

Impossible Endings? Reimagining the end of the French empire in the Sahara, 1951-1962.

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Abstract

This thesis examines a late colonial attempt to reimagine the French empire in the Sahara, through the little-known case of the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS). This organisation, which lasted from 1957-1962, was created by the French state as an economic and social development project which would operate in the Saharan regions of Algeria, Chad, French Soudan (Mali), and Niger. This case study of the OCRS is at the intersection of a number of key developments in the field in recent years.

Firstly, studies of the ends of colonial empires have moved away from discussing whether independence was 'snatched away' or given in a 'transfer of power'. The historiography now emphasises the messiness and contingency of the end of empire and questions the inevitability of the shift from empire to nation-state. Secondly, in discussions about France's (post-)colonial ties with Africa, scholars are increasingly focusing on delineating French strategies for retaining a sphere of influence in the region rather than labelling change and continuity. Thirdly, with an explosion in global and transnational history, historians stress the importance of studying connections and the 'politics of comparison' (Stoler, 2001) moving away from treating French colonial history, and particularly Franco-Algerian history, as exceptional.

In light of these historiographical developments, this thesis uses the example of the OCRS to explore the possibilities and impossibilities of reimaging and ending the empire, whilst at the same time retaining control over the region. The OCRS is examined from multiple angles: as a transitional organisation that was both connected to and reflective of shifting international and domestic circumstances, as a self-aware organisation that sought to establish its success and its status in comparison with other projects across the globe and as an attempted reimaging of colonial rule where its planners sought to learn from the 'mistakes' of former planners.

This thesis demonstrates how the OCRS was used as a possibility to reimagine French colonial rule, and the impossibility of this feat. French planners intended to reshape political, economic and social structures in the Sahara. Using comparisons with other, purportedly similar, socio-economic projects without colonial ties, they attempted to make these structures more palatable to a range of other actors, including African political elites. This attempt, however, was impossible because of the weight of history and the increased importance of sovereignty and self-determination in this period.

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Author's Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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Abbreviations

AEF	French Equatorial Africa
AOF	French West Africa
BIA	Bureau d'Investissement en Afrique
CREPS	Compagnie de Recherches et d'Exploitation de Pétrole au Sahara
DOM	Département d'Outre-Mer
EDC	European Defence Community
ELEC	European League for Economic Co-operation
ENA	Ecole Nationale d'Administration
ENFOM	Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer
FLN	National Liberation Front
GPRA	Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic
MinFOM	Ministry of France d'Outre-Mer
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MSA	Mouvement Socialiste Africain
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OAS	Organisation Armée Secrète
OCRS	Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes
OCTS	Organisation Technique de Coopération Saharienne
PCF	French Communist Party
PPN	Parti Progressiste Nigerien
PPT	Parti Progressiste Tchadien
RDA	Rassemblement Démocratique Africain
SDECE	Service de Documentation, d'Etudes et de Contre-Espionnage
SELIS	Société d'équipement pour l'infrastructure saharienne
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
TOM	Territoire d'Outre-Mer
TVA	Tennessee Valley Authority
UDN	Union Démocratique Nigerienne
UFF	Union et fraternité française
US-RDA	Union Soudanese- Rassemblement Démocratique Africain

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Dissemination

Conferences and Workshops

(Presenter) Université de Genève, 'Between the "big conspiracy" and network-building on the ground: understanding the transition in francophone Africa as social and transnational history', paper entitled: 'Holding on at all cost? The case of the French Sahara and the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (1957-1962)', September 29-30, 2017.

(Presenter) FCHS Annual Meeting, paper entitled: Jacques Soustelle: Seeking Eurafrica and the re-imagination of the French Empire through the OCRS, Université Aix-Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, June 15-17 2017.

(Presenter) University of Oxford, Trinity College 'The Algerian War of Independence: Global and Local Histories 1954-62, and Beyond', paper entitled: 'The Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS): Eurafrica in action?', May 10-12, 2017.

(Presenter) University of Portsmouth Postgraduate Seminar Series, paper entitled: 'Piecing the Sahara back together: colonial archive research in Paris', November 17, 2016.

(Organiser) University of Portsmouth Ends of Empire study day, March 2, 2016.

(Presenter) ASMCF Annual Conference – Myth Making, University of Hull, paper entitled: 'The Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes: Eurafrica in action?', September 8-10, 2015.

(Attended) Université Paris I – Panthéon Sorbonne Cartography and GIS course for historians, Paris, June 1-5, 2015.

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(Panel chair) University of Portsmouth Study half day, Crossing Boundaries in the study of France and Africa, panel: Challenging geographical and chronological divides, February 18, 2015.

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(Poster presenter) University of Portsmouth Using Visual Materials in Teaching and Research study day, 22 May 2013.

Publications

Review of the book *Decolonization and the French of Algeria: Bringing the Settler Colony Home*, by S. Choi, *Reviews in History*, 2017.

Review of the book *Heroic imperialists in Africa. The promotion of British and French colonial heroes, 1870–1939*, by B. Sèbe, *Modern and Contemporary France*, 2016.

Review of the book *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*, by F. Cooper, *Modern and Contemporary France*, 2015.

Introduction: The ends of empires

Descolonización se ha vuelto una palabra 'mágica', tal es así que lo abarca todo y al mismo tiempo nada.

Decolonisation is a 'magic' word, it encompasses everything and at the same time nothing.

(Rivera Cusicanqui, 2017)

L'éveil du Sahara est une certitude: nul ne peut dire à quelle date précise les manifestations du progrès pourront connaître une utilisation rationnelle à la dimension du désert.

(Cornet, 1956, p. 243)

In January 2012 Tuareg separatists launched attacks on Malian army garrisons in the Saharan towns of Menaka and Tessalit, sparking a dramatic upheaval and reshaping of Mali's political landscape. With the return of these rebels from the Libyan conflict in August 2011, bringing weapons and military experience back to Mali, renewed violence in this region appeared likely. However, the wider-reaching significance of the conflict surprised journalists and scholars alike. With the help of foreign and local militants, the Tuareg separatists successfully seized most of Azawad. In April 2012 this region of northern Mali, comprising Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal and part of Mopti, was declared independent by the Tuareg separatist movement, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). The Malian army command was overthrown by disillusioned junior officers, followed by the collapse of the army and many of Mali's democratic institutions (Lecocq, et al., 2013). In the subsequent months, as the Malian government sought to regain control of the country's northern region and come to terms with the consequences of the prolonged conflict, commentators from a range of political persuasions looked to Mali's turbulent past in order to draw an understanding of the present. Previous rebellions and coups by dissident Tuareg tribes against the Malian state had come about as a result of the perceived marginalisation of nomadic peoples by the ruling sedentary elites. Successive Malian governments have struggled to come to terms with competing separatist movements and claims to ethnic difference since the country achieved its independence in 1960. During the Tuareg insurgencies from 1963-64 and again from 1990-1996, separatists drew on the failures of French colonial rule in providing for the nomadic populations upon independence, lamenting the abandonment of France's attempt to create a Saharan region

separate from the decolonised countries of North and West Africa. This was a reference to the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes or Common Organisation of Saharan Regions (O CRS), an economic organisation created by the French government in 1957 to delimit a region for industrial exploitation but was abandoned upon Algerian independence in 1962. Designed to unite the Saharan regions of Algeria, French West Africa (AOF) and French Equatorial Africa (AEF), the borders of the O CRS cut across modern-day Algeria, Chad, Mali and Niger, with the stated aims of coordinating the development of industries in the Sahara and improving the quality of life for Saharan populations (See Figure 1). Long after its end, the short-lived O CRS project has been unearthed to support arguments made by a wide range of actors. Writing in the aftermath of the 2012 conflict, in support of the calls from Tuareg nationalists for an independent state of Azawad (Al Jazeera and agencies, 2012), the Mauritanian blogger Nasser Wedaddy (2013) suggested that the O CRS could be regarded as a blueprint for an autonomous Tuareg 'tribal' region.

Other observers however, such as one Malian journalist who uses the pseudonym 22 Septembre – the date of Malian independence (2012), draw on the O CRS in order to denounce imperialism and the negative effect that this project had on the country. He argues that it would be yet another example of the treacherous legacy of colonial divide-and-rule. Similar anti-imperialist language is also used by Tuareg separatists to denounce their treatment by Malian political elites in Bamako. Speculation about the resurrection of the O CRS was not limited to Mali. Michel Abhervé (2013), a French social economist, also commented on the creation of a Saharan structure which could be used as a contemporary reference point. Although he notes the colonial origins of the O CRS, he implies that it could be used as a model for an economic alternative to the Malian nation-state. Sid Ahmed Ghazali (Moussaoui, 2012), a former member of Algeria's National Liberation Front (FLN), who was the Algerian Minister for Energy in 1965 and again from 1977 to 1979, and head of the government-owned Sonatrach gas and oil company from 1966 to 1977, unsurprisingly dismissed the idea of resurrecting the O CRS region in an interview with the French communist newspaper *L'Humanité*. He regarded the O CRS as an attempt by France to partition Algeria under the pretext of economic purposes and as an attempt to sustain French control over Algerian resources. This is the same position of hostility towards the O CRS as that held by the FLN during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62). Ghazali's reaction also reflects the suspicions that the Algerian state continues to have towards France's ongoing ambitions to shape the region.

This renewed discussion of the O CRS demonstrates its ongoing legacy – either as a model to aspire to or as the embodiment of a neo-colonial trap to avoid – and yet very little is known about the organisation itself. Analysing the strategy, strategists, operations and the obstacles to the implementation of the O CRS between 1957 and 1962 provides a fascinating case study of an end-of-

empire project of relevance to a number of key debates in the field about the shifting nature of colonial rule, the (re)imagining of colonial spaces and the entanglements of the local, national and international in the process of decolonisation. Using a case study of the OCRS and the Sahara, this thesis explores what French planners and other actors sought to achieve in the Sahara, the origins of their ideas, as well as how they attempted to translate these notions into practice and how they presented their policies and practices to the rest of the world. Moreover, it examines the obstacles that these planners faced during a period that is now commonly regarded as the ‘end’ of French colonial rule and which contributed to the difficulty, for these actors, in executing their ideas about empire on the ground. To understand the necessity of examining endings and reimaginings of empire, especially the French empire, this project begins by addressing a number of key developments in the past two decades in the historiography of the end of the French empire.



Figure 1: The borders of the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS) 1957-1959

Beyond transfer of power versus decolonisation

The historiography of the end of the French empire in Africa has long centred on the objective of untangling how the transfer of authority from colonisers to the former colonies and emerging nation-states took place, whether by a process of decolonisation or the creation of new neo-colonial relationships. Debates about the end of empire and decolonisation previously focused on whether

independence was 'snatched' by African leaders or 'given' by the French state in a 'transfer of power' (Brunschwig, 1973; Ageron, 1991; Hargreaves, 1988). Todd Shepard (2006) highlights the tension between historiographical narratives of decolonisation as the 'winning of independence' and the 'transfer of power'. The first refers to the triumphalist anti-colonial struggle and the second has become a popular phrase amongst historians for the diplomatic and political negotiations that took place between colonial planners and African elites. However, Frederick Cooper (1996, 2005, 2014) has long urged scholars to move away from these discussions. In place of these narratives about the end of empire new lines of enquiry have emerged, firstly those which emphasise the 'messiness' and contingency of the end of empire. Within these debates scholars of empire have begun to question the inevitability of the transition from empire to nation-state. Secondly, in discussions about France's (post-)colonial ties with Africa, scholars now place less emphasis on labelling change and continuity and more emphasis on delineating French strategies for retaining their influence over Africa. Thirdly, in the past two decades studies into global and transnational history have become increasingly popular, with historians emphasising the importance of studying connections as well as the 'politics of comparison' (Stoler, 2001). These scholars have moved away from treating French colonial history, and particularly Franco-Algerian history, as exceptional.

The messiness and contingency of the end of empire

Since the 1990s, Cooper (1996, 2005, 2014) has called on scholars to question the inevitability of the shift from empire to nation-state in the 1950s and 1960s. For Cooper (2014), the era of the decolonisation of the French empire began after the Second World War and was a long and complex process, grappled with by French and African politicians and planners who did not necessarily seek to end the empire. Hindsight may suggest that this process led inevitably towards the dismantling of European formal empire and the emergence of a series of sovereign nation-states. Looking beyond the end result and studying the paths not taken, or the paths taken and then abandoned, allows us not to produce a hypothetical 'what if' history, but rather to explore the complexities and contingency of decolonisation and understand it in its multiple facets. Following on from Cooper's seminal work, a number of scholars have engaged with the 'messy' and 'overlooked' cases contributing to or hindering the end of the empire (Wilder, 2005; Smith & Jeppeson, 2017).

Historical accounts of French decolonisation have also begun to move away from the idea that it was either a violent and uncontrolled (as with the case of Algeria) or peaceful (West Africa) process. Tony Chafer (2002) has led this line of argument with his work on French West Africa as a case which had previously been presented as a 'successful' example of decolonisation. Rather, he argues that France had not intended to relinquish AOF, but by decolonising, the European power was able to retain its

prominence on the world stage. With the instability of the Fourth Republic, a permanent French Union seemed a risky prospect for many French politicians and senior civil servants. Without the foresight to see beyond the global instability of the time, France reactively, rather than proactively, dismantled the colonial institutions and gave the overseas territories the means to become independent nation-states.

Ends of empires and impossible republics

Within these scholarly debates about the complex processes of ending the empire, there has been a deep engagement with ideas about citizenship, and the realms of possibility and impossibility. Shepard (2006) has argued the case that following the end of the Second World War, France sought to reassert the 'Frenchness' of the empire and at the same time develop a more inclusive understanding of what it meant to be French. However, because of de Gaulle's abandonment of Algeria, this vision of the empire was discarded. Shepard (2006) maintains that the sudden and illegal retraction of French citizenship from Muslim Algerians in 1962 represented a counter-revolution, removing the long-fought for and so-recently attained, French principles of race-blind equality and republican universality which dated back to the 1789 revolution in France. Shepard (2006, p. 77) stresses that de Gaulle's extraction of France from Algeria suggests that the French President believed that 'Algeria and Algerians were not and had never been French', thus destroying the idea of a multicultural, multi-ethnic empire.

James McDougall (2017) argues that the attempt to make French citizens out of the Muslims of Algeria, at least on paper, was merely a manifestation of late colonialism. In line with Cooper (2005), McDougall (2017) also acknowledges late colonial attempts to reinvent empire but does not regard them as ever having been realistic. McDougall demonstrates that there was an increasing gap between the formal regime and the 'real' regime which acted on the ground in Algeria. As the formal regime introduced policies to widen the legal definition of French citizenship, giving full citizenship to Muslims in Algeria, the real regime became more and more repressive. He juxtaposes this escalation of citizenship policies and state-led violence to the point when all 'Algerians both became formally fully enfranchised citizens, and at the same time were exposed to a regime of unmitigated emergency powers' (McDougall, 2017, p. 4). For McDougall, the case of Algeria was demonstrative of France's inability to reimagine French identity in which its multicultural constituent parts were equal and also the impossibility of reimagining the French empire in Africa. In this way, he argues that the attempt to make French citizens out of Algerians and create a multi-ethnic French Republican empire was a futile attempt to create an impossible republic. It was impossible because of the violence that had been exacted on Algerians, to the extent that they could not feel or imagine

themselves as French. Making citizens out of these people required a recolonization of Algeria (McDougall, 2017).

McDougall's idea that what the late colonial state was attempting to create was an impossible republic resonates with the case of the Sahara, and in particular the OCRS. This organisation can be perceived as an alternative to empire as an organisation of mutual interests. Because it was dependent on Saharans and African elites buying into this vision for the desert region, the project was presented as being more egalitarian than previous forms of colonial rule. However, the success of the OCRS required greater French control which French planners were unable to do. The OCRS thus represents an impossible path towards a 'decolonialised' form of political, social and economic organisation because it would have required coercion or other colonial practices to force the African elites to relinquish their convictions about sovereignty and their hopes of acquiring their own nation-states.

Strategies for retaining influence

The contemporary historiography of the end of France's empire but the continuation of colonial-type ties with Africa encourages rigorous examinations into French strategies for maintaining its (post-)colonial influence in the region. Guy Martin (1985, 1995), in his studies of French West and Central Africa, has focused on France's continued political and economic involvement beyond the dates of independence. He argues that the African colonies were decolonised from above following the Second World War. He states that decolonisation was a granting of independence to AOF and AEF. France divided Africa into nation-states in order to prevent the emergence of large federations which would be harder to control. He also suggests that the late colonial state planned to continue political and economic ties in the form of 'colonial-type domination' or *coopération*, mapping out the transition during the negotiations between France, the AOF and AEF prior to independence. For Martin, this means that independence and *coopération* were intimately linked.

The literature on *coopération* has since expanded, with scholars looking at the multiple strategies attempted, not just by states, but also non-governmental agencies, businesses, charities and more, to retain influence beyond the end of formal colonial rule (Mann, 2014). These ties binding former colonial states with newly independent nation-states are referred to as 'entanglements' by Andrew W.M. Smith and Chris Jeppesen (2017). They highlight the processes that were put in place before the African countries became independent, thereby obscuring the end of empire.

Chafer (2014) has challenged approaches to studying post-colonial Franco-African relations which reduce these to corrupt and covert practices, relying on official and non-official relationships. He critiques the intense scholarly focus on the continuity of these relations, which are often summed up

as *françafrique*. As an analytical tool, Chafer avoids *françafrique*. He regards the term itself as problematic, as it is supposed to reference France's colonial past, and yet it encompasses countries that were not part of the French empire (such as the Democratic Republic of Congo). It also homogenises the multi-layered and complex relationships between France and its former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, and it overlooks the multi-faceted nature of 'France'. This latter point observes a common, but avoidable, practice of referring to France as a single actor, and overlooking the different priorities and agencies of French policymakers and planners (Chafer, 2014, pp. 516-517).

In his examination of French military intervention in Africa, Bruno Charbonneau (2008) also critiques previous uses of the neo-colonialism framework. He argues that discourses on France's continued military presence and operations in Africa have tended to diverge. They portray these interventions as 'manifestations of Empire', while similar European interventions are often regarded as a different, 'liberal interventionism' (Charbonneau, 2008, p. 279).

This literature on post-colonial Franco-African relations demonstrates the increasing unpopularity of labels such as *françafrique*. This is because they are no longer particularly useful or even accurate when used to describe and analyse these relationships. All too often these labels suggest a framework of bilateral ties, whereas Franco-African relations need to be located in a broader international context. This is an important development in the historiography of the end of the French empire and can be recognised in the story of the OCRS. This organisation has previously been regarded as a continuation of colonialism, but a deeper analysis of the OCRS reveals the adaptability of French colonial structures in the Sahara and the role that French planners and actors played in the 'non-leaving' of the French from the Sahara at the end of the empire.

The post-Second World War narrative of the rise of nationalism in countries under colonial rule and the increasing pressure on colonial powers such as France to reform and even decolonise their empires is well known. As is the story of the changes that France made to the African empire with the introduction of the *loi cadre* in 1956, granting more autonomy to certain African territories and independence to others (Morocco and Tunisia) and with the creation of the French Community in 1958 following the introduction of a new French Fifth Republic Constitution. However, what is not so well-known is how the OCRS fits into this narrative as a project that was presented as a way of improving conditions in the 'French' territories in the Sahara. Its controversial introduction during the Algerian War of Independence and its continuation beyond the dates of independence for the AOF and AEF suggests that the OCRS can be regarded as an example of this colonial adaptation to a shifting international context.

Global histories of decolonisation

In the past fifteen years scholarship has shifted away from Franco-African (or Franco-British) histories of the end of empire, with far greater emphasis on how the process of decolonisation was entangled with the international context, especially the construction of Europe and the unfolding Cold War (Connelly, 2001; Westad, 2007).

