payments of the *ticket modérateur,* SYNCOTAXI was created on 30 June 2011. However, the new union was not created by a taxi driver or drivers, but rather by experienced civil society activist Mahamadou Gamatié. Gamatié had started his civil society career during the "movement against the high costs of living" in 2005, fighting alongside Nouhou Arzkia's *Mouvement Patriotique*, who would later become one of the main supporters of

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[110] The *ticket modérateur* was a per driver subsidy of somewhere between 30,000 and 45,000 FCFA/month, depending on the newspaper sources and who you ask.

[111] Most taxis do not belong to the drivers but to businessmen or state officials, who lend them out for around 8,000 FCFA per day (12.20 Euro). Drivers typically start work around 6 am, fueling their taxis on credit. Having repaid their credit in the course of the day, they typically continue to work before sublending to a second driver until around midnight. Thus, the fuel price has a major impact on the drivers' income.

Tazartché. Gamatié denounced the unionists for embezzling the money (several of whom were consequently arrested), and lobbied for a payout from the national treasury. In doing so, SYNCOTAXI became the dominant taxi labor union, claiming to represent 4,000 of the apparently 5,200 taxis in Niamey. Alongside Arzika's *Movement Patriotique*, renamed *Mouvement pour la Promotion de la Citoyenneté Responsable* (MPCR)[112] in 2011, and the political opposition ARN (mainly composed of CDS and MNSD politicians), SYNCOTAXI had been vocal in its criticism of the fixed fuel price since the official announcement in November 2011. These political opponents also referred to Tandja and his promise of a lower fuel price. SYNCOTAXI and CPT responded to smaller taxi unions refusal to join the strikes, and their calls to drivers to boycott it, by accusing them of being on the government payroll. However, Gamatié's profile as a civil society activist with a pro-*Tazartché* history, and not a taxi driver, undermined his public credibility. Indeed, his propagation of similar views and work together with the political opposition led to accusations that SYNCOTAXI was in fact an association of *Tazartchists* that was only playing the political game.

Treating SYNCOTAXI like the political opposition by refusing to negotiate with them and rejecting their demands to deregulate the Niamey transport market, the government continued fixing the taxi price at 200 FCFA. To break the strike, they also temporarily introduced public buses in Niamey with fares of 100 FCFA, and arrested taxi drivers who continued to charge 300 FCFA/trip. The public could then report drivers for overcharging.[113] According to SYNCOTAXI, about 60 drivers were subsequently arrested and their cars confiscated. To retrieve the cars, drivers would have to pay police between 15,000 and 57,000 FCFA (22.87-86.90 Euro), depending on their personal networks. At the same time, *kabou kabou* (motorcycle taxis) became common in the city to meet the demand. Although *kabou kabou* were officially forbidden in Niamey, SYNCOTAXI claimed that the government was tolerating them to break the strike. While SYNCOTAXI persisted in demanding 300 FCFA for fares for several weeks, drivers soon returned to charging 200 FCFA, complaining that the government was authoritarian, and that they needed to work to support their families.

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[112] To restore credibility lost due to political affiliations or cooptation, leaders may decide to rename civil society associations, especially to appeal to foreign donors.

[113] Each taxi is marked with a number on the back to make it easy to identify.

On 15 October 2012, civil society associations ROTAB, GREN and *Alternative* issued a declaration denouncing the government as "warmongers", especially for arresting taxi drivers, and for trying to scotch the will of the population to reduce the fuel price fix. Referring to the Nigerien constitution, they underlined that the oil belonged to the entire Nigerien population, and not to political leaders. To make their threats real, they called for a general mobilization on 20 October 2012. However, instead of holding the protest, ROTAB, GREN, and *Alternative* later decided to join a public meeting at Place Toumo in Niamey organized by SYNCOTAXI. On October 21, only around 300 people gathered at Place Toumo to denounce the fuel price fix – relatively few in comparison to past protests. The organizers argued that as "their oil" was now being exploited and refined within Niger, it should be subsidized by the government and sold for about 400 FCFA/liter. In total, 21 civil society structures (associations and labor unions) participated in the protest.

Despite the lack of success on this occasion, taxi union strikes would pop up time and again over the next few years. In January 2013, the government reduced the fixed fuel price from 579 FCFA to 540 FCFA/liter. Twelve months later, the taxi unions again went on strike, demanding another reduction. In response, the government promised to review the fuel price in 2016, when the pipeline to Chad for the export of crude was expected to be completed. When 2016 came around, however, the pipeline was still far from complete, and the government refused to reduce the price. In January and in November 2016, taxi unions again went on strike in response to the government refusal. The Nigerien transport ministry finally agreed to negotiations with SYNCOTAXI, and the two signed an agreement on 24 November 2016 to end the strikes in return for reduced taxes and other expenses, an end of police persecution of drivers, and the incorporation of the union in governmental decision-making (Zabeirou 24.11.2016).

In sum, I argue that Niamey can be characterized as the center of "oil nationalism", where oil seems to be commonly seen as a national good that belongs to every Nigerien. Indeed, oil is not only understood as collectively owned good in the Nigerien constitution, but also in public discourse in Niamey in particular. As such, public demands for a "rightful share" (Ferguson 2015) of national wealth through fuel subsidies typically receive popular support. This understanding of sharing based on ownership is reflected in the labor union strikes and the civil society and media responses to them – in these instances, citizenship comes into life as the powerful social identity of "owners" (of a national resource) (ibid.: 188). As such, social and political actors in Niamey therefore accused the national government of greed for fixing the fuel price too high, as well as dismissing the violent protests in Zinder and Diffa as disrupting national unity and fueling regional and ethnic separatism. Indeed, this oil nationalism therefore illustrates how infrastructures (oil) and citizenship (ownership) can become closely entangled (Anand 2011; Shever 2012; Schnitzler 2016).

Contrary to the oil talk in Zinder and Diffa (and the uranium talk and Tuareg rebellions in Agadez), ethnicity did not figure (prominently) in Niamey's public disputes. In Niamey, nationality, and not ethnicity, was at stake. The absence of ethnicity in public debate should, however, neither be understood as evidence of ethnic homogeneity, nor as an absence of ethnicity in politics, but rather as a sign of the hegemonic position of power from which political representation is established. Dominated by Zarma-Songhai, Niamey and its surrounding regions Dosso and Tillabéri are ethnically heterogeneous.[114] As in Zinder, voting in these regions is typically along ethnoregionalist lines. The *Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*, (ANDP-Zaman Lahiya) is widely considered *the* Zarma-Songhai party of Dosso, and it receives most of its six percent of the national vote here. Until 2009, the party was led by Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye (1939-2009), a descendant of the most powerful ruling Zarma dynasty, the Zarmakoy of Dosso. Following Djermakoye's death during a demonstration against *Tazartché,*[115] his brother took over the presidency. Since 2009, these regions have also been the electoral stronghold of Hama Amadou, a Fulani from Tillabéri, and president of the MODEN-FA Lumana party, which he formed after Tandja had ousted him from the MNSD.

In other words, oil nationalism in Niamey is not a rejection of ethnic politics per se, but rather highlights the area's hegemonic position, from which it claims to speak in the name of the entire Nigerien population. To understand the hegemonic position of western Niger, I will now outline how the area developed over time. Prior to 1902, when the French installed a military post and slowly transformed Niamey into a politically important town, it consisted of only five villages. This is not to say, however, that the area had no form of political organization before the French, as *Zinderois* narratives typically suggest. Indeed, when the French conquered Western Niger, two Zarma-Songhai empires with highly hierarchized and structured societies down to the village level existed there (Olivier de Sardan 1984). Areas of today's Tillabéri region were controlled by the Dendi kingdom (1592-1901), which had emerged out of the greater Songhai Empire (ca. 1000-1591); while the Dosso region of Niger was controlled by the Dosso Kingdom, which was founded by Zarma aristocracy around 1750 and brought all eastern Zarma people under a small state. While the Dendi Kingdom was ill prepared to defend itself and was easily conquered by the French in 1901, the French formed a military alliance with the Dosso Kingdom in the 1890s, and together they defeated other smaller Zarma states, and the larger Hausa states to the east. Having together defeated the Dosso's main enemies by 1898, the French military forces stayed in Dosso for the next 60 years. From then on, the Zarmakoy (aristocratic ruler) was integrated into the colonial system of French West Africa, the French allowing him to not only retain but actually expand his territory, and to maintain the pre-colonial state by choosing his own successors (Fuglestad 1983: 67). Indeed, the French were so dependent on the Zarmakoy of Dosso for governing their colonial system that, in 1926, they moved the capital of the then Military Territory of Niger from Zinder to these villages in the west, which were to become Niamey. The French decision not only made Niamey Niger's largest city (from about 1,000 inhabitants in 1926 to over one million today), but also entrenched a western Nigerien hegemony. To preserve this hegemony, according to Ibrahim (1999: 198), in 1976 Zarma-Songhai leaders established a secret organization called *Energie de l'Ouest,* a thinktank to counter Hausa ambitions to power.[116] Indeed, Zarma hegemony has continued until today, at least in the perception of other ethnic groups in Niger and particularly in the collective Hausa identity narrative.

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[114] Niamey is 51.1 percent Zarma-Songhai, 34.4 percent Hausa, 7.5 percent Fulani, 4.4 percent Tuareg, 0.5 percent Arab, 0.4 percent Gourmantché, 0.1 percent Tubu, and 0.3 percent other (INS-Niger 2011). Dosso is 48.1 percent Zarma-Songhai, 42.1 percent Hausa, 8.6 percent Fulani, 1 percent Tuareg, 0.1 percent Arab, 0.1 percent Kanuri, and 0.1 percent Gourmantché (ibid.). Tillabéri is 63.6 percent Zarma-Songhai, 12.6 percent Fulani, 11.1 percent Tuareg, 10.5 percent Hausa, 1.9 percent Gourmantché, 0.1 percent Arab, 0.1 percent Kanuri, and 0.1 percent other (ibid.).

[115] Djermakoye's supporters, and the political opposition more generally, often claim that he was poisoned by the Tandja regime.

In contrast to the oil nationalism hegemonic in the capital, in public discourse uranium production appears to be seen as "nuclear imperialism" (Allman 2008).[117] The reason for this lies in the uranium-political configuration that I analyzed in chapter 2, and which I return to briefly below. After the regime change from Tandja to Issoufou, Areva postponed the start of production at Imouraren from 2012 to 2014, then to 2016, and finally indefinitely, claiming that exploitation would not be profitable in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, which had led to the uranium price crashing by 62 percent.

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[116] According to Idrissa and Decalo (2012: 356), however, the organization *Energie de l'Ouest* was not established in 1976, but in response to the establishment of the Hausa organization AMACA, which itself was likely formed in either 1982 or 1989 (depending on which author you follow).

[117] Similarly, emerging with Mexico's large, new corporate wind parks, "Aeolian publics" dismissed the so-called "Aeolian infrastructure" as economic imperialism (Howe and Boyer 2016).

However, in Nigerien popular discourse, there is another explanation for these delays. With the Nigerien government opening up its resource sector for international competition, Areva wanted to secure the Imouraren uranium deposit, but had no short-term intention of exploiting it. This led to accusations of French neocolonialism. On 5 April 2013, students in Niamey protested against the unfair and exploitative collaboration between Areva and the Nigerien state. In these demonstrations against Areva and the "French neocolonial system", they held placards and shouted slogans such as "*Non au système français*", "*Non à l'exploitation et au néocolonialisme*", "*Non à la France!*", "*Non à Areva*!" or "*A bas l'impérialisme!*" (BBC Afrique 2013). In October 2013, the Nigerien government and Areva started negotiations over the renewal of their uranium contracts, which were due to expire later that year. At the same time, the civil society groups ROTAB and GREN rallied against Areva, claiming it was time Niger finally received a "fair deal" for their uranium resources. The same civil society associations that had blamed the national government for the fuel price fix were now focusing on Areva/France's neocolonial uranium exploitation in Niger. In contrast to their framing of the fuel price, in which the Nigerien state was failing the people while China was simply doing business, they argued that Areva/France was continuing its neocolonial exploitation of Niger. In May 2014, Areva and the Nigerien government signed a strategic partnership agreement, and set up a joint committee to decide on the start of mining at Imouraren. Prior to negotiations, preparation works had remained stalled, and new start dates that had been agreed upon were repeatedly postponed. Writing in 2018, it seems that a start date prior to 2020 remains highly unlikely. The Issoufou government sold the agreement as a victory, naming it an equal agreement by pointing to an increase in mining royalties from 5.5 percent to 12 percent and emphasizing Niger's close relationship with France (AFP 26.05.2014). However, civil society activists, especially ROTAB, had long denounced the opacity of the negotiations (Idrissa and Simpere 2013). In numerous interviews and press conferences, Ali Idrissa argued that the fact the terms of the agreement had not been made public was evidence of a continuation of neocolonialism.

The neocolonial discursive link between uranium exploitation and Nigerien public debate can only be fully understood by extending the perspective to the consumption side of the uranium-political configuration. In contrast to oil which is refined, transported and consumed within Niger, as one of my interlocutors in Niger so clearly illustrated, “no one in Niger has neither seen nor used uranium”. In other words, uranium is exclusively for foreign consumption. Although successive Nigerien governments have hoped to develop nuclear energy, these political projects have never been realized due to a lack international will. Furthermore, for countries like Niger, the development of nuclear weapons capability is internationally sanctioned. If such countries were to develop weapons, they would be portrayed as aggressors. As Hecht (2010), for example, shows, the US war against Iraq was justified on the basis of Saddam Hussein’s alleged clandestine possession of 500 tons of Nigerien yellowcake. This narrative, drawing on the US-American public’s fear of nuclear weapons, of Africa, and of any nuclear materials not within direct Western control, also produced an equally dangerous image of Niger (under Tandja), as a (rogue) state supplying other rogue states. In this way, I argue, uranium is conceptualized as a foreign product in Nigerien public opinion: it is allowed neither for military nor civil use within Niger, but solely exploited and processed by the French, who are fleecing the Nigerien people, and leaving radioactive pollution, death and disease in their wake.

In short, in the entanglement of governable spaces (administrative regions) and histories of marginalization (Zinder and Diffa) and domination (Niamey), the petro-infrastructure (oil wells, pipeline, refinery, transport, service stations) produced an oil nationalism in Niamey, alongside the regional identities of *Zinderois* and *Diffalais*. Specifically, the fact that oil was refined in Niger, its special importance as the lifeblood of urban economies, and Chinese rather than French involvement made it a national product for national use and created demands of a rightful share. In the case of uranium, however, the absence of a uranium processing infrastructure in Niger, alongside the particular history of *Françafrique*, not only reinforced the ethnoregional identity of Northern Tuareg in Niger, but also the nuclear imperialism of the 1960s (see chapter 3; for more on this issue see also Schritt (2016)).

7.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at how the dispersal of the new petro-infrastructure over different administrative regions in Niger (re)produced collective identities by stitching together several otherwise temporally and spatially separated narratives. Specifically, *Zinderois* claimed favoritism toward western Niger and especially ethnic Zarma in the distribution of positions in the oil industry, relating this perceived bias to narratives about the historical political marginalization of the Damagaram sultanate, and demanding compensation in various forms – employment for local people, regional fuel prices, and a new petroleum law. In contrast, in hegemonic discourse in Diffa, not only was there a bias toward western Niger and the Zarma, but also, through the construction of the oil refinery in Zinder, towards the *Zinderois*. Through this perceived deprivation and loss of economic opportunities, a collective regional Diffa identity emerged as an alternative to the more established ethnic identities in the region. In public debate in Niamey, however, ethnic and regional belonging did not ostensibly play a significant role, as oil was rather conceptualized as a national good belonging to the Nigerien people as a whole. Though framed in nationalist terms, these arguments also drew on ethnic and regional identities, albeit unmarked identities. Moreover, in these narratives from the hegemonic West, *Zinderois* and *Diffalais* demands for regional favoritism and compensation were dismissed as undermining national unity.

In each of these regional/nationalist narratives, the materiality and possibility of oil – it's harmfulness on the one hand, and it's beneficial effects and connectivity on the other – were (co/re)produced in political negotiations about territoriality and ownership. The construction and location of the oil infrastructure, especially the decision to build the refinery in Zinder, were part of wider controversies about oil's ownership and about the discursive (anticipated) positive and negative effects of becoming an oil producer. These narratives can best be understood by looking at oil's material qualities (understood as constituted within socio-technical arrangements), the development of oil related infrastructure, the anticipation of oil's materialization, and the political situation of Niger becoming a new oil producer. In other words, the construction of the petro-infrastructure brought forth a particular logic of political contestation that cannot simply be limited to the distribution of resources revenues, as the resource curse thesis' oil-money equation would suggest. Instead of explaining political contestation solely from a rational choice perspective of greed, grievance and weak states, political contestation should be viewed more holistically, focusing on how the materiality of oil and the socio-technical arrangements that are related to it becoming a resource articulate within particular regimes of signification. Looking at the political contestation around the infrastructure sites, we have seen how the development of the petro-political configuration and infrastructure coproduced governable spaces, or what I called "territorialization". In short, regional claims around Niger's petro-infrastructure entangled with administrative regions, identity politics and historical experiences of political marginalization to reshape the political dis/order of oil-age Niger. This process reinforced the governable spaces of the nation and the region by closely tying together the three pillars of identity, territory and rule.

In this chapter, I have drawn on the literature on objects and infrastructures in political life to analyze and understand how political contestation and resistance revolved around the development of the petro-infrastructure in Niger. This theoretical lens made visible how the materiality of oil, the petro-infrastructures, and the information and anticipation about them became an integral part of the politics themselves. The concept of infrastructural publics enabled us to consider the emergence of publics around the issue of oil and the reproduction of collective identities by pointing to the connections made by the petro-infrastructure with histories of marginalization, governable spaces, laws and socio-cultural conditions such as youth unemployment and precursors of rebellion that may have been, at least partly, temporally and spatially separate before. In a nutshell, the material-semiotic practice of infrastructuring oil in Niger transformed pre-existing assemblages in unexpected and contingent ways. Such infrastructural work is important for understanding how oil becomes political in Niger (see introduction).

8. Crude Dis/entanglements: The making of Niger's petro-political configuration

Since the end of the Cold War in 1989, and with the emergence of new powers on the world stage, Africa has become increasingly important in the competition for oil, especially between Western and Chinese oil companies. This competition was fueled by high oil prices on the world market between 2007 and 2014 (with the exception of 2009), and political instability in the Middle East that shifted the attention to hitherto underexplored regions in Africa. Pointing to the similarities and continuities of colonial exploitation in Africa (see chapter 3), many academics and journalists have coined this competition a "new scramble for African oil" (Ghazvinian 2007; Klare and Volman 2006; Yates 2012). In doing so, however, these critics neglect the new agency of African states after independence and the end of the Cold War (Frynas and Paulo 2007). It is through both their agency and increasing competition for oil that many African countries became new oil producing states (Hicks 2015).[118] After nearly five decades of not-yet-ness, Niger finally signed a Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) with the CNPC in 2008, with production beginning in January 2012.

In this chapter, I extend out to Western and Chinese petro-assemblages by analyzing their entanglements and disentanglements with the Nigerien context. I focus primarily on economic, socio-political and military dis/entanglements. Looking specifically at Niger in this case allows us to see how these elements "are assembled, are held in place, and work in different ways to open up or close down possibilities" (Anderson et al. 2012: 172) in a particular context. The dis/entanglements of Western and Chinese petro-assemblages in Niger, and in Africa more broadly, will thus illustrate the effects of oil's catalysis, namely the ensemble-effect of bringing together newly arriving travelling elements with existing elements of the context. By building dis/connections between these heterogeneous elements, the emerging oil production opens up new possibilities while closing down others. In sum, resource and context specific dis/entanglements are important for understanding the emergence of Niger's petro-political configuration.

In analyzing the transformation processes induced by Western and Chinese oil assemblages, I make use of the resource-political configurations analytical framework which I developed in chapter 3. In doing so, I analyze how the heterogeneous elements of

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[118] With the recent fall in oil prices, some countries (including Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania) are still waiting to start producing oil (at the time of writing in 2017).

Western and Chinese oil assemblages dis/entangle within the Nigerien context and form Niger's petro-political configuration. Such a configuration is a network of economic, (geo)political and socio-cultural elements of politics and oil production that emerge as an entity with causal powers exceeding the sum of its components. In using the term causal powers, I here refer to specific inward oriented (governmentality and the necessity of profit-maximization inherent to capitalism) and outward oriented forces (transnational governmentality and capitalist processes of accumulation). In doing so, I want to look at the specific capitalist properties that different oil assemblages generate.

My perspective on capitalism resonates with the "regulation school" (Hirsch et al. 2001) that first emerged in France in the mid-1970s (Aglietta 1976), but which also later came to prominence in Germany (Hirsch 1990) and Great Britain (Jessop 2007). While orthodox Marxist approaches analyze how the economic base (mode of production) determines the political superstructure (state), the regulation school considers a dialectic of base and superstructure. This school asks how the capitalist regime of accumulation is stabilized through political and socio-cultural regulation, namely the institutions and norms that generate individual and collective behavior which fit the historical conditions of accumulation (Klimek 2010). My approach further resonates with the "varieties of capitalism" (VoC) school (Hall and Soskice 2001) which tries to analyze the institutional foundations of comparative advantage in explaining differences between national capitalisms. Both approaches have been rightly criticized for their methodological nationalisms (Peck and Theodore 2007), which need to be overcome by multiscalar analysis (Klimek 2010). The difference between an assemblage approach and these (Marxist) political economy approaches is primarily an ontological one. Whereas a dialectic approach of base and superstructure sticks to a "deep ontology", an assemblage approach follows a "flat" (Latour 2005b) or better "historical relational ontology" (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014; see also introduction), which considers its heterogeneous parts symmetrically, and asks what kind of (capitalist) wholes emerge or are coproduced through associations and dissociations between these parts.

I will argue that the different capitalist properties of these two petro-assemblages, a Western and a Chinese one, have triggered different economic, socio-cultural and geopolitical transformation processes in Niger. First, by looking at the economic dis/entanglements of Western and Chinese petro-assemblages in Niger, I will show that the Western assemblage's neoliberal properties – which could be characterized as "points of profit" or the “enclave approach” – divide Niger according to the old (French) colonial classifications of *Afrique utile*, the economically useful, and *Afrique inutile*, the economically useless (Ferguson 2005). In contrast to the Western oil assemblage, I will first show that the Chinese oil assemblage’s state capitalist properties have enabled the Nigerien economy to develop so-called upstream and downstream oil industries – not only for extraction of the oil, but also for refinement, use, and sale within Africa. The Chinese oil assemblage brings into being large-scale industrialization and infrastructure modernization projects, promoting the buildup of network-style spatial connections and linkages in *Afrique inutile* itself. Secondly, analyzing the political and socio-cultural entanglements of these two petro-assemblages, I will show that by articulating China’s oil diplomacy of “equal partnership”, “win-win relationships” and “non-interference” with Tandja's political project for constitutional amendment, China’s political rhetoric became a kind of “soft power” in Niger. In contrast to China’s oil diplomacy, I argue that the translation of Western transnational governmentality in Niger has largely failed because Western politics are portrayed as neocolonial and ineffective in promoting national development (Schritt 2013). Third, by focusing on the geopolitical and military entanglements of these two oil assemblages in Niger, I will show that the military approaches of China and the West abroad (particularly of the USA and France which have long competed for supremacy in West Africa) differ in such a way that we might speak of a “soft” Chinese and a “hard” American and French military strategy (Sun 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Chinese military presence is constantly growing in Africa, and these two approaches appear to be converging. Finally, I will summarize the diverse dis/entanglements of the Western and the Chinese petro-assemblages with the Nigerien state, sketching out how the heterogeneous elements of these two assemblages – which emerge in relational, overlapping, conflicting, competing and cooperative forms – reveal particular varieties of capitalism.

Acknowledging the inherently unequal development of capitalism(s), I will first look at conceptualizations of capitalist dis/entanglements. That is, the work done by Western and Chinese oil companies’ to detach themselves from the socio-cultural, political and economic environments within which they operate, before I empirically trace these dis/entanglements in Niger. By doing so, I connect my arguments to contemporary academic debates about “the oil industry” in general, and “China in Africa” in particular.

8.1. Dis/entanglement work

In the scientific debate between Callon and Miller in the social science journal *Economy and Society,* Callon (1998) argued that capitalism disentangles the market economy from its social, political and cultural environment in order to enact the laws of the market in pure form. Miller (2002), by contrast, argued that capitalism always remains deeply embedded within the culture and society it is operating in. I would argue that both are true to some extent. As I will show in the following, the literature on petro-capitalism shows the hard work of oil companies to disentangle their operations from the social, political and cultural environments in which they operate to allow for smooth capital accumulation. However, the oil industry is never able to fully succeed: on the one hand, the industry is deeply enmeshed in the capitalist logic of its origin, where it is accountable to shareholders, investors, creditors and consumers; and on the other, it inevitably becomes entangled with heterogeneous social, cultural, political and economic elements in the environments it operates.

In his work on the political economy of oil in Nigeria, Watts (2012) has theorized the "oil assemblage" as a regime of accumulation and a mode of regulation held together by the global oil infrastructure. In Watts's conception, the main feature of this structure, within a neoliberal petro-capitalist world system, is a permanently moving frontier of dispossessing – understood as a particular political, economic, cultural and social space – that violently establishes the conditions for capital accumulation. According to him, this assemblage incessantly extends oil exploitation deeper and deeper into Africa (and beyond), like archipelagos or enclaves, from primary reserve creation to tertiary recovery and from onshore sediments to offshore and (ultra) deep basins (ibid.). The commercial production of Niger's land-locked, deep-seated and comparatively small oil reserves would be a case in point for such an extension of the oil assemblage.

As Ferguson (2005) argues, seeing like an oil company in contemporary neoliberal capitalism is a way of territorializing Africa by creating oil enclaves according to old colonial patterns of an *Afrique utile* governed by multinational corporations and nation states, and an *Afrique inutile* governed by NGOs. Categorizing Africa like this, we see that these "useful" enclaves are linked to the financial centers of modern capitalism to allow investor capital to jump scales. Building on Ferguson's analysis, the majority of social science approaches to oil extraction have analyzed oil infrastructures and the workings of capitalism by pointing to the enclave nature of production. Appel (2012a), for example, analyzed offshore production as the disentanglement work of transnational oil corporations to make their business operation seem untouched by the politics in which they are deeply enmeshed. She calls this "modularity" or "modular capitalism" an attempt to replicate a near identical model of oil operations all over the globe. In a similar way, Zalik (2009: 577) shows "how popular, territorial claims on extractive sites prompt the petroleum industry to seek further social and spatial disembedding of production in the offshore", but also highlights the fact that this is done together with the state.

However, modular capitalism can also operate onshore, with oil companies bringing their own "oil kit".[119] By looking at the legal-institutional architecture of on and offshore oil enclaves, Donner (2011) and Yessenova (2012) show how oil companies use security measures, contractual dimensions and development practices in walling themselves off from their socio-economic and political surroundings in host countries to allow for smooth capital accumulation. Drawing on Žižek's notion of "ethical capitalism" in which profit-making is entangled with ethical practices of production and consumption, Donner (2011) calls the legal-institutional architecture of oil enclaves "immunization" or "encapsulation": with security measures to protect the oil installations against socio-cultural environments seen as hostile on the one hand, and development practices of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to appease these environments on the other. Yessenova (2012: 109) argues that "the provisions of standard oil contracts sacrifice the political authority of the state to the autonomy of the multinational oil project, reducing the state to a mere commercial party". In doing so, she argues that these enclaves promote oil's negative effects, as captured in the notion of the resource curse. The authors mentioned here – Ferguson, Watts, Appel, Zalik, Yessenova and Donner – all emphasize how oil companies seek to present themselves as disentangled, and proceeds in a modular way, externalizing risks and social or environmental impacts.

In contrast to the extensive literature on capitalist disentanglement, there is little literature on capitalist entanglement within the host society, with this focus having only recently gained some degree of prominence, primarily through the notions of "local" or "national content". In the 1970s and 1980s, oil producing states were still focusing on state control of petroleum revenues through quotas and regulations. In the 2000s, the failure of these policies triggered a transition to promoting domestic linkages of the oil industry within producing state territories, with an increasing number of African countries starting to implement local content laws (Ovadia 2016). The African Petroleum Producers' Association (APPA) defines local content as the percentage of expenses incurred by the industry to ensure employment and training of local staff, the supply of goods and services, the realization of social projects, and the creation of value-added industries (African Petroleum Producers' Association). Suggesting that local content levels of 20 percent in African countries are considerably lower than the 50 to 70 percent elsewhere, the APPA's primary objective has been to increase local content for African oil producers (ibid.). The idea is to build linkages, so that the "enclave economy" of oil production – identified as a major cause of economic decline (Auty 1993) – could be overcome. In this sense, in addition or even in contrast to neoliberal policy recommendations of good governance and capacity building to escape the resource curse (cf. Humphreys et al. 2007), national content is mostly an African initiative to prevent the development of extractive enclave industries. To guarantee national content, one condition of the Tandja government's oil tender was the construction of an oil refinery in Niger. Moreover, article 21 of the 2007 Petroleum Code provides that license holders and their subcontractors must favor Nigerien candidates with the necessary qualifications in the recruitment process. To that end, the article also provides that a licensee organizes and finances training programs for Nigeriens from the outset of their activities in the oil sector.

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[119] For the Chinese oil industry in Niger, political scientist Mahaman Tidjani Alou called it the "kit chinois" during an unscheduled keynote at a 2016 conference of the DFG project SPP 1448 in Potsdam, Germany.

In the following, I take up the notion of dis/entanglement work to understand the making of Niger's petro-political configuration. I start with economic dis/entanglements before I analyze the socio-cultural and military dis/connections of Chinese and Western petro-assemblages in Niger.

8.2. Assembling economics – building linkages

Economically, Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world, with cycles of drought and famine, strong population growth, scarce arable land, and degraded fertile soil. Niger also has low levels of productivity and technology, and is highly dependent on foreign investment and development aid. These economic characteristics have a long history, and have remained largely unchanged since decolonization (Charlick 1991: 89).[120] Having long classified Niger as *Afrique inutile*, the French colonizer's economic policy was purely exploitative, and aimed at keeping administrative costs to a minimum. As such, the colonial government made little to no investment in infrastructure development. Today, infrastructure development in postcolonial Niger remains largely dependent on foreign investment. From a historical perspective, it has therefore been argued – against the resource curse thesis that sees the enclave economy as an effect of oil production – that the African economy in general has inherited an enclave character from colonialism, which was designed to exploit the colonies for the development of the Empire (Mhone 2001). From this perspective, these (post)colonial enclaves are seen as the root cause of African "underemployment" and "underdevelopment" (ibid.).

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[120] This is not to suggest that livelihood systems in Niger have not changed during this period. Indeed, in adapting to Niger's changing structures of political economy, they have diversified and changed in manifold ways (Dorlöchter-Sulser 2014).

Prior to the beginning of oil production in 2011, Niger lacked sufficient energy supplies, and was dependent on expensive oil imports (especially from Venezuela) and hydroelectric power (from Nigeria). In this context, a desire for energy autonomy (especially nuclear energy and fossil fuels) has existed in Niger since uranium was found in 1956 and oil exploration began in 1958 (see chapter 3). When, in 2006, Esso and Petronas concluded that oil production and refinement would be unprofitable and abandoned the Agadem oil block, it seemed once again that the Nigerien authorities' desire for energy autonomy would not materialize. Here it is important to remember that Western oil companies are multinational enterprises and therefore large capitalist players. As such, their goal is not to develop untapped oil reserves or build downstream industries in the Global South, but rather to maximize profit in a setting of economic competition. In the logic of capital accumulation, oil's abundance needs to be turned into (a rhetoric of) scarcity on the world market in order to maintain high prices (Labban 2008). The world history of oil has therefore not been driven by great explorers seeking to make ever more oil accessible to mankind (cf. Yergin 1991), but has rather been characterized by oil companies delaying the discovery of untapped oil reserves (Mitchell 2011). This is especially true for the landlocked Sahel-Saharan countries like Niger, which remain underexplored today (Augé 2011).

With an increase in the global oil price from 30 USD in 2006 to 147 USD in 2008, the economic profitability of Nigerien oil skyrocketed (Moussa 2012). In this context, the condition of building an oil refinery in Niger was met by the CNPC in 2008. The now large corpus of literature on China's oil engagement in Africa often emphasizes its strategy of capturing smaller markets. With the oil market long dominated by Western oil companies, the Chinese are seen as having less technology and expertise, and are therefore forced to concentrate on less profitable markets like Niger (Jiang 2009). Chinese oil companies are thereby said to “ignore short-term commercial considerations for the sake of the real bottom-line of their majority shareholder, the Chinese state, which is energy security” (Soares de Oliveira 2008: 107). This literature also often criticizes China’s readiness to engage with “trouble zones” (like Angola or Sudan), and its assumed lack of strong environmental policies and employee safety. Authors like Downs (2007) and Brautigam (2011), however, contest these claims, maintaining that the purported differences between “China” and “the West” mythologize a “ruthless” Chinese energy politic to break into the African (oil) market hitherto dominated by Western firms. In the following, I want to review the differences between Chinese and Western energy politics by looking at their dis/entanglements in Niger. I thereby focus on several heterogeneous elements of China’s petro-assemblages and the linkages they produced within the Nigerien context, and compare the ensuing assemblage with Western petro-assemblages. In particular, I focus on oil contracts, the petro-infrastructure, in/formal economic linkages, corporate practices, and industry standards.

8.2.1. The oil contract

With the agreement to construct an oil refinery in Niger, I will show that the CNPC set out to start a more comprehensive industrial project than Western firms typically would. In Western petro-assemblages, the valuable energy resource is most often simply transferred to centers of industrial production and consumption in the USA or Europe (for the case of uranium in Niger see chapter 3). With its agreement to build a refinery, the CNPC effectively agreed to leave much of the energy produced to be used for industrial production and final consumption in Niger. This facilitates the development of so-called backward and forward linkages within the host country, thereby promoting economic development and helping to tentatively overcome enclave industrialization. With Hirschman (1981), I understand linkages as closely related regional networks creating several forms of connections. These linkages are manifold: first, forward linkages through the further processing of resources within the region; second, backward linkages through the additional manufacture of intermediate products derived from the resource in question as inputs of production; third, consumption linkages through the generation of consumer demand resulting from new employment and income possibilities; and fourth, fiscal linkages resulting from additional state revenues that are to be spent on regional development (ibid.).[121] Without these production linkages, the resources are simply exported to and processed within the industrial centers of the world, while the regions of resource extraction remain "black holes" (Innis 1995).

On 2 June 2008, the CNPC and Niger signed integrated upstream and downstream agreements for the Agadem oil block in the far east of the country. The agreement involved exploration and the development of a 20,000 barrel per day (bpd) oilfield (the Sokor, Gouméri and Agadi oil deposits that were discovered by Esso in 1982, 1990 and 1994 respectively), a 20,000 bpd joint venture refinery in Zinder, and the construction and operation of a 462.5 km pipeline connecting the oil fields to the refinery. Owned by the *Société de Raffinage de Zinder* (SORAZ) (60 percent Chinese and 40 percent Nigerien shareholdings), the SORAZ refinery near Zinder has a central power station and is expected to produce a total of 20,000 barrels per day of gasoline (34 percent), diesel (56 percent), fuel oil (three percent to be used by the refinery itself), and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) (seven percent). Between 2012 and 2018, however, output had typically varied been between 5,000 and 20,000 bpd (Trading Economics 2018). These fuels are first used to supply the Nigerien domestic market, which consumes approximately 7,000 bpd of fuel (gasoline and diesel). The surplus is then exported to neighboring countries, especially Nigeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The crude oil produced beyond the Zinder refinery's capacity (potential oil production is estimated at between 80,000 and 100,000 bpd) is designated for the world market, and will be exported through the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, which is operated by American oil company Esso (for background on the negotiations over connecting the Western and the Chinese technological zones in Chad see van Vliet and Magrin 2012).

With the transformation from colonialism to independence in Africa, the contractual relations between resource exporting countries and multinational oil and mining companies changed (Abusharaf 1999). While in the era of colonialism the multinationals had control over the colonies' resources, in the era of decolonization, the newly independent states began to nationalize the oil companies. Nevertheless, with the debt crises in the 1970s and 1980s, the now independent states were forced to renegotiate the oil and mining contracts by agreeing to the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) in exchange for loans from the

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[121] I primarily use Hirschman's linkage model in a descriptive way to illustrate the associations and connections that result from the implementation of the Chinese built petro-infrastructure in Niger, rather than as a clear-cut development theory.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. This era of (re)negotiation led to new and more flexible contractual agreements which included elements such as production sharing, service contracts, work contracts, and joint ventures (ibid.). The primary goal of oil contracts is to guarantee economic and legal stability for the oil companies to calculate and project investments, and to determine the share of risk between them and the host government. As Abusharaf (1999) shows in Sudan, the contracts provided economic incentives (tax exemption, sales protection, liberalization of capital transfers, privatization, and liberalization of trade) and legal incentives (stabilization clauses, protection of property rights, and dispute settlement mechanisms) to guarantee a stable economic, political, and legal environment for the future business affairs of multinationals. International regulations are then accompanied and strengthened by national regulatory bodies (such as the Ministry of Oil) and laws (such as a *code pétrolier* or *décrets pétroliers*), which appoint responsibilities and regulate the distribution of oil rent within the host country.

Atsegbua (1993: 13) describes the core elements of a Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) as follows: the host country determines an international oil company as a contractor for a specific area, in the Nigerien case, the CNPC for the Agadem oil block. In the allotted territory, the international company acts at their own risk under the control of the host country. Production formally belongs to the host country. Over time, the host country refunds the international oil company the production costs ("cost oil"), and in return, the equipment and the installation becomes the property of the host country, either from the outset or after depreciation rates. After the deduction of "cost oil", the "profit oil"[122] is shared between the oil company and the host country at a predetermined percentage. The revenue ratio of the international oil company is then taxed in accordance with the contractual rate. The production sharing agreement between the CNPC and the Nigerien state assigns 40 percent of profit oil and an ad valorem royalty of 12.5 percent to the Nigerien state. Furthermore, the joint venture refinery shares investment and profit, with the CNPC receiving 60 percent, and the Nigerien government receiving 40 percent. In addition, as outlined in the 2007 petroleum code, in signing the contract, the CNPC agreed to pay the Nigerien state 300 million USD.

Niger's agreement to accept 40 percent profit oil in the PSA is comparatively low. A PSA between the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and a Nigerian subsidiary of American oil company Ashland, for example, awards the NNPC a 65 percent profit oil share (Atsegbua 1993: 14). The revenues made up of cost oil and profit oil are uncertain for the government as it is difficult for them to calculate and verify the oil companies' investment costs. However, sources of revenue for the government also comprise royalties, bonuses, taxes, customs duties, and indirect benefits that arise from price caps and domestic market obligations (for example, to provide SORAZ with a predetermined crude oil price) (Bindemann 1999: 85). Indeed, according to an employee at the Nigerien Ministry of Oil and Energy that I spoke to, the share of profit oil accounts for a relatively small percentage of a host country's revenue from oil production. Atsegbua (1993: 17/18) concludes that PSAs effectively transfer the bulk of the power from the host countries to the international oil companies, with the companies maintaining control over the oil flow and where it is sold to, allowing them to pocket windfall gains from price increases. In other words, with international oil companies maintaining de facto control over the industry, the nation state's claims to ownership of the oil are primarily symbolic.

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[122] Profit oil is the balance of total revenue and cost oil (investment costs to bring the oil production into being).