Odd Arne Westad (2007) looks at how both Third World revolutions and superpower interventions played a role in the course of the Cold War. He argues that the Cold War was not Europe-centred, emphasising its connection with political and social development in the Third World and its influence over decolonisation and the rise of radicalism in the newly-emerged nation-states. He also examines the Cold War as a continuation of colonialism, with practices used by the US and Soviet Union superpowers, alongside their allies, reminiscent of those used by colonial states (Westad, 2007, p. 396). Westad was certainly not the first historian to understand decolonisation as part of a wider, global history. Matthew Connelly (2001) situates the Algerian War within this international context of Cold War tensions. He argues that the superpower rivalries spilled over into the colonial conflict, with the US and Soviet Union imposing their own global priorities and exploiting conflicts for their own benefit. However, he also maintains that Algerian revolutionary leaders also used the Cold War in an attempt to gain an advantage over France. By bringing the Algerian conflict into the international arena, these leaders were able to use the ideological and political tensions to shine a light on the war and expose France, not only risking the European power's position in the world order but leaving it 'vulnerable to its adversaries and dependent on its allies' (Connelly, 2001, p. 238).

This line of thought, developed just after the opening of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA)'s archives, has since been expanded upon by a number of scholars, including Martin Thomas (2007). Thomas (2007) argues that both nationalist movements and colonial powers played on Cold War rivalries in an attempt to reinforce their political legitimacy and gain international support. He also links this context to France's changing strategic priorities in Europe, with its leading role in the construction of the European Economic Community from the late 1950s onwards. While Thomas (2007) looks at France's colonial and strategic priorities in North Africa and Europe within the context of the Cold War, Jeffrey Byrne (2016) offers an alternative narrative. He argues that rather than seeking a better way for unaligned nations, the Third World, and in particular Algeria, were much more pragmatic and manipulative in perpetuating Cold War rivalries (Byrne, 2016). Byrne emphasises the role of the Third World project as a leading force in decolonisation. He highlights the role that Third Worldism played in bringing together the non-aligned colonised and formerly

colonised nations. The Third World, he maintains, imposed an 'order and structural uniformity on the process of decolonization' (Byrne, 2016, p. 10). In this way he offers an alternative, even transnational perspective to the African narratives of decolonisation, one in which the decolonising struggle is still top-down, but from a different authority to that of the colonial power. Byrne's approach may seem removed from my own, which is to study the French experience in the Sahara and their motivations and portrayal of their activities in the region. However, his work raises the importance of broadening the analytical gaze and questioning the motivations and agency of not just the French actors that appear in the colonial archives, but also the African voices that are raised in these documents. This thesis considers the wider geo-strategic priorities of French actors prior to and during the implementation of the OCS, but also the reasons why the project was resisted by various African and European actors and the effect that this had on the success, or otherwise, of the organisation.

This transnational perspective has also been applied by scholars to mid-twentieth century European construction. Long ignored as part of the history of the European Union, the way in which the break-up, or re-imagining, of European empires was intertwined with the birth of the European Union is attracting the interest of a growing number of scholars. These scholars have begun to unpick the process of decolonisation and discuss the alternative routes to ending empire which were attempted and later abandoned. Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson (2014) highlight the importance of examining European integration within the context of colonialism and the end of the French empire. While tracing the history of Eurafica, a project that consolidated colonial inequality and 'perpetuated it into the contemporary world order', they highlight that the efforts to unite Europe coincided with efforts to reframe the colonial system in Africa (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, p. 6). Where the history of the EU has been dominated by Eurocentric conjecture, Hansen and Jonsson (2014) draw on Eurafica to demonstrate that decolonisation was not a rupture with the past but a solution to the many problems associated with European imperial decline, by securing European control over African resources without the need for further colonial coercion. However, in line with McDougall's (2017) argument about the impossibility of creating a 'new' French republic, this version of Eurafica was impossible because it could not be implemented without colonial practices because it threatened the sovereignty that African leaders sought.

Meanwhile, Megan Brown's recently completed thesis on the attachment of Algeria to the European Common Market has demonstrated the continuation of Algeria's involvement with Europe beyond independence. As a result of the 1957 Treaties of Rome and an unintentional oversight in the independence documents which came out of the Evian negotiations, Algeria remained attached to the European Economic Community beyond independence. Brown (2017) argues that the

negotiations and interaction of the European partners over the inscription of Algeria into the Treaty demonstrate that the question of empire was central to the establishment of a formally integrated Europe. She maintains that this inclusion of Algeria into the EEC challenges traditional narratives of European integration, that Europe replaces empire. Instead, she argues that this provision for Algeria influenced French decisions over the empire and presented a geographically-altered Europe from the officially accepted version. French administrators in the 1950s and 1960s had a very loose understanding of the limits of Europe, all too different from the widely-spread image of the six European partners. Brown's work demonstrates that administrators in the new European institutions could not be certain of the shape of Europe even after 1962.

In line with Brown, Muriam Haleh Davis (2015) examines the provisions France made for its colonies in the economic planning of Eurafrika, a notion to create an integrated administrative region for the benefit of both European and African countries, and its implications for European integration which came to define the postcolonial era. Here she demonstrates how French planners attempted to use the Constantine Plan (1959-1963) to reshape the empire. She draws on Eurafrika to demonstrate how the idea was central to France's political identity in the world, which increasingly became aligned with that of its European neighbours. In doing so she links European integration with economic development and the evolution of post-colonial national identities.

This literature, especially the latter narratives, which draw on connections between the French empire and the construction of Europe, demonstrate the need to look at France's late colonial activities in a more globally-connected way. The OCRS thus can be used to understand how this region of the empire was connected (and imagined by planners as being connected) to a wider, global history.

The OCRS: a global microhistory?

Scholars are increasingly interested in comparing the interlinking pasts of European empires to understand a wider global context and to use these cases to engage with the broader realities of these global connections (Laure-Stoler, 2001; Thomas and Thompson, 2014; Thénault and Goscha, 2017). Microhistories of decolonisation and alternative ends to empire have become more prevalent in the historiography of French decolonisation. These narratives enable researchers to use case studies to address the bigger questions and understand how they did or did not fit into the wider national and global histories. In their introduction to the *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History's* special issue on the connected histories of empire, Simon J. Potter and Jonathan Saha (2015) explore the ways in which this field has emerged and become a key part of European imperial history. In particular they highlight the importance of avoiding oversimplification and drawing on the

links between different empires and different colonies across time and space. They specify that through these connected histories it is possible to 'accord more agency to individuals, and recognise the crucial importance of choice, contingency and chance' (Potter & Saha, 2015). Recent conferences on this subject have been organised by the University of Portsmouth and the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) (2014), which looked at the connected histories of decolonisation, and the University of Oxford (2017), which explored the global microhistories of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). These conferences exploring connected global histories have been successful in using colonial history to understand a global history with new, global geographies, rather than continuing to focus on isolated narratives which provide little context for cases which traverse the borders of empires.

The OCRS could be considered a part of this global colonial narrative as a microhistory. This is because of the global importance that French planners attached to the organisation. These planners, many of whom were internationally-minded politicians and technocrats, constantly compared the OCRS to other state-owned development organisations across the world. These comparisons were frequently made with both colonial and non-colonial projects initiated by France's contemporaries on the world stage, including Britain, the US and the Soviet Union. Not only did the OCRS become significant within the Cold War just by virtue of these comparisons, but also it demonstrates the uncertainty amongst planners over the best way to present France's continued colonial role in Africa. Comparisons between the OCRS and non-colonial organisations reveal a certain level of insecurity amongst the planners over their colonial rule in Africa at a time when their authority in Algeria, and previously in Tunisia and Morocco, was being called into question.

The historiography of the Sahara and the OCRS

The Sahara has recently emerged as a renewed topic of discussion amongst academics, this is evident with the publishing of certain books such as Scheele and McDougall's (2012) edited volume on Saharan Frontiers, and the *Journal of African History* forum on trans-Saharan histories, with articles from Ghislaine Lydon (2015) and Baz Lecocq (2015). The historiography of this desert region has tended to fall into two themes, the first about how the region was imagined and the second considers economic activity in the region, in particular oil exploration. In their edited volume *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa*, Judith Scheele and James McDougall (2012, p. 4) have expressed concern that the historiography of the Sahara has isolated the desert from the history of Africa proper, so that it neither belongs to the former, nor has it been able to develop its own singular identity. Furthermore, there is the problem that the Sahara has long been

regarded as a void within Africa; perceived as the seen or 'unseen' empty space in between the Mediterranean/Arab Africa and the continent proper (Scheele & McDougall, 2012, p. 13).

Scheele and McDougall (2012, p. 15) argue that scholarly perceptions have also coincided with local ones in the Sahel. The desert has been polarised as the 'other' in order to relocate the Sahara into the wider African history and therefore it should be viewed as an 'intelligible' rather than an 'empty space'. Furthermore, Scheele and McDougall (2012, p. 5) aim to not simply look at 'the routes across the Sahara that have made it a global corridor, but at the "spaces in between" that have made it, and make it today, a "world crossroads"'. In doing so, their introductory chapter aims to recalibrate the level of analysis and return the Sahara to being understood as an 'intelligible region in its own right'. In his chapter within this edited volume on *Frontiers, Borderlands, and Saharan/World History*, McDougall clarifies that he does not seek to isolate the Saharan area, but rather he takes a comparative route and traces the common and different features of the Saharan region against other borderlands. In doing so he attempts to 'determine both what is distinctive and particular to a specific case through examining how the distinctiveness and particularity of one time and place can be related to others' (McDougall, 2012, p. 80).

Lecocq (2015) also discusses the Sahara beyond the borders of the current nation-states and yet focusses mainly on the evolution of scholarly work on the region. He argues that this work has suffered from a 'civilizational bias' towards North Africa (Lecocq, 2015). He explores how perceptions of the trans-Saharan space have developed. However, this research is still confined within the neat chronological periods of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial which so often limit studies of the Sahara and its far from straight-forward decolonisation. Moving beyond observations of a Saharan divide and looking at the intricate connections between these lands and its peoples and the rest of Africa, both to the north and to the south, is the aim of Lydon's (2015) examination of Saharan historiography. Lydon's (2015) research spans from the earliest Arabic writings to modern day African studies in North African universities. She traces the shift in perceptions of the Sahara, from 'a continent composed of two "Africas"' to 'a racial and geographic divide' to the current trans-Saharan approach. Lydon supports the importance of studying the Sahara beyond the dividing and 'othering' perceptions which have defined it in the past. Where this topic has been examined across a broad time spectrum and has largely been confined to discussing Africa alone, leaves the door open to assessing this subject within a case study. This approach will enable the narrative to be drawn from exterior influences beyond Africa and the Sahara as well as the 'interior' context. This literature demonstrates that the Sahara was not and should not be studied as an isolated region in history.

Scholarship on France's Saharan project, the OCRS, remains limited to a few articles and chapters, or short sections in monographs. Much of this research has a tendency to explain the OCRS within the wider narratives of either the emergence of the African nation-states (Boilley, 1993; Bourgeot, 2000; Lecocq, 2010) or about its role in establishing the oil exploitation in the region (Sèbe, 2010; Cantoni, 2017). In recent years, it has also been included in the histories of European construction and the formation of the European Union, even suggesting that it was an attempt at a Eurafrika project (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014; Davis, 2017). In this way, these scholars have used the OCRS to explore the geostrategic importance of the region for France after 1957 when the organisation was created, and that, through departmentalisation, the Algerian Sahara was attached to the metropolitan government in Paris.

The OCRS has especially been used to examine the 'transfer of power' and its consequences in Mali. Lecocq (2010) provides an insightful interpretation of decolonisation and the Tuareg rebellions in Northern Mali in 1963 and 1990, in his work which studies the Central Sahara on a local level yet framed within the global context. Pierre Boilley (1993; 2005) has also studied the OCRS from the perspective of Mali, both in his research on the nomadic peoples of the region and from the southern and sedentary Malian viewpoint. His interests particularly lie in mapping the political, economic and social evolution of the Tuaregs of the Adrar des Ifoghas from 1890 to 1960. Boilley is widely regarded as one of the leading academics on the decolonisation of the Sahara. This is evidenced by several scholars who reference Boilley and his narratives in their discussions of the OCRS (Lecocq, 2010; Giuffrida 2007; Keïta, 2005). However, the main role of the OCRS in Boilley's work is to provide an explanation for the failure of the peaceful decolonisation of Mali. This, he argues, is because France's plans for the OCRS were to extract the Saharan parts of Algeria, AOF and AEF. This alarmed the Territorial Assembly in French Soudan (Mali) as they believed the French to be denying Malians part of the country they were to inherit. Furthermore, Boilley (2005, pp.20-21) argues that French colonisation and the OCRS are partly to blame for the divisions between the Saharan peoples of French Soudan and the sedentary peoples of the south. These arguments have been reproduced by other scholars including Keïta (2005) and Lecocq (2010). In fact, Keïta (2005) has expanded on this argument in his examination of the Kel Tamacheq people. He argues that the OCRS may have exacerbated the rift between the Saharan and Sahelian peoples in the French Soudan and caused lasting complications for the nation-state of Mali (2005, p.92).

These scholars also often argue that the OCRS was a colonial project which failed as a result of the independence of France's African empire. This is a rather obvious assessment of the organisation, since it was abandoned with Algerian independence in 1962 (Sèbe, 2010, p.308). But Algeria was not the only member of the OCRS to gain independence during its lifetime, and the project outlived the

decolonisation of its other members (Mali, Niger and Chad). In fact, Niger and Chad decided to remain a part of the project beyond independence (Sèbe, 2010, p.308).

In terms of the purpose of the OCRS, scholars have stressed the centrality of the OCRS to France's late colonial policy and also to its status in the world order. Bourgeot (2000, pp.21-23) attributes this importance to the location of this region, between the three French overseas administrative regions; North, West and Equatorial Africa, as well as its role as the site of certain key events which took place during the nineteenth century. These events that Bourgeot (2000) identifies include the French exploration of the Sahara, the end of its conquest in 1902 and the creation of the OCRS. However, Sèbe (2010, p.304) connects the strategic importance of the Sahara not to its location, but to its oil and gas reserves and to its use as a site for nuclear testing, underscoring the Sahara's economic significance for France. Roberto Cantoni (2017, p. 130) also stresses the importance of oil exploitation in the creation of the OCRS. While allowing that the OCRS could secure French geostrategic interests, he suggests that the OCRS was primarily established as an administrative framework which would enable the exploitation of Algerian resources and thereby ensure French economic security. He situates this organisation within the context of the Algerian war, arguing that the OCRS constituted a move to separate the Sahara from Algeria, making it 'easier and less risky to make administrative concessions to an Algeria severed from her richest areas' (Cantoni, 2017, p. 131).

Boilley (1993) approaches this theme from an alternative angle. He instead examines the narrative of France's endeavour, during the 1950s, to reunite the Saharan areas of North and West Africa in an attempt to retain control over the region. He attributes this effort to the climate of France losing control in North Africa. This, he argues, is because the emergence of Saharan unification projects was coinciding with the independences of Morocco and Tunisia with France and the uprisings in Algeria (Boilley, 1993, pp. 216-220). Nevertheless, Boilley (1993, pp.221-222) places greater emphasis on the economic importance of the Sahara for France than other themes, and that the social development plans to improve the quality of life for the Saharan populations were used to justify France's true purpose in the region; economic exploitation. Bourgeot (2000, pp. 37-38) supports this idea with the argument that France considered unifying Fezzan in Libya (which they had been occupying since 1945) with the Saharan areas of Algeria. This, he argues, was purely following the advice of the oil explorer Conrad Kilian who saw multiple economic benefits to this plan. Although French political and military leaders were ultimately dissuaded from this path following the Suez crisis in 1956, France did succeed in uniting its Saharan regions in 1957 under the OCRS and the Ministry of the Sahara. Yet again this is a demonstration of an entanglement of France's economic and strategic interests in the Sahara. Existing scholarship has tended not to

emphasise France's political motives in retaining influence in the Sahara by 1957. With an unstable state of affairs elsewhere in France's empire, especially in Algeria, Bourgeot (2000) deems it logical that French planners made such efforts to retain control of one of the few regions which remained under French administration. This same argument is used by Sèbe (2010, p.307) to suggest that the OCRS was a 'last and desperate French attempt at retaining power over an oil-rich territory'. Here again he demonstrates the entanglement of strategic interests with economic interests.

Cooper (1996, pp. 8-9) warns against the danger, when reading decolonisation from above, of extrapolating 'discussions of political institutions from their social and economic context' and 'rereading history to conform to a subsequent notion of what constitutes progress'. Knowing how the OCRS ended is of little use to scholars when looking at the intentions of the planners who implemented the project. There are multiple approaches to studying this organisation and the French and African politicians, administrators, industrialists and military commanders took no single, united path in their attempts to put the OCRS into practice. This subject cannot just be a study of what the planners said that they wanted to achieve. The context in which this work took place as well as the planners' intersecting and, at times, conflicting priorities is also integral to this story.

From the existing literature on the OCRS it is still unclear as to how the on-the-ground administration of the Sahara was linked to France's overall strategy for the region. In 1957, many of the Saharan regions were still under military control (Stein, 2012, p.774). Scholars, such as those highlighted above, have explored the French strategic interest, which was based on the economic benefits, of the region. Yet, it is still unclear how this strategy was put into place in the desert itself, beyond the creation of the Ministry of the Sahara and the OCRS. This thesis seeks to foreground the agency of key individuals who drove the OCRS and how their motivations and actions were central, not just to the activities of this organisation, but to its very identity. As well as examining the organisation from the outside, from the viewpoint of European institutions, foreign nation-states and certain industrial actors, it also looks at the OCRS from inside, using its own archives and those of its key actors, including the first leaders or *Délégués Général* of the OCRS, Max Lejeune and Jacques Soustelle. The OCRS is thus examined from multiple angles; as a transitional organisation that was both connected to and reflective of shifting international and domestic circumstances, as a self-aware organisation that sought to establish its success and its status in comparison with other projects across the globe and as an attempted reimagining of colonial rule where its planners changed the colonial systems in an effort to 'improve' the empire and learn from the mistakes of former planners.

This thesis uses the late French colonial history of the Sahara and the OCRS to explore the possibilities and impossibilities of reimagining and ending the empire. It contributes to the shift towards studying history, and especially colonial history, in a more connected way. By understanding the connections between the OCRS and the rest of the French empire in Africa, and also to the wider international context it will be possible to shed further light on France's determination to retain control over the Sahara.

Chapter plan

Chapter 1 uses existing literature to set up the conceptual framework for thinking about spaces under French colonial rule up until and including the mid-1950s. The OCRS, as an imagined space, was the culmination of a series of ideas about Eurafrique, Eurafrika, France-Afrique and the Sahara. These ideas may be understood as alternative routes to empire or the end of empire that were considered by the late colonial state. The notion of Eurafrique, or Eurafrika, was a nineteenth century European idea which promoted the colonisation of Africa. This idea re-emerged in the inter-war period and again in the 1950s amongst French and European planners seeking to create a supposedly mutually beneficial relationship between the two continents (Adebajo & Whiteman, 2012; Hansen & Jonsson, 2015). This chapter analyses how the concept of Eurafrika came to be used by Fourth Republic actors, such as Guy Mollet and Jacques Chaban-Delmas, to re-imagine colonial structures and how they might be put into practice on the ground. It also looks at the francocentric version of Eurafrika, France-Afrique.¹ This notion was used by planners such as Chaban-Delmas, who were focused on national objectives and France's place in the world as a leader (Dramé & Saul, 2004). The chapter traces the longer histories of ideas which planners drew upon when creating institutions such as the OCRS to merge Europe and Africa, with France at the head of this union. It examines how the idea of France-Afrique was used to promote French activities on the international stage and to use economic institutions to further bind France and Africa. Intersecting with these notions about France and Europe's role in Africa and how it could be shaped to create an interdependent relationship, were a very potent set of ideas about the Sahara. This region, in which the military had previously been the ultimate decision makers and implementers of policy, was centralised and became integral to French geostrategic and economic planning in the 1950s.