On 28 November 2011, the Agadem upstream and downstream integrated project was completed and became operational. The cost of the oil refinery, about 980 million USD, was financed by a loan from China's EXIM Bank with a repayment term of 10 years. The pipeline costs amounted to approximately 348 million USD. Since 2012, government revenues from the integrated oil project have been slightly over 100 million USD annually. The fiscal linkages from Nigerien oil production have thus already slightly exceeded the annual revenues from uranium extraction by Areva which have made Niger the world's fourth largest uranium producer. With the beginning of oil production in January 2012, Niger's GDP growth jumped from about two percent in 2011 to nearly 13 percent in 2012. In 2015, former secretary general of Niger's oil ministry and new president of the African Petroleum Producers Association (APPA) Mahaman Laouan Gaya (2015) predicted that all (African) oil producers, with the exception of Niger, would go into economic recession in the coming years due to falling oil prices. Niger is said to be still experiencing a slightly positive economic upturn from falling prices, as it refines its whole production within the national territory, and is yet to export any of its crude oil (at the time of writing in 2018).[123] However, with falling oil prices since 2014, annual economic growth slowed from 7.3 percent in 2014 to 3.5 percent in 2015. It was estimated at 5.2 percent in 2016, and was projected to continue slowly increasing (Sylla et al. 2017: 3). To understand these up and downturns in economic growth, we have to take a closer look at the profitability of the refinery.

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[123] Export of crude oil was expected to start in 2017, although by mid-2017, it seemed doubtful that this was realistic.

8.2.2. The refinery dispute

Within the first month of Issoufou's presidency, disagreement arose over the building cost of the oil refinery. Initially projected at 600 million USD, the CNPC claimed the final cost was 1.2 billion USD. The Nigerien government refused to pay its 40 percent share, and entered renegotiations with the CNPC. Following arbitration, the government was ordered to pay a total of 980 million USD. Whereas the cost of building the refinery was thus 63 percent higher than projected, the projected costs for research and exploration, oil wells and infrastructure, and the pipeline were all completed at or below budget. Here, we should note that with the exception of the refinery, the infrastructure for oil exploration and production is 100 percent owned by the CNPC. For the Nigerien government then, the costs of the refinery increased from 240 million USD to 392 million USD, to be paid for with a Chinese loan. To reduce the 1.2 billion USD cost of the refinery, Chinese expatriate worker's salaries were renegotiated, decreasing their total salary costs per year from 42 to 26 million USD. Around the same time, the inequality in Chinese and Nigerien engineers' salaries became a public issue, with the Chinese initially earning 4,268,023 FCFA/month (6,507 Euro) on average, while Nigerien engineers were only offered 140,000 FCFA/month (213 Euro). Moreover, accusations that SORAZ had purchased secondhand vehicles and invoiced them as new became a major issue, even within the Nigerien National Assembly. Although driving up cost oil is a well-known practice amongst multinational oil companies in general to increase the companies' share of profits, and not only of Chinese firms, the accusations added to a general notion in Niger that the Chinese were engaging in corrupt practices (I will turn to the perception of the Chinese in Niger again later).[124] Moreover, this aroused concerns that the revenues from the refinery would not be sufficient to repay the loan.

The dispute over the cost of the refinery was closely connected to general concerns about its potential profitability and with the fuel price in Niger, especially as the World Bank, IMF and Western multinational oil companies had long predicted that a refinery would be unprofitable. While SORAZ is producing oil for around 42 USD per barrel, similar refineries normally produced oil for around half the cost. The CNPC and the Chinese-Nigerien joint venture SORAZ had agreed on a fixed price per barrel of 67 USD (at a time when the global oil price was over 100 USD), calculated to reimburse Chinese cost oil within five years. At that price, SORAZ was effectively producing fuel for 336 FCFA/liter. When the 15 percent domestic consumption tax on petroleum products (TIPP) (50.40 FCFA) and the 19 percent value added tax (VAT) (63.84 FCFA) were added, the price amounted to 450.24 FCFA. Then, with compensation for the Nigerien state-owned company SONIDEP, which was in charge of stocking and distributing the oil products (34.74 FCFA), transport costs (41.18 FCFA), and distribution costs of service stations (51.07 FCFA) were added, the cost of the fuel totaled 577.23 FCFA, and was thus fixed at 579 FCFA/liter (Ministère de l'Energie et du Pétrole 7.11.2012). This price was a reduction of only 14.7 percent from the former price of 679 FCFA/liter on the fuel imported from Venezuela.

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[124] The Chad government also faced a much higher bill than they initially agreed upon with the CNPC for the completion of the refinery.

With a fall in oil prices in late 2014, a long-standing conflict between SORAZ and Nigerien state-owned SONIDEP flared up once again. At least since 2011, SORAZ had asked the Nigerien government to dismantle SONIDEP in order to reduce the fuel price and increase the refinery's profitability by independently and directly marketing the oil. However, the government had refused. On 14 August 2015, SORAZ stopped operating the refinery due to a reported compressor failure. However, analysts on national and international news platforms such as tamtaminfo.com and africaintelligence.com interpreted the shutdown as a decision by the CNPC to pressure the Nigerien government to acquiesce to demands for a larger share of export revenues from refined oil products. According to these analysts, with the oil price crashing to under 50 USD a barrel in mid-2015, SORAZ moved into the red, as it had agreed on a fixed price of 67 USD/barrel. The CNPC's insistence, Rosen (2015) argues, "on selling at above the market price – even to a refinery for which it is itself the majority stakeholder – is an effort to impose authoritarian certainty on inherently unstable markets". However, sharing costs at SORAZ 60/40 with the Nigerien government, while sharing profits of crude oil sales from the oil wells at the same rate, it may also be considered a reasonable economic strategy for the CNPC to insist on a fixed price.

The conflict illustrates how SORAZ sought to control the sale of their products by claiming that SONIDEP poses another burden on the fuel price in Niger. During the conflict, SORAZ had accused SONIDEP of large outstanding debts (68 million USD), an accusation which SONIDEP publicly denied. Without SONIDEP however, the Nigerien government would find it difficult to control the quantity of oil products sold and exported, thereby making capital flight significantly easier for the CNPC, as majority shareholder in SORAZ. Here, it is important to note that capital flight is one important factor depriving oil states of their revenues. This capital flight is typically achieved by incorrectly invoicing exports and imports (Ndikumana and Boyce 2011).[125] Moreover, whereas the Western neoliberal version of the "governance curse" sees corruption and bad governance in the oil states as the root cause of the curse materializing, and which needs to be overcome by good governance mechanisms (Humphreys et al. 2007), corruption of politicians and civil servants in Africa displays only about 10 percent of the amount African states lose due to tax avoidance and tax evasion by international corporations (Beckert 2017). Finally, SONIDEP is responsible for ensuring Niger's fuel supply, and is therefore vital to the country's energy security.

8.2.3. In/formal economic linkages

Although the refinery's (lack of) profitability led to disputes between the CNPC and the Nigerien government, the construction of the refinery did help create new linkages in the Nigerien economy. First, it triggered the emergence of new Nigerien transport companies owned by individual businessmen. Second, from the beginning of refinery operations until 2016, over 100 private petrol stations had sprouted up in and around the capital, where about 80 percent of Niger's petroleum products are consumed. Stations have also popped up in other urban centers along the two main trunk roads headed north and east from Niamey. In April 2013, Niger had a total of 497 operating gas stations, of which 117 had been newly opened in Niamey, with an annual growth rate of 25 percent (Xinhua News Agency 2013). In the city of Zinder, the number of petrol stations had increased from six in 2011 to 21 by October 2015. In the city of Diffa, the number of petrol stations had increased from two to four, while no new petrol stations had been set up in N'guigmi, the town closest to the oil extraction zone.

The newly opened petrol stations are mostly owned by the same individual Nigerien businessmen who started the transport companies and who had, by 2017, built vertically integrated corporations. These firms (including Rharous, Bazagor, Escadrille, Oriba, and

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[125] Capital flight is especially high in oil-exporting countries; in countries that are members in the CFA currency group with their fixed currency rate to the French franc; and in those countries affected by internal conflict (Weeks 2015). Niger currently fulfils two of these criteria, and at times of the recurrent Tuareg and Tubu rebellions, all three. Indeed, in the case of the country's uranium extraction in the north, AREVA is time and again accused of capital flight by politicians and civil society activists in Niger (and beyond).

NigerOil) are not part of the *Groupement des Professionnels du Pétrole* (Total and OiLibya) that controlled 77 percent of the Nigerien market in 2010. These new companies have thus greatly increased national content in the Nigerien oil industry by pushing foreign oil businesses out of the market. Today, OiLibya operates only 18 petrol stations in Niger, 10 of which are in Niamey. Total runs about 70 petrol stations, approximately 30 of which are currently leased from NigerOil. While the refinery has led to greater linkages, these transport companies and petrol stations are controlled by a few extremely wealthy businessmen from Niger and neighboring countries – reaffirming scholarly arguments that elites profit most from national content initiatives (Ovadia 2012; 2013b; Hansen et al. 2015).

Despite the growth in the number of petrol stations, the majority of the population in eastern Niger continued to buy smuggled fuel from Nigeria, which was sold for about 300 FCFA/liter (compared to the fixed price of 540 FCFA/liter at petrol stations) at the time of writing (in 2018). In contrast to the street fuel sellers in western Niger who buy directly from the petrol stations and then resell it at slightly higher rates in one liter whiskey bottles at roadside stands, fuel sold on the street in Zinder and Diffa has been purchased at regular petrol stations in Nigeria and smuggled over the border in cars packed with 50l-brand jerry cans. As such, the street fuel price in Niger is highly dependent on developments and politics in neighboring Nigeria. For example, the refinery's inauguration in 2011 coincided with the IMF demanding that the Nigerian government end fuel subsidies, which in turn briefly pushed the fuel price on the black market in Niger to 600 FCFA/liter. Due to major protests in Nigeria, president Jonathan Goodluck partly reinstated fuel subsidies, pushing the fuel price on the streets of Niger down to 450 FCFA/liter. On becoming president, Muhammadu Buhari sacked the entire board of the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), and resumed operations at Nigeria's refineries in September 2015 (AFP 26.06.2015). The fuel price on the streets of eastern Niger subsequently fell to 250 FCFA/liter the same month. However, this was short-lived, with fuel shortages in Nigeria skyrocketing the price to 750 FCFA/liter. However, even if the street fuel price is higher than at the petrol station, most Nigeriens continue to buy from roadside stalls due to personal attachments, habits, mutual trust relations and the credit facilities that individual street vendors offer. Those who buy at the stations are mostly state officials who receive petrol vouchers, or staff from development projects or transport companies.

Chinese infrastructural investment in Niger has not been limited to the integrated up and downstream oil project. Chinese companies have also invested in infrastructural linkages in other sectors such as road and bridge construction, fiber optics, telecommunications, hotel construction, and water supply. By 2014, China had become the largest provider to Niger (13.5 percent of the country's imports, ahead of France with 12.3 percent), its second largest trading partner (with a trade volume of 300 million USD), a significant employer (with 30 Chinese companies employing about 6000 Nigeriens), and with total investments reaching 4.7 billion USD (Souleymane 2015). These figures reflect a recurrent feature of Chinese engagement in Africa over the past decade: to access the natural resources that it lacks at home, China has offered generous credit lines for infrastructure projects, especially in the extractive industries. These "infrastructure-for-resources deals" have resonated well in many African countries, which for decades have felt that their Western partners have neglected infrastructure development (Alves 2013). This is, of course, more than just a feeling – the neoclassical investment models employed by foreign extraction companies intentionally minimize all infrastructural development in the host country. With its "infrastructural fix" (Bach 2016), the Chinese state, on the contrary, has pursued an ambitious program of infrastructure and development, based not only on economic theory to promote growth, but also building on affective dimensions of power and identity. In doing so, China has taken a leading role in financing direct infrastructural investment across the world, eventually creating the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as an alternative to the financing system of the World Bank (ibid.).

In contrast to China's infrastructural investments aims, a 2010 World Bank study on the petroleum product markets in Sub-Saharan Africa concluded that the small size of African markets (Niger is one of their examples) made the development of the downstream petroleum sector uneconomic. As a rule of thumb, the bank calculated that refineries needed to produce at least 100,000 bpd (Zinder's capacity is 20,000 bpd) to be profitable. Moreover, the economic unsustainability of these small producers was exacerbated by problems in other sectors in Africa, especially poor electricity supply and a lack of infrastructure (World Bank Group 2010: 33). Rather than suggesting the construction of this lacking infrastructure, the World Bank report suggests "cutting" existing production linkages. Existing refineries in Africa should be closed because of their inefficiency and lack of competitiveness, as they would push up the price of petroleum products in Sub-Saharan African countries, thereby impeding growth by burdening domestic markets with additional costs (ibid.: 39). In addition, the report found that consumption linkages resulting from the new job and income possibilities of oil refineries were negligible. Although this might be true for the operational phase of the oil refinery, which has 548 staff at its headquarters (265 Nigeriens and 283 Chinese), the argument ignored three important dimensions of consumption linkages.

Firstly, in the three-year construction of the oil wells, refinery and pipeline, several thousand Nigerien workers were recruited, making the oil sector by far the largest single employer in eastern Niger. Secondly, income redistribution in social networks as a form of social security system leads to a situation in which several members of the family, friends and the neighborhood live off the salary of one oil worker. In several interviews and informal conversations, when I was asking oil workers how they use their salaries, they replied that the salary is completely consumed by their social networks that demands its redistribution. A formal salary in Niger has thus a large multiplier effect for poverty reduction and social security. Thirdly, the installation of the upstream and downstream oil industry associated with the informal economy in Niger thereby provided additional job opportunities. The new business in transport prompted, for example, a local businessman in Zinder to open a private parking area outside the city. This area is managed by the transport drivers' union, and attracts retail dealers, petty traders, sex workers and service providers from the larger West African subregion, all trying to sell their products and services to the hundreds of truckers who wait days or even weeks for the call to load their tankers at the refinery. In addition, in anticipating the coming of oil in Niger after the signing of the oil contract in 2008, a construction boom took place: new houses, especially villas, were built, as well as hotels by the country's elite (politicians and businessmen). These projects employed hundreds of subworkers, carpenters and bricklayers in the towns of Niamey, Zinder and Diffa. Furthermore, Nigerien market traders supply Chinese food providers with vegetables, meat, fish and beverages. However, as many of the Nigerien oil workers lost their jobs after the end of the construction phase, and many of the newly constructed houses in Zinder are still waiting to be filled, little can be said about the sustainability of these Chinese promoted and, of course, still tentative linkages in Niger.

8.2.4. Corporate practices

An important aspect of the industry's dis/entanglement work is corporate practice on the ground. Western multinational oil companies have increasingly focused on "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) which typically includes engagement in local development programs, communication with local authorities, and training and education campaigns for the local population. CSR has come to increasingly replace older forms of “corporate philanthropy” which often involved paternalistic redistribution patterns or “gift culture” – the distribution of cash, foodstuffs and sanitary products to the local population (Rajak 2011; Shever 2010; for a review of the literature on CSR see Watts 2005). While CSR practices also create linkages with local authorities and neighboring populations, critics argue that they are intended to create a stable and safe business environment, thereby disempowering local populations and delegitimizing their resistance (Barnes 2005; Kemedi 2003). Critics also argue CSR is an attempt at “green washing” companies to present a positive image to shareholders and consumers (Fleshman 2002). Thus, the growing importance of CSR has to be understood in the context of neoliberal or so-called “ethical capitalism” (Žižek 2009), in which new forms of ideology emerging in the West, such as the moralization of consumption, have directly affected corporate strategies. “Ethical consumption” itself, Žižek argues, has increasingly come to replace philanthropy as the dominant mode of redistributing profits of capital accumulation (ibid.). In this sense, it is more important for a company to present their products as ethically pure rather than to redistribute profits from the unethical practices of capital accumulation afterward.

In contrast, looking at Chinese state companies’ social engagement in Niger reveals that their activities follow the classical paternalistic redistribution patterns of “corporate philanthropy”. In Zinder, SORAZ engaged in about 30 philanthropic activities, including the construction of schools and water wells, the donation of 50 tons of cereals, a contribution to the local government to solve the water supply problem, the distribution of oil to the local population neighboring the refinery, and financial donations to several commemorative events and public institutions. In Diffa, the CNPC has engaged in philanthropic activities, including the construction of or contributions to treatment centers, water wells and schools. However, this corporate philanthropic approach often faces opposition on the ground. Many people complained to me that Chinese state owned oil companies only deal on the state-to-state level. For example, administrative chiefs and authorities from the regional directions of the oil ministry, the ministry of environment and the labor inspectorates in Zinder and Diffa complained that they had not been included in any administrative issues related to oil production, and that they lacked the political leverage to effect change should they notice breaches of health regulations or safety and environmental standards.

8.2.5. The standards debate

Many actors in Niger complained about the poor employment conditions and quality standards at the CNPC and SORAZ. In interviews and informal conversations, for example, Nigerien oil workers accused the Chinese of systematically blocking knowledge transfer and preventing them from forming a union. Only in January 2013, over four years after the beginning of construction and one year after the start of production, was a national oil workers union allowed. The *Syndicat National des Travailleurs de Pétrole* (SYNATRAP) was created to cover workers in the Agadem oil block, while the SYNATRAP (SORAZ) subsection was for workers at the oil refinery. The union immediately demanded a pay increase and a new salary scale, the renewal and conversion of fixed-term contracts into permanent contracts, the provision of health insurance, an improvement in working and living conditions, and a planned, quality national staff training program. From the outset, the union accused the company of attacking workers' freedom of association, as well as harassment, dismissal and threats of arbitrary relocation. Less than two months after its creation, the union called a strike. Through the intervention of the oil ministry and the labor inspectorate, an agreement was reached (Reuters 2.03.2013), although the union has held repeated strikes since, accusing Chinese management of failing to adhere to it.

In interviews, Nigerien oil workers complained about a lack of precautionary measures for handling chemicals resulting in serious health issues and even deaths, the treatment of illnesses consisting of the distribution of painkillers, poor working conditions and underpayment, unjustified lay-offs in cases of illness, and substandard housing. Civil society organizations publicized the poor working conditions in studies, radio debates and press statements, even garnering the interest of parliamentarians. In addition, former oil workers had launched several lawsuits against Chinese oil companies (CNPC, CPP, SORAZ), accusing them of breaching Nigerien labor law, especially in regard to the continuous renewal of short-term contracts and lay-offs in cases of illness. The Chinese oil companies' primary strategy for resolving these cases were cash payments in out of court settlements. Moreover, Nigerien oil engineers working at the oil refinery complained about "gamesmanship" once technical tasks were to be performed. One Nigerien refinery worker, for example, claimed that the Chinese simply do not perform work that requires technical skills in front of Nigerien workers in order to prevent a "Nigerization" of oil. When they need to perform technical skills they issue a "fetch and carry" order. Once the Nigerien worker is coming back, the work would have been done already. Another worker told me a similar anecdote, that when Nigerien workers asked for professional training, the Chinese would quickly build a computer office. As a consequence, he said, the Nigerien engineers would do nothing but surf on *facebook* or organize the work schedule. They also complained that briefings, instructions and training would take place in “broken English” instead of French, which they interpreted as an attempt to prevent knowledge transfers or any Nigerization of oil inside the refinery. In short, Nigerien workers complained an apparent Chinese disregard for knowledge transfers, safety and employment standards.

Processes of standardization have been a major analytical focus in seeking to understand the normalizing effects of the oil industry (Barry 2006). Barry views the global oil industry as a “technological zone”, a trans-territorial space “within which differences between technical practices, procedures and forms have been reduced, or common standards have been established” (ibid.: 239). He thereby divides the technological zone into three different general forms. First, the metrological zone, where measurement systems are standardized; second, the infrastructural zone, where common connections in transport, information and communication technologies are standardized; and third, the zone of qualification, where knowledge and practices are standardized according to common criteria (ibid.). In failing to provide adequate training to local staff, the Chinese companies were violating Article 21 of the 2007 Petroleum Code to provide national content via knowledge transfers and qualifications training. The Nigerien case, thus, questions assumptions of inevitable standardization within the zone of qualification. With regard to the technical knowledge of oil workers, this case rather points to Burawoy’s (1972) observation that even within the resource extracting industry – his example was the Zambian mining industry in the Copperbelt – knowledge transfers may be blocked to maintain what he called the “colour bar” in post-apartheid Zambia, or what we can call here more generally the “power bar” between Chinese expatriate and national oil workers. Indeed, one reason transnational oil companies use to justify their retention of effective control over operations in host countries is the lack of qualified local personnel (Panford 2014).

Similar complaints to those about knowledge transfer and training also existed about breaches of Article 22, which related to national standards on hygiene, security personnel, and environmental protection. In this regard, the planning of the nature reserve Termit & Tin Toumma in Diffa became a focal point for environmental organizations. As the oil pipeline was to transverse the reserve, the Nigerien government and the CNPC were concerned about future obstacles and possible delays in oil production if the reserve was completed before the pipeline became operational. Indeed, nature conservation associations accused the government and the CNPC of systematic corruption to delay the creation of the reserve. At the same time, these associations made repeated complaints about illegal hunting by Chinese workers, scrap metal being left behind, and open lakes of oil. On 6 March 2012, after the pipeline had been operational for more than one year, the Termit & Tin Toumma National Nature Reserve was finally established. At 97,000 km², it is the largest reserve of its type in Africa. Nevertheless, with strong competition between oil production and nature conservation, Magrin and van Vliet (2014) argue that the reserve could easily become another "paper park".

Nevertheless, in competition with Western multinational oil companies, the Chinese state and its companies operating around the globe do appear to be highly capable of learning and adopting (at least rhetorically) global standards. A look at CNPC's website demonstrates that China is highly aware of the need to communicate its corporate responsibility to the public. Here, they display their responsibility to the environment, health, safety and public welfare with statements like "While providing energy products and services, we strive for harmonious relationships between operation and safety, energy and the environment, and corporate and community interests" (China National Petroleum Corporation 2017). Nevertheless, although Chinese state-publicly owned companies have started to meet global standards by enacting laws and regulations, the companies have shown little commitment to implementing them (Tan-Mullins 2014). Having been restructured in 1998 to develop China's oil and petrochemical industry more efficiently, these formerly purely state-owned companies[126] were listed on international stock exchanges to raise funds, forcing them to adopt, at least rhetorically, strict international regulations (Meidan 2016: 28).

At the same time, lower standards may facilitate more local linkages ("national content") with the oil industry. Schareika (forthcoming) offers the example of a Chadian trader who was able to sell his services to a Chinese oil company by operating mainly outside the standards of the technological zone. Processes of standardization may thus, at least partly, explain capitalist exclusion and inclusion within the oil industry. With the "financialization of accumulation", the Western oil companies became publicly traded firms which were thereby dependent on shareholder value, insurance modalities, credit approvals and high oil prices (Labban 2010), inextricably linking global energy, debt and monetary systems (Sager 2016; Smith-Nonini 2016). With the emergence of such “shareholder capitalism” in the West since the 1980s, which is based on the principle that the economy benefits if corporations maximize shareholder value (Lazonick and O'Sullivan 2010), Western oil multinationals have become increasingly reluctant to award contracts to local companies, citing the need to meet global security, health and environmental standards in accordance with shareholder value, credit approvals and company (re)insurances. In Uganda, for example, Witte (2018: chapter 6) illustrated how the standards gap has been identified as a serious barrier to local content, and has caused controversies between Western and local companies, with the latter crying foul over willful exclusion from the industry. In Niger, however, disputes about high standards as a barrier for doing local business with the oil industry were simply absent. Thus, the lower Chinese standards in relation to work, health and the environment also appear to promote local connections to the foreign oil companies.

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[126] China has numerous national oil companies, the largest of which include Sinopec, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), and CNPC (with its subsidiary PetroChina).

8.2.6. Preliminary summary

In contrast to Western oil multinationals, the subchapter showed that Chinese oil businesses simplify and allow for greater (and more informal) incorporation of local content, including African trade, within their petro-assemblages. Building on low-cost production, Chinese oil companies pay African workers significantly lower wages and accommodate them in poorer housing than their Western counterparts. Incorporating (informal) local elements and minimizing labor costs enables low-cost production, making it possible to exploit less profitable oil fields like those in Niger. Indeed, the conflict between SORAZ and SONIDEP shows capitalist processes are at work not only in Western but also in Chinese oil production. In the case of Sudan for example, Patey (2013) notes that although they are state-owned, Chinese (and Indian) oil companies are not simply agents of state interests, but do indeed pursue corporate strategies of profit-maximization.[127] In general, Taylor argues that “oil companies from state capitalist systems have lower labor costs, stiff profit margins [*often less than 10 percent compared to 15-25 percent for Western corporations*] and rapid project completion [...*that*] gives them a strong competitive edge" (Taylor 2014: 350).

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[127] China developed business strategies for its multinational corporations (including the oil companies) that involved forming joint ventures with other companies, to gain on a managerial and technical level and to get a foothold in a new country (Alden and Davies 2006: 87; Meidan 2016: 29). In contrast to Western oil companies, China National Petroleum Corporation, established in September 1988, is however fully state-owned and is listed on the New York and Hong Kong stock exchange through its subsidiary PetroChina. It retains 90 percent of shares and the lines between the two companies appear altogether blurred (Meidan 2016: 31). By contrast, CNOOC has been internationally oriented since its creation in 1982 and is said to be more familiar with Western practices (Meidan 2016: 29). CNOOC is traded on the stock exchange in Hong Kong, Toronto and New York. The Chinese state owns a majority of shares (64.4 percent), while the remaining 35.6 percent is split amongst various shareholders including banks, investment companies and individual shareholders.

To summarize, the Chinese oil assemblage has enabled the government of Niger to achieve their desire for a national oil refinery and with it to politically generate linkages within the national territory. It is therefore not the nature or materiality of oil per se that is the root cause of the "missing linkages" or "enclave economy", as resource curse theorists would have it, nor is it a global capitalism, as Marxists would argue (cf. Altvater 2013: 20), rather, it is the particular form of capitalism which is most relevant. I argue that the "missing linkages" are the effect of a Western neoliberal capitalism. In contrast, a Chinese state capitalism – that is, not neoliberal (Nonini 2008) – allows for the buildup of these very linkages. These findings do not support the common notion of a "ruthless" and "exploitative" Chinese strategy. It may well turn out that – going along with Rogers' (2014) deliberations on "petrobarter" – that the more encompassing approach of China's infrastructure for resources deals would be more likely to prevent the downward spiral of economic decline and poverty defined by the notion of the resource curse. Indeed, Niger appears to be a case in point, with its economic growth largely being attributed by analysts such as the African Development Bank to oil production, and the refinery in particular (Goumandakoye 2016: 364). Despite their criticism that downstream industries are unprofitable in a country like Niger, even the IMF and the World Bank were forced to acknowledge the impact of the oil refinery on GDP. Indeed, the first quantitative study on the economic impact of refining capacities in oil producing countries as a core characteristic of the Chinese mode of oil investments shows a robust positive correlation between economic growth and refining capacities (Baur 2014). This suggests that developing a refinery (and the forward and backward linkages this promotes) in the host country may be a way out of the resource curse (ibid.).

However, the extension of the Chinese petro-assemblage could also be interpreted as another form of territorial-spatial control. Moreover, cheap loans could be classified as a governance strategy to create dependencies and the possibility of future political interference, in much the same way that many scholars argue that "the West" has facilitated the Third World debt crisis to exert political interference (Graeber 2011). If the African states are not able to repay their massive loans, the Chinese government may take control of these countries by virtue of their financial power. It may therefore be that history is repeating itself, albeit in a different guise. In the entanglement of capitalism and imperialism, it may be that the Chinese assemblage merely affords a different form of domination than the oft described petro-imperialism of Western oil empires. It is thus not a question of development or imperialism, but a "both/and" understanding that I argue for, thereby acknowledging the emergence of a new Chinese variety of imperialism, albeit one that may offer greater potential for broader economic growth in Africa (Ovadia 2013a).

8.3. Assembling political rhetoric and culture – constituting soft power

As I outlined in chapter 3, Niger was ruled by authoritarian regimes until the early 1990s: Hamani Diori (1960-1974), Seyni Kountché (1974-1987), and Ali Saibou (1987-1990). The foundations of these autocracies had been laid by French colonial intervention to secure access to Niger's uranium reserves in the late 1950s. With the reintroduction of a multiparty system in the 1990s, the rules of the game had changed to political competition and strategic conflicts between the opposition and the government majority with new social (civil society associations and labor unions) and political actors (political parties) emerging. It was in this context that the oil contract was signed in 2008 and immediately put to use in political disputes.

8.3.1. Significations of oil and China in Niger

In chapter 4, I outlined how President Tandja's supporters launched *Tazartché* (the campaign to change the constitution) at the refinery's foundation stone ceremony in 2008. In the supporting political narratives, the Western oil companies that had conducted oil exploration for five decades but never started production, had wanted to prevent Niger from becoming a producer and to keep the oil as their own future reserve; but Tandja had overcome them. He was a leader able to resist neocolonial interference, a man whose strength and pragmatism had finally made Niger an oil producing country. As the father of oil production, his pragmatism perfectly matched China's pragmatism. This strength was only reinforced when the international community enacted sanctions against his regime and he expressed his determination to stay in power with the help of China.

This rhetoric was possible as the Chinese state has adopted a carefully constructed oil diplomacy strategy built on non-interference and equal partnership (see also chapter 2). In these narratives, "north-south cooperation" is built on Western paternalism, direct intervention, imperialism or even neocolonialism, whereas China engages in "south-south cooperation" with its energy politics being portrayed as development strategies for Africa, in much the same manner that Western diplomacies portray their energy politics (Taylor

2006). While Western interests demonize China, portraying it as self-interested, and for showing a contempt for human rights and environmental and social responsibility, China claims to satisfy not only its own needs, but also those of the African populations (Jiang 2009). Unlike the West, which has never been interested in the good of the host country, China claims to always seek “win-win relationships”. To promote these narratives, like the West, China has also started radio stations in Niger and throughout Africa to manufacture popular consent for its (energy) politics among local populations, thereby attempting to reinforce its own energy security (Luther 2011).

However, whether China’s oil diplomacy actually becomes “soft power” depends on the subjectification of Chinese oil diplomacy by African elites and African populations more generally (Fijałkowski 2011). I argue that with Tandja associating China’s oil diplomacy with his project for constitutional amendment, the Chinese political rhetoric increasingly became a kind of soft power in Niger. To understand this soft power, it is important to note that the history of Western and particularly French domination of resource (non)extraction in Niger form the point of comparison when looking at significations of China today. As such, Chinese narratives fit well with popular Nigerien discourses about Western power, which is seen as paternalistic, neocolonial and failing to deliver development (see chapter 6), while the Chinese portrayal of themselves as working for an equal partnership and a win-win situation are widely accepted. In adopting this approach, China has been able to avoid accusations of neocolonialism in Nigerien public discourse, which is considered almost exclusively a trait of Western power. As such, major Chinese investment projects typically receive widespread public support.

This fits into the larger picture, with China and its engagement in Africa largely rated positively in popular African discourses (Wike et al. 2015). In an Afrobarometer survey conducted in 36 countries, 63 percent of respondents rated China’s growing presence in Africa either “somewhat” or “very” positive, while 15 percent seeing it as “somewhat” or “very” negative (Lekorwe et al. 2016). The survey concluded that China’s positive image was mainly due to investments in infrastructure and business development, and the low cost of products; while the negative image of China in Africa is primarily related to poor quality products. In other words, any poor image of China was not related to Western discourses about China’s willingness to work with autocratic or less-than-transparent regimes. Indeed, Chinese “non-interference” was actually viewed as the fifth most important factor in contributing to a positive image of China, with five percent of the respondents highlighting it. Most interestingly, China’s positive image in Africa had the second highest scores in Niger (84 percent), while China was also considered the ideal development model for Niger (28 percent), even outpacing the USA (24 percent) and France (27 percent). These figures are even more impressive as Nigeriens say that France, as the former colonial power, still has the most political influence in the country (60 percent, while 16 percent said China) (ibid.). Based on this evidence, I argue that the more positive image of China in Niger than in other African countries is due to particular experiences: including China’s role in developing infrastructure, especially the oil refinery in Niger itself, and partly as Tandja forcefully and positively associated China’s oil diplomacy to his own nationalist and anti-imperial rhetoric, through which it became a kind of soft power. Moreover, dissatisfaction with the failure of French uranium exploitation to deliver any recognized benefits to the population or to drag the country out from the bottom of the international poverty scale, as well as five decades of waiting for oil production, surely contributed to the positive image of China which achieved oil production in only three years.

However, the translation of China’s soft power appears to be showing fractures at the local level, especially for Nigeriens who have firsthand experience with the Chinese companies. Here again, significations of “the Chinese” have to be understood in relation to “the Westerners”, who have long been visible in Nigerien public life, especially in the development sector, but also in the oil sector. Consequently, those people who work directly with the Chinese or have been harmfully affected or are disaffected by oil production, like oil workers and parts of the population in Diffa, argue that the Western oil companies which preceded the CNPC paid higher wages, treated them better, implemented higher safety standards, and involved the neighboring population in development programs. Moreover, as all oil related issues are directly negotiated between the CNPC and Nigerien state representatives, seemingly without any consequences in the case of regulation breaches, local populations have complained that the Chinese are “very strong in corruption”. In a nutshell, these groups tend to perceive and portray the Chinese as “hard-working donkeys”, “outlaws”, “masters of corruption”, “xenophobes”, “communists” or even “racists”. I turn to that in more detail now.

As many of the predominantly young, unskilled, Nigerien oil workers involved in the construction of the sites told me in interviews and informal conversations, the oil sector was imagined to promise them long-term employment and some extra money to save, build a house, marry, support their families, pay for their children’s education and so on. In this sense, oil mostly signified the opportunity to achieve ideal masculinity as the family's bread winner (see chapter 6). In most cases, however, these expectations have not been fulfilled. First, most workers were only given successive short fixed-terms contracts, all of which ended with the completion of construction in 2011. Two lawyers, one of whom also pled the expropriated farmers' case (see chapter 5), organized 960 oil workers in a class action lawsuit against SORAZ, as the Nigerien labor legislation (*code de travail*) prohibits several successive fixed-term contracts. The lawyers argued that workers in Niger have the right to a permanent contract after two years of employment, or three fixed-term contracts in a row. However, one of the lawyers told me that most of the workers had first received a copy of their work contracts and certificates of employment only after the work was complete, and which covered the entire period. According to him, the court did not accept the majority of the claims, with only five out of 960 workers awarded compensation.

The workers also complained about low wages, poor nourishment, poor living conditions (in tents or in the open) and discrimination. Two oil workers, for example, told me that they were discriminated against while working on the construction of the desert pipeline. They claimed that the Chinese supervisors, who slept in air-conditioned containers, forced them to sleep in the open next to a pit toilet; and that the toilet itself was reserved for the Chinese supervisors, while the Nigeriens had to use the bushes. Another young man told me:

> They don't care about the people who work: you work, and they mistreat you. They insult us, the workers. They dismiss you without any reason while you are working. They just dismiss you. Sometimes only a small fault that does not even matter and they shout at you or even hit you on the head. (male, mid 20s)

Stories of dismissal in cases of union activities, mistakes at work, or cases of sickness abounded. One common story was that in cases of sickness, Nigerien oil workers would receive only painkillers, but no medical attention. If they were not able to continuing working, they were sent home for medical treatment, which also meant dismissal. Some of these cases had also made it to court, with the Nigerien workers winning those cases to my knowledge.

The general sentiment of Nigerien workers toward spatial segregation from the Chinese expatriates in terms of housing, eating and leisure time was one described by one oil workers as "implementing Apartheid". While the Chinese lived in pairs in air-conditioned containers during the construction phase, and were provided with food, cooks and entertainment, the Nigerien workers either slept in large tents (of ten) or in the open, and had to buy their own food from street vendors. In response, Nigerien workers often referred to Chinese as “communists” or “atheists”, as non-believers who thus did not respect the human dignity of Nigeriens.[128] Moreover, based on rumors and gossip widespread in Niger, Chinese were said to eat dogs and donkeys.[129] Several versions of these rumors existed in the gossip, but all highlight the fundamental “inhumanity” of Chinese. In one version, for example, an oil worker claimed that just after he saw a donkey giving birth, the Chinese boss ordered the cooks to prepare the foal for him. In general, the Chinese were said to not share anything with the Nigeriens, even throwing away leftover food and material, and criminalizing any attempt by Nigeriens to take them. Other rumors had it that the Chinese oil companies brought prisoners from China to work in Niger in exchange for freedom. Several Nigerien workers claimed to have seen Chinese being maltreated by superiors, or had at least heard about it from friends, and some even claimed to have seen Chinese in handcuffs. Irrespective of their veracity, gossip, rumor or myth-making are creative means of local sense-making (Marfaing and Thiel 2014). In these examples, they help understand discriminatory treatment by Chinese supervisors against Nigeriens, and also against other Chinese. At the same time, gossip, rumor or myth are also a form of agency of the subaltern (Besnier 2009), who would otherwise lack a (significant) public voice (see chapter 5).

Although the poor working conditions and perceived discrimination led to disappointment and frustration among the workers on the micro-level, it did not necessarily contradict significations of oil, or of China as a positive contributor to national development. For example, several oil workers said that although they had not benefited personally, the nation as a whole would benefit from oil production. One worker I interviewed told me that although he had lost his job as a result of becoming unwell and was still suffering from an unknown disease caused by contact with chemicals, he was optimistic that oil production would contribute to the nation. Another injured worker I visited in hospital also told me that although oil had come at a personal cost, it was beneficial for the nation. These examples may illustrate a broader paradoxical trend – that individuals and groups may dissociate their own, predominantly negative lived experiences from, and indeed reiterate, the popular narrative, that oil is essential for national development.

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[128] However, Nigerien state authorities and intermediaries who occupied positions of responsibility portrayed the Chinese as “hard-working”, in contrast to the Nigeriens who were “not used to hard work”. A Chinese interviewee claimed that Nigerien workers suffered from an “Islamic fatalism”, and that their subsequent “passivity” explained conflicts in the workplace. According to him, “the problem of Nigerien oil workers is their mentality. They think everything is coming from God. They do not see that they have to work hard in order to help themselves”. The statement shows that (non)religiosity played a mutually constitutive element in Chinese-Nigerien working relations.

[129] Hausa narratives about eating dogs are not limited to the Chinese, but also to other ethnic or national groups like southern, non-Hausa or Christian Nigerians to showcase their distinctiveness and (moral) inferiority.

8.3.2. Significations of oil and the West in Niger

In contrast to China's oil diplomacy, Western neoliberal thinking manifests itself in the good governance discourse that shifts the blame from market failures to bad governance in the Global South (see e.g. Humphreys et al. 2007). In an outward oriented state such as Niger, this discourse has, if not subjectified by its population, to be at least displayed by its leaders in extroverted rhetoric (see chapter 4). When Djibo took power from Tandja in the 2010 coup, he said that his aim was to turn Niger into an example of democracy and good governance, rhetoric well adapted to western political rationalities. This neoliberal good governance discourse itself had come to dominate Western development policies in the 1990s, with the blame for deepening poverty through oil production laid on "bad institutions" and "irresponsible behavior" in the Global South. The neoliberal policy effectively attempts to modify the intervening variable of the resource curse, namely "resource extraction + bad governance → poverty exacerbation to one of resource extraction + good governance → poverty reduction" and thereby transform the whole model into one of "governance failure" (Pegg 2005). In short, the resource curse can be beaten by policy intervention to ensure good governance mechanisms, transparency and institution building (Humphreys et al. 2007).

From the early 2000s onward, the neoliberal good governance discourse was heavily articulated in policy programs on natural resource management and implemented across the globe. National governments and NGOs became engaged with international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, while campaigns such as Publish What You Pay (PWYP) or the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) were developed as transparency mechanisms and to promote good governance (Weszkalnys 2011). PWYP Niger was founded in 2006, but Niger did not complete validation of the EITI criteria until March 2011 (under Djibo). As I showed in chapter 4, within a year of his rule, Djibo had organized new elections that saw the former political opposition come to power under Mahamadou Issoufou. Issoufou equally drew on the neoliberal version of the resource curse in his inaugural speech. Building on the idea that bad governance is the root cause of resource conflicts, he tried to reassure an international audience of his commitment to good governance and transparency in the resource sector. With this move, Issoufou wanted to regain western sympathies, and end the international sanctions enacted under Tandja.