Chapter 2 seeks to link the ideas and mind-sets (Thomas, 2011) developed in Chapter 1 with the on-the-ground planning for the OCRS. The chapter uses Ministry of the Sahara documents, held in Aix-

¹ This is a different notion from that of *françafrique*. Although it was adopted from France-Afrique as used by Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1955, *françafrique* is a term first used by François-Xavier Verschave for the title of his (1998) book which discusses the neo-colonial networks between French and African political leaders.

en-Provence, Max Lejeune's private archives, held at the Somme departmental archives, and debates logged in the *Journal Officiel*. These documents enable an analysis of the origins of the organisation and its purpose as an economic and social development of these regions, that was directed by the Ministry of Sahara in Paris. Its key actors included Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who presented the OCRS bill to the National Assembly in 1956 and was later the first president of Côte d'Ivoire, Max Lejeune, the first Minister of the Sahara and Délégué Général of the OCRS, Guy Mollet, French Prime Minister from 1956-1957, and Eirik Labonne, former French Resident-General in Morocco and Tunisia and member of the OCRS economic commission. This chapter demonstrates how their political trajectories shaped how they engaged with the question of French rule in the Sahara. Tracking the public pronouncements and private archives of these actors also helps us to understand how the OCRS came to reflect shifting Fourth Republic priorities in the 1950s.

Chapter 3 uses Ministry of the Sahara documents, National Assembly debates and Jacques Soustelle's private archives to explore the effect of the fall of the Fourth Republic on the OCRS. It examines questions of both continuity and change in France and French politics, which were reflected in the Sahara and in the partial reformation of the OCRS in 1959. Some scholars have questioned the shift from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic and whether claims that this signified a break from the past were exaggerated. For example, Martin Evans (2012) argues that little changed in 1958 in terms of personnel in the French government, apart from at the very top. This was reflected in the Ministry of the Sahara and the OCRS, which remained largely unchanged until 1959 when Soustelle replaced Lejeune as Minister and head of the OCRS and the organisation was reformed by law to reduce its political dimension, which had been a point of tension between the territorial assemblies and the French National Assembly, and further stress its economic development objectives. However, Lejeune's archives reveal that the political changes of 1958 signified more for the OCRS than a simple alteration of the organisation's director. In 1958 the OCRS was able to introduce a series of new measures, such as the Oil Code, which would encourage foreign investment in France's oil industry while retaining French sovereignty over the Sahara.

Chapter 4 uses French military correspondence and reports from Saharan command posts to analyse how the OCRS was perceived by the military administrators in the region. It addresses their priorities which often lay with the defence of French borders against mounting African nationalism and the FLN. It also traces the relations between the OCRS inter-army military commander and the military leaders in the Territoires du Sud, the AOF and AEF and how their role as combined defenders of the French empire and as administrators and implementers of policy in the Sahara continued despite the presence of civilian rule in the other overseas territories. With the ongoing Algerian War and the independences of new African nation-states, this chapter considers the extent to which these factors

became more of a priority to the military than their administrative role in the Sahara and the OCSR. Using OCSR documents and Max Lejeune's article collection, this chapter also explores the industrial actors in the region, notably the French industrial commissions such as the *Comité d'Action pour le Sahara Français* which worked with the oil and gas companies and the military to build the infrastructure which would enable the extraction and transport of resources. It explores the language of development that was used by these actors and their agenda in the region. It also reflects on the French expansion of foreign access to Saharan resources with the Sahara Petroleum Code, published in 1958 and how it demonstrated the attempt of these industrial and military actors to put French plans for Eurafrika into practice.

Chapter 5 focuses on the perception and reception of the OCSR by key African actors and France's western and European allies, particularly the US, UK and West Germany. Using Territorial Assembly debates, *Journal Officiel* entries and Ministry of the Sahara correspondence, this chapter explores the member territories' and departments' (Algerian Sahara departments, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) approach to and, in the case of Mali and Mauritania, their ultimate rejection of the OCSR. These archives reveal a range of perceptions of France's Saharan activities. The French Sudan leader Modibo Keita and the Mauritanian politician Sidi el Mokhtar regarded the OCSR as a late-colonial partitioning of Africa in order to prevent self-determination in the region. Therefore, the Mauritanian Territorial Assembly refused in 1956 to allow its lands to be included in the OCSR but agreed to send delegates to the High Commission so as to remain involved in the project's activities. During the late negotiations for self-determination, in 1959 French Sudan withdrew from the OCSR. However, other African leaders including François Tombalbaye (Chad), Hamani Diori (Niger), and also Houphouët-Boigny and Léopold Sédar Senghor (who were interested in the project from their perspective as French Community leaders) saw the project as a way of securing economic resources for the benefit of all of France's former overseas territories and as an opportunity to develop the infrastructure of the Saharan regions. The chapter also uses National Archive documents on the OCSR, Chatham House articles and Jacques Soustelle's collection of articles, aimed at both Francophone and Anglophone (US and UK) audiences, along with existing secondary literature on France's discussions with her European partners about the inclusion of the empire in plans for a Common Market (Hansen and Jonsson, 2014; Brown, 2016; Davis, 2015), to explore the reaction from France's western and European allies, situated within the context of the Cold War, to France's activities in the Sahara. Through analysis of how France (through politicians such as Soustelle) presented its geostrategic objectives to these allies, it also shows how France sought to be viewed as an actor in the Sahara and as a leader on the world stage. This chapter further serves to

demonstrate the external constraints laid on the OCRS and how these affected the shaping of the organisation and French imaginings of the region.

The conclusion will demonstrate that the attempted implementation of late-colonial ideas for the empire such as Eurafrica and France-Afrique came to represent an attempt at mid-twentieth century (re-)colonisation. By the 1950s the Sahara was still only under very superficial French rule, so for France to reimagine the colonial relationship, colonisation first had to take place. The planners behind the OCRS, who were key actors in the late colonial state, were politicians who had such belief in the idea for a French-led Eurafrica that would be mutually beneficial that they could not imagine that it would not be accepted even after the OCRS was abandoned at the end of the Algerian War in 1962. It can also be understood that the OCRS was unable to last beyond African independences in an era of decolonisation. It was not an end of empire that French planners sought to manage, but a recolonization. This attempt resulted in a messy and ambiguous late colonial French policy in the Sahara that failed to satisfy any of the parties, within France and without, that were directly involved.

Chapter 1: The alternative routes

Vive la Communauté franco-africaine!

Vive l'union !

Vive la fraternité !

(Houphouët-Boigny, 1958)

Ce que veut faire la France avec l'Afrique, c'est préparer l'avènement de l'Eurafrrique, ce grand destin commun qui attend l'Europe et l'Afrique. (Le discours de Dakar de

Nicolas Sarkozy, 2007).

Introduction

In May 1962, the Vice-President of the French National Assembly Jacques Raphael-Leygues was on a flight from Paris to Dahomey charged with a letter from President of the National Assembly Chaban-Delmas to the African political leaders of Dahomey and Cameroon. It invited these leaders to be a part of the *Groupes d'Amitiés* that the inter-parliamentary organisation Europe-Afrique was forming. It was during this flight, seated next to the President of the Benin National Assembly, Valentin Aplogan Djibodé, that the cabin pressure malfunctioned and while the plane dropped from 11,000m to 3,000m Raphael-Leygues noted that his neighbour was one of the few on board not to panic. When asked how he was able to remain so calm, Aplogan is said to have replied that the French government had made him a Grand Officier de la Légion d'Honneur, which is what they gave to the best of the best in the army, and therefore such a person should have a certain 'tenue'. This experience bonded the men together so much so that when they finally arrived in Dahomey and Aplogan learned of the birth of his seventh child, he named the baby Didier Raphael in honour of the plane journey and his already fast friendship with the Vice-President of the National Assembly.² The story of the meeting between these two powerful politicians seems to epitomise the very personal relationships between the French political elite and the post-colonial African elite. However, it was not upon independence that these relationships were formed. In fact, the path towards the formation of what is today pejoratively referred to as *françafrique* was established long before, arguably at the same time that the colonisation of these countries began in the nineteenth century.

The relationship between France and her African empire was a fabricated, shifting and ambiguous relationship. These relations evolved through French understandings of assimilation, to association and *coopération*, moving towards a more bilateral and more equal relationship, but one in which

² AN, 101 AJ19, Jacques Raphael-Leygues, *Letter from Raphael-Leygues to Chaban-Delmas*, May 26, 1962, pp.1-4.

France was always the more senior partner. By the 1950s, French planners dreamt not only of a united Europe and Africa but of a renewed world order with France restored to her rightful place as a superior power supported by an African partnership.

In 1955 France had departed from Indochina and had returned its focus to the French territories in Africa, most particularly Algeria where the FLN had been leading an insurrection since November 1, 1954. For many French politicians and senior planners, it was in Africa, that France's future lay as a European and world leader. With the loss of Indochina, and the French grip on Algeria at risk, France looked to the emerging sub-Saharan African elite to bolster the empire. Often too easily characterised (either positively or pejoratively) as Francophile, the motivations of this elite were often much more complex and ranged from the promoters of closer Franco-African relations, such as Félix Houphouët-Boigny and Léopold Senghor to those seeking a clean break and an opportunity to carve their own way as nation-state leaders such as Sourou Migan Apithy, Sidi el Mokhtar and Modiba Keita. This chapter focuses on the history of the idea of a France-Afrique relationship and seeks to demonstrate how French planners worked with these African elites in order to reimagine the empire while negotiating the wider context of the end of European empires.

This chapter explores these reimaginings of empire which were considered by French colonial elites, including Eurafrica and France-Afrique, and how they were attempted to be put into practice in the empire. These notions were often referred to in reference to France's plans for one particular area of the empire: the Sahara.

Eurafrica

In July 2007, on his first visit to sub-Saharan Africa since gaining office, President Nicolas Sarkozy gave a now infamous speech at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar.³ His oft-quoted speech had a lasting impact on France's relations with Africa for the rest of his tenure, but it also marked an important moment for historians and scholars alike. This is because he resurrected the term 'Eurafrrique' (Eurafrica), prompting the notion's re-emergence in scholarly debates. An ambiguous euphemism for a close relationship between Europe and Africa, Dominic Thomas (2013) discusses Eurafrica in terms of its use in Sarkozy's plans for the Mediterranean and likens the idea to *françafrique* in the way that it echoes neo-colonialism (2013, pp. 92-93). Bruno Charbonneau (2008) agrees, suggesting that Sarkozy sought to use the notion in order to seek peace and prosperity for

³ At the time the speech caused controversy because the president appeared to resurrect paternalistic and neo-colonial language and was based on discredited stereotypes of Africa (Charbonneau, 2008). He also suggested in his speech that since independence, African states had failed to embrace progress, and therefore alienated his contemporaries: «La réalité de l'Afrique, c'est celle d'un grand continent qui a tout pour réussir et qui ne réussit pas parce qu'il n'arrive pas à se libérer de ses mythes» (Jeune Afrique, 2012).

Europe and Africa but that such a project would renew, rather than end, French neo-colonial practices.

Despite the revived interest in Eurafrica, few academics examine the concept within a historical context (Thomas, 2013, p. 102). This is problematic since the modern understanding of Eurafrica is quite dissimilar to its original form when it first appeared during the inter-war period. Nevertheless, the notion is commonly accepted by historians as a 'geopolitical grand design' for a more equal European partnership with Africa, one in which European countries could politically and economically co-operate with each other and with African countries and colonies (Chipman, 1989, p.62). Located within its longer history, this notion may be explored as an idea that was considered by French planners towards the end of the colonial period as a way of developing and improving the empire in Africa. In order to understand how such a method was envisioned, it is necessary to first comprehend the origins of Eurafrica and by what means it became so significant to the French colonial elite in the 1950s.

History of Eurafrica

The political origins of Eurafrica lie in the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, which introduced the 'theory of empire' and formed an early example of pan-European cooperation for operating in Africa (Whiteman, 2012, pp. 24-27). However, Chipman (1989) traces its intellectual roots back to the writings of Victor Hugo in 1876 in which he encouraged Europeans to unite and together conquer lands in Africa. By the early 1920s, Eurafrica was considered to be a relationship between Europe and Africa on the basis that Africa was Europe's route to economic recovery. At this time, Eurafrica was not about cooperation between Europe and Africa. Disregarding the concerns of the African populations, this notion was about European countries cooperating with each other to coordinate their African policies and preventing any outbreak of war amongst themselves over Africa.

Hansen and Jonsson (2014) argue that the Eurafrican idea emerged out of pan-European thought. The Austrian philosopher, politician and early Eurafricanist, Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi (1894-1972), was one of the principal advocates of the pan-European movement, seeking a united Europe which would prevent future wars and bring the different countries together as one cultural community, a 'single racial nation' (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, p. 26). Through his pamphlet, *Panuropa*, which launched the movement in 1923, Coudenhove-Kalergi was able to appeal to intellectuals and politicians alike, including the German writer Heinrich Mann, Nobel Laureates such as Albert Einstein and Gerhart Hauptmann and also political leaders such as Winston Churchill and Konrad Adenauer. It was also through this union that economic arguments for European integration were explored. With increases in unemployment and national debt, and decreasing production,

there were fears amongst European economists such as Otto Deutsch that Europe would become even more dependent on North America. Deutsch recommended pan-European planned economy, including removing trade barriers and cancelling debilitating debts including those imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. Deutsch also suggested that in order to catch-up with the flourishing US and Soviet Union economies, the colonies ought to be included in pan-European agreements, thereby creating a larger market and resource-base for exploitation. In this way, Africa was presented as a 'necessary condition for economic recovery' (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, pp. 26-27). Through the economic perspective of Deutsch, it is possible to understand the development of the geopolitical and economic argument for creating Eurafrika. Only by producing European unity within their African empires, in terms of a concerted effort to exploit resources and foster stronger connections between the two continents could Europe begin to reap the rewards. As Liliana Ellena (2004) underlines, a united Europe was no trivial thing during the inter-war period. Not only did countries compete over borders and sovereignty, but also diverging local and national frameworks often led to disputes both within Europe and abroad.

Coudenhove-Kalergi's strategy for Pan-European colonial management of Africa was based on arguments involving raw materials and migration. He regarded Africa as Europe's granary, with its natural resources there for the taking. Beyond agricultural produce, what motivated Coudenhove-Kalergi was the potential Africa provided with its mineral resources and hydroelectric power that could be used to Europe's benefit. With a rapidly growing population in Europe, for Pan-Europeans, Africa's role in this 'relationship' was not only to provide a pool of resources, but also an 'empty' territory to resettle any surplus of the European population (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, p. 11). This perception reflects the common characterisation of Africa perpetuated across Europe in the nineteenth century and which had indeed been used to justify the so-called 'Scramble for Africa' when the continent was carved up by European colonisers. Often, lands which were vast and sparsely populated were mis-labelled as empty in order to remove any other claims on the resources and highlight the geo-strategic potential they may have offered.

In his definition of Eurafrika, Coudenhove-Kalergi does not include Great Britain as one of the European colonial powers. This is because he regards British interests as being beyond Europe and Africa due to the transcontinental nature of its federal empire. Instead, he looks to France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Holland and Belgium as the forerunners of the 'great European colony in Africa' (Ellena, 2004, p. 244). The French politician Joseph Caillaux agreed, arguing that the UK was secure in their Commonwealth of 'Free Nations' comprising Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Australia and was reluctant to bind these countries along with her African territories to Europe, even if European peace and financial stability was left vulnerable to the spread of Bolshevism (Communism)

in Russia and the threat of the US recalling its debts in Europe (Caillaux, 1925). This movement towards the Commonwealth and away from Europe may therefore explain one of the reasons why the UK was omitted from later Eurafrican plans and projects.

Meanwhile, in Italy, the origins of Eurafrica took on a much more anthropological and ethnological nature. One of the early authors of the idea was Giuseppe Sergi, an anthropologist who first penned the term Eurafrica as a way to disprove the Aryan origins of European peoples. Sergi claimed that Europeans originated in Africa and had developed into a Euro-African race within which there existed three ethnicities who peopled the continent. These, he argued, were the Africans, the Mediterraneans and the Nordic.⁴ He stipulated that in previous discussions the Greeks and Latins had mistakenly been named as Aryan, when in fact they were Mediterranean as they peopled the shores of the sea, whereas the Aryans had come from Asia, invading and settling in southern Europe (Ellena, 2004). Sergi's theory was adopted in multiple academic and scientific debates and in fact came to be used by Italian colonialists in order to justify and support their ambitions in Africa (Sorgoni, 1998). It was also used in other European countries, particularly in southern Europe to justify the superiority of the Eurafrican 'race' over Arabs and Berbers and to establish the Eurafrican geographical concept (Ellena, 2004). This demonstrates an alternative context within which the term Eurafrica was used, linking race and geographical space together. However, Coudenhove-Kalergi was opposed to Sergi's thoughts on the history of European race. He disagreed with the idea that there was a 'pure' origin to the peoples of Europe, and that Sergi's work manufactured a split in the continent which was to the detriment of European unity. In fact, he argued that no single European 'race' existed, rather that those who lived there were part of a great intermingling of ethnic groups, producing Europe's 'complex racial mosaic' (Ellena, 2004, p. 249).

In France, the concept of Eurafrica resonated with the contemporary idea of Greater France. An alternative phrase for France's overseas empire, Greater France altered the very notion of what signified France and being French, attempting to make all metropolitan and colonial lands, cultures and peoples inclusive of what it meant to be French. In particular, proponents of the idea sought to create a fused entity of the colonial territories, especially North Africa and the European epicentre in France (Ellena, 2004). Therefore, the first Eurafricanists emerged from interest groups who were invested in the fortunes of the colonial empire. One such French advocate of a Eurafrican project was the radical politician Joseph Caillaux (1863-1944). Caillaux had long campaigned for the rapprochement of France and Germany, at the expense of the Entente Cordiale – something which

⁴ Sergi is said to have defined the African variety as being made up of the 'aristocratic' tribes such as the Nubians, Masai, Fulas, Egyptians, but not the Arabs, the Mediterranean signified those peoples who lived on the shores of the sea and the Nordic were those peoples who lived in Northern Europe (Ellena, 2004, p. 248)

had led to his imprisonment for treason following the First World War. He wrote profusely on the subject, advocating economic solidarity between the two countries, as well as a union allowing free trade which would encompass African territories. Caillaux (1925, p. 497) argued that France was a leading voice in the renewed inter-war call for a 'United Nations of Europe' as professed by the government in 1925, one in which European countries would work together in 'cooperation'. For Caillaux (1923) this cooperation would take place through political and financial agreements in order to secure peace and to reconstruct 'the ancient Continent' and in such a way work towards a 'real unity'.

Another prominent supporter of Eurafrica was the scholar and politician Eugène Guernier. Guernier served as President of the Casablanca Chamber of Commerce (1916-1922) and was a member of the government of the Moroccan Protectorate (1918-1922). It was while he was a lecturer in politics and economics at the Institut des hautes études marocaines in 1923 that he is said to initially use the term 'Eurafrique' or Eurafrica (Whiteman, 2012), although other scholars would argue that Coudenhove-Kalergi was first to use the term in its geopolitical context that same year (Betz-Bornstein, 2007; Hansen and Jonsson, 2014). However, it was not until the 1930s that French interest in the concept took off. It was with Guernier's work *L'Afrique – Champ d'expansion de l'Europe* (1933) that attention was brought to his ideas for Europe to unite in order to fully achieve the civilising mission and to develop African resources (Marcum, 1957). For Guernier, Eurafrica was a form of European cooperation. These African countries were already colonies; therefore the notion was not used as an argument for invasion. Rather it was a way to legitimise interwar notions for economic and industrial development such as *mise en valeur*. Guernier argued for the bringing together of African resources and financing their development by and for the benefit of several European countries (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014). In addition, Eurafrica would serve a greater purpose and guarantee European peace by ensuring European countries worked together towards a common economic goal.