In general, western diplomacy is based on “freedom discourses” – freedom of the press, freedom of speech, human rights, democratization, and so on (Schritt 2013). Reiterating western governmental, economic, business and NGO discourses, many journalists and academic studies therefore portray Chinese energy politics in Africa as disregarding human rights, security, and environmental standards, as well as boosting authoritarianism and corruption. Chinese energy politics in Africa are therefore linked to, or are even made responsible for, a second resource curse. In this narrative, the Chinese are accused of violating the underlying principles of development, democracy, human rights, and good governance, and thereby promoting the manifestation of the resource curse. However, Western governments and companies deploy these freedom discourses selectively to serve their own interests, while simultaneously supporting and profiting from “well-oiled regimes” and working hard to anticipate, respond to and minimize potential criticism for this support (White and Taylor 2001).

In contrast to China’s oil diplomacy, the translation of Western transnational governmentality in Niger mainly fails because Western politics are widely portrayed and seen as neocolonial. As I showed in chapters 5 and 6, discourses on Western neocolonialism have frequently triggered protests against Areva/France in Niger, and were also a factor that drove the protests against Charlie Hebdo in January 2015. We should therefore be cautious about Ferguson’s and Gupta’s (2005) argument that Western transnational governmentality mainly succeeds by bypassing African states and directly cooperating with NGOs. Whereas China’s transnational governmentality has mainly succeeded – at least in public national discourses – by being associated with national Nigerien state political projects, Western transnational governmentality in Niger has largely failed, and Nigerien NGOs are often perceived by the population as vehicles used by the national elite for self-enrichment. Once “soft” governance technologies fail, these failures might legitimize “hard” governance technologies of coercion and force. I turn to that now.

8.4. Assembling geopolitics and the military – constituting crude power

In chapter 3, I showed that the strong military ties established with France in the colonial era continue today. France had only agreed to decolonize Niger on the basis of secret military arrangements, resource agreements and special monetary zones – all of which served to secure France’s energy security. In 1961, one year after independence, Niger signed a defense treaty which granted the former colonizer priority access to uranium and other strategic materials. The defense treaty assured that the French would retain a profound influence on Niger's military, an influence which continues to shape the entire Nigerien military and political landscape today. Indeed, although Chinese, US and more recently German military involvement is growing, France remains the largest provider of military assistance to Niger.

8.4.1. Western geopolitics in Niger and beyond

Africa has undergone increasing Western militarization since 9/11. In 2002, the US launched a special program called Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) to fight the threat of terrorism in the trans-Saharan region by training government troops from Mali, Mauretania, Niger and Chad. With the launching of the PSI, around 400 US rangers were sent to the Chad-Niger border regions. Ending in 2004, the PSI was extended in 2005 by the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) to incorporate eleven countries from the region in the fight against terrorism. In 2008, TSCTI was incorporated in the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), which covers the whole of Africa (except Egypt) under a joint military command headquartered at Kelly Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany. One aim of the US AFRICOM initiative was to import at least 25 percent of its oil from Africa by 2015. With 9/11, the US justified the expansion of the Western oil assemblage into Africa by promoting a discourse on energy security that combined the peak-oil hypothesis with the fact that the remaining oil reserves lie outside US-American territory, in countries they argued were prone to terrorist activities (Labban 2011). The discourse thus drives the expansion of open markets in combination with a militarization of global space to "allow the free flow of commodities and investment capital" (ibid.: 326). It thereby seems that despite historical competition between France and the USA for Africa, they have increasingly started to cooperate (Keenan 2009).

Ostensibly created to fight terror on the continent, several scholars argue that the US established their new Africa command (AFRICOM) as a political strategy to secure energy resources, especially oil, and to combat growing Chinese interest in the continent's resources (Volman 2003; 2009; Besteman 2008; 2009; Keenan 2008b). The consequences for African states are manifold, as Barnes (2005: 6ff.) argues: On the one hand, the creation of military bases and "lily pads" (bases for military equipment) enforce the US military presence on the continent, and on the other hand, the implementation of military training, the financing of counterterrorism, and the supply of arms promote military capacity building amongst those African countries loyal to US interests. Despite the size and impact of the program, Western mainstream media has largely remained silent about AFRICOM, and the subtle and shadowy militarization of the continent (ibid.: 15 ff.). Reyna (2016b) holds that a "global warring" is at work, in which the US seeks to reproduce their capitalist oil-empire whenever the American oil supply is endangered (see also Klare 2001; 2004). However, Western governments are only one element amongst many within an oil assemblage, and it may well turn out that what seems at first sight to be a "war for oil" (in Iraq), was instead a "war for no oil", to avoid a drop in oil prices that would hit oil company profits (Palast 2013).

While France and the USA had long advocated for military bases in Niger, their calls had been refused by consecutive governments until 2013. Although Issoufou was the first to accept US and French demands to install a military base in Niger, the country was already central to broader process of militarization on the continent. In 2011, two years before the base was agreed upon, a Nigerien military surgeon who worked in the oil region from 2004 to 2006 was already concerned that the militarization process had begun, and that their security chief was American:

> The Americans demanded the region of Dirkou [*north of Agadem oil block*] a long time ago, but the former presidents refused. The new president [*Issoufou*] has also refused as I know. But actually in the caserns next to us, I will show you the place, there are French militaries in air-conditioned rooms. That's ridiculous! There have been already eighty who were in the bush to search for the people who stopped Areva. Now there are a lot who come bit by bit. Fifteen arrive today, ten tomorrow, and 20 the day after tomorrow. What do they do? I think that the military base is already on its way to be constructed without the Nigeriens' consciousness – because they have already lots of stuff there. They have their cars, their weapons, and their planes. What is it? The whole world could see it. What is a military base? Do you need a place in order to speak of a military base? No! There are soldiers who circulate freely in our country wherever they want to go with their own equipment. I think the military base has already been installed! (male, mid 30s)

In this context, the 2013 installation of a military base in Niger would be widely perceived as a serious threat to the country's sovereignty and independence. Indeed, the process of militarization has been widely viewed as a threat to the fragile sovereignty and independence of Niger, a narrative the military surgeon clearly endorsed:

> You know, we are in a country where independence has not yet been assured […] In our country we have an army that is disciplined. It is true that in comparison to Europe we lack material means. We do not have a large enough air force or sophisticated weapons to face situations like the Libyan crisis. Don't you see?! Regardless, it is not at all normal that an external force can come to take control over the security of our country!

When I further asked him about the threat of terrorism spread by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) he continued: “Two Areva four-wheels drives were apparently hijacked. As a member of the military, I can tell you, that story was fabricated. France just wants [*an excuse*] to build a military base piece-by-piece in Niger.” While the Libyan crisis posed a threat to the Nigerien nation through arms and drugs trafficking, he concluded that the threat of French militarization posed a greater danger to the people and the nation.

These statements exemplify just how salient the sovereignty and independence of the Nigerien nation are in the national political discourse. Formally educated Nigeriens (those who have received high school education) are well aware of, and constantly wary of, French (and Western) neocolonial and imperial influences. Consequently, discourses in educated or intellectual circles typically link contemporary world politics (including war, unequal development, poverty in the Global South) to imperialism and neocolonialism, in direct contrast to the narratives spread in Niger through western radio stations such as RFI, BBC, VOA and Deutsche Welle that mostly put the responsibility for “poverty” and “underdevelopment” on the governments of the Global South. During the Libyan war, for example, I witnessed how western media coverage of the conflict – which legitimized the war on the basis of the al-Qaddhāfī regime’s oppression of the Libyan people – often invoked disbelief and disapproval among the Nigerien population. A number of different people portrayed the war to me as a personal issue between French President Sarkozy and al-Qaddhāfī, and as an attempt to overthrow a powerful opposition regime, one which was not oppressing but actually providing for its people. Similarly, the military coup that led to Issoufou coming to power was rumored to be and widely understood as a French conspiracy to install a president loyal to their interests, and to allow them to construct a military base (and to keep further uranium exploitation amongst other things under direct control). Rumors of a Western plot were fueled by media reports that the computer disk with the electoral results data had been lost, just as a UN commission wanted to verify them. Others suspected that Issoufou agreed on the presence of foreign military forces to prevent a future military coup against himself. Several times Issoufou publicly spoke about coup attempts that were prevented at the last moment. Taken together, these examples highlight the character of political discourse in Niger, which strongly centers on the sovereignty and independence of the Nigerien nation.

In 2013, Issoufou agreed to the installation of a drone base with 120 US-American soldiers in Niamey. At the US-Africa summit in July 2014 in Washington, he granted permission to open a second drone base near Niger's Areva-operated uranium mines in Agadez. From this base, the USA – alongside France, with whom they have increasingly started to cooperate with in the fight against terrorism – can strike Islamist groups in the Sahel-Saharan region. On 23 October 2014, the French government also started construction on a military base at the fort of Madama near the northeast border of Niger with Libya. From there, it aims to strike jihadist groups in the Sahara. In October 2016, Germany also negotiated opening a military base in Niamey, which will officially be responsible for supporting the UN-mission in Mali.

Today, Niger has become an important strategic partner for the US and the EU, not only in the fight against terrorism, but also in the EU's fight against African movements of flight and migration to Europe. With its migration hub Agadez, where many refugees from the greater West Africa pass through en route to the Saharan desert and the Mediterranean, Niger has become part of the newly established EU-African "migration partnerships" network. This network externalizes the EU-border regime: in exchange for funding and security equipment for African militaries and police forces, the EU engages in the construction of detention centers on African territories, and makes agreements with African governments and their security forces to stop movements of migration. These agreements are almost certain to have broad dis/ordering effects, including more refugees becoming "stranded" in Agadez and other migration hubs, and African governments employing the new military equipment for their own projects, particularly for dealing with domestic conflicts such as Tubu or Tuareg rebellions in Niger. Recognizing these dangers, and fearing a loss of independence in particular, there has been strong criticism of the installation of the military bases in Niger. In commentary boxes on national newspaper platforms there was an extreme backlash from the public. Commenters on newspaper articles uploaded by tamtaminfo.com, for example, accused Issoufou of turning Niger into a "*bordel militaire*". In addition, civil society activists such as those from Alternative have accused the government of selling out the country's independence to foreign interests, and of persecuting the most marginalized migrants rather than improving living conditions in Africa so that they do not have to leave in the first place. In general, especially as terrorist activities in the Sahel-Saharan zone have increased with the growing presence of foreign military forces, the Western military presence in Niger is often seen as a deception to increase their control in the region, and a broad attack on Nigerien sovereignty.

Finally, it is worth noting that soft governance technologies of subjectification do not eradicate hard governance technologies of coercion and force, but rather coexist with them. The historical and social reality is therefore not only a process of (neoliberal) rationalization; instead, it is a “mix ratio” of freedom, self-conduct, disciplinary subjugation, and force (Lemke 2000: 41). From a governmentality perspective, we might therefore argue that if the translation of transnational governmentality into soft power fails, this failure might legitimize hard governance technologies of coercion (such as economic sanctions against the regime of Tandja) and force (such as the militarization of Niger) (for more on this issue see Schritt 2013).

8.4.2. China’s geopolitics in Niger and beyond

Although China puts most of its overseas efforts into soft power, its military presence has grown constantly over the past few decades, and especially since 1990, when it agreed to join in UN peacekeeping responsibilities. By May 2013, China had 14 times more UN-peacekeepers in Africa then the USA (1645 compared to 118 soldiers). In addition, China tries to protect their overseas investments in Africa by arming and training the armies of their host countries to create political stability. Sun (2015) therefore sees China as employing a “soft” military overseas approach that builds on “the temporary deployment of armed forces for overseas military exercises, as well as the deployment of military patrols, peacekeeping forces, military trainers, and consultants”. In contrast, the USA employs a “hard” military strategy which includes military bases within the borders of African countries, the right to access and use the bases freely while enjoying extraterritorial rights and privileges, and the support of military efforts including combat, command, surveillance and intelligence collecting operations (ibid.). Hillebrand and Closson (2015: 140) predict that by 2020 “the weak African nations, which eagerly accepted Chinese aid and investment in the first decade of this century, will come under increasing pressure as China begins requesting a military presence to protect its substantial investments and to discourage other outside interests”. There is some evidence to support this argument, with China already signing their first military agreement in Africa in February 2014, allowing the Chinese navy to use Djibouti port. Although the growing Chinese military presence in Africa is seen by most political analysts as a direct threat to US geostrategic interests, it also allows for potential cooperation, as the development of the historical competition between France and the USA in Africa into partners of convenience appears to show.

8.5. Western and Chinese petro-assemblages

From the perspective of a deep ontology like that of classical Marxist approaches, the capitalist mode of production per se is the underlying structure or deeper base on which the legal, political and ideological superstructure is built. For example, Watts (2012), whose academic work can be classified as a "rigorous and wide-ranging theoretical engagement with Marxian political economy" (Perreault 2011: 323), conceptualizes the oil complex (or oil assemblage) as a regime of accumulation, with a permanent frontier of dispossession that violently extends in order to establish the conditions for new capital accumulation. The most influential social science approaches to oil extraction and the industry, which I outlined at the start of the chapter, generalize oil infrastructures and the workings of capitalism by pointing to the enclave nature of oil production, and the process of the oil companies walling themselves off from their socio-economic and political surroundings within host countries to allow for smooth capital accumulation (Ferguson 2005, Appel 2012a; 2012b, Donner 2011; Zalik 2009; Yessenova 2012). In doing so, these authors have thus generalized the working of the oil industry based on the assumption that there is only one form of petro-infrastructure, and only one form of neoliberal or Anglo-American capitalism on a global scale. In contrast, the literature on China's involvement in Africa often tends to overstate differences between China and the West, and neglects the basic fact that similar capitalist interests are at work in both resource economies. In contrast, debates on capitalist diversity in the "comparative capitalism" (CC) and the "varieties of capitalism" (VoC) literature emphasize the significant diversity within capitalism. In doing so, they criticize the simplistic assumptions made by globalization theses "which predicted a post-Cold War convergence of all institutional forms of capitalism towards one supposedly superior market-liberal Anglo-American model" (Bruff and Ebenau 2014: 5). Nevertheless, by pointing towards the institutional configurations rather than the wider socio-cultural, political, economic and technological relations in which institutions are entangled, the comparative capitalism literature seems to fall back onto national container assumptions (for an overview see Bruff/Ebenau (2014)).

In contrast to this literature, I make use of the historical relational ontology of assemblages to conceptualize "varieties of capitalism" not as a superstructure – like a deep ontology would – but to see capitalist variations rather as specific properties of trans-territorial assemblages of heterogeneous elements. By having engaged the empirical example of Western and Chinese oil assemblages' entanglements in Niger with the broader literatures on the oil industry and China in Africa, I identify the following heterogeneous elements as being assembled within the process of bringing oil production into being: petro-infrastructures, economic theories, oil diplomacies, lending institutions, corporate structures, corporate practices and regulations, contractual agreements and military strategies. I outline these as follows:

Heterogeneous Elements	**Western petro-assemblages**	**Chinese petro-assemblages**
Petro-infrastructure	Enclave industrialization	Upstream and downstream industry
Economic theories	(Neo)classical economic theory: governance curse	Infrastructural fix, linkage approach
Oil diplomacy	Selective deployment of freedom/human rights discourses Demonizing China for a second resource curse	"equal partnership", "win-win relationship", "south-south cooperation", "non-interference" Demonizing the West for neocolonial interference
Institutions	World Bank, IMF, PWYP. EITI, international NGOs	EXIM Bank, China Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)
Corporate structure	Stock exchange listed transnational oil companies	State-owned national oil companies If listed, the Chinese state is the majority shareholder
Corporate practice and regulations	Corporate Social Responsibility, global standards	Corporate philanthropy, state-to-state cooperation, low standards, low-cost production
Contractual agreements	Mixed (often concessions, PSAs, service contracts)	Mixed (mainly PSAs, joint-ventures)
Military strategies	Militarization of Africa (AFRICOM), training and outfitting local armies, global warring	Political stability, arming and training armies of host countries

Figure 12: Comparing Western and Chinese petro-assemblages

Regarding oil assemblages as trans-territorial spaces of capitalist order that we might call "oil zones" (Schritt and Behrends 2018) I suggest conceptualizing the Western and the Chinese zones of petro-capitalism as different entities with specific characteristics which enact causal powers. By causal powers I refer to specific inward oriented (governmentality and necessity of profit-maximization inherent to capitalism) and outward oriented forces (transnational governmentality and capitalist process of accumulation). In the Western petro-assemblage, the connection of heterogeneous elements like oil concessions, transnational oil companies, shareholder value, enclave infrastructures, international donor organizations, freedom discourses, a demonization of China, the militarization of global space, the setting of global standards, and neoclassical economic theories together produce a form of "neoliberal militarized ethical capitalism" in which new forms of ideology emerge (like the moralization of consumption) that directly affect corporate strategies (like CSR).

The Chinese petro-assemblage incorporates vastly different heterogeneous elements. As such, it has shaped a capitalist zone that is not neoliberal, but combines elements of "socialist planning" and "social engineering" (Jeffreys and Sigley 2011) into a "developmental state model" or "state capitalism" (Taylor 2014). Its causal powers rather resemble logics of capital accumulation in industrial capitalism that allow for the build-up of manifold linkages. Nevertheless, as markets increasingly globalize, so too does the connectivity of states. Thus, instead of seeing varieties of capitalism as separate entities (the container problem), it seems more productive to look at one global "variegated capitalism" (Peck and Theodore 2007) which acknowledges the fluid nature of capitalism, in which, rather than seeing neoliberalism as a hegemonic order or unified set of policies, it can be deployed "as a mobile technology" (Ong 2007). In this sense, the Chinese state has diversified its portfolio of oil corporations to capture and connect to various forms of capitalist profit-making. To avoid neatly tying up the loose ends and thus smoothing out the inconsistencies and irregularities of capitalism, I argue that we should rather look at variegated forms of capitalism and the mobile technologies of neoliberalism or state capitalist planning.

In this sense, capitalism itself is patchy (Tsing 2015: 4-5). Rather than simply assuming their existence, assemblage theory points to how capitalist entities emerge through the dis/connections between their heterogeneous patches. Assemblages are therefore not to be understood as totalities, not as organisms characterized by relations of interiority, but rather as entities emerging from relations of exteriority between self-contained parts. Western and Chinese oil zones thus emerge as relational, overlapping, conflicting, competing and cooperative entities. Although the Western and Chinese oil zones are competing for African oil, this competition does not necessarily exclude exchange and cooperation. Nor does this competition inherently lead to violent conflict and war, though it may be one possible outcome. Furthermore, the elements in the assemblages I have identified here are neither timeless nor set in stone, but are rather themselves part of dynamic processes of change. This is clear when one looks at companies' growing involvement in CSR activities, militarization, or the corporate strategies of profit maximization employed by Chinese state-owned oil companies.

8.6. Conclusion: The petro-political configuration in Niger

I started this chapter by looking at how Chinese and Western oil assemblages are entangled within the Nigerien context. I showed that these entanglements have triggered the emergence of a particular configuration of politics and oil production in Niger which I call the petro-political configuration. Using Niger as an example, and situating it in a wider context by drawing on the vast literatures on the oil industry and China in Africa, I have sketched out two trans-territorial spaces of assemblage, a Western and a Chinese oil zone, each enacting particular (capitalist) properties.

Despite multinational companies' explorations for oil beginning in Niger in 1958, oil production did not begin until 2011. This non-production was due to several, interrelated elements of Western models of oil production: especially a Western oil zone that socio-spatially produced scarcity to avoid oversupplying the market and a pushing down prices; and based on neoclassical economic theory, a classification of Nigerien oil production as uneconomic, especially during the trough periods of world oil prices. It was not only a spike in world oil prices but also Chinese engagement that finally enabled Niger to become an oil producer, and to build forward and backward linkages, thereby tentatively overcoming enclave industrialization, and ensuring that at least some of the oil produced in Niger is available for use within the country itself. Whereas the literature typically suggests that enclave capitalism is the inevitable by-product of oil's production in a global capitalist regime, the Nigerien case study shows that the Chinese oil zone has indeed allowed for manifold – albeit fragile – linkages within the national economy, and the tentative establishment of national content within the oil industry.

Spatially, it would be fair to say that the Western oil zone has developed the materiality of oil as a "point source resource" (Auty 2001; Le Billon 2001: 570) into a point resource strategy of enclave industrialization, creating points of profit for transnational capital in a minuscule area of the continent considered *Afrique utile*. The Western oil zone forges minimal linkages out from the enclave of oil extraction, mainly in the construction of access roads and oil-company related transport. Looking more closely at the Chinese oil zone, however, illustrates that although oil is naturally a point source resource, this does not necessarily translate into a point resource strategy of enclave industrialization and points of profit. It is able to extend out on a much larger scale within the territory of processing, establishing the different linkages which Hirschman (1981) outlines in his linkage model, thereby allowing parts of so-called *Afrique inutile* to also become *Afrique utile*.

The Western and Chinese oil zones are further entangled with the specific political and socio-cultural context in Niger. Firstly, when its oil diplomacy was linked into former president Tandja's project to change the constitution*,* China's political rhetoric became a kind of soft power in Nigerien public national discourse, something the Western political rhetoric of freedom discourses has long failed to achieve. At the same time, this failure of Western transnational governmentality in Niger has legitimized means of coercion and force visible in AFRICOM. While China is also increasingly investing in military means on the continent and is therefore closing the gap, its military footprint is still small in comparison to that of France and the USA.

Finally, the differences in the assemblage of economic, political and socio-cultural elements are due to the particular characteristics of the two different types of zones. The Western oil zone typically assembles heterogeneous elements such as multinational oil companies, enclave industrialization, freedom discourses, corporate social responsibility, AFRICOM and monetary institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, combined with neoclassical economic theory to form a kind of "neoliberal militarized ethical capitalism". In contrast, the Chinese oil zone assembles their own lending institutions (EXIM bank, China Development Bank and AIIB) and visions of economic theory, state-owned corporations, upstream and downstream petro-infrastructure, political rhetoric of "equal partnership", "win-win relationship" and "non-interference" and soft military strategies into a form of state capitalism that is not neoliberal. Understanding the particular capitalist properties of these two different zones helps lay bare the varying economic, political and socio-cultural transformation processes induced by the dis/entanglements of these petro-assemblages within the Nigerien context. This case study also reveals how different capitalisms and their articulations with local elements lead to the emergence of a complex and unique petro-political configuration, a configuration that cannot be sufficiently understood using simplistic notions of neoliberalism as the single, global capitalist force shaping the world.

9. Conclusion

Scholars drawing on the resource curse and rentier state as theoretical perspectives typically tell the history of oil and uranium in Niger in a quasi-deterministic manner. When Tandja renegotiated the uranium price with Areva/France in 2007, Servant (2008) asked if Niger was on its way to a new resource curse, arguing that the first step had already been made. In the article, Servant quickly draws a causal chain based on the rentier state model: the resource rent enables the political elite to neglect the population (here the Tuareg), which in turn take up arms to express their grievances, who are in turn further repressed by an elite which now has the financial means to do so. A similar analysis has been made by Grégoire (2010), who describes *Tazartché* as Tandja's attempt to claim the future resource rents of oil and uranium for himself and his followers. Similarly, when the Nigerien government decided to break the French monopoly on its mining sector, especially uranium, and in the ensuing 18 months allocated over 150 exploration permits to companies from around the globe, Gazibo (2011: 342/343) also saw a resource curse scenario taking shape, both through an armed Tuareg insurgency that called for a fairer distribution of mining revenues and Tandja's anti-constitutional project to stay in power.

However, these arguments overlook the fact that Niger has been a rentier state since uranium exploitation began in the early 1970s. Moreover, Niger's dependence on "development rent", which is said to have similar effects to oil rent (Bierschenk 1988; Collier 2006; Olivier de Sardan 2013), has also increased with the influx of donor money, especially since Tandja took power in 1999. According to the resource curse and rentier state models, these rents should therefore have long led to conflict, corruption, authoritarianism and economic decline in Niger. Phrased another way, how many resource curses can hit a country? As a case study then, Niger offered the opportunity to analyze the specific socio-political effects of oil as an emerging resource, in comparison to the socio-political effects of uranium and aid. As such, it offered the chance to revisit the central assumption of the resource curse, that mineral resources in general, and oil in particular, foster corruption, conflict, economic decline and authoritarian tendencies.

Inquiring into questions of oil-induced change and resource-political dynamics, the starting point of this thesis was the oil refinery's inauguration ceremony and the various actors' concrete practices of celebration and contestation in late 2011. I asked in the introduction how the inauguration event became political and contested, and I developed a framework to conduct such an analysis. To do so, I sought to combine two seemingly dichotomous notions, namely, that oil both enters into a pre-existing political game, and that new publics emerge around the issue of oil. I showed that although publics did emerge around the inauguration, they did not emerge from a void, but rather built on pre-existing foundations and constellations of the political configuration. I thus argued that to answer questions about the transformations to the economic, political and socio-cultural configuration triggered by oil, we first need to understand the configuration prior to oil. As a point of comparison, I looked at pre-oil Niger's uranium production in the north of the country, which has been highly influential in the post-Independence era. To compare and understand the dis/connections between resource-specific and context-specific elements in the historical and relational processes of both uranium and oil becoming resources in Niger, I drew on the notion of resource assemblages. In particular, I analyzed how resource-specific elements such as material effects, extractive infrastructures, scientific controversies, economic models, companies, contracts, laws, imperial powers and diplomatic soft powers dis/entangled with context-specific elements of the economy, politics and society (such as civil society associations, political parties, media coverage, political claims and ideological narratives). I termed such a network of resource assemblages and heterogeneous contextual elements resource-political configurations.

To answer these questions about oil-induced change, I conducted an extended case study of the oil refinery's inauguration. In doing so, I was able to trace the moment of Niger entering the oil-age into both the historical process of Niger becoming and transforming into an oil producer and the spatial connections between politics in Zinder, Diffa, Niamey, Beijing, Paris and New York. To do so, I reformulated the extended case method in chapter 2 in light of contemporary social theory by extending out from its traditional strength, the focus on practice and process, to the relational and material focus of assemblage theory and Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). With such a reformulation of the extended case method I not only laid the groundwork to analyze the inauguration, but also sought to make a methodological contribution to the anthropological endeavor by pushing the classical insights of the Manchester School through the material turn of contemporary social theory. Using these methodological tools throughout the thesis, in chapter 3 I showed how pre-oil Niger could best be described as a uranium-political configuration. This configuration was strongly influenced by the legacy of *Françafrique* that had shaped not only the way politics were played in postcolonial Niger, but also the ideologies and narratives that were inextricably entangled within this game. Based on these findings, in chapter 4 I analyzed how the coming of oil was put to use in pre-existing political conflicts. Here, I showed empirically how oil had been incorporated into the logic of Niger's political game long before it had actually materialized, rather than instantly changing the game on arrival. Building on these conclusions about Nigerien macro-politics, in chapter 5 I ethnographically analyzed the micro-politics around the inauguration. I showed how these micro-politics were not only built on pre-existing conflicts, but also produced new dis/connections between various political and social actors, thereby slowly transforming the resource-political configuration itself. In chapter 6 I used these findings to highlight the continuities and ruptures of Nigerien politics and society. This chapter, in particular, is an important contribution to the ethnography and understanding of contemporary Niger. By looking at these historical and socio-political continuities in chapter 7, I sought to understand how the infrastructure of oil reinforced, transformed or newly created particular socio-political dynamics in oil-age Niger. Taking up the focus on oil-induced change in chapter 8, I highlighted how the oil assemblage dis/connected with the pre-existing uranium shaped economy, politics and society in Niger to emerge as a new petro-political configuration.

Providing a particular anthropological contribution to the study of oil, I opted for a relational, practice-oriented and processual approach by combining assemblage theory (focusing on historical and spatial processes of composition) with a conflict perspective (focusing on actors' concrete practices of dis/association from/to the emerging configuration). Whereas assemblage theory follows a historical relational ontology which considers the heterogeneous elements symmetrically, and asks what kind of configurations emerge through associations between these elements, conflict approaches focus on strategies of inclusion and exclusion such as protest, violence, repression, cooptation, bribery and corruption. Specifically, I argued that to trace the transformation processes induced by oil in Niger we need to combine the notion of resource assemblages with that of making oil political to understand the work political players did to dis/associate themselves from/to others in the emerging petro-political configuration. In the spirit of abductive inquiry inspired by Peirce, my aim was to then discover combinations of features or causalities which could not be accounted for using established theory, in this case the resource curse thesis and rentier state theory. Throughout the thesis, I identified several problems and shortcomings with the resource curse thesis and rentier state theory research framework, providing a fresh look at the macro- and micro-political workings of an emerging oil-age Niger.

Relevant for anthropologists, resource scholars, and proponents of the resource curse and rentier state, the overall argument of the thesis was non-normative: for the Nigerien case, I argue that oil has neither been a blessing nor a curse so far. Rather, oil acts as a catalyst that accelerates pre-existing dynamics. Drawing together heterogeneous elements from resource assemblages and the particular economic, political and socio-cultural context, a new configuration with strong continuations of historical political domination emerges. The transformation process induced by oil production in Niger can thus only be understood if one thinks the monetary, symbolic, material and temporal dimensions of oil together with the social, political, economic and cultural elements that pre-existed production. In other words, oil is neither the sole driver for structural change, nor is it simply incorporated into an existing socio-cultural, political and economic structure. Rather, as a catalyst, it accelerates the reaction between and the connection of numerous heterogeneous patches in an ensemble-effect to produce a new entity. Seen from an assemblage theory perspective, oil forges dis/connections between heterogeneous elements in the creation of a petro-political configuration which I call "Petro-Democracy". This configuration is characterized not only by political competition and public debates about oil after years of authoritarian rule in uranium-age Niger, but also by the development of new economic linkages and social and political actors emerging along the oil production chain that open up a window for democratic change. From an actor-centered conflict perspective, I was able to specify how oil provides political players with new ideological and material resources in building or cutting connections to/from the emerging petro-political configuration through practices of association (inclusion) and dissociation (exclusion). In other words, the case study has shown that the coming of oil accelerates, intensifies and thus transforms pre-existing resource-political configurations by providing political actors with new resources to engage in the (public) political game. I now turn to several aspects of oil as a catalyst as they became visible throughout the book, namely: oil as an idiom, material politics, oil zones, and petro-democracy.

9.1. Oil as idiom

In chapters 4 and 5, I analyzed the political and social process through which Niger has emerged as a new oil state since 2008. Drawing on an ethnography of political events surrounding the inauguration of Niger's first oil refinery in 2011, I argued that oil is an important, but by no means *the* determining factor in the country's current political game.

I showed that at the beginning of production the most important dimension of oil's immediate presence were not those factors predicted by the resource curse thesis (poverty, conflict, authoritarianism, corruption, gender inequality) but rather talk about oil. Firstly, oil was incorporated into pre-existing political conflicts that were played out in a globally circulating oil language which included the resource curse thesis itself. Various political actors, including the government, political parties, civil society and wealthy businessmen transformed oil into a political resource by developing particular notions, images and meanings of oil. In doing so, they used oil to make claims to power and legitimacy, to build alliances, to increase negotiating power, to gain recognition as an interest group, to compete for positions and shares of state revenues, and to formulate visions of the future. In other words, in its immediate presence in Niger, oil served as an idiom within which pre-existing political conflicts became framed. Looking at these significations of oil also affected my approach to the resource curse thesis, illuminating how the very notion of the resource curse has become a political rhetoric and an instrument of discursive power used by various local actors to play the political game in oil-age Niger. I thus showed how the resource curse thesis trickled down into macro- and micro-political workings in Niger, where it was translated in both introverted and extroverted political narratives and put to use either to question the legitimacy of opponents in political disputes, or to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of international donors to access financial flows.

In this sense, resources like oil are enacted in contested political spaces. In these spaces, talk is an important medium in the resources' discursive manifestations, which in turn shape the social and political reality in the country. In chapters 4 and 5, I employed critical political discourse analysis to understand language use as social practice shaped by relations of power. In doing so, I argued that there is another important element in oil talk: talking oil in the public political sphere is not simply about communication, but also about political positioning. That is, by using images of oil production and the effects it has, actors talk oil to jockey for political position and power. To understand these politics, it was necessary to situate the oil talk in its particular sites to identify the positions, projects and practices of the political actors involved. I showed how the logic of political competition in a multiparty system shapes how actors situationally interpret and frame Niger as a new oil producer. Building on Goffman's (1974) theory of framing, we can say that the political actors' roles on the public political front stage subsequently frame how they articulate significations of oil. Specifically, I showed how political actors use images of oil production and its (anticipated) material effects to question the legitimacy of their opponents in the politics of naming, blaming and claiming. However, while Felstiner, Abel and Sarat (1980-1981) argued that legal disputes emerge out of an injurious experience – such as environmental pollution – which then translates into blaming and claiming, my case study showed that this is not necessarily the case in political disputes. Rather, politically named grievances were anticipated, invented, and paternalistically ascribed to and expressed on behalf of subalterns who themselves lacked a significant voice in public politics. By doing so, political players staged, transformed or discarded subaltern grievances to serve their own political agenda. I coined this "crude talking": talking politics in the language of oil. In this sense, I would argue that talking oil is not different from talking politics in Niger (and beyond) more generally, but it nevertheless is an important element in shaping the political and socio-cultural reality in the oil-age.

By incorporating ordering technologies and artefacts such as tires, fuel, stones, mobile phones and radio into my analysis, I argued that crude talking is enacted in a double sense. I showed that actors talk oil through the logic of their political scripts, which in turn shape how they produce significations of oil. However, to enact crude talk, political players also need access to media, especially radio. To access and effectively agitate on radio, political players require skill, knowledge, position, authority and financial leverage. Speaking more generally, the political agenda is set in the media not only by which but also how topics are discussed. In Niger, political players typically set the agenda themselves by paying to release statements or organize radio debates. In contrast, social actors who lack both formal recognition as members of political parties or civil society associations, and cannot afford to buy air-time, are typically denied access. In other words, radio offers some (typically elite) actors the opportunity to articulate their political projects, while denying access to others, particularly socio-economically disadvantaged groups – dispossessed farmers and workers, the poor, women, or ethnic, religious and national minorities. In this case study, I have illustrated how the subaltern – the expropriated rural population around the refinery, marginalized youth and women – were largely excluded from creating public political narratives because they lacked access to the public sphere. If their voice was heard at all, it was mostly through paternalistic representation by elites who may have claimed to speak on their behalf, but were also clearly pursuing their own political projects. In short, access to radio was essential for participation in the public sphere and in forming Nigerien publics. As such, privileged access to media remains a means of elite domination.

This is not to suggest that the subaltern has no agency at all. Indeed, I showed how subaltern groups may use new media formats like talk-back radio, or they may turn to avenues outside the official news media and thereby produce different publics through texting, rumors, gossip or violent demonstrations. The mobile phone in particular has become an instrument of political agitation that has changed the nature of the public political game. The anonymity possible when texting via unregistered SIM cards allowed for new forms of organizing, mobilizing and leading massed groups around the inauguration. Whereas access to radio as a mouthpiece was more restricted, being controlled by journalists and financial flows, texting allowed a more uncontrolled form of dissemination. However, I showed that what may initially appear to be politics from below were as much politics from above. Celebrating the democratizing force of certain information and communication technologies like radio or mobile phones, or of certain actors like civil society or youth, therefore appears both naïve and misleading. Rather, we have to empirically identify the manifold and diverse connections between ordering technologies and the particular politics played by, with and through them. Taken together, it is clear that only by considering the interaction between ordering technologies and politics in Niger does an understanding of the specific character of local political dynamics become possible. In this sense, ordering technologies like the radio, mobile phones or burning street barricades have not only become important devices within political players' tactical repertoire, but also play an important role in shaping the "how" of contemporary Nigerien politics.

In short, the double layered enactment of talk and access to media technologies required to be an effective actor has produced a specific political logic in Niger. As political representation in contemporary Niger is closely linked to media access, political representation continues to be an ideological tool that serves to legitimate political positions and reinforces structures of inequality, subordination and domination that pre-existed oil-age Niger. The political player's crude talking thus not only helped shape oil-age Niger's social and political realities, but also reconstructed social and political differences, and reinforced established patterns of domination.

In chapter 6, I looked at the periodical patterns of violence in Niger that reemerged in different guises before and after the commencement of oil production. After years of authoritarian silence, the emergence of democracy and new media spaces in Niger (television, radio, the press, internet, mobile phones) caused new public spheres to sprout up. In these spheres, the politicization of topics and events took place by proxy. Exploited by actors in a context of political competition, these proxies included the refinery's inauguration, water shortages, public holidays and religious sentiments. While these topics are diverse, politics by proxy does not mean that the topic in question can be arbitrarily replaced by any subject whatsoever. Rather, the topic needs to possess a powerful signification, one that may be loaded with high aspirations and hope (such as oil), inextricably entangled with personal identities (such as religion), have an existential dimension (such as a water shortage) or already be a well-established public holiday where the population routinely gathers (such as May Day). In this sense, we might say that while politics always turns around issues, they do so in historically sedimented but contingent ways. However, although political debate follows the logic of politics by proxy in which various issues are put to use in pre-existing political conflicts, the political debate also changes the political constellation in this process. In other words, while these conflicts are mainly played out in an existing political game, they not only reproduce but also alter that political arena by transforming existing, adding new, and substituting old elements.

Comparing the case of Niger with oil politics in neighboring countries, and referring to other ethnographic studies of oil production, we see how oil is talked about differently in the various moments of its production. In other words, significations of oil differ in their temporal dimensions, depending on the "phases of oil development" (Heilbrunn 2014: 110–44). I see five broad phases of oil production to be of particular importance. First, the phase of not-yet-ness, when the government, and at least parts of the population are aware that oil exploration has begun, but production has not yet started. Weszkalnys (2011; 2014; 2016) in São Tomé and Príncipe, Witte (2017) in Uganda and Behrends (2008) in Chad have analyzed how the absence or not-yet-ness of oil production spurred all kinds of anticipatory practices and economies of expectation, and thus materialized and affected the country, although the oil remained in the ground. Second, the phase as an emergent oil producer, where oil production is just about to or has just commenced. I showed that Niger in 2011-2012 was characterized by oil's immediate presence, with oil acting as an idiom that framed political conflicts. However, as I showed with recurrent protests around various events in Niger, after several month or years of production, oil's discursive presence has diminished over time, and political debates have increasingly turned toward other issues. Third, the phase of a mature oil producer like Nigeria, where production started decades ago, and patterns to manage and absorb oil revenues have become well-established. In this advanced stage of production, oil seems to have lost its early significance in public discourse. Nevertheless, oil continues to profoundly shape the very form of political configurations, as it does in Nigeria (Watts 2004), where it has trickled down into everyday life, becoming expressed in all kinds of illicit behavior (Apter 2005). Fourth, the phase of declining production, as in Gabon or Oman, where hydrocarbons decrease and oil revenues start to fall. In this late stage of production, oil appears to again become discursively pertinent, with a (perceived) end to production looming. In Oman, for example, this has spurred new discussions about a future without oil (Limbert 2010), and in Gabon, the continuous depletion of oil has produced new uncertainties among the population (Fricke 2017). Fifth, we can imagine a post-oil phase where production has ceased, and where oil might be (actively) remembered or forgotten. However, we should not conceptualize these phases too neatly, or as self-contained. In the uranium case of Niger, for example, we see how uranium periodically became an issue, decades after production had started and networks were established. In other words, oil (and other resources) still retains discursive power that political actors may be able to draw on, especially in relation to broader international events, such as a price boom or crash.