Guy Martin (1982) clarifies that colonial planners in Europe justified their colonial actions because European elites perceived the two continents as being tied politically, economically, culturally and socially. In this way, not only Eurafrica, but also colonialism was justified. Martin also adds that these ideologists sought the 'complete integration' of Europe and Africa as the 'ideal solution' (1982, p. 222). Martin was writing in 1982, when the Marxist interpretation of colonialism, that it was influenced by economics, was popular. He regards this 'solution' as one-sided, benefiting only the ruling European classes and not the populations of the colonies. These European elites used this idea of integration to rationalise their colonial activities and defend their political and economic interests.

Therefore, it was not only the thought of wealth and natural resources which drove the arguments of Eurafricanists. Hansen and Jonsson (2011, pp. 447-449) suggest that Eurafrica was approached in the inter-war period as a solution to create peace, particularly between France and Germany who were at an impasse over the Rhine and Ruhr regions. Eurafrica, in terms of an assimilation of Africa into Europe, became a 'strong argument for the unification of Europe'. This links to Coudenhove-Kalergi's belief in the geo-political benefits of Eurafrica. He perceived that European countries could move away from their past antagonisms and instead create sustainable and prosperous relationships with one another through their cohesive work in Africa. It was not only the Austrian's Pan-European project which sought Eurafrica in order to establish peace in Europe. The European League for Economic Co-operation (ELEC), formed in 1946 as an international forum for generating transnational economic policies and to establish co-operation between Western Europe and its overseas territories. This organisation included Britain's colonial possessions, and pursued the joint exploitation of Africa so as to build a more united Europe and move away from the destructive disputes which had set the region back in the previous decade (Kottos, 2012). Although Coudenhove-Kalergi describes Eurafrica as the solution to the cycle of destructive wars which, in his eyes, hindered European progress, this was not to say that he deplored the use of violence. The conflation of Europe and Empire necessitated violence beyond European borders and this Eurocentrism, and indeed racism were pre-conditions to the success of Eurafrica (Ellena, 2004).

During the 1930s, those referring to the ideology, such as Guernier and Coudenhove-Kalergi, understood Eurafrica through colonial terms, with the benefits to Africa described using the same language that the civilising mission used; 'morality, culture and civilisation' (Hansen & Jonsson, 2011, pp. 449-450). Hansen and Jonsson (2011, p. 450) highlight that the inter-war discourse of Eurafrica was racist, with key contemporary theorists discussing the ideology in racial terms, highlighting the inherent differences between black and white races (Coudenhove-Kalergi) and describing the duties of Europeans to enable a 'primitive and isolated Africa [to] enter the circle of human culture' (Guernier).

During the Second World War, Eurafrica faded from most discourse as war-time priorities took charge. The term nevertheless had currency for the Vichy regime, as well as amongst certain German and Italian fascists. Whilst the collaborationists were in power, a Europeanist discourse emerged amongst certain theorists advocating a united Europe in a Eurafrican form, one which would be able to match up to the Soviet Union and the British Commonwealth (Nordblad, 2014, pp. 716-718). This Eurafrican vision echoed the ideas spread by theorists during the inter-war period in that Europe (which did not include the UK or the Soviet Union) would unite and share the resources of a joint African colony. However, the renewed ideology saw Germany, who would be enticed by the

prospect of colonial wealth and territories, at the head of this supranational structure. Yet again, one of the key purposes of this ideology was to determine a peaceful solution for Europe as Eurafricanists had sought in the 1930s (Nordblad, 2014, pp. 716-719). Within this vision, Africa signified territories absent of Africans, apart from those who would be used as workers to extract the coveted natural resources. With the end of the war and the Vichy regime in France, this fascist version of Eurafrica became obsolete (Nordblad, 2014, p. 720). Nevertheless, as Davis (2015) has argued, the racialised language of development remained.

Following the Second World War and during the Cold War, the notion of Eurafrica experienced a re-birth and was increasingly referred to in economic and political debates. Eurafrica came to be seen as strategically important at a time when certain European powers, such as France, were looking to keep their colonial possessions out of the grasp of communists and nationalists. This was especially important to France by the time that war broke out with Algeria in 1954 (Brown, 2017). Bruno Charbonneau (2008, p. 287) suggests that a number of French politicians, administrators and military officers including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Christian Pineau, saw Eurafrica as a way of balancing the 'American-Soviet confrontation' and integrating the empire into the new European Community. Other politicians, such as Gaston Defferre were more interested in the economic benefits to France that a version of Eurafrica could create. He saw that by integrating African colonies into the European construction plans, France could secure external aid to cover some of the costs of running the empire. Furthermore, as West Germany began to recover and grow as a European power during the 1950s, European integration through Eurafrica was seen, by the French, as a way of containing this growth and turning it to their advantage (Charbonneau, 2008, pp. 286-287).

This renewed version of Eurafrica had mostly outgrown its imperial inter-war model and had laid to rest most of its racially-charged terminology such as the 'civilising mission', in favour of a new vocabulary of cooperation or *coopération*, interdependence and a mutually-beneficial or even symbiotic relationship. Yet, in Algeria this language continued to be used and implied certain racial connotations and perpetuated within the Constantine Plan which was seen by French planners as a way of 'making the Muslim man productive' (Davis, 2015). The argument that European states, including France were shedding their former quarrels in favour of mutual interdependence between European countries and their colonies in Africa was advanced by contemporary scholars such as John Marcum (1957). He maintained that this interdependence had already emerged in the form of large, international organisations such as NATO and the Council of Europe, and also on a smaller, more specialised scale with supranational bodies including the Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the Benelux customs union created in 1944 and made up of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

This highlights the inclination in the 1950s towards creating supranational ties, particularly in Europe, but also between economic regions and ideologically aligned regions. These were not just supranational communities, but also international organisations with representatives from each member, therefore there was an underlying assumption that African states and emerging states would be represented. It is within this context, Marcum (1957) argues, that France sought to draw Africa into a new interdependent union with a Western international community. Indeed, this version of Eurafrica implied that Europe could continue to access African resources, but that African territories could be associated with Europe through the 1957 Treaty of Rome and therefore gain access to European markets and financial and technical aid (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, pp. 13-15).

Nevertheless, despite this alternative approach to Eurafrica, Martin (1982) suggests that the notion continued to be colonial rule in new packaging, with Africa still being exploited and retained by European powers, and was in fact an excuse for France to retain sovereignty over its overseas territories during a time when its status as a world power and indeed a colonial power was weakening. The Dahomean French National Assembly deputy Sourou Migan Apithy was sceptical about the Eurafrican idea, particularly in terms of a proposed European Defence Community. He believed that pooling resources within Europe would conflict with the constitution's provisions for the French Union. He regarded Eurafrica, and in particular the defence question, in terms of sovereignty, seeing that there would be two layers of sovereignty, one European and one French. The former would leave out Africa whereas, within the latter, Overseas France would retain its 'Frenchness'. Apithy believed that European sovereignty did not have any clear provisions for the African territories, whereas French sovereignty, provided within the French Union, had a distinct place for Africa (Cooper, 2014, pp. 209-210).

It may be true that Eurafrica was viewed by the French as a plausible strategy to maintain power both in Europe and in Africa, particularly following the Suez crisis of 1956 and the ensuing conflict in Algeria which exposed France's weaknesses as a global actor and a colonial power. Nevertheless, Eurafrica may also be viewed as a solution for colonial powers faced with empires that no longer functioned in a post-Second World War world. This is something which has been touched upon by certain scholars such as Davis (2015) who argues that Eurafrica as it was envisioned during the 1950s was a regional solution for France in the form of economic development situated within the broader context of decolonisation and European integration.⁵ Senghor, a Eurafrica proponent who maintained that France was not a European country, stressed that it was a republic composed of the

⁵ See Davis' (2015) thesis for more on the role of Eurafrica in European integration and the provisions made for France's colonies in the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

metropole and overseas territories and departments. He feared that the negotiations in the early 1950s over European cooperation risked bypassing the African leaders and turning the French African territories into an 'international colony' (Cooper, 2014, p. 202). For Senghor the overseas territories were by right to be a part of the European economic community, with the Eurafrican idea signifying African participation in European institutions. Alongside Abbas Guèye, also a Senegalese deputy in the French National Assembly and Jean-Hilaire Aubame (Gabon), Senghor stressed the benefits of Eurafrica, particularly integration and a role for Africans in developing and managing this form of co-operation (Cooper, 2014, p. 208).

The idea of uniting European and African efforts to develop the colonial territories was not exclusive to France and its Western European partners. From 1945 until mid-1949, Ernest Bevin, then foreign secretary of the British Labour government and a former trade union minister and wartime secretary fostered the notion of a Third World Power project led by Britain and France. This British project aimed to create a system in which Western Europe, large parts of Africa and Commonwealth members would loosely 'associate' or work together independently of the US and Soviet blocs. This 'association' would be based on economic, political and defence agreements (Deighton, 2006). Although he clearly intended for Britain and France to lead this project, Bevin was unable to firmly establish what role Western Europe or even the Commonwealth would play. Furthermore, the purpose of the project appeared to be fluid, at times focusing on colonial development and the exploitation of resources or a neo-colonial 'customs unit' providing access for Europe to raw materials, or even a wider ideological, political and defence project seeking to unite the geopolitical strategic space between the US and the Soviet Union (Deighton, 2006, p. 836).

The French and the British Eurafrican projects relied on the ability of multiple European powers to coordinate their efforts abroad and reach agreements at least on trade and economic matters if not political and defence affairs as well. However, following the end of the Second World War French and British relations were not in a good place, with the countries clashing over the Levant and over Germany. The British government was also concerned about the strength of the French Communist Party which was one of the leading political parties in France between 1945 and 1947. This led to tensions between the two colonial powers which superseded previous assertions of them being natural imperial allies. However, as a result of shrewd decision-making by Bevin, in particular to retain the Conservative British Ambassador Duff Cooper, who was able to repair many of the strained relations between Britain and France, the British Foreign Office was able to begin work on an Anglo-French customs union.

This post-war re-emergence of what had been an inter-war colonial, and at times, racially-charged notion can be explained for two reasons. Firstly, following the Second World War, Europe was in need of a political and economic reconciliation, particularly between France and Germany, in order for the continent to recover. French intellectuals and bureaucrats of the time firmly believed that Europe's economic and political problems could be solved by a link with Africa. They felt that Africa's resources and raw materials could help European economies to recover (Chipman, 1989, pp.62-77). From the French perspective, Eurafrica was seen as a way of reconciling the French Union (which, as a result of the constitutional shift, became the post-Second World War term for France and its empire) and its franc zone with a common European market (Migani, 2008, p.23).

Secondly, Eurafrica re-emerged as a result of the Cold War hostilities between the US and the Soviet Union, forcing Europeans to revise their perceptions of the place of Europe in world affairs. It was thought that by integrating Western Europe and Africa, not only could Europe become a more substantial economic and political force, but also a 'Third Force'. Proponents of Eurafrica argued that it was an alternative to the two blocs created by the superpowers, a third bloc which could protect itself from communist extremism and American political and economic domination. Furthermore, this notion presented other possibilities such as a wider spread of European military bases and a testing ground in the Sahara for atomic weapons and therefore enhanced defence for their interests during the Cold War (Chipman, 1989, p.77).

Attempts were made to put this idea of Eurafrica into practice in North Africa. Davis (2015) has argued that the plans to industrialise Algeria under the Constantine Plan were an example of this implementation and again in the Sahara through the OCSR (Davis, 2017). However, these projects were planned and implemented by French actors. The OCSR may have had the input of certain African political leaders, but whether it can be regarded as a Eurafrican project is questionable. Instead, this attempt may be understood not as an example of a French-led Eurafrica, but of a Franco-African project funded by European countries.

France-Afrique

In *French Power in Africa*, John Chipman (1989) introduces students of French colonial history to the political concept which bound France to Africa following the re-evaluation of empire in the 1950s, but prior to the independence of the bulk of overseas France. This concept, which he calls 'France-Afrique' is distinct from its homophone *françafrique*⁶ in that the former refers to the relationship

⁶ Although the term was adopted from France-Afrique as used by Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1955, *françafrique* is a term first used by François-Xavier Verschave (1998) for the title of his book which discusses

which was formed throughout colonial rule and the latter is used to refer to a loosely-defined neo-colonial network created by the late colonial state. Chipman (1989) argues that the main aim of the French republican governments was the maintenance of French influence in Africa both during colonial rule and after its end. He highlights that when France sought to emphasise its grandeur it would refer to its role in Africa and the strong ties it enjoyed with its overseas possessions. This 'extension' of France into Africa, in the minds of French elites at least, was nothing new in French politics. Discourse about a 'Greater France' began to be circulated after World War I to describe this unit of France and her African and Indochinese territories (Wilder, 2005). Chipman (1989) argues that this concept was used when the French wished to declare France as 'great' simply as a result of their sphere of influence in Africa. He regards France-Afrique as a symbolic, strategic idea which was linked to French national prestige. In this way, it was politically useful for getting the French public and African elites alike to accept the grand design and help to secure overseas support for continued control under the guise of a common destiny. However, he also argues that as a mere symbol, or even myth, France-Afrique in practice was devoid of political content and proponents of the idea were often marginal figures. Yet, their arguments helped to develop ideas about France's relationship with Africa.

In a similar way to Eurafrika, the notion (but not the term) of France-Afrique first emerged during the late-nineteenth century 'Scramble for Africa' and evolved throughout the early twentieth century, particularly capturing the imagination of scholars during the inter-war period. However, unlike Eurafrika, France-Afrique was rooted in the French 'civilising mission', using the exportation of French identity and practices to maintain France's position as a superior power in the world order. This is exemplified by the increasing political and public references to the French empire throughout the 1930s, even under Leon Blum's Popular Front which had initially sought to distance itself from imperialism, but as humanitarian colonialists moderated their policy for the empire (Chipman, 1989). This idea may have interested certain Algerian political leaders in the 1930s, such as Ferhat Abbas who at the time advocated assimilation as a means to securing political rights for the majority (Evans, 2012, p. 69). After the outbreak of the Algerian War in 1954, within the FLN ideas such as France-Afrique were associated with the so-called *beni-oui-ouis* (yes-men) in the Algerian parliament and the Bachaga Boualem – loyal *caïds* or landowners who identified themselves as French (Horne, 2002, p. 170; Evans, 2012).

the neo-colonial networks between French and African political leaders. Subsequently it has been used by scholars, politicians and the media to describe post-colonial Franco-African relations.

It was in this climate in the 1930s that politicians drew the attention of the French public to the empire in order to celebrate its longevity and support its future which had begun to be questioned as talk of self-determination and reform increased. One way in which the empire was celebrated was through public exhibitions which had proved popular across Europe. First emerging in the 1880s, colonial expositions were used to 'sell' the concept of empire to the white masses. However, there continues to be scholarly debate about whether these exhibitions were able to successfully engage European publics with the empire and, in the case of France, demonstrate proof of the efficacy of the civilising mission. Nevertheless, the Paris colonial exhibition of 1931 illustrates the emergence of 'Greater France' into the national culture, one which was not just for the colonisers and the high-level politicians of the country, but also for the wider French population (Evans, 2005). Not only did these exhibitions demonstrate the effectiveness of the civilising mission to the French public but also the benefits of empire to France. In doing so, French politicians were able to draw on the development or *mise en valeur* of the empire, which was presented as mutually beneficial, in order to make it more profitable.

Not all French people regarded the empire so favourably. Besides the revelation by the Minister for the Colonies, Georges Mandel, in 1938 that the empire only provided France with 4 per cent of raw materials, a number of industrialists saw the empire as competition to France rather than as an opportunity. These industrialists feared that by investing in overseas development projects, metropolitan structures would suffer (Chipman, 1989). This contrasts with the Eurafica rhetoric from colonial lobbyists which called for Africa to be transformed into Europe's powerhouse.

Another facet of the empire which was said to demonstrate the strength of France was the colonial army. With approximately 450,000 African soldiers from the French empire deployed during the First World War, colonial troops became a symbol of France's far-reaching military capabilities as tensions in Europe reached breaking point at the end of the 1930s (Johnson, 2002, p. 239). Beyond the controversies which have captivated scholars of France's colonial army, the symbolism of the African troops remained an important factor of French colonial rule.⁷ With France's ability to call on and conscript soldiers from across Africa, and indeed the rest of its extensive empire, France could maintain its position as a global power. The state's ability to react to events and put sufficient boots on the ground across the globe enhanced its geo-strategic options and remained fundamental to France's foreign policy throughout the twentieth century.

⁷ This is a vast literature which has dealt with the recruitment, treatment, recognition (or lack thereof) and contributions of the colonial armies from their inception to the present day. In-depth studies of this subject include but are not limited to: Nancy Lawler (1992); Ruth Ginio (2017); Eric T. Jennings (2015).

By the late 1950s, in light of the pressures of the Algerian War and increasing international questions about France's place in Africa and, indeed, in the world, France drew on these geo-political and strategic options. France-Afrique, often under the guise of Eurafrika, was pursued not just by marginal French or African politicians, rather it became the basis for France's international relations. Thus, with France posing as the leader of European and African relations, and many of these relations in fact taking place between French and African politicians and planners, in France Eurafrika essentially became the politically accepted label for France-Afrique. It was at this time that this notion of Eurafrika was incorporated into a number of political constructs, both real and imagined in order to serve French political needs both within the empire and within international contexts. The presentation of France's ideas and constructs for its relationship with Africa came to be particularly important to French planners operating on the international stage. They especially became conscious of how these relations would be perceived by their international partners and competitors such as Britain.

French Commonwealth or Community?

With the largest spheres of influence in Africa, coming as a result of their respective empires, British and French colonial policy has long been the subject of comparative studies. Rather than highlighting the differences between the two approaches to colonial rule, recent trends prefer to both compare and contrast the policies of the two European countries (Pitts, 2005; Thomas, 2014; Warson, 2015). With the shift away from using labels such as 'empire' taking place much earlier in Britain, during the First World War the British Commonwealth became the substituted term for Britain's colonies. British decolonisation gradually took place following the end of the Second World War, with many of the former colonies becoming members of the post-colonial organisation; the Commonwealth. This notion has customarily been understood as a uniquely 'British' concept whereby Britain's empire-like features were discarded, standing apart from the French late colonial constructs of the French Union and the French Community (Karatini, 2002, p. 108).

In June 1959, Jacques Soustelle spoke at Chatham House, the influential international affairs think tank where frank and honest discussion of foreign relations was and is still today encouraged. Soustelle spoke on the prospects of the Fifth Republic which was barely a year old at this time. Moulding his discourse for a predominantly British audience, he explained Charles de Gaulle's Fifth Republic constitution referendum of 1958, and what exactly the 'states of the overseas territories' were voting for:

The other territories chose to become autonomous States not within the French Republic but within a common framework called 'Community' and I think the best way to translate it in English would be to

call it a Commonwealth, in which the States are directly in relation with the President of the Republic, who is at the same time the President of the Community (Commonwealth), and not with the Government of the French Republic. I mean that I, for instance, as a Minister of the Government of the French Republic have no power in the States of the Community; the only exception is if by agreement between their Government and ours they decide to ask us to do this or that in their territory.⁸

Where most contemporary literature would render the Communauté Française with the direct translation 'Community', Soustelle prefers to adopt the British term because he regards them as parallel institutions. He did not regard it as an organisation through which the French Republic could retain power over the 'States of the Community', rather as a series of states working in conjunction with France under the figurehead of the President of the Republic. Guy Pervillé (1992) suggests that these were not synonyms, but rather that France sought, under de Gaulle, to transform the Community into a French Commonwealth which would be composed of a confederation of sovereign states.

Following the 1956 Suez crisis, relations between France and Britain and the US were strained. In March 1955, France had hosted the second Bilderberg conference of European and North American political elite and industry, finance, academia and media experts in Barbizon, sending multiple French representatives including Guy Mollet. However, by 1958, following Charles de Gaulle's return, French participation in this 'Western' power bloc conference had diminished, with very few and less politically important figures featuring in the attendee lists. In 1959, only one French participant was sent, potentially as a token observer of the meeting. This reflects de Gaulle's public position in the same year towards the US and his new policy for France. Although he still supported the West's stance against the USSR, he was no longer willing for France to stock American nuclear weapons or contribute French forces to NATO. De Gaulle accused the US of not sharing allied secrets with France and maintaining a monopoly over the command of any future nuclear war. He feared the risks of France being involved in a nuclear war that Frenchmen had no control over, highlighting his argument for France's right to defend its own borders (Vaisse, 1998). This demonstrates de Gaulle's determination to take France in a separate direction from its Anglo-Saxon allies, seeking to form its own European links in the Common Market and international support in the form of multi-lateral relations with the Community.

⁸ The Chatham House Online Archive, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Jacques Soustelle, *Prospects for the Fifth Republic* (n°8/2631), June 4, 1959, p. 13.

In the CIA reports⁹ (which are made publicly accessible in the archive section of the US government website) of the constitutional changes to France and her empire following the 1958 referendum, the US understanding of France's situation was summarised as follows:

The French claim to great power status is based on France's vast territorial holdings in Africa. In a move to retain some position in the area in the face of growing nationalism, the French gambled by scrapping their colonial controls and substituting a Community concept. Individual territories are given virtual autonomy in domestic affairs, but France in effect retains control in certain important Community-wide fields such as foreign affairs, defense, and finance (USA Central Intelligence Agency, 1959, p. 10).¹⁰

The use of the terms 'gamble' and 'scrapping' suggest doubt about France's changes to the empire. They give the impression that France is creating instability for itself and this new Community. By retaining the direct English translation of the Communauté (Community), the US is able to keep the two institutions separate; the appropriate model from the fragile, risky construct.

Although de Gaulle attempted to distance French foreign policy from that of the US and the UK, he still required their support as allies, for example at the United Nations (UN), in order to permit the French nuclear development program to continue. Therefore, whilst in London in his role as Minister of the Sahara and responsible for French nuclear development, Soustelle used his visit to the British Parliament in order to promote France's newly developed foreign policy and strengthen its ties with its Anglophone allies. It is therefore understandable that his speech at Chatham house should draw comparisons between the Commonwealth and the Community to reassure the UK that France was not behaving in an exceptional way. This is reiterated in his article published the same year, which demonstrated the overlap in policy over the Sahara and the Israeli desert, the Negev, which became part of the newly created state of Israel in 1948 and was home to many of the country's military bases. Here he highlights the 'true' enemies of western economies:

The Suez events have proved that as long as we depend on the whines [sic.] of any Middle-Eastern dictator to feed our industry, we don't stand a chance in this hard world of today. Pan-Arabic fanaticism and racial hatred have a stranglehold on our economy and on those of western European nations as a whole. The only means to force ourselves and the world from the blackmail of this new form of imperialism is to develop the Sahara in order to get our oil from French territory. This implies, of course, that France must not be cut off from the Sahara and that she must keep Algeria at any price.¹¹

He also uses this opportunity to demonstrate France's claims to the Sahara, based on an urgent need to secure energy interests. By using the threat of pan-Arabism, Soustelle is appealing to US and UK

⁹ USA Central Intelligence Agency Electronic Reading Room, NIE 22-59, Director of Central Intelligence, *The Outlook for France* (n°383), April 21, 1959, pp.1-17. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP61-00549R000200110003-9.pdf> (accessed August 10, 2017).

¹⁰ Ibid, p.10.

¹¹ Archives Nationales, 112AJ23, Jacques Soustelle, *French and Israeli deserts: the Sahara and the Negev*, ms, 1959, pp.1-5.

fears and playing on these in order to justify the Algerian War. By doing this he hopes to secure 'Anglo-Saxon' support at the UN during the debates on Algeria. This section is also provocative because of Soustelle's assertion that pan-Arabism was a form of neo-imperialism which is ironic coming from the pen of a former colonial governor and a (then current) colonial cabinet minister. However, it is used to draw on the Anglophone fears of loss of energy control and geo-strategic control in the Middle-East, distancing the Arab world from the so-called West.

Not only does Soustelle justify France attempting to keep Algeria, but also reiterates that the new French Fifth Republic is not acting in a way so dissimilar to the UK. For example:

I personally believe that it will be a reality within a few years and that the erstwhile useless wastes will become the main powerhouse of Eurafica along the great North-South axis from the North Sea to the Congo. South of the Sahara proper, the new African republics of our Commonwealth, who only recently achieved statehood, are becoming more and more interested in sharing the wealth of the Sahara through voluntary association with the OCS – a State corporation devoted to the promotion of Saharan resources.¹²

Soustelle normalises France's claims over the desert, referring to it as a 'useless waste' and conjuring images and connotations of an empty or barren space that only France was able to make profitable. In doing so tapping into the old colonial stereotype whereby settlers used to claim they had 'made the desert bloom'. It is also interesting that Soustelle should refer to France's former African empire south of the Sahara as a series of republics. This suggests that the Community was made up of states which reflected France and were equal to the French government within this multi-lateral institution. This assertion reinforces his foreign policy arguments about France and it also suggests that Soustelle believed French colonial rule to have been successful; enabling these new nation-states to emerge.

Analysis of the French Commonwealth or French Community demonstrates that there was a two-tier approach to French foreign policy following the birth of the Fifth Republic. De Gaulle officially turned France away from the US, the UK and NATO and looked towards creating tighter links between France, the Community and other Western European countries. Part of the country's new image was based on its nuclear and economic power, which relied on the Sahara as a geostrategic space and industrial zone. However, development of nuclear weapons was dependent on the UN not blocking the test plans which were to take place in the Sahara. It is therefore understandable that Soustelle took such a remarkably different approach to De Gaulle when presenting French energy policy on the international stage.

¹² Ibid, p.2.

At the time of voicing his views on the Community and the Commonwealth, Soustelle was the head of the O CRS, the Délégué Général, and the mouthpiece of the organisation. He used his position to promote the O CRS, and also link it to his understanding of France and the empire within an uncertain international context. The O CRS was the body which would secure French interests in the Sahara through industrialisation and the construction of an infrastructure that would facilitate this economic development. Therefore, he perceived that the economic and political success of France and the French Community during this shift towards Europe and away from the 'West', lay with the O CRS and the Sahara.

Friendship Groups

The notion of France-Afrique introduced the idea of a more equal colonial and post-colonial relationship, with France 'associating' itself with the individual territories. Within this construct, France is the instigator, and Africa acts not as a unit, but as a series of colonies, and later states, operating with the metropole, but not necessarily with each other. As with Eurafrica, the French vision of France-Afrique was of a multilateral geopolitical unit. President of the French National Assembly, Gaullist and well-known Eurafricanist, Jacques Chaban-Delmas emphasises this in his Palais des Beaux-Arts speech in Brussels in 1959:

Pour sa part, le continent africain, au regard des préoccupations qui sont les nôtres ce soir, ne présente aucune unité, bien au contraire.¹³

He then highlights that it was individual territories, rather than regional groups, who sought continuity in their relations with France:

Une...catégorie [of African states] comporte les jeunes Etats qui ont décidé librement d'associer leur sort à la République Française, au sein de la Communauté franco-africaine dont le sens principal d'évolution balance présentement entre : fédération et confédération.¹⁴

On the face of it, Chaban-Delmas, who rather patronises these countries by referring to them as 'young states', suggests that the member territories of the French Community sought to remain linked with France. He also uses the language of federation and confederation that is used by the leaders of the emerging states, including Senghor, who sought a federation of African states as a natural successor to the French empire (Cooper, 2014).

Beyond the dates of independence for France's African empire in 1960 and 1962, *coopération* became an important tool in framing relations between the former colonisers and colonised territories. Relationships (official and otherwise) between France and these newly independent

¹³ Archives Nationales, 101AJ19, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, *Perspectives Eurafricaines*, October 21, 1959, p. 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

states were fostered by the late colonial state, but were based on a certain level of mutual consent and conditions of France providing a certain amount of “voluntary” financial aid’ to the African countries (Bossuat, 2003, p. 431). While these agreements were presented as official ‘technical assistance’ that would be funded by the French Department of Cooperation, many other ministries including Education, Defence and the Interior also contributed to ‘aid’ programs in Africa. When these programs were first initiated in 1960, they were framed as a transition from the colonial system to a policy of co-operation based on equality and partnership, but one in which France would retain a certain level of influence over African affairs and a presence within its ‘*pré carré*’ (Chafer, 2002).

While it was presented by de Gaulle as a way of ensuring continued relations between France and Africa and continued support from the metropolitan state to these countries in the form of economic and technical assistance, scholars have since begun to unpick the many layers of these complex relations (Chafer & Keese, 2013). This policy may have come under the special purview of the French President, but it was carefully run by the devoted Gaullist Jacques Foccart who presided over the Franco-African Community and was secretary general to the president for African and Madagascan affairs (1960-1974). Not only did Foccart help construct a network of ‘special relationships’ between public figures in France and Africa, but the ‘assistance’ given to these countries came largely in the form of economic ‘loans’ and the systematic transfer of technical experts and teachers to these regions, intensifying issues of ‘dependency, clientelism, irresponsibility’ (Bossuat, 2003, pp. 433-434).

This policy has commonly referred to relations between France and post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa, however de Gaulle claimed in September 1960 that there was a need for ‘exemplary’ cooperation in Algeria, that without France, the country would ‘fall into an abyss of massacres, poverty, and disorder’ (Pickles, 1963, p. 15). Even though these claims amounted to little more than threats and may have had more to do with securing certain guarantees for the French of Algeria once the country became independent, *coopération* between France and Algeria came to be an important theme in the Evian Negotiations that led to Algeria’s independence. Within these discussions de Gaulle’s negotiators pressed their hope that the GPRA would be willing to bring one particular region under a cooperation agreement; the Sahara (Connelly, 2002, p. 359).

In 1960, before the dust had settled on the newly independent African states, Chaban-Delmas led the charge to secure France-Afrique within a network of *coopération*. In conjunction with the inter-parliamentary association ‘Europe-Afrique’ and on behalf of the Assemblée Nationale he invited the

new states to join *groupes d'amitiés*. According to Marius Durbet, a Gaullist député and one of the key organisers of the *groupes d'amitiés*, they were designed to:

recevoir, dans un proche avenir, des parlementaires des Etats visités; les liens personnels noués au cours de telles visites s'avèrent en effet un puissant facteur de compréhension et de rapprochement.¹⁵

In his role within the *Commission des affaires culturelles, familiales et sociales* where he was charged with investigating the interest in creating such a network, Durbet reported to Chaban-Delmas on the encouragement he received from both African and French officials.

Nous avons été très heureux de pouvoir vous apporter ce matin le témoignage de l'amitié manifestée aux membres des missions, partout magnifiquement reçus par les Présidents des Assemblées des jeunes Républiques africaines et accueillis de la façon la plus cordiale par les parlementaires de ces Etats. Les groupes d'amitié, dont la création est souhaitée aussi bien du côté africain que du côté français, devraient, ainsi que j'ai eu l'honneur de vous le proposer ce matin, présenter un entière et être créés sous votre Haute Autorité afin de pouvoir jouer leur rôle dans le maintien et le développement des bonnes relations franco-africaines.¹⁶

This Europe-Afrique association is curious, because on the face of it, it appears to be a manifestation of Eurafrique. However, with its membership, from the executive committee to the general assembly, made up entirely of French politicians it appears to rather have been a French organisation with Franco-African aims. With the creation of *groupes d'amitiés*, the association may be logically perceived as an attempt at post-colonial multi-lateral relations. However, each *groupe* was in fact a partnership between France and an African state, for example the 'France-Sénégal *groupe d'amitié*'. This suggests that Europe-Afrique was a network of early French bilateral relations under the guise of a multi-lateral European relationship with the former French empire.¹⁷

Conclusions on a French-led Eurafrica

Thus far this chapter has demonstrated how the evolving nature of the term Eurafrica led to increasing connections, for European planners, between space, European unity, peace and prosperity. In the case of France this led to greater ties, in the minds of elites, between the metropole and its colonial lands as well as to the idea of a Franco-African space which could bring profit to Europe as a whole. Eurafrica was therefore viewed by certain planners in France as an attractive opportunity both in economic and geostrategic terms. On the one hand, it could ensure the place of France's African Empire, in particular Algeria, in the fledgling European Economic Community thereby easing trade negotiations. On the other hand, it would enable France to emerge

¹⁵ Archives Nationales, 101AJ19, Marius Durbet, *Lettre à Chaban-Delmas, Président de l'Assemblée nationale*, May 3, 1961, p.1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Archives Nationales, 101AJ19, Association Parlementaire Europe-Afrique, *Bulletin* (n°8), October 15, 1961, pp.1-21.

as the leader of a Eurafrikan bloc, one which could rival the Soviet-led Eastern power and at the same time withstand the West (US and Britain). This was far from a fanciful notion that existed on paper. It was certainly taken seriously by the governments of the 1950s who sought to implement Eurafrikan both through negotiations on the place of European colonies in the Treaty of Rome and through French appeals for wider European investment in industrial development projects in Africa.

By the late 1950s the overriding attitude amongst French political leaders was that Franco-African relations should be prioritised. The birth of the Fifth Republic witnessed a marked change in direction in terms of how France should and did see itself. While European construction continued to be central to French foreign policy, Franco-African relations in the form of Eurafrikan became central to reinforcing France's position on the world stage. France-Afrique emerged as a Fifth Republic version of Greater France, with political thinkers using *coopération*, the French Community and the *groupes d'amitié* to put it into practice.

This chapter has so far demonstrated that, even before the establishment of the bilateral *coopération* agreements, French politicians had a tendency to portray their central idea for continued control in Africa in various ways which would play to their diplomatic, strategic or political advantage. This was the case with the French Commonwealth, which remained in essence the French Community, but could be translated for Anglophone audiences in order to make it more familiar and accessible. Furthermore, what may have at first seemed to be a demonstration of multi-lateralism, as with the *groupes d'amitiés*, on further investigation was revealed to be another form of French bilateral relations. This is because, as with Eurafrikan, French late colonial policy relied on keeping Africa divided, with France at the centre of all future relations. This policy was not explicitly French. During the debates on the *loi cadre* in 1956, certain African leaders, led by Houphouët-Boigny had opposed the formation of African federal assemblies and federations. Houphouët-Boigny was particularly concerned that this federalism would signify the concentration of political power in the Federal capitals of Dakar and Brazzaville (and away from his own, richer territory of Côte d'Ivoire) (Keese, 2003). Nevertheless, multi-lateral relations would have risked, in the eyes of Gaullists, encouraging pan-Africanism which could lead to a comparable loss of power to that which France had experienced in the Middle East.

Concerns about how to maintain colonial control coalesced in the late 1950s in the Sahara in the form of the OARS. While this project was not instigated by de Gaulle, it was he that continued its work through his close friend and Minister of the Sahara (1959-1960), Jacques Soustelle. This project lasted beyond the independence of the AOF and AEF in 1960 but was ended with the signing of the Evian Agreements in 1962. These ideas and reimaginings of empire that were fostered by French

planners, were used by these same actors to establish, implement and promote the OCRS. However, it is not possible to fully examine this organisation without first understanding how the Sahara came to be so intricately important to France. This history and the key features of the French administration of the Sahara, will establish the framework for the role of the OCRS in the non-departure of France from the region in the late-colonial period.

French Planning in the Desert (1798-1950)

French interest in the Sahara evolved throughout the mid to late- nineteenth century colonisation and military administration of the region. During a century of European occupation, French popular political conceptions of the Sahara alternated between the desert being bare and empty, to the exoticisation of the land and the people who live there, to it being a sea, like the Mediterranean to be crossed or bridged.

Pre-invasion roots and interest in the Sahara

For centuries, the Sahara has fascinated European states, especially France, which has been intimately involved with these lands since the nineteenth century. The story of the Sahara has in the past been told in a 'fragmentary and incomplete way' (Porch, 1986, p. ix). This reflects the nature of the French colonisation of this land, which was by no means courtesy of a straight-forward invasion. However, before the invasion and colonisation of these lands can be discussed, the reasons for and interest in attempting such a feat should first be addressed.

Before 1830, French interactions with the Sahara can predominantly be linked to the efforts of individual explorers and the agency of societies such as the *Société de Géographie* which encouraged and funded scientific expeditions. In eighteenth century France, there had been an increase in wealth and leisure. The end of the Seven Years' War (1754-1763) meant that more men had the leisure time and means to travel. Moreover, there was a rise in the popularity of travel books and certain men felt the desire to satisfy popular curiosity on the source of the Nile, the mysteries of Timbuktu and the wonders of the Niger. Many of these explorers were also overcome with visions of fame and wealth and hoped to duplicate the success others had had in various parts of the world (Porch, 1986, p. 14). Since the 1790s, Europeans had been successfully exploring the Saharan desert and ranging across its length and breadth, mapping its main features.¹⁸ However, such expeditions were long, dangerous and costly. The difficulties encountered by explorers were far from

¹⁸ The African Association of London funded a number of Saharan expeditions in the 1790s, including Friedrich Hornemann's voyage to Hausaland, north of the Niger, which began in 1797 (Robinson & Smith, 1999, p.126).

discouraging and only fuelled a need throughout the nineteenth century to create more suitable conditions for exploring and traversing these lands.

Exploration and the gathering of 'scientific knowledge' about the Sahara came to be an important facet of France's relationship with the desert region. The French army reached the Sahara by the north and the south gradually, setting out from Senegal's Saint-Louis in 1818 and Algiers in 1830, with colonial explorers travelling these regions at the same time (Blin, 1990, p. 70). Early French military interest in the Sahara can be linked to the invasion of Algiers and the violent conquest of what is today known as the Algerian Sahara. At this time the French could only conceive of lands in terms of states, and a state, at its base, defined by its borders (Lefebvre, 2011) .

One of the most famous accounts of French exploration into the Sahara was of the pioneer Auguste René Caillié who travelled the desert in the late 1820s with the aim of being the first European to reach and return from Timbuktu. In April 1827, René Caillié, disguised as a Muslim, set out from Kakondy in Guinea on what would be a year-long journey to Timbuktu, interrupted by a five-month illness contracted in present-day Ivory Coast. Caillié was motivated by his desire to visit the African interior and also by the 10,000-franc prize of the Grande Médaille d'Or des Explorations which was offered by the Société de Géographie. Rather than embarking on a large-scale and costly expedition with an extensive entourage as was then the custom with other explorers, Caillié spent much of his voyage with a companion or by himself. He relied on his studies of Arabic and Islam to enable interaction with the locals, using tales of his fictional experience as a trader and his wishes to follow the lifestyles of West African tribesmen in order to convince hosts of his purpose in Africa (Caillié, 1830).

Caillié was not the first European to reach Timbuktu. The British officer Major Gordon Laing took that honour; however, he was the first to quit the city and return safely to Europe. Laing was murdered in September 1826 upon his attempt to leave Timbuktu and was therefore unable to enjoy his posthumously awarded Grande Médaille d'Or which was also presented to Caillié in 1827. In a time when explorers would often return from their voyages with lavish descriptions of the lush landscapes they had 'discovered', Caillié set himself apart with his almost disappointed account of Timbuktu. Upon his initial relief at arriving safely in the city and giving thanks to God for his successful passage, Caillié was confronted with an unexpected vision of the city:

This duty being ended [having prayed his thanks to God], I looked around and found that the sight before me, did not answer my expectations. I had formed a totally different idea of the grandeur and wealth of Timbuctoo. The city presented, at first view, nothing but a mass of ill-looking houses, built of earth. Nothing was to be seen in all directions but immense plains of quicksand of a yellowish white colour. The sky was a pale red as far as the horizon: all nature wore a dreary aspect, and the most profound silence prevailed; not even the warbling of a bird was to be heard (Caillié, 1830, p. 49).