Whereas I argue that in its immediate presence, oil may become an idiom that frames pre-existing conflicts, from a resource curse and rentier state perspective, oil is said to inherently provoke conflicts (Humphreys 2005; Collier and Hoeffler 2004) and authoritarian tendencies (Ross 2001). From such a perspective, it seems apparent that *Tazartché* or the disorder around the refinery's inauguration were oil-induced conflicts in which different actors fought over the largest piece of the (future) resource pie. One reason for such a straightforward determinism may be that neoclassical economics approaches are effectively ahistorical (a criticism that has also been leveled at political science from within by Pierson 2004). Neoclassical economic theory's ahistoricity is at least partly built around the model of *homo oeconomicus*, who acts at a particular instance in time, subjectively-defining ends that are rationally calculated to maximize one's own benefit, and in disregard for previous decisions that may influence (irrational) decisions and create path-dependent action. Therefore, in the resource curse thesis, the flow of oil revenues into state coffers inevitably transforms political actors into rent seekers, greedy rebels, corrupt individuals, brutal dictators or warlords, who as *homo oeconomicus* instantly and without any regard for their own past decisions alter their behavior to profit from the oil. Looking at the emergence of Niger from a historical perspective, however, reveals that what resource curse theorists might view as greedy rent seeking behavior caused by oil is in fact neither new nor novel, but rather a general feature of the established political game (the literature review on politics and the state in chapter 3 also illustrates this point in other countries). The main case in point here was *Tazartché*, which was not about accessing oil rents per se, but rather a longer running political conflict. First, *Tazartché* dated back to at least 2004, when Tandja and Prime Minister Hama Amadou began fighting for control of the MNSD Nassara. Second, oil was not the root cause for the production of disorder during the oil refinery's 2011 inauguration, but rather the stage on which conflicts related to the politics of *Tazartché* were played out. In other words, when oil enters into a political game that is already well-structured and which already features political conflicts between established players, my case study illustrates that historical, pre-existing patterns of domination matter. Moreover, while the material and ideological resources that oil provides may indeed exacerbate political and social conflicts (as the resource curse predicts), they may equally quell conflicts (as the rentier state theory predicts), thereby undermining any straightforward determinism. Thus, in contrast to linear cause-effect understanding of causality, catalytic causality is better suited to grasp oil-induced transformations by looking at dis/conntections between pre-existing and arriving elements.

In this study I have drawn on three dimensions considered particularly fruitful in conducting an anthropological approach to oil production, namely significations, temporality and materiality. In doing so, I have shown that adopting such a multi-pronged approach to these closely interrelated dimensions frees us from determinist theories about the social and political transformation processes triggered by oil, and allows us to build empirically-grounded and context-sensitive theories. Having explored my argument "oil as an idiom" from the entry point of the sensitizing concept of signification, and then having looked at the connections between significations and the dimensions of materiality and temporality, I will now move to look from the entry point of materiality, and explore the argument of "material politics" (Barry 2013) in connection to significations and temporality.

9.2. Material politics

In looking at how *oil* becomes political, I followed Barry's (2013a: 183) approach to the study of material politics which attends "at once to the specificity of materials, to the contingencies of physical geography, the tendencies of history and the force of political action". In contextualizing oil in time and space, "resource materialities" (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014) force us to look not only at the physical substance of oil, but beyond it to its distributions within assemblages that include infrastructures, epistemologies and political action. In doing so, I came to see how the petro-infrastructure in Niger became integral to political disputes, and how, more broadly, it changed the properties of the emerging petro-political configuration. Building on the concept of political situations, I combined ethnographic and historical analysis to focus on the emergence of Niger as an oil producer and the making of its petro-infrastructure. Through this, I explored the work that was done to bring oil production in Niger into being, and the forms of political contestation and resistance that emerged from it.

Firstly, looking from a historical perspective in chapter 4, I showed how the petro-infrastructure in Niger was political before being technical. That is, from the planning phase, the infrastructure's location, construction and interpretation became an integral part of Niger's emerging petro-political configuration. Specifically, I showed that the successful becoming of Niger's oil production was related to a rise in the global oil price, the construction of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline which allowed the Nigerien oil fields to be connected more easily to existing infrastructures, and the CNPC's agreement to construct a national refinery. The construction of the refinery in Niger was political in two important ways. Firstly, it pushed Niger toward greater energy independence, a long-time state political goal and a popular political project. Secondly, in building the refinery in Zinder, Tandja was hoping to win support for *Tazartché* from a historically disaffected and marginalized region. This illustrates how history is important in understanding the multiple conditions necessary for a thing, infrastructure or issue to become political in the first place. In short, oil production in Niger came into existence by being associated to economic theories of industrialization, Chinese commitments to production linkages within the territory of Niger, oil price fluctuations, and infrastructural developments in Chad and Cameroon. Moreover, the Tandja government's decision to distribute the oil infrastructure over different administrative regions in Niger was due to its political projects, histories of political marginalization and strategic political maneuvers.

Secondly, comparing political disputes along the petro-infrastructure in chapter 7, I analyzed the logic of infrastructural publics. In doing so, I showed that these publics could not be reduced to conflicts over the distribution of the oil rent, as rentier state and resource curse perspectives would have it. Rather, I showed how the infrastructure not only entered particular regimes of governance and significations, but also (re)produced and transformed them. In particular, I showed how the implementation of the petro-infrastructure stitched together narratives of historical political marginalization and of ethno-regional separatism in Niamey, Zinder and Diffa: rivalry between Niamey and Zinder (which has existed since colonial times) was exacerbated by disputes over the infrastructure, with Zinder claiming political marginalization, and Niamey accusing Zinder's people of ethno-regional separatism; while a new collective *Diffalais* regional identity also appears to have emerged, particularly through access to joint oil benefits, collective oil-related grievances and a perceived threat from Zinder through the construction of the refinery there. These collective identities were not only related to particular histories, but also more broadly to resource-political configurations, including decentralization politics, the distribution of the oil rent, and the (anticipated) material effects of oil in terms of job opportunities or environmental hazards. In short, in highlighting politics as emerging from associations between heterogeneous elements, I showed how the implementation of Niger's petro-infrastructure became inextricably entangled with particular administrative spaces, revenue laws, oil's materiality and histories of marginalization. I argued that the construction of the oil infrastructure over different regions triggered processes of territorialization by reconfiguring the relations of territory, identity and rule. In this sense, "the political significance of materials is not given; rather, it is a relational, a practical and a contingent achievement" (Barry 2013: 183). In other words, the petro-infrastructure forms part of a dynamic assemblage of heterogeneous elements which produces unintended and unexpected effects. The petro-infrastructure thus became an integral part of these processes of territorialization, not only by mapping out new and reinforcing established political terrains in which ethno-regionalist politics were played out, but also by reinforcing old and producing new collective identities in these terrains.

To show how the refinery was incorporated into the political game long before the start of the production, I extended Latour's, Marres' (and Barry's) prominent focus on *Dingpolitik* to also place an equal emphasis on *Realpolitik*. While Barry (2013: 102) showed that populations along the pipeline were brought into being as affected communities by the oil company prior to the construction of the pipeline "in order that they could be informed and consulted, and the impacts on them assessed", I showed that before the refinery started operating, actors had already begun incorporating its anticipated material effects such as environmental pollution and job opportunities into the political game, while the communities neighboring the oil infrastructure were barely given or able to establish a voice as affected communities. Whereas actors employed some grievances in political disputes prior to and throughout the construction and operation phases (such as access to jobs), other grievances were clearly anticipated or even discarded. While water, air and soil pollution were rightly anticipated before the refinery started operating, actors also created misinformation to blame their opponents, such as Dan Dubai's claim that polluted refinery water would be sent to Zinder city directly for drinking. Moreover, while oil workers repeatedly complained that the Chinese oil company CNPC paid and treated them poorly, political players largely ignored these narratives, as they were not relevant to the introverted political game directed at their political opponents. In this sense, oil talk was not simply about solving oil-related problems that available institutions are unable to address, as Latour (2005a) and Marres (2005b) would have it in their account of issue-centered publics, but also about anticipating, staging or even inventing problems. Thus, to understand how and why particular aspects of the oil production came to be of political significance while others did not, we need to not only analyze how the petro-infrastructure affected diverse social and political actors into publics, but also how certain actors were enrolled (included) or silenced (excluded) through political mobilization, repression, cooptation and bribery. In chapter 6 I showed how pre-existing constellations of the political order help explain the (non)participation of certain actors in publics in the first place. In this sense, political machines, a hybrid civil society, collective identities, the historical legacy of *Françafrique*, Islamic reform movements, the situation of youth, violent masculinity and the media landscape all play an important role as sociological pre-conditions in how publics form and swirl around certain issues and infrastructures such as oil.

In contrast, the most influential variants of the resource curse thesis explain contestation, conflict and resistance through a rebel greed mechanism, that is, rebel attempts to capture oil rents is considered significantly more important than political or cultural arguments such as grievances (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).[130] In thinking oil beyond the blessing-curse dichotomy, I accounted for the forms of agency and control that are contained in the technological, socio-political and economic infrastructures surrounding resource production. Thus, instead of seeking to explain political contestation solely from a rational choice perspective of greed, political contestation should be viewed comprehensively by looking at how the materiality of oil and the socio-technical arrangements related to it becoming a resource both articulate within, and transform, particular regimes of signification.

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[130] For resource curse theorists who consider that there are also other possible mechanisms at work, see Humphreys (2005).

Taken together, I have looked in detail at how the material-semiotic dimension made the oil refinery political in Niger, showing how various actors with particular histories and positionalities within the political constellation acted in concert with diverse material effects, infrastructures and technologies in the very moment of Niger emerging as a new oil producer. I argued that rather than playing off *Dingpolitik* against *Realpolitik*, we have to reconcile these two seemingly opposed notions to obtain a more holistic picture of politicization processes. In doing so, we need to account for the interplay of several dimensions, including the now classical focus on the political game and mobilization, with a more contemporary focus on temporality and materiality, not only of resource production, but also of politics itself. While the literature on infrastructural publics helped us to consider political debate and contestation as turning around the petro-infrastructure in Niger, to make up for its inability to incorporate historical processes and patterns of domination that make it possible for infrastructures to become political in the first place, we need to also incorporate not only the literature on politics and the state in Africa, but also that on political mobilization and collective action. In short, the theoretical lens of resource assemblages made visible how the materiality of oil, petro-infrastructures, and information, interpretation and anticipation about the infrastructures of oil entangled to become an integral part of the politics themselves. In other words, the catalytic causality of the material-semiotic practice of infrastructuring oil in Niger transformed pre-existing configurations in unexpected and contingent ways.

As I have now looked at the material-semiotic assemblages of political situations, I will turn to look more closely at the spatial dimension of oil production, namely the spaces of oil assemblages. The spaces of assemblage perspective is important in replacing the container and society-bound models that have long dominated, and indeed hampered, social sciences.

9.3. Oil zones

Speaking about resource assemblages and resource-political configurations always entails a spatial, or better, global dimension of techno-science, economic rationality and knowledge flows (Collier and Ong 2005a). From the perspective of assemblage theory and ANT, spaces are not simply containerized territories such as nation states, but rather are constructed within networked configurations. Thus, instead of conceptualizing scale as pre-existing frames (global, national, regional, local), we have to understand scales as aggravated effects of networking practices (I developed this as the concept of resource-political configurations in chapter 3). Combining this perspective with a conflict inspired practice theory (similar to ANT), space also needs to be understood as a practice, as “doing space”, that is, “to link/de-link”, “to associate/dissociate” or “to dis/connect” something from/to something else. In this sense, I understand spaces as both, practices and the aggravated effects of dis/connecting or dis/assembling practices, or as so-called spaces of assemblages.

Looking through the perspective of the spaces of oil assemblages, the scramble for African oil and the diversification policy of the Nigerien government under Tandja offered the opportunity to compare Western and Chinese African oil engagements in Niger. In chapter 8, I looked at the concrete example of the relatively standardized Western and Chinese approaches to oil production, and their respective receptions in the country of extraction, Niger. In doing so, I focused on the particular petro-political configuration that these two different oil assemblages produced, and the trans-territorial dimension of the oil assemblages’ dis/entanglements. This focus allowed me to not only compare Western and Chinese oil assemblages and to situate them in the growing literature on China in Africa and the global oil industry, but also to think about the different capitalist properties that these two oil assemblages generate.

I argued that the literature on China’s involvement in Africa often tends to overstate differences between China and the West, and neglects the fact that similar capitalist interests are at work in both resource economies. Most social science studies focusing on the global oil assemblage, global petro-capitalism or the global oil industry, however, equally appear to have a bias, being dominated by an Anglo-American thinking which assumes only one oil industry model is at work, a neoliberal capitalist oil assemblage that tries to disentangle profitable from unprofitable parts of Africa. By engaging these two corpuses of literature with each other, neither buying into the notion of China being the different other, nor assuming that approaches to oil extraction have the same characteristics everywhere, I aimed at decoding different forms of petro-infrastructures and capitalism(s) on a global scale. I thereby built on the idea that assemblages constitute capitalist entities whose particular properties emerge from the interaction between heterogeneous parts that are assembled within the process of bringing oil production into life. These elements included petro-infrastructures, economic theories, oil diplomacy, lending institutions, corporate structures, practices and regulations, contractual agreements, and military strategies. By first empirically identifying the heterogeneous elements for Western and Chinese approaches in Niger (and beyond), I then analyzed their dis/connections, arguing that the differences can best be explained by a Chinese state capitalism in contrast to a Western neoliberal capitalism. However, in acknowledging how different elements overlap and become trans-territorially entangled, I argued against the national container model inherent in the varieties of capitalism approach, and for a global variegated capitalism that accounts for the deployment of mobile (neoliberal) capitalist technologies. In this sense, rather than seeing China's state capitalism as a national container or incompatible with neoliberalism and Western neoliberal capitalism as purified from state regulation, I see these capitalist assemblages as neither homogeneous nor enclosed, but rather as fragmented and mutually entangled with each other.

These differences became evident with CNPC's agreement to construct a blueprint oil refinery with a capacity of 20,000 bpd in Niger, an endeavor Esso and Petronas had not been interested in. Through the construction of the refinery in Niger, Chinese state capitalism has enabled the Nigerien state and its local economy to develop so-called upstream and downstream oil industries – from extraction to refinement to transport to sale to use within Niger and the West African sub-region. Not envisioned in Western neoliberal capitalist models of oil (or other point resource) exploitation, these linkages were a central platform of the Tandja government program to kick start national industrialization. In contrast to the Western approach, which can be framed as points of profit or enclave economy that divides the continent into *Afrique utile* and *Afrique inutile*, China engages in large-scale industrialization and infrastructural modernization projects that allow for the creation of network-style spatial connections and linkages in *Afrique inutile* itself. While China and the West do adopt different approaches, resulting not only in different forms of imperialism but also in different spatial effects, both seek to control territories in the pursuit of the same fundamental interest, the capitalist extraction of resources.

By taking up a relational and spatial point of departure, I described not only the spatial expansion of oil in Niger, but also how it connects to formations of governance and the international economy. I conclude that Western and Chinese approaches to oil differ to such a degree that one can speak of the creation of different trans-territorial spaces of order or "oil zones" (see also Schritt and Behrends 2018). I developed the notion of oil zones out of the spatial ordering dimension of the concept of assemblage, in which assemblages are trans-territorial spaces of order that are neither global nor national, but rather emerge as new types of ordering, transcending the nation-state on the one hand, and coexisting with it on the other (Sassen 2008). In this sense, the trans-territorial space production of oil zones can best be described, paradoxically, as “Global Territories” (Opitz and Tellmann 2012). This term points both to the (dis)connections between (distant) places through infrastructures, technologies, borders, fences and security practices, as well as the discursive movement of ideas, economic theories, industry standards and narratives. The concept of oil zones thus encompasses the material and immaterial ways in which oil extraction sites are disconnected from their immediate surroundings and simultaneously connected to places abroad.

The concept of oil zones enables us to look at specific places in Niger, like the oil extraction sites disconnected from their immediate surroundings by fences and military guards, but at the same time connected with distant places in Africa and beyond (USA, Europe, China) through pipelines, specific means of transport, and the conversion of crude oil into new products and monetary forms. These oil zones range from national institutions in, for instance, China or the US, to the regulations and procedures established by national or multinational oil companies, to the particular places of oil extraction, their state institutions and administrative regulations, and to the pastoralists or farmers living on the land next to oil wells. The concept of oil zones also helps us to analyze the particular and unique forms of dis/connection between places on a global scale in relation to the ideas, scientific theories and economic models that bring forth these very dis/connections. By taking up a relational and spatial point of departure, I thereby sketched how different oil zones – in this case a Western and a Chinese zone of petro-capitalism – emerge in relational, overlapping, conflictive, competing and cooperative forms.

According to the resource curse thesis, we would expect oil production to lead to economic decline (Auty 1993), which is commonly explained by the enclave economy theory. From an economics perspective, the materiality of oil as a point source resource inherently translates into an enclave of industrialization where few linkages are created in the host country, resulting in few follow-on economic effects. This perspective is ahistoric, as it fails to acknowledge the fact that many countries in the Global South have inherited an enclave economy from colonialism, meaning that the national economy often lacks the necessary industries to create these linkages in the first place. Moreover, the resource curse and rentier state theories have been rightly criticized for their exclusive focus on the nation-state level, making them unable to account for transnational dynamics and global configurations of power. By black-boxing transnational power relations, the resource curse thesis implies a national container model. This is not to say that corporate oil and geopolitics have never been a topic in economics and political science, as the "scramble for oil" literature clearly shows, but rather that such literature has by and large been ignored in the resource curse and the rentier state framework.

The national container model is also apparent in neoliberal versions of the resource curse, which is transformed into a governance curse. Through the concept of good governance and transparency, the neoliberal version retrieved the principle of the market of classical economic theory, placing the responsibility for all the evils attributed to oil solely on the oil producing countries in general, and on African governments in particular. In doing so, it assumes that through good governance, the curse of oil production would turn into a blessing. From this perspective, China's oil engagement in Africa promotes the emergence of a resource curse, as the model of non-interference ignores practices of democracy, good governance and transparency. In doing so, China is even said to be promoting authoritarianism, corruption and poor governance in oil producing countries. Indeed, many economic and political science studies are explicitly normative, blurring the line between academic research and political consultation. Through this work, the resource curse thesis has largely been transformed from an analytical to a policy model. With this shift, the application of this model around the globe, most notably through the World Bank and IMF in policy initiatives such as EITI and PWYP, has had and continues to have real and lasting effects around the globe. As such, the resource curse and its neoliberal offshoot, the governance curse, needs to be incorporated into anthropological analysis as a socio-cultural phenomenon articulating across the globe.

Taken together, I argue that the particular properties of different oil zones have different implications for the actors. In the case study, I showed how the entanglement of the oil assemblage (Western or Chinese) with heterogeneous elements (social, political, historical, economic, cultural) in the oil-producing country have different, often time- and space-specific, spatial, economic and political implications. I analyzed how the heterogeneous elements of Western and Chinese oil zones entangle with the Nigerien context and – through various players attempts to connect with these assemblages while disconnecting opponents – form the petro-political configuration. Such a configuration – produced from the effects of oil as catalyst – is a network of economic, (geo)political, spatial and socio-cultural elements of politics and oil production that emerge together as an entity with particular properties, which I term in Niger "Petro-Democracy".