Although he did concede:

Still, though cannot account for the impression, there was something imposing in the aspect of a great city, raised in the midst of sands, and the difficulties surmounted by its founders cannot fail to excite admiration (Caillié, 1830, p. 49).

Caillié's interpretation of the city contrasts with the exotic accounts of Timbuktu and other Saharan regions as described by Gordon Laing and other explorers of the nineteenth century (Wise, 2001). Nevertheless, Saharan cities like Timbuktu captured the imagination of the French public.

Although celebrated explorers, like Caillié, Henri Duveyrier¹⁹ and Charles de Foucauld²⁰, certainly impacted on the French experience in the Sahara, it was the army that was instrumental to the conquest and colonisation of the desert region west of Egypt. The region which came to be known as the French Sahara was conquered incrementally, but never colonised in the same respect as Algeria which became a settler colony²¹. From the 1840s, French army policy in the Sahara was determined by a dependence on allies and the challenges presented by operating in the desert. The army had limited resources, was compounded with transportation problems²² and was forced to co-operate with local tribes including Tuaregs and Moors who continued practices long condemned by the French, such as slavery (Klein, 1998, p. 74).

This form of military administration was conducted by General Bugeaud's Arab bureaux which were introduced to Algeria in 1841 in order to gather knowledge about the newly acquired territory and to maintain order (Hannoum, 2001, p. 345). Not only this, but they were a way of sustaining communications between the French military administration and Muslim Algeria and enabled officers to learn the local language and study indigenous culture (Strachan, 2011, p. 215). For over a century, until 1944, these military offices were used to contain Algerians and restrict their liberties through legal text and administrative practices, governing the countryside and its populations. This method of authority was largely unregulated and common practice by French officers was to use the bureau to repress and dispossess local populations (McDougall, 2017, pp. 120-121).

During the initial colonisation of Algeria between 1830 and 1848, the French used Algerian notables to retain control over various zones across the Saharan Atlas. For example, Ahmed ben Salem, who was head of the elite family from Laghouat, who held strategic control over the 'door to the desert' and an opponent of the emir Abdelkader (Brower, 2009, p. 38), was named head of the central Algerian Sahara in 1844. However, this method of retaining control was not especially effective, with

¹⁹ Who travelled to El Goléa and studied Tuareg tribes.

²⁰ Extensively explored Morocco and settled as a monk in Tamanrasset.

²¹ Where Algeria experienced increased numbers of European settlers fleeing Europe in the late nineteenth century for a number of political and financial reasons, the Sahara does not have the same settler history.

²² Owing to the lack of route options and desert-resistant methods.

none of the local rulers able to maintain their power. In order to support such leaders, the French would use small garrisons of French soldiers. These garrisons were also a physical representation of French control over the Algerian Sahara. However, these garrisons were soon overpowered or mutinied, as was the case with Biskra in 1844 (Brower, 2009, pp. 39-40). The mid-nineteenth century is characterised by a push-pull attempt to retain control of areas that the French conquered, and it was not until they had expanded into the southern zones of the modern-day Algerian Sahara in the late nineteenth century that they were able to report any success in holding onto the areas they invaded. In 1848 the bureaux were replaced by the administrative *cercles* which enabled a military leader to maintain control over a vast area. These were regarded as more sustainable for France's holdings in the Sahara and continued to be used for much of the rest of the century.

While Algeria was a part of metropolitan France and divided into three departments²³, much of the lands south of the Tell Atlas Mountains were not included in this departmentalisation. Algeria experienced a long and difficult transition from military rule to civilian rule, with officers making way for politicians in the day to day running of the administrative regions which came to be under the control of the Government-General of Algeria. The structure and administration of these departments throughout the colonial period is complex and yet well known, thanks in large part to the work of historians such as Charles-Robert Ageron (1993; 1994) and Benjamin Stora (1991; 2001) and contemporary work which seeks to untangle the narratives of the *communes mixtes* and the administrative structures (Mussard, 2012; Clark 2016). However, in the Sahara it was quite a different matter. The conquest of the Sahara was even more gradual than that in Algeria, lasting into the early twentieth century. It remains contested as to when precisely the Sahara became 'French', some such as Brower (2009) would say it was with the massacres of the Kel Ahaggar Tuareg at Tit in 1902 and the introduction of the December 24, 1902 law. This created the Territoires du Sud, administered by the army under the authority of the Government-General of Algeria and composed of the military regions encompassing Aïn-Sefra, Oasis, Ghardaïa and Touggourt. Other scholars, however, including Baz Lecocq (2010) and Martin Evans (2012) recall the continued resistance to French rule, beyond the submission of the Ahaggar Tuareg and the introduction of this legislation. Evans (2012) argues that it was much later, in the 1920s that the southern areas of the (Algerian) Sahara were brought under French military rule.

By the time that Tamanrasset (an oasis city located in the Ahaggar Mountains) was defeated and a peace treaty between France and the Ahaggar Tuareg had been agreed upon in 1905, the French had firmly established a pattern of placing local leaders in control under the French flag. In some

²³ Under the 1848 law.

places these leaders were compensated with weapons and a salary. However, having learned from past mistakes, they resolved to use long-range military patrols or 'administrative tours' in order to ensure that these areas across the Sahara remained under French control (Porch, 1986, pp. 272-273). These patrols were made up of *Sahariens* (Saharans)²⁴, heterogeneous forces made up of mokhaznis, spahis, blacks, tirailleurs and Chaamba²⁵ and were often led by French officers. Such forces were well equipped to invade and control the Saharan regions of Algeria.

This concept of conquering a Saharan territory and leaving a garrison to retain control was widely used in French colonial Africa but were first employed by a military chief in the Sahara. In January 1894, Etienne Bonnier sailed troops down the Niger and landed at Timbuktu. Since there was little in the way of defence for the locals, the city submitted immediately. Bonnier left a garrison to maintain control of France's latest acquisition and continued on towards Goundam where he and his remaining force met their untimely fate at the hands of the Tuaregs (Klein, 1998, p. 73). This demonstrates that even in French West Africa, the administration of the Sahara was left in the hands of the military, rather than attempting to establish any sort of civilian administration such as there was in Algiers or Dakar.

Perceptions and the Trans-Saharan Railway

The idea that the Sahara could be used as a bridge between France's territories in North and West Africa was a popular French political perception in the nineteenth century, following the invasion of Algiers. By the 1870s, French ambitions were to build a railway which would not only enable more secure and more economical transport, but also represent a strategic and economic link between North and West Africa. With such a railroad, France could avoid the more dangerous sea routes which were often controlled by the British Navy. Railway imperialism was in full flow across other European empires, notably the British Empire in North Africa, with engineering taking a prominent role in securing imperial interests. This was demonstrated in the mid-nineteenth century with the construction of the Suez Canal (Strachan, 2011, p. 212). The activities of the British in their colonies arguably gave agency to France's own ambitions and investors became interested in supporting expeditions which could lead to the construction of a Saharan railway. Furthermore, this new

²⁴ This was a term which was commonly used by the French for nomadic populations, but it was also used by the French military in their official documentation to classify the non-French troops, that is to say French subjects who legally did not originate from France or Europe.

²⁵ These were commonly used French names for different units of the French army in the Sahara. The mokhzanis were official troops of the Moroccan makhzan that were under French command and were used in Morocco and other parts of the Saharan desert to impose order. Spahi were cavalymen from Algeria but in French service; the term 'blacks' was an official category to describe the black African troops; tirailleur were a colonial light infantry unit and Chaamba were originally a Sulaymi Arab nomadic tribe who traditionally raised camels in the northern Sahara of modern-day Algeria, see for example discourse in SHD 1H3247.

approach to imperial rule demonstrates a shift in the focus of the civilising mission, away from French exportation of language, values, and political, economic and educational systems. That is not to say that these efforts halted. Indeed, the civilising mission continued to be pursued well into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, we can see the advent of development projects being linked to this civilising mission in the late nineteenth century with the exportation of European engineering demonstrating the emergence of new priorities for France in its governance of the empire.

Although plans for a trans-Saharan railway had been proposed in the 1860s, it wasn't until Charles de Freycinet became Minister of the Public Works in 1879 that these proposals were seriously considered.²⁶ As Minister, Freycinet set up a commission which would look into these ideas and potentially execute them. This was a major undertaking, with around 40 politicians, scientists and businessmen involved, including famed explorers such as Henri Duveyrier. The commission at first ordered four expeditions, the first three, run by the engineer Justin Pouyanne, the architect Auguste Choisy and the explorer Paul Soleillet, were designed to find the best path from North and West Africa into the desert. The final mission, run by Paul Flatters was to seek the best path across the Sahara itself (Heffernan, 1989).

Lieutenant-Colonel Flatters was a French soldier who hoped to capitalise on this railroad imperialism both for the benefit of France, and for his own career interests. Having served in the Sahara and as a commander at Laghouat, he saw himself as the perfect candidate for an exploratory and scientific survey mission to prepare for the construction of the Trans-Saharan railway. Along with a contingent of Europeans and Algerian *tirailleurs*, guides and cameleers, Flatters left Constantine in January 1880 and headed through Touggourt, Ouargla and Ain Taiba. The journey was marred by logistical difficulties and conflicts, both internally between the French and their Chaamba guides, and by opposition from a party of Ajjer Tuareg. On April 21, Flatters ordered a retreat north and swiftly returned to Paris in order to present a positive report and secure funding from the Ministry of Public Works for a second expedition to return to Ouargla (Strachan, 2011, p. 212). Despite a drop in enthusiasm within the French government and amongst geographic society figures for a further campaign alongside criticism from renowned explorers such as Henri Duveyrier, Flatters was nevertheless able to secure enough funding to return to Ouargla in December 1880 (Heffernan, 1989, p. 347). However, this time he had far fewer French officers accompanying him and was consistently followed and harassed by a group of Ahaggar Tuareg. Finally, on 16th February 1881, Flatters' unit was routed by the same group of Tuaregs and Flatters was killed. With a significantly

²⁶ Both the Montpellier engineer Alphonse Duponchel and the explorer Paul Soleillet had submitted proposals for a trans-Saharan railway in the 1860s to no avail (Heffernan, 1989).

reduced party, as Flatters' second in command and many of the other officers and men were also fatally attacked, the remaining survivors turned north. However, many of these perished as a result of lack of food and water, fatigue and further attacks. On 4th April 1881 those few who were left of Flatters' original group (none of whom were European) arrived in Ouargla, just as news about the fateful expedition reached Paris (Heffernan, 1989, pp. 347-348).

Initially, public reaction in both Paris and Algiers to the deaths of Flatters and the other French soldiers was one of outrage. However, relatively quickly the tragedy was forgotten, arguably because it occurred in a faraway land which was well known to be dangerous. Strachan (2011, p. 213), however, expresses his surprise that Flatters was not the subject of much acclaim nor was the tragedy used in Paris to lobby 'for an enhanced role for the military'. Although, he does surmise that Flatters had few qualities to either endear him to the public nor which made him suitable for command. Brower (2009, p. 241) notes that after a short period of outrage in the metropole and several enquiries into the mission, no firm answers were uncovered to explain its failure. The head of Arab affairs in Algiers, Louis Rinn concluded that Flatters failed because of his clumsy leadership and misplaced European ideas and principles of civilization which did not fit with those of the nomadic Saharan populations (Brower, 2009, pp. 241-242). Moreover, the deteriorating public status of the military by the 1880s, particularly in the eyes of many of the European settlers who remembered the interference of the army in the Algerian government's affairs following the anti-French insurrection in Aurès in 1879, may have contributed to the relative French Algerian ambivalence over the deaths of Flatters and his European contingent in the Sahara (Strachan, 2011, p. 213).

This incident contributed to the evolving perception of the Sahara and its use for France. Reports retrieved from the fateful Flatters Mission describe the Ahaggar Massif as 'absolutely desolate, sterile, and, so to speak, a desert in the full meaning of the word'. These reports fuelled the idea that the desert itself was not worth developing and that while it had no material value in itself it could be put to use to improve France's access to the sub-Saharan African colonies. Alongside French perceptions of the Sahara as a sea to be bridged in order to reach colonial possessions in sub-Saharan Africa, it was also long-perceived as barren (Brower, 2009). Imaginings of the Sahara as an empty stage on which Europe could operate, long preceded the French military conquest of the desert, but also outlasted the late nineteenth century failed attempts at industrial operations such as the Flatters Mission. For example, the French army came to view the large desert spaces as an arena upon which they could demonstrate their 'grandiose, transcontinental territorial power, gained and maintained by reckless courage and political skill' (Scheele & McDougall, 2012, p. 2).

The idea that, in the nineteenth century, the Sahara was not regarded as a 'thing in itself', but rather a 'transparent medium for trans-Saharan trade, above all linking sub-Saharan economies and those of the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and Europe' is a prevalent line of argument amongst certain historians (Horden, 2012, p. 26). The Sahara has often been compared to the Mediterranean in the sense of it as a setting for which transport is required and therefore the local environment (the peoples and cultures) were of far less interest than the transportation of goods.

Together with the idea of the desert as a sea to be crossed were the exoticised perceptions of the Sahara. Europeans have long been writing about the desert and this intensified during colonial rule in the nineteenth century. With the rising popularity of travel writing and colonial explorers, exotic visions of 'barren landscapes and lush oases in the middle of oceans of sand' and romanticised notions of desert warlords (nomads and *Saharien* colonial officers) became commonplace in France (Sèbe, 2010, p. 306). In fact this craze, or, as Sèbe (2010, p. 306) describes it, 'Saharomania', became so great that by the 1920s 'Saharan novels became a literary trend in inter-war France' and the appeal of the exotic meant that French élites became deeply attached to this desert and France's connection to it.

The Flatters incident is not only useful for understanding how the Sahara was perceived in France, namely a dangerous place that was simultaneously exotic and barren. It also demonstrates the evolving nature of the 'civilising mission' and how France justified their presence in, and later authority over the desert. Strategic and industrial planning of the trans-Saharan railway was an early example of scientists and engineers being involved in developing this region. Although of course this is not unique to the Sahara, since 'experts' in general played a key role in colonial expeditions in European empires, their work could arguably be understood as a precursor to the Saharan development projects executed by France in the mid-twentieth century.

Renewed colonisation

The conquest of the Sahara began in the 1840s with the military's 'pénétration pacifique', using military and scientific experts to explore the desert and incrementally expand French control south of Algiers (Brower, 2009). Porch (1986, pp. 10-11) has outlined the national tensions that gripped France in the 1880s, leading to the expansion of armed forces and, with a lack of conflict, a need for imperial expansion in order to put these weapons and armed men to work. He also underlines that the desert constituted the final piece of the African jigsaw which would leave France in control of uninterrupted lands from the Mediterranean to the Congo (Porch, 1986, p. 130). However, Brower (2009) argued that the conquest was built on more than just a 'scramble for Africa'. He outlines how the early so-called peaceful expansion of the military into the northern most regions of the Sahara

was soon replaced with a violent and brutal process to bring the Saharan lands further south, along with the local populations, both nomadic and sedentary, under French control. This process was masked by deception and self-deception, with colonisers forging a colonial imagination which stressed the importance of the Sahara to France (Brower, 2009, p. 199).

With the submission of the Ahaggar Tuareg in 1902 the conquest of the Sahara was officially completed. During this colonisation of the Sahara, natural resources continued to be sought out by French scientists and engineers. Nevertheless, prior to the end of the Second World War, exploration of the desert was fragmented, with authorities focusing their efforts, for the main part, on the Colomb-Béchar region where the Kenadza coal deposit was used during the war to supply fuel.²⁷ In the 1950s French political and military perceptions of the Sahara altered with the discovery of new types of natural resources.

Discovery of Oil and Gas

As a region long-coveted by France, the Sahara was deemed valuable for the most part because of its strategic importance. However, this changed in 1956 with the discovery of oil in Edjeleh. Between 1945 and 1956, France instigated systematic development of the Sahara in terms of infrastructure and research into the extraction of natural resources and began to establish a framework to organise this activity. Saharan exploration was facilitated by the April 30, 1946 law which called for the systematic exploration of all areas of the French Union in order to seek out all resources for the benefit of the French Union. In 1946, the Superior Reform Commission of the Government-General of Algeria looked to create a series of model villages between the Algerian coast and El-Goléa (an oasis town in central Algeria), therefore the oasis Zelfana in central northern Algeria was created. During this period rural improvement centres were built that especially looked at developing agricultural practices such as the irrigation of date-palms. The Government General of Algeria was particularly focused on the hydraulic improvement of the Sahara. From 1949 a subterranean sea was suspected to exist, extending around 250,000km². However, forages to discover this were fruitless, with limited results (Treyer, 1966, p. 38). Furthermore, in March 1957, Kilian even attempted to convince the French to retain control of Libya because of the presence of oil, and also maintaining that French jurisdiction over a seaside town such as Fezzan would enable crucial access to the sea. However, the Franco-Libyan border was fixed by the UN in 1951 when an independent federal state was created under the governance of constitutional monarch Mohamed Idriss es Senoussi (Idris I), putting an end to French designs on that territory (Cornet, 1956, p. 234). Furthermore, Kilian's

²⁷ ANOM, FM1AFFPOL 2207, Marin, *Sahara: Bulletin Bi-Mensuel de Agence France-Presse* (n°. 00), 25 May, 1957, p.1.

evidence of oil in the Sahara was deemed insufficient and he failed to make much further headway (Sèbe, 2010, p. 306). In fact, oil companies were, for the most part, disinterested in the region and therefore little prospecting activity took place in earnest until the 1950s.

Once prospecting and oil research finally began in 1952, with the creation of the Bureau d'Investissement en Afrique (BIA)²⁸, in a matter of years results were yielded and by 1954 gas was found in Djebel Berga and in 1956 oil was officially discovered in Edjeleh and Hassi Messaoud and so began a period of economic development and prosperity for French interests in the Sahara (Treyer, 1966, p. 40). Treyer (1966) argues that by the 1950s, French public opinion was conscious of the importance of 'their' Sahara for France, the Franc Zone, Algeria and the French Union. This was likely to have enhanced the BIA planners' conviction in the value of their Saharan investments.

Historians such as Keita (2005, p. 103) have underlined that the discovery of oil and gas prompted the French into desiring to unify the region into a single territory. In doing so, the French could retain economic and strategic control over the region. Sèbe (2010, p. 306) highlights this link further by suggesting that oil discovery signified energy independence for France. This is because of estimates which were made, that owning Saharan resources could save the European power \$300 million a year. He therefore argues that this was the basis for uniting the region in order to 'co-ordinate actions'.

From 1950 onwards, the French gaze widened beyond simply seeking out Saharan resources and began planning the strengthening of the administrative organisation of the Sahara. Certain politicians were concerned with safeguarding the united character of the Sahara for political and economic reasons. Such politicians, and also certain specialists, believed that administering the Saharan territories through the Gouvernement-Général in Algeria, and the High Commissions in the AOF and the AEF was no longer viable for the exploitation and the development of the desert. They wanted to reaffirm the French presence and create an overriding institution with its own specific means of organisation, and its own budget.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the French empire was based on certain imaginings of lands and peoples and their perceived use and importance to metropolitan France. The renovated concepts of empire, Eurafrika and France-Afrique represented a reimagining of French colonialism within a changing international order. While Eurafrika may have been posited by French planners as a way of

²⁸ The BIA was the main development organ in the Sahara and worked with other African organisations and institutions (Treyer, 1966, p. 40).

developing European interests in Africa for the benefit of both European and African populations, many of these planners in fact intended for French interests to be served first, with Eurafrica the means of France leading European development and coordinating European funding of France's colonial interests in Africa. In this way France could remain as a front runner in both Europe and Africa in the face of the developing Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union and the rise of nationalist movements in Africa. These notions were to be put into practice through on the ground projects in strategic regions of the empire. One such region which was identified for this purpose was the Sahara which had long been overlooked in terms of serious colonisation and yet remained an area of special interest for the French colonial elite.