9.4. Petro-Democracy

> [*M*]ost of those who write about the question of the 'rentier state' or the 'oil curse', as the problem is known, have little to say about the nature of oil and how it is produced, distributed and used. They merely discuss the oil rents, the income that accrues after the petroleum is converted into government revenue. So the reasons proposed for the anti-democratic properties of oil – that it gives government the resources to relieve social pressures, buy political support or repress dissent – have little to do with the ways oil is extracted, processed, shipped and consumed, the forms of agency and control these processes involve or the powers of oil as a concentrated source of energy. (Mitchell 2009: 400)

With its focus almost exclusively on rents, the resource curse thesis neglects the ways political power is related to the various forms of resource extraction, production, conversion, enrichment, refinement, marketing, distribution and consumption. Moreover, with its focus on political elites or rebel groups that threaten their power, the thesis also tends to neglect the wider population's attempts to achieve certain rights, or to state aims and claims, projects which may take the form of sabotage, non-compliance, protest, civil society activism, or social movements. In adopting the concept of the resource-political configuration, I have tried to show that resources like oil do not have clear-cut, pre-determined transformitory effects. Rather, these resources are contested, contingent, and always related to specific sets of heterogeneous, resource-related elements, as well as the time- and place-specific politics of a particular context. These elements include, but are not limited to, transnational companies, resource contracts, laws, extractive infrastructure, NGOs, political programs, media and economic models. It is through this assemblage of heterogeneous elements that politics and resource extraction are coproduced, an understanding reached by comparing the well-established uranium-political configuration in Niger with the newly emerging oil production configuration. Through this case study then, I have demonstrated how a new political configuration has come to the fore.

Adopting a historical and spatial entanglement perspective in chapter 3, I showed that the concept of resource-political configuration is useful in mapping the constellation of heterogeneous elements in Niger's uranium production and the political landscape that dominated Niger for around 40 years prior to oil production. These elements include secret military arrangements, resource agreements and special monetary zones, yellowcake and radioactive dust, extractive infrastructures (*route de l'uranium*), spot-price fluctuations, neocolonial narratives, rebellion, political claims for fairer distribution of profits, civil society organizations, NGOs and (neo)classical economic theory. These elements emerged to form a uranium-political configuration alongside the successful formation of uranium production in Niger. Aside from the Tuareg rebellions, few internal political demands have been addressed to the Nigerien government in relation to uranium exploitation, especially not in the capital Niamey, where extremely few are involved in the extractive infrastructure. Despite the fact that Tandja and Issoufou were able to negotiate slightly better terms for Niger, uranium deals still favor the former colonial power. As the uranium-political web of relations has become well-established, it forms an intrinsic logic. That is, the historical incongruity of Niger as the world's fourth-largest uranium producer, but typically also one of the lowest ranked countries in the Human Development Index, is highly salient in the national public discourse, and has led to Areva and the "French neocolonial system" being blamed for "underdevelopment". In this (discursive) context, it is unsurprising that conflicts, negotiations and public disputes within the uranium-political configuration predominantly center on the distribution of profits between the Republic of Niger and Areva/France, and to accusations of French neocolonial exploitation, of a policy of underdevelopment, and of brutal interference.

As I have shown in great detail, the historical process of transforming the oil as a material substance into a resource has assembled elements not included in the uranium-political configuration. Unlike uranium, oil production combines processes of exploitation, refinement, distribution and consumption within the national territory of Niger. In its formation process, the petro-political configuration in Niger associated a long state of oil's not-yet-ness with China's oil diplomacy and the *Tazartché* political campaign. More importantly, the oil assemblage allowed several new social and political actors along the oil production chain – labor unions, civil society associations, youth groups and neighboring populations to name but a few – to formulate claims to rightful shares of the nation's new wealth. In this process, oil exploitation has developed a national character which contrasts starkly to the foreign discursive character of neocolonial uranium exploitation. While Areva and France are widely blamed for the lack of uranium-based development in Niger, for political actors in Niamey, the focus of blame for insufficient oil-based development is the national government. Within the short window of opportunity before the fluid relations of an assemblage become routine and stable, the transformation of the whole Nigerien political landscape is now open to change. Thus, in the space of a few years, oil production has opened up new political possibilities in Niger: transforming political claims, and incorporating both new and more diverse political actors (civil society associations, labor unions, youth groups, opposition politicians), who now address the national authorities, rather than foreign states or companies.

In rentier state and the resource curse theories, democracy appears to be typically understood as non-governmental actors' ability to make political claims and thereby hold political authorities accountable, or the "no taxation, no representation" principle. In reducing government dependence on taxation, oil should therefore reduce accountability – a prediction which did not stand up to empirical analysis in Niger. Rather, oil appears to have offered a short window of opportunity for democratic changes to occur in Niger. The newly emerging petro-political configuration has forced the national authorities to address segments of the Nigerien population such as taxi and transport unions, civil society associations, and youth groupings which had remained unheard in public discourses since uranium production began. Moreover, even the so-called (anti)modernization effect, which claims that oil exploitation would only create a small number of industrial and service sector jobs, and would thereby reduce the likelihood of the population forming social movements and pressing for democracy, seems to be inverted in the case of oil production in Niger. Even if relatively few, unsatisfactory jobs were directly created for the local population through the oil project, more jobs and economic possibilities opened up informally with the economic linkages that were created. This, however, is not so much related to the materiality of oil as a point source resource, but rather to China's infrastructural fix, which has promoted the development of so-called forward and backward linkages. In other words, in the particular case of Niger, the shift to a newly emerging petro-political configuration and the discursive construction of oil as a national resource, especially in Niamey, appears to offer some democratic potential, as the government authorities become accountable to a broader, more diverse set of political actors in and through the management of oil.

Nevertheless, such a democratic tendency is limited in at least two ways. First, democratic potential is closely linked to political actors' potential for sabotage acts related to the flow of energy (Mitchell 2011). In Niger, except for the transport unions, the oil infrastructure clearly limits the potential of sabotage acts, as most of the oil flow is based on technologies that do not require a large number of workers (like the pipeline), are difficult to sabotage (the pipeline lies underground and in the Saharan desert) and are, at least in most cases, not managed by Nigerien workers (like the oil refinery). Second, socio-political actors' success in achieving political rights, aims and claims depends on how the political authorities address these claims. As the governance of oil in Niger is an incremental process (Tidjani Alou 2013), the political authorities will have to learn and adapt how they deal with political claims as they develop in the future. As I have illustrated, the political authorities have (at least until now) continued to use the authoritarian patterns which pre-existed oil production to quell opposition: cooptation, bribery, strike breaking and imprisonment.

The new influx of oil money could facilitate the political elite's continued use of pre-oil authoritarian governance by incorporating political activists into governmental redistribution networks or repressing social movements, two causal mechanisms of oil identified by Ross (2001) in his development of the resource curse thesis. Indeed, government actions indicate that these forms of authoritarian governance are likely to continue: Tandja incorporated civil society structures into *Tazartché*; on attaining power, Issoufou replaced Tandja's civil society supporters on governmental committees with his own, and compensated those businessmen who had financed his election campaign with public markets; from 2013, Issoufou developed a "government of national unity" which allowed him to co-opt large swathes of the political opposition into the state administration. In doing so, Issoufou considerably weakened the opposition, and easily won the 2016 presidential elections, despite a lack of popular support. In the following weeks, months and years, a government crackdown on civil society associations that were deemed playing politics for the opposition followed.

The empirical examples of oil and uranium in Niger show that an understanding of democracy based solely on accountability is too narrow to fully grasp the political transformation processes triggered by oil. Although the petro-political configuration forces the national authorities to address parts of the Nigerien population which had previously remained unheard in public discourses, and the government has thus become accountable to a diverse new set of social and political actors, both examples demonstrate that the actors' sabotage potential, as well as financial flows, are important factors in actors' power. The study of Niger becoming a new oil producer thus shows that we do not find the authoritarian tendencies claimed by the resource curse and rentier state. However, democratic tendencies are also weak and their evolution remains uncertain. The results are in line with the first quantitative study on the institutional effects of refining capacities that shows a positive, yet not robust relationship between the start of oil production and pro-democratic effects, arguing that they might be outweighed by structures of clientelism and corruption that pre-existed production (Baur 2014). Whatever the case, we do find a historical shift in the Nigerien political landscape from a uranium-political to a petro-political configuration, with each assemblage generating particular properties involving different social and political actors, political claims, ideological narratives, economic theories, soft power and extractive infrastructures. Although both configurations continue to exist, the petro-political configuration now not only overshadows the uranium-political configuration in terms of financial revenues, but also in the public imagination, as a national resource with all kind of actors demanding their rightful share.

The Niger case study thus reinforces Mitchell's (2011: 5) idea that "[*t*]he transformation of oil into large and unaccountable government incomes is not a cause of the problem of democracy and oil, but the outcome of particular ways of engineering political relations out of the flows of energy". Indeed, Mitchell's perspective is a useful heuristic to direct our empirical focus away from oil as money to oil's diverse entanglements and empirical sites. Using Mitchell's idea and by focusing on uranium and oil production in Niger, I have developed the notion of resource-political configurations to account for the heterogeneous elements that associate within the historical process of becoming a resource. I have shown that the different properties of the particular resource-political configurations emerged through the entanglement of resource specific elements with the particular historical constellation of Nigerien politics at the time. Whereas the uranium-political configuration has been characterized by a neocolonial discursive formation or nuclear imperialism in public opinion and governance and political disputes, predominantly revolving around the distribution of profits between Areva/France and Niger, the petro-political configuration has produced a new oil nationalism in Niamey, alongside new oil regionalisms in Zinder and Diffa. Although the resource-political configurations do continue to coexist, this configurational shift has brought with it a new, democratic potential, as new social actors have addressed political claims at the national government, and have pursued these claims through sabotage acts. Whether these democratic claims will, in fact, lead to a more democratic Niger is still uncertain. Despite this new configuration, the political logic in governing public claims appears to have, at least as yet, largely remained unchanged.

In sum, I have argued that what emerges from resource exploitation is not the one-way road to authoritarianism that the resource curse and rentier state models would suggest. Without wishing to neglect the importance of financial flows or rents in maintaining the elements of a resource-political configuration, as rents were indeed used by various Nigerien presidents to purchase the loyalty of socio-political networks, the resource curse and rentier state models are simply not comprehensive and holistic enough to account for transformation processes of the whole resource-political configuration. Those studies focusing mainly on the effects of resources as money have a significant blind spot, as I have shown throughout this thesis. That is, they fail to take into account, or even to observe, the importance of historical transformations of resource-political configurations related to heterogeneous sets of elements other than rents. One possibility to open the black-box of resource curse and rentier state theories, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, is to account for resource-political configurations by following the historical and spatial processes of their compositions, and the particular properties they generate. I therefore propose that future research should take a holistic, multipronged approach to study the causal relationality of various dimensions of resources – revenues, significations, materiality and temporality. Thinking of oil as a catalyst, as I have done throughout this book, may be such a holistic, nuanced approach.

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Year	Company	Operations	Announced Results	Region
1958 - 1960	Cipao (operator Mobil West Africa)	First surveys (geological overview)	Area classified unfavorable	Illumeden basin
1960 - 64	Petropar	Exploration; 9 oil wells (4 in Djado and 5 in Talak)	Oil wells were dry	Djado and Talak
1962	Sapphire International Petroleum (Iranian)	Demanded permit for 150,000 km²	Permit denied (due to financial situation)	South-East
1970 - 1980	Bishop Oil and Refining (from Petropar)	No real activities	No results stated	Djado and Talak
1970 - 76	Conoco (Shell owned 50% since 1971)	Airmag 200,000km², 1687 km of seismic data; one (1) oil well	Dry	Niger SUD
1970 - 79	Global (Operator: Texaco (1973-77); Esso (1977-80))	Exploration permit, drilled 2 wells	Both dry	Seguedine
1970 - 79	Global (Operator Sun Oil 1971-76)	Exploration permit, drilled 1 well	Dry	Dosso
1969 - 77	Texaco (Esso enters in 1974)	Exploration permit, drilled 2 wells	1 dry, 1 hints of oil (1975 Madama/Tin-Touma)	Agadem
1977 - 80	Texaco and Esso (Esso hold 51%)	Exploration permit, drilled 6 wells	4 dry, 1 hints (Yougou1), 1 faint hints (Yougou2)	Agadem
1978 - 83 1981	Elf Aquitaine (SNEA)	3 exploration permits drilled 4 wells	No information 2 dry, 2 positive (Sokor 1, Sokor 2)	Niger occidental Manga, Bilma Agadem
1977-81	Oxoco-Arraca	No real activities	No information	Dibella
1985/ 1990 - 95	Elf and Esso	No information New license; 5 wells	No information 4 wells positive	Agadem
1992	Hunt Oil	Exploration permit	No information	Djado
1997/98	Esso and Elf	3 new wells	No information	Agadem
1998	Esso	Took all permits from Elf	No information	Agadem

1997 - 2003	TG World Energy	Withdrawal of permit	No field operations	Ténéré
2000	Hunt Oil	Drilling	No information	Djado
2002 - 06	Esso and Petronas (operator)	3 wells; abandoned Agadem in 2006, judging it economically not profitable	Estimated reserves: 324 million barrels of oil and 10 billion m^3 of gas	Agadem
Since 2004 (November 2003)	CNPC (TG World Energy holds 20%)	No information	Oil found at Oyou-1	Ténéré and Bilma
Since 2005	Sonatrach	No information	No information	Kafra
2008 - 14	CNPC-NP (Production Sharing Contract; joint venture refinery and pipeline)	124 exploration wells with 93 discoveries (a 75% success rate)	Estimated reserves more than 975 million barrels of oil (2P reserve base) and more than 16 billion m^3 gas	Agadem
2012 - 16	Labana Petroleum (Nigeria)	2 blocks	Not yet	Dibella I and Dallol
2012 - 16	International Petroleum (Australia)	4 blocks	Not yet	Manga1, Manga2, Aborak, Ténéré West
2012 - 16	Genmin (Bermuda)	1 block	Not yet	Djado I
2012 - 16	Sirius Energy (Nigeria)	1 block	Not yet	Grein
2012 - 16	Advantica (Nigeria)	1 block	Not yet	Mandara M2
2014-16	Savannah Petroleum	4 blocks in Agadem	Identified 118 exploration targets with prospected recoverable resources at 2.185 billion barrels of oil	Agadem, R1, R2, R3, R4

11.3. Acronyms

3N	Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens
ADINI	Association pour la Diffusion de l’Islam au Niger
AEC	Alternative Espaces Citoyens
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMACA	Association Mutuelle pour la Culture et les Arts
ANDP	Alliance Nigérienne pour la Démocratie et le Progrès-Zaman Lahiya
ANPE	Association Nationale des Parents d'Élèves
ANT	Actor-Network-Theory
APPA	African Petroleum Producers’ Association
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ARCI	Association pour le Rayonnement de la Culture Islamique
ARN	Alliance pour la Réconciliation Nationale
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BEICIP	Bureau d’Études Industrielles et de Coopération de l’Institut Français du Pétrole
BNA	Bloc Nigérien d’Action
BOAD	Banque Ouest Africaine de Développement
BRGM	Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières
BRGGM	Bureau de Recherches Géologiques, Géophysiques et Minières
BRP	Bureau de Recherches de Pétrole
BUMIFOM	Bureau Minier de la France d’Outre-Mer

CASARIF	Comité d'Appui aux Services d'Assiette et de Recouvrement des taxes et Impôts Fonciers
CCN	Conseil Consultatif National
CDS	Convention Démocratique et Sociale-Rahama
CDSCN	Coalition Démocratique de la Société Civile Nigérienne
CEA	Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique
CEDEF	Convention pour l'Elimination des Discriminations à l'Egard des Femmes
CENI	Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFA	Colonies Françaises d'Afrique
CFDR	Coordination des Forces pour la Démocratie et la République
CFP	Compagnie Française de Pétrole
CIN	Conseil Islamique du Niger
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CODDAE	Collectif pour la Défense du Droit à l'Energie
CODDHD	Collectif des Organizations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie
COGEMA	Compagnie Générale des Matières Nucléaire
COGES	Comité de Gestion Scolaire
COMINAK	Compagnie Minière d'Akouta
CPC	Chinese Petroleum Corporation (Taiwan)
CPP	China Petroleum Pipeline
CRAS	Comité Régional des Associations et Syndicats de la Région de Zinder
CREPS	Compagnie de Recherche et d'Exploitation Pétrolières au Sahara
CROISADE	Comité de Réflexion et d'Orientation Indépendant pour la Sauvegarde des Acquis Démocratiques

CSC	Conseil Supérieur de la Communication
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSRD	Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie
CSSTN	Collectif des Syndicats du Secteur des Transports du Niger
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
EU	European Union
FAC	Famille, Amis et Connaissances
FAN	Forces Armées Nigériennes
FARS	Forces Armées Révolutionnaires du Sahara
FCFA	Franc de Colonies Françaises d'Afrique
FIDES	Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social
FIMA	Festival International de la Mode Africaine
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GREN	Groupe de Réflexion et d'Action sur les industries Extractives
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HALCIA	Haute Autorité de Lutte Contre la Corruption
ICA	Ingénieurs Conseils Associés
INS	Institut National de la Statistique
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOC	International Oil Company
LASDEL	Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEBA	Ministère de l'Éducation de Base et de l'Alphabétisation

MFPPJ	Mouvement de Fada et Palais pour la Promotion des Jeunes
MJRN	Mouvement pour la Justice et la Réhabilitation du Niger
MNJ	Mouvement des Nigérien pour la Justice
MNRD	Mouvement Nigérien pour le Renouveau Démocratique – Hankuri
MNSD	Mouvement National de la Société de Développement-Nassara
MODEN-FA	Mouvement Démocratique Nigérien pour une Fédération Africaine-Lumana
MPCR	Mouvement pour la Promotion de la Citoyenneté Responsable
MPDNP	Mouvement Patriotique pour la Défense de la Nation et du Peuple
MPPAD	Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement
MSA	Mouvement Socialiste Africain
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIGELEC	Société Nigérienne d'Electricité
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
OCRS	Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes
OFID	OPEC Fund for International Development
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
ORTN	Office du Radiodiffusion Télévision du Niger
OSC Manga	Collectif des Cadres et Représentants des Organisations de la Société Civile du Manga
OURD	Overseas Uranium Resources Development
PAC	Parents, Amis et Connaissances
PETROPAR	Petróleos Paraguayos
PCF	Parti Communiste Francais
PNDS	Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme-Tarayya
PPN	Parti Progressiste Nigérien
PPP	Purchasing-Power-Parity

PSI	Pan Sahel Initiative
PWYP	Publish What You Pay
RAP	Régie Autonome des Pétroles
RCI	Radio China International
RFI	Radio France International
ROTAB	Réseau des Organisations pour la Transparence et l'Analyse Budgétaire
RSC	Risk Service Contracts
RTT	Radio Télévision Ténéré
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
SEEN	Société d’Exploitation des Eaux du Niger
SIM	Subscriber Identification Module
SNPA	Société Nationale des Pétroles d'Aquitaine
SNEN	Syndicat National des Enseignants du Niger
SN REPAL	Société Nationale de Recherche et d'Exploitation de Pétrole en Algérie
SMS	Short Message Service
SNCRN	Syndicat National des Conducteurs Routiers du Niger
SNTHN	Syndicat des Transporteurs d’Hydrocarbures du Niger
SONIDEP	Société Nigérienne des Produits Pétroliers
SOMAIR	Société des Mines de l’Air
SORAZ	Société de Raffinage de Zinder
STMN	Syndicat des Transporteurs Marchandises du Niger
STS	Science and Technology Studies
SYNATRAP	Syndicat National des Travailleurs de Pétrole
SYNCOTAXI	Syndicat des Conducteurs de Taxi
SYNCIBUS	Syndicat des conducteurs de minibus
TIPP	Tax on Petroleum Products

TSCTI	Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative
UDN	Union Démocratique Nigérienne
UDSR	Union Démocratique et Sociale de la Résistance
UNIS	Union Nigérienne des Indépendants et Sympathisants
UNTN	Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Niger
USD	United States Dollar
USN	Union des Scolaires Nigériens
USTN	Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Niger
VAT	Value-Added Tax
VIP	Very Important Person
VOA	Voice of America
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

11.4. Hausa terms

arziki	wealth, prosperity and well-being
dan Dubai	son of Dubai
dan ubanci	conflicts, rivalry, disputes and disunity
faba faba	minibuses
fada	conversation groups
kabou kabou	motorcycle taxis
kouran daga	the fighting hyena
kubli	wife seclusion
palais	youth gangs
shugaba	boss
tazarce	continuation, continuity or prolongation
zaki	lion