This was a military sphere of control and evaded civilian administrative control until the 1950s when planners began to reconsider the region's economic and geo-strategic value. Perceptions of the Sahara have influenced the way in which the French military administered the region, and indeed how the military perceived its role. Long seen as a barren and empty space, of which the only use was to unite France's North and West African territories, it became the focal point for engineers from the 1850s onwards in order to develop a bridge to cross this 'sea'. As discussed, this bridge was envisioned in the form of a railway, the likes of which Britain was developing in India. The attempt to build such a railroad heralded the introduction of scientists and engineers into the colonial project in the Sahara. No longer were French imperialists in the form of warriors and explorers, instead it was those who could develop the land that France had conquered that were the modern imperialists. Furthermore, this introduction of materially developing colonial regions enables a greater understanding of the evolving motivations for the French to remain in the Sahara as well as the different methods used for maintaining control. These methods became central to French parliamentary debates throughout the 1950s and culminated in the creation of the OCS in 1957.

Chapter 2: The OCRS: From a (more) French Sahara to industrialising the desert

Le Sahara est la nouvelle chance de la France. Cette conviction est partagée par les plus hautes instances du pays si nous considérons que le projet de l'Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS) qui sera amplement discuté dans les Assemblées s'est judicieusement inspiré du foisonnement des idées les plus diverses sur l'aménagement de notre zone aride (Cornet, 1956).

Introduction – Uniting a desert

In 1951, Emile Béline, the founder and president of the *Comité du Sahara français* and the former director of the Office du Niger, a government agency created to manage irrigation surrounding the Niger River in French Soudan (Mali), introduced France to the idea of unifying the Sahara. This *Comité* that he created, was intended to spark a *mouvement d'opinion* which would encourage parliament to proclaim the Sahara a 'national territory' (Bourgeot, 2000). The lands which Béline referred to, those under the colonial rule of the French Fourth Republic, formed a geographic whole, encompassing the deserts of Mauritania, the mountains of Tibesti, the Haggar Massif and the plains of the south-west. However, there was no single administrative unit which corresponded to the entirety of France's Saharan lands. Administratively there were three French Saharan regions; that of Algeria, in the area south of the three French *départements* and then known as the *Territoires du Sud* (see Figure 1), AOF, and AEF.²⁹ This administrative split came as a result of the incremental, and not necessarily well-coordinated, French military conquests and colonisation, discussed in Chapter 1, predominantly reaching south from Algeria and east out of Dakar. The *Territoires du Sud* were attached to Algeria in 1947 and in 1948, the budget for these regions was integrated into the Algerian budget, but without specifying whether they were incorporated into the existing departments or if they would constitute new French departments. Conversely, the Saharan areas of the AOF and AEF were incorporated into these administrative regions under looser legislation, which left politicians, such as Félix Houphouët-Boigny, declaring in the 1950s that these regions had Saharan territories because at the time it had been a 'convenience' for the French state. An arrangement which he declared artificial, when he sought to justify the French government's plans to reshape the empire's administrative borders.

²⁹ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Débats Parlementaires de l'Assemblée Nationale*, December 14, 1956, p.5935.

To resolve this split, Bélime led an investigation into creating a 'Sahara Français', and his findings were published in the periodical *Hommes et Mondes*, in 1952, concluding that:

Il faut nationaliser le Sahara, le rattacher directement à la métropole et puisque les départements semblent plus unis à la métropole que les territoires, il faut le départementaliser³⁰

The magazine then began a campaign to 'nationalise the Sahara', publishing articles which outlined the economic value and strategic sense of making an official, united French Sahara (Bourgeot, 2000, p. 41). This campaign was picked up by the magazine *L'Opinion économique et financière* that same year which published a technical study of the possibilities of heavy industry in the Sahara.³¹ A report detailing this press campaign and the political propositions for the Sahara was compiled by an unknown source and can be found in the archives of the office of the first head or Délégué Général of the OCRS and Minister of the Sahara, Max Lejeune.

Even before the discovery of oil in Edjeleh and Hassi Messaoud in 1956, the metals, coal and phosphates to be mined in the desert had long been sufficient to capture the attention of French industrialists. Coal was discovered in Colomb-Béchar in 1907 and began to be exploited in 1917. By 1956 there were estimated to be around thirty-five million tons of bituminous coal deposits in the region and a billion tons of coking coal in the entire French Sahara. Coupled with the discoveries and exploitation of iron in multiple locations including Ougarta, Tindouf and Mauritania, these resources, along with the discovery of zinc³², presented an important reserve for the French steel-making industry (Cornet, 1956). However, many of the resources discovered and being mined in the Sahara by the mid-1950s, had not been known of or even suspected to exist there until after the Second World War. This meant that perceptions of the desert were transformed in a relatively short space of time, fuelled by the press campaign ignited by *Hommes et Mondes*. As well as being a source of valuable natural materials, the Sahara was presented by the magazine as being the 'perfect' location to put new industrial techniques into practice thanks to the desert climate providing an abundance of natural heat, light and wind. These modern techniques were said to be of potential benefit to the Sahara itself, improving the fertility of the soil and habitability of the land. In strategic terms, legal possession of the Sahara could prevent unrest in the Middle East directed towards territories encompassed by the French Union characterised by the rise of pan-Arabism and non-aligned Arab nationalist republics (Levey, 1997). In addition to these arguments, *Hommes et Mondes* claimed that

³⁰ Ibid, p.5939.

³¹ ADS, 37J, 81, Max Lejeune, *Eléments de Rapport*, June 17, 1952, p.1.

³² Which is used to make galvanised steel.

the Second World War had highlighted the strategic importance of the trans-Saharan transport routes, both aerial and terrestrial, and therefore it was in French interests to maintain these.³³

Subsequently, a number of projects were proposed to the government, with the best ways to unite the Sahara in order to aid economic development and resource exploitation. Like Bélime, Pierre Cornet, a right-wing rapporteur for the financial commission who supported Charles de Gaulle upon his return to power, proposed in 1952 that the Sahara should be 'nationalised'. Later, in 1956, Cornet published his book *Sahara: Terre de Demain*, with the support of leading French political figures such as Albert Sarraut, the President of the French National Assembly. His book centred on the history of the Sahara, the plans for its industrialisation and the early discussions on defining French sovereignty in the region. Cornet's proposal in 1952 argued that the region should be legislatively tied together as a single territory with its own administration and borders. Promoters of Pierre Cornet's 'nationalisation' project, including Sarraut, and other French Union councillors such as Gabriel Schleiter (made vice-president of the French Union Assembly in 1955) and the conservative traditionalist Marcel Roclore, also had a variety of reasons to justify this legislation for the Sahara. They compared this ambition with that of other examples of territories separated from the metropole being 'nationalised', such as Alaska and the Antilles. They also argued that the Sahara was geographically whole in terms of factors including its climate and population and therefore should not be divided. Another frequently used argument was that the Sahara was relatively empty, and therefore France was not at risk from any claims on the land from a large indigenous population. A further, prominent reason used by partisans of the project was that France had an important historical claim on the region, as explorers, pacifiers and developers of the Sahara.³⁴ In this way the Sahara was being reimagined as a place of modernity, but French claims to it were based on familiar, older arguments about emptiness and its potential riches.

This report also summarises potential stumbling blocks for this idea to 'unite' the Sahara, identifying the potential for opposition to the project both in France and in Africa. For example, it highlights the concerns from certain unnamed financial and political circles that an increased Saharan industry could flood the French market, fears of negative reactions from the neighbouring states about delimiting the Sahara and these same groups hesitated at the magnitude of the task for France. Moreover, nationalist groups in 'Afrique Française Noire' were reported to strongly object to the

³³ ADS, 37J, 81, Max Lejeune, *Eléments de Rapport*, June 17, 1952, p.2

³⁴ *Ibid.*

idea, and in the name of the million Saharan inhabitants and the rights of the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, they protested against it.³⁵

Nevertheless, a 'Comité du Sahara français' was formed in 1952 with the aim of integrating the Saharan territory into France. The Royal Academy of Colonial Sciences³⁶ also expressed its hope that by becoming a national territory, French sovereignty over the Sahara would be secured.³⁷

The Gaullist politician Pierre July used arguments about race and climate to argue that Cornet's project should not fall under the Ministry of Overseas France's remit:

Il est maintenant avéré que la race blanche s'accommode parfaitement du climat saharien; à plus forte raison, s'en accommoderont, s'en accommodent déjà les populations d'Afrique du Nord...³⁸

On the basis of the potential for the Saharan region to be more densely inhabited, July regarded the Sahara as more relevant to the Ministry of the Interior than the Ministry of Overseas France, meaning that the region ought to be united as a *département* as opposed to a 'région' or 'territoire d'outremer'.

Both Senators Pierre Cornet and Pierre July proposed essentially similar projects to reorganise the Sahara as one autonomous *région* or as a *département*. These proposals which sought to grant 'national territory' or (*territoire national*) status to the Sahara were put before the French National Assembly and the Assembly of the French Union. However, in the Algerian Assembly and the Assembly of the French Union, where delegates from both France and the colonies participated, a number of Algerian and AOF delegates believed that their administrations should benefit from the mining of natural resources in the Sahara. In the Assembly of the French Union, these AOF delegates consequently therefore blocked the legislation. In the Algerian Assembly, which was disproportionately dominated by European settlers, these proposals were briefly discussed, but the Assembly did not have the power to debate or vote on them. The settler delegates, who often sought more autonomy from the metropolitan government, protested the proposal to separate the Sahara from the three Algerian *départements*. However, in subsequent debates by the French National Assembly, these protests do not appear and seem to be overlooked.³⁹ In 1953, as a result of the indecision over which solution to proceed with, the proposals were voted down by the National

³⁵ Ibid, p.3.

³⁶ Formed under the name of Institut Royal Colonial Belge and renamed the Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales (Royal Academy of Colonial Sciences) in 1954 was formed in Belgium to contribute to knowledge on overseas regions, although before 1959 its geographical spectrum was mostly restricted to the Belgian Congo, it also took an interest in other colonised regions (Historical Overview, 2018).

³⁷ ADS, 37J, 81, Max Lejeune, *Eléments de Rapport*, June 17, 1952, p.4.

³⁸ Ibid, p.5.

³⁹ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Débats Parlementaires de l'Assemblée Nationale*, 1953-1956.

Assembly in 1953 and for a time the idea was side-lined (Boilley, 1993). It was not until 1956, following the discovery of oil in July in Hassi-Messaoud in the Algerian Sahara, that instead of a sovereign French territory separate from the well-established French administrative departments and territories of North, West and Equatorial Africa, ideas for creating an economic zone, which supposedly did not have implications for administration or citizenship, were presented and plans to unite the Sahara started to make headway.

The technocrat Louis Armand, a former teacher at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) and director general of the SNCF was behind these latest plans, having presided over the BIA, created in 1952 by the French government to industrialise certain French territories in Africa. The BIA began its work, not with the exploitation of a mine in the Sahara, but with creating a means of transporting materials that would not outweigh the profit to be gained from the mining. It therefore focused on building factories to process the resources on site thereby reducing the need for immediate transportation (Capot-Rey, 1955). As a result of his experience as president of the BIA, Armand concluded that the Sahara was a work in progress which required long-term investment and time for the new technologies to be implemented, but this progress was slowed by the administrative borders of the region. For him, it hindered transportation plans and therefore the Saharan regions within which France and French industrial companies operated needed to be administratively united.⁴⁰

Armand published his research on uniting the Sahara as an economic zone in the journal *Promotions* in 1955.⁴¹ *Promotions* was an ENA journal, founded by the grande école's students in 1946 and distributed within the school and to its extensive alumni. Armand's 1955 letter outlined the range of development that the Sahara required and the various industrial techniques which could be applied to the region. By 1954, Armand felt that France was significantly behind its competitors, the US, USSR, Canada, Britain and Belgium, in terms of equipping under-developed regions with the required transport infrastructure to exploit resources. He saw it as imperative to address this issue in order for France to regain its deserved *rang* (rank) among the world's elite. His letter was optimistic, not only about the wealth of minerals to be extracted in the *Territoires du Sud*, but also that French development in the Sahara would internationally be a forerunner in desert industrialisation. However, much of Armand's arguments were based on conjecture. He believed that the speed that mineral deposits had been discovered during surface soil tests indicated that there were extensive

⁴⁰ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Débats Parlementaires de l'Assemblée Nationale*, December 14, 1956, p.5937.

⁴¹ ADS, 37J 81, Louis Armand, *Promotions*, 1955 (n°32), pp.15-24.

resources to be exploited. Although this later proved true, at the time there was little evidence to suggest that calculations for the extent of the minerals were anything beyond broad estimations.

Armand also believed that another advantage for France was that development of the desert did not require a large-scale settlement of people, as had taken place in Algeria. In this way Armand alludes, using various implicit references, to the settlers being a problem and technology being the solution, one which would 'tirer parti systématiquement de tous les gains de la machine sur l'homme'. He envisioned the benefits of the desert lay in what could be extracted using innovative technologies which 'permettent à la fois de substituer dans une très grande mesure la machine à l'homme' and would resolve potential political problems.⁴² Initially, this would be achieved by improving the state of transport in the desert, which had for so long impeded development. This was underway with railway construction plans, facilitated by modern techniques with diesel, enabling the fuel to be adapted to different climates. Advances in aviation were underway, but road-based transport remained problematic due to the delays in building adequate routes.

Nevertheless, Armand saw France as geographically better placed to develop their desert than other states because of geographic proximity. He argued that the relatively short distance between Paris and Colomb-Bechar (1950 km) compared to New York and New Mexico (2875 km) or Moscow and the Kuznetsk Basin (3200 km) meant that France could more easily implement heavy industry in the Sahara than its international peers. He also stressed the on the ground benefits of developing a French Saharan industry, that the territory would be able to enter into the French market along with the rest of French North Africa. With an increase in jobs and business, expanding the economic life of the region beyond agriculture, he envisaged a general improvement in the lives of North African peoples. He also stressed that this development was not for France's benefit alone and would not be done in order to simply strip the lands of their wealth, leaving destitution behind. Rather, these assets needed to be integrated into the national economy, thereby increasing their value and benefitting the region in return.

Armand's letter is filled with the language of its time, using phrases such as *mise en valeur* to describe economic plans for the Sahara and the French Union more generally. This was a loaded phrase which suggested 'putting a value on' or even 'improving' the lands of the French empire, as if they were not already of value without colonial interference. The term emerged from the doctrine of state-sponsored social welfare, construction of economic infrastructures and also 'population policies and political engineering' which were promoted by Albert Sarraut in the 1920s (Aldrich, 2002, p. 924). The expression was not just used by Armand, it came to be featured in all the official

⁴² Ibid, p.16.

discourse on the Sahara throughout the 1950s, from debate speeches to bills and laws recorded in the *Journal Officiel*.

Armand linked the need for a renewed Saharan administration and legislation for the region with plans for economic development by arguing that prospecting could not take place in a new country without providing that country with a status within the French Union. What Armand was attempting to convey was that because the Algerian administration was ill-adapted to govern the *territoires du Sud*, economic progress in the territories had stagnated. The administration he refers to was disproportionately dominated by settlers. His doubt about the settler-dominated Algerian government may reflect a prejudice that these Algerians were not capable of governing the départements without metropolitan intervention, and it also suggests that Armand saw this government as behind the political problems and this economic stagnation. Consequently, he sought a reorganisation of the colonial structures which could support the necessary operations for economically improving the region such as the growth of transport, distribution of materials and exploitation of resources.⁴³ He also saw that these operations would be impossible without investment of the likes that France alone could not support. Armand was therefore an early proponent of seeking European investment in French Saharan exploitation. He drew on President Mendes-France's call, during Franco-German conversations that year, to France's European, in particular German, allies to benefit from African resources and a relationship which he compares to that of the USSR's with Siberia.

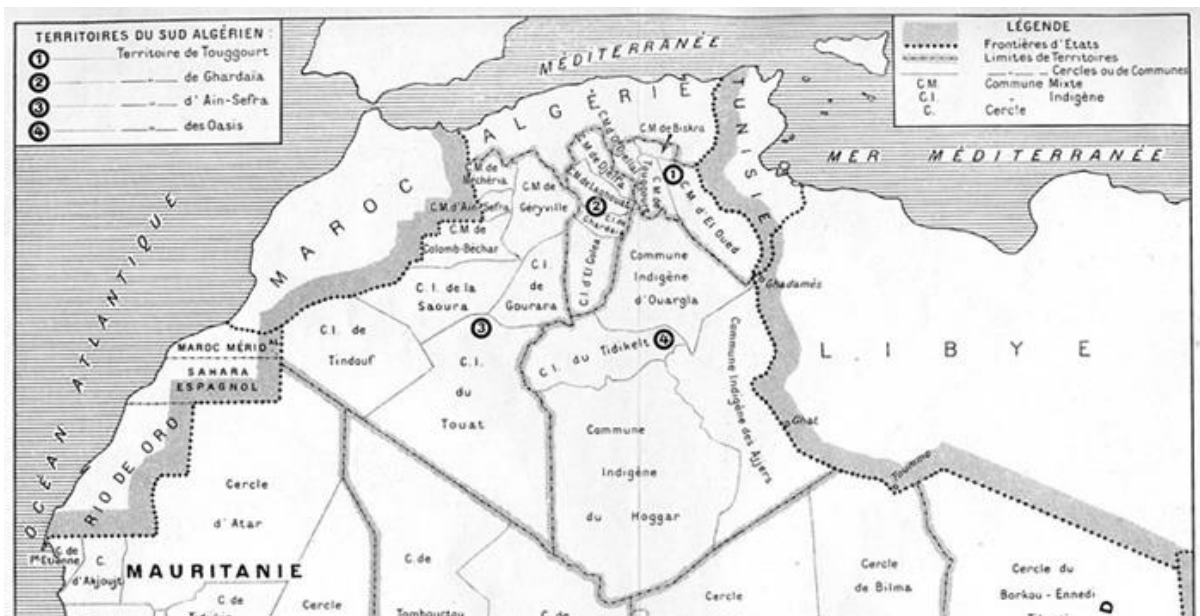


Figure 2: Map of the Southern Territories in 1956 (Goanvic, 2014)

⁴³ Ibid, p.23.

On June 16, 1956, in his speech before Parliament which was again debating the re-framing of the administration of the Sahara, the socialist Christian Pineau, Minister of Foreign Affairs, declared that no matter how the government chose to proceed with the industrialisation of the region, the political rights of Saharans and Mauritians would not be compromised. Pineau, who as Foreign Minister had so recently been involved in resolving the Suez Crisis in Egypt and the signing of the independence agreements for Morocco (March 2, 1956) and Tunisia (March 20, 1956), was eager to confirm that any local populations within the Saharan region would not be detrimentally affected by the changes. This declaration was made to reassure local Saharan elites as well as encourage their acquiescence to one of the multiple projects which were proposed.⁴⁴ Guy Mollet's government even proposed its own project, presented by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, as a bill in August 1956. This was the OCSR, which was to be debated upon by Parliament that autumn. Up until this point, the key arguments driving these discussions on creating a more comprehensive French Saharan zone were economic development and resource exploitation. However, within these discussions and against the backdrop of Morocco and Tunisia becoming officially independent from France, there was an underlying debate about sovereignty and the political administration of the Saharan region. Although in the early 1950s the settler delegates within the Algerian Assembly had discussed the alteration of the status of the Sahara, their voices are curiously absent when the issue was re-examined by the French government in 1956. This may be because, for the most part these debates took place in the French National Assembly, with none of the delegates from the three departments participating in these discussions, but it also may suggest that their priorities were directed elsewhere from 1954 onwards under the context of the Algerian War of Independence.

By the autumn of 1956, the National Assembly had reduced the diverse ideas for establishing new legislation on the status of the French Sahara to four propositions. The fact that so many proposals about the Sahara were made to the government is significant because it indicates an increased level of interest in the question across the political spectrum. The first was a bill which proposed to make the Sahara an integral part of the French territory. It was presented by Alexis Pelat of the Union et fraternité française (UFF) right-wing group calling for the Sahara to be proclaimed a 'territoire national'. The second was a bill presented by Pierre July, Edgar Faure, Paul Reynaud and Jean de Lipkowski. They sought to create new legislation which would make the Sahara an intrinsic part of France, but, unlike Pelat's bill, it would be distinctive from the other overseas departments. This bill proposed to create a 'zone saharienne centrale et désertique' by creating three new French departments with a 'statut special', to be called 'Afrique sahariennes française'. This meant creating

⁴⁴ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Débats Parlementaires de l'Assemblée Nationale*, December 14, 1956, p.5942.

a legislative status which was particular to the Sahara and not relevant to the other French overseas departments and territories. The third bill proposed was essentially the same as Pelat's proposal for a « territoire nationale » but it was delivered by the socialists Jacques Fourcade (Indépendants et paysans d'action sociale), Jean-Marie Louvel (Mouvement républicain populaire) and Pascal Arrighi (Parti républicain, radical et radical-socialiste). The final bill, which was largely a repetition of the UFF and socialist proposals, again sought to declare the French Sahara a 'territoire national' and was submitted by the conservative Jean Laborbe on behalf of the Parti Paysan. These bills, which came from across the political spectrum were characterised by a vision of a united territory in the Sahara with a unique status that would legislatively link the region more explicitly to France. Although this vision appeared to cross political party lines, there was a certain level of contention as to the purpose of the region, whether administrative changes were needed or simply an economic plan for the region. Only July's bill (the second proposal) was distinctive from the other three which, while divided on political party lines, all sought to create a Saharan territory that was an integral part of France.

In response to these four bills, Prime Minister Guy Mollet's government proposed the OCRS⁴⁵, as a consensual bill that would serve as a compromise to these proposals.⁴⁶ In October 1956, Mollet informed the Minister of Overseas France, Gaston Defferre, that he was creating a 'Comité de coordination pour l'OCRS' which was charged with presenting the bill or projet de loi to be voted upon by the Assemblies and preparing documents for implementing the project in the Sahara.⁴⁷ However, it was not until December 1956 that the National Assembly was able to extensively debate the bill, alongside the other propositions.

Pierre Hénault (Indépendants et paysans d'action sociale), who was the rapporteur for the overseas territories commission, presented the OCRS to the National Assembly and explained the pressing need to resolve the 'Saharan question' which was based on the increased public interest which had resulted from the press campaign and the recently published studies on the Sahara. Although most of the early suggestions for how to adjust the status of the Sahara were based on either delimiting or defining the territory, all of them called for a definitive determination of the Sahara's future. It was the socialist Paul Alduy's idea to create a space within which the industrial economy of the Sahara could be promoted that was the first to focus on the economic rather than political organisation of the region. For Hénault, this idea of an economic zone with no political agenda would simplify the

⁴⁵ See Annexe 1

⁴⁶ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Débats Parlementaires de l'Assemblée Nationale*, December 14, 1956, p.5927.

⁴⁷ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Guy Mollet, *Letter to the Minister of Overseas France Gaston Defferre*, October 12, 1956.

problem at hand and calm any apprehensions about France's intentions in the Sahara. Such a zone would need to be delimited, but would enable the territories of Algeria, AOF and AEF to remain with their borders unchanged.

Alduy expanded on these concerns that July's idea of reforming legislation for the administration of the Sahara and creating a new French department would cause more problems for France than it would solve. He argued that it would incense the Algerian populations and provide a permanent pretext for the newly independent Moroccan and Tunisian governments, and through them, other foreign powers, to intervene in France's overseas affairs. It would also thwart Mauritania's sovereign claims, which were already disputed by Morocco and it would disappoint the populations of the overseas territories who, under the *loi cadre Defferre* which had been introduced mere months before, had been granted significant rights by Parliament. These territories, he argued, were accustomed to the idea of an 'association à l'entreprise saharienne' without any threat to local political rights.

However, Alduy highlighted that in the early 1950s, following several mining discoveries, state-sponsored, but privately run, industrial enterprises, in particular oil companies had proliferated. But there was very little control over the movements and activities of these 'bureaux miniers'. With the BIA operating with a budget the size of a small French department's, Alduy was concerned about the transparency of the organism and the companies who worked under its umbrella and therefore the overall management of French industry in the Sahara. As it stood, there appeared to be no governmental checks over how the BIA operated, and Alduy feared that if this continued or a project of the likes of July's was implemented, there would not have been anything to prevent it from diverting industrial profits from the 'real' economic and social destinations in France, Algeria and the overseas territories.⁴⁸

It was out of Alduy's idea for an economic organisation that the government came up with its own project for the Sahara. Prior to the National Assembly debates on the Sahara in December 1956, the government's overseas territories commission met to discuss how Alduy's idea could be put into practice. As well as Alduy, there were a number of French *députés* who were key to these discussions. Pierre-Henri Teitgen, law professor and an important figure in Schuman's European Community project and in drawing up the *loi-cadre*, provided the commission with his academic support by directing the debate on constitutional issues that the project may have faced. Paul Devinat, of the Parti républicain radical et radical-socialiste and who had a solid reputation in public

⁴⁸ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Débats Parlementaires de l'Assemblée Nationale*, December 14, 1956, p.5941.

works and civil aviation, which were both key to development in the region, was also said, by Hénault, to have been heavily involved in the commission's discussions. It was from these very discussions, Hénault concluded, that the government's Saharan project was to be exclusively 'economic' in its nature, as they did not want the territories concerned to have any cause to believe the French government was breaking its promise to develop and expand the industrial capabilities of their Saharan zones.⁴⁹

However, Hénault appears to contradict himself later in his speech when he questions whether it was actually possible to make the Délégué Général's role purely economic and separate it from the administrative needs of the OGRS. He argues that without a clear definition of this role and a minimum number of powers granted to this actor, the Délégué Général risked being undermined by the incumbent administrative powers, and unnecessarily complicating the organisation of the Sahara.⁵⁰ This suggestion that the head of this organisation should have both economic and administrative powers over the Saharan region raises the early question as to how far the French government was prepared to consult with African leaders over the establishment of this project, beyond the discussions which had already taken place in the French Union Assembly.

Interestingly, Hénault compares the French government's deliberations over the Sahara to the early colonisation of Algeria:

Nous sommes là, comme en 1830, devant un problème humain. Aucune hésitation n'est permise. Ne renouvelons pas certaines erreurs ; elles seraient impardonnables.⁵¹

With this argument, Hénault may reveal the early intentions of Mollet's government in attempting to alter the administrative and economic nature of the Sahara. This project was not an attempt to reorganise colonial rule but to implement a more 'successful' form of colonialism, indeed colonise a region of the empire which had previously been overlooked and 'improve' on former colonisation methods, by overturning the more exploitative and unequal legislation. Mamadou Dia, who represented Léopold Sédar Senghor's indépendants d'outre-mer in the National Assembly and who later became Senegal's first Prime Minister, attempts to address this interpretation of the project when he argues:

Il serait fâcheux, en effet, que la création d'un complexe industriel dans le Sahara devienne, sous prétexte de technicité, l'occasion d'installer une nouvelle colonisation au détriment des intérêts locaux que l'on se promet de servir en toute priorité.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.5928.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.5929.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.5930.

⁵² Ibid, p.5948.

While other participants (including Hénault) may have believed that this form of 'colonisation' was a good thing, Mamadou Dia saw that it was in the interest of the French government for the project to strictly adhere to the wording of the bill, which emphasised that the rights of the local territories would not be affected by the implementation of the project. He stressed that the newly attained autonomy in these regions could only continue if planners satisfy their agreement to serve the local communities in addition to France and the rest of the French Union.⁵³

Devinat cut through these debates with his observations on the 'organisation du Sahara'. This authority on Saharan affairs had been working with the commission on their own, similar project to unite the Sahara. However, by the time of these debates in 1956, the commission's project was so similar to the government's OCRS proposal, that many of his colleagues' ideas came to be integrated into the final bill that the National Assembly voted upon. Devinat understood that the parliament had boiled their discussions down to two choices, between the concept of a national territory and a 'communauté d'intérêts'. Where in the past Devinat expressed that he would have freely agreed with Béline, that a national territory was the 'best' solution, he felt that as a result of 'les évènements et les circonstances', by which he meant the Algerian War of Independence, there was no easy solution to the Sahara problem. He agreed with Alduy, that what was actually required in the Sahara, was time in which to put practices in place, such as the delimitation of the French territory. But because of the time constraints, caused by the increase in powers given to the territorial assemblies, and because of the pressures of the Algerian war, it was too late to adopt a 'political solution'. Devinat compares this 'communauté d'intérêts', which he believed corresponded with the Tennessee Valley Authority as opposed to the 'ancienne solution' which was of a national territory such as that of the Reichsland, created by Germany in Alsace-Lorraine.⁵⁴

The debates on the OCRS in late 1956 demonstrate the compromise that was formed in the shape of Houphouët-Boigny's bill. This proposal linked all the cross-party ideas for reframing Saharan administration and establishing a formal structure that could direct industrial development across the Algerian, AOF and AEF Saharan regions. These discussions reveal a language of development and 'mise en valeur' that came to shape the ways that the OCRS was presented and implemented. The debates also demonstrate the voices of caution from African delegates, reminding their fellow French policymakers of the importance of the local populations, but especially of the autonomous powers so recently granted to the Territorial Assemblies governing the AOF and AEF through the *loi cadre*. Despite this caution, certain French politicians intimate a different level of purpose to this

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.5946.

new framework for the Sahara by suggesting that it could become a new form of French rule in the region.

A Unique Idea?

The example of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was one often used by Devinat's contemporaries as a point of comparison with the OCRS. The TVA, created in 1933, was a US federally-owned corporation set-up to develop navigation, flood control, electricity and fertilizer manufacturing in the Tennessee Valley, with the ultimate aim of lifting the region out of the effects of the Great Depression. Pierre Cornet (1956) noted the similarities between the two projects and suggested that the Saharan authority could learn from the American corporation about its organisation, irrigation techniques and its status as an entity.

However, this comparison was not the only one used. Across the globe, states were putting into practice economic development programs, both within and outside of their national borders. In his monograph study of the Sahara from 1956-1962, the economist and self-proclaimed Saharanist, Claude Treyer (1966) draws on the example of the TVA in the US, as well as other developmental projects such as those in Russia, China, Iraq and Jordan to the OCRS. The OCRS had many of the characteristics of the TVA including being a state-owned creation to coordinate the economic development of one of the US's poorest regions. Unlike the OCRS the TVA was a corporation and performed its activities within the administrative boundaries of the US. In the Jordan Valley the US had negotiated a unified water resource and irrigation development plan in 1953. Similarly to the OCRS, this was a transnational project between the countries of Israel, Jordan and Syria, and led by the US. It was designed to reduce conflict and promote cooperation and economic stability in the Jordan by optimising the entire river basin as a single unit. However, while it sought to unite the waterways as a network, this project differed from the OCRS because it focused on one industry rather than several and did not seek to create a new entity to administer the entire region. The comparison was used to understand how a development programme which could transcend political divisions could work.

Another desert development organisation set-up at this time was the Iraq Development Board, established in 1950. As with the OCRS, this was a state-led operation which sought to coordinate Iraq's oil industry and use oil revenue to fund the country's wider planning and construction program. Although this was a state initiative, it received a lot of input and, at times unwelcome, interference from the British government. This both sets the project apart from and likens it to the OCRS which was also led by a European colonial power, but which operated across administrative

boundaries. These comparisons made by French politicians and technocrats were drawn between the OCRS and other projects in former colonial and non-colonial nation-states. Where many of these other projects were coordinating the activities of a single industry, the OCRS was a more ambitious organisation, designed to manage all the different industries in the Sahara in order to improve economic growth across the region.

Moreover, Treyer (1966) highlights that these other countries seeking to implement economic projects did not have the same problem of developing deserts as important as the Sahara. In China, the Taklan-Mahan desert did not pose the problem of being an important trade or migration route, nor was it largely populated and was therefore not a priority for the Chinese government to economically develop. The TVA, the Johnston Plan and the Iraq Development Board of 1950 were significantly different to the OCRS because they were developed within one national territory. The French were attempting to unite several territories into a multi-lateral territory, a feat rather more complex than a nation developing a part of itself.

Paul Devinat regarded the TVA as a successful example of a 'community of interests', because although it only operated within US borders, it still required the cooperation of several American states. Its service area covers six states in total; Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia. He saw this example as relevant to the French National Assembly because of the complex relationships that existed between the different American states, just as there were in Europe. He maintained that because these states were able to work together to make the TVA a success, France could learn from the corporation in terms of implementing the OCRS.⁵⁵ Moreover, it demonstrated that an economic organisation could have political motivations without interfering with the local administration of individual territories. In fact, the TVA was a useful example of promoting closer administrative and political links between the different states.

Although it was mainly French voices that compared the OCRS to other development projects, Mamadou Dia also likened France's ambitions in the Sahara to the large and successful operations in the US and the formerly underdeveloped regions of the Soviet Union. In comparing these projects, he felt it was reasonable for these governments to be enthusiastic about their hopes for elevating these populations out of poverty and uncovering an impressive, although still incomplete, inventory of resources with such a wide variety of benefits to the French Union.⁵⁶ They were also able to demonstrate the validity of the OCRS as being potentially successful because of its hypothetical success in comparison with other similar and existing organisations. Using examples from the US and

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.5946.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.5948.

the USSR, rather than other countries, enabled these French actors to stress the importance of 'their' project on the international stage. In this way they were not only justifying the need for its creation but also using these comparisons to emphasise France's position as a world leader.

Justifications

While certain conservative National Assembly delegates such as Hénault justified France's plans for the Sahara using claims of industrial and social benefits, Pierre July, regardless of his political persuasion, recalled France's historic position in the Sahara as coloniser and explorer of the desert. He argues that historically the Sahara had been a single, entire space and it was only as a result of the 'unfortunate' coincidence of colonising the Sahara from Algiers, Dakar and Brazzaville that by the mid-twentieth century the region was 'artificially' divided.⁵⁷

Alexis Pelat of the right-wing, anti-establishment *Union fraternité française* (UFF) agreed with this point, and, ignoring pre-colonial African history and the Saharan populations themselves, stressed that it was not Algeria, West Africa or Equatorial Africa who had explored and 'pacified' the Sahara. He used the arguments of his colonial predecessors that:

Ces tâches [exploration et pacification], longues et ingrates, c'est notre pays, seul, qui les a accomplies. Peut-on dire qu'avant notre arrivée en Afrique, le Sahara, à une époque quelconque passé ait appartenu à d'autres Etats de son pourtour ?⁵⁸

His aim here was to stress France's sovereignty over the Sahara, but rather than use it to justify the government's OCSR project, for Pelat, it was demonstrative that this bill did not go far enough. He states that the Sahara was just as much a part of France as Alaska was for the United States and Siberia was for the USSR. For these reasons, Pelat argued that the National Assembly should reject this bill, and vote in his own *projet de loi* to legislate the Sahara as a national territory which specified that the desert region was not merely incorporated into existing French territories but was a separate entity directly and administratively attached to the French metropole. Moreover, he argued that because there was so little reference to France within the OCSR proposition, there was little to suggest that France would profit from it. He maintained, rather dramatically, that by not explicitly asserting French sovereignty over the Sahara within the project proposal, the French government risked effectively confirming sovereignty over the Saharan lands for the Algerians seeking independence as well as for the territorial governments in West and Equatorial Africa.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.5939.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.5950.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.5950-5951.

Pelat was not the only politician in these National Assembly debates to use the example of France's historic colonising role. Hénault drew upon this interpretation of history in order to present the French colonisers as agents of civilisation to further justify French interference in the Sahara. Using emotive language, Hénault expresses ambitious plans to prevent famines caused by drought, build food stocks, improve medical access for those most isolated and build schools for children as part of the 'social' role of the OCRS. He also stresses that this would be done out of French benevolence since these actions to improve the Saharan quality of life would require billions of francs of funding with no hope of profit for investors.

Nevertheless, in almost the same breath he stresses that the government's project actively needed to win over the local populations, and, like Pelat, is keeping one eye on events in Algeria, thereby making an unspoken comparison:

C'est souvent vrai. Et sur ces terres affreusement ingrates, n'oublions pas que les hommes qui y vivent verront naître des richesses ; craignons alors de les voir devenir des révoltés et leurs yeux cracher la haine. Cela ne sera pas si nous le voulons, car, de l'œuvre grandiose que nous voulons instaurer doit sortir un complément social inestimable.⁶⁰

However, Achille Auban, a socialist and rapporteur for the National Defence commission, argued that development of the Sahara would benefit the lands and local populations on an even deeper level. He suggested that through the OCRS, the Sahara would be able to take on a new role, going beyond its position in the 'plan de la stratégie africaine' and instead 'entrant dans le jeu d'une organisation encore plus générale'.⁶¹ That is to say, Auban regarded the Sahara as an opportunity for France to take a leading role in the 'bigger', global questions beyond being an industrial powerhouse. Rather, this industrial power would enable France to engage more actively in defending Europe against future conflicts, namely nuclear weapons.

It was for this potential, of the Sahara being a strategically valuable land, particularly once industrialised, that Auban's commission were so favourable towards the government's project. This was because of the key position that the Sahara represented in contingency plans for another world-wide conflict. The Sahara, he argued, was perfectly placed to suit France's logistical needs in Europe or the Middle East. By weaponizing the region, the Sahara could constitute an important counter-attack option for the French against countries along the east of the Sahara, such as Egypt who had so recently withdrawn from French and British interference and was emerging as a pan-Arab leader.⁶² Alduy countered that in order for this to succeed, the French would require foreign investment in the Sahara. In doing so, the French could ensure stability for the neighbouring countries of their

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.5931.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Saharan territories and even create additional 'zones d'action communes' whereby mining companies could operate across not just administrative, but also international borders.⁶³ However, Auban did not see any pressing need to resolve questions over the role and structure of the military in the OCSR, since the project was not yet in its debut and would first need to prioritise equipping the economic infrastructures and bases such as Colomb-Béchar.

Nevertheless, Max Brusset, rapporteur for the government's financial commission, maintained that the OCSR was a timely proposition which could 'promouvoir une politique d'investissements' in the Sahara. However, he warned that the government's decision to put in place what he termed a 'generous social policy' needed to be considered carefully before it was implemented. He argued that because such a large amount of capital was required for this Saharan development, the government's priority should be on France and her imperatives, and, to a lesser extent those of international cooperation.

Conversely, Mamadou Dia argued that the OCSR's commission of coordination and control, which would be largely occupied with the project's policies, needed to prioritise the 'delicate problem' of immigration and population mobility. Although there were no references to a settler population being introduced, this may refer to the increased levels of Saharan Jews migrating towards Israel during this period, or even a misrepresentation of nomadic movements in the region. For him the rate of success for the organisation's social policy would depend on the approach taken with these matters. He added that if the government was adamant about altering perceptions of the project being solely about mineral and energy resources and not concerned with human welfare, then there was a straightforward way to approach them. By extending the initiative, using the existing legal and administrative framework, and expanding its economic zones of development to encompass the French Union, the government could demonstrate that it was more concerned with the construction of a common Franco-African market than with simply consolidating France's dominant economy. For Mamadou Dia, this was the only way for the French to move beyond the hypocrisy that hindered their attempts at economic integration in Africa.⁶⁴ In effect he pushed for any profits from the OCSR and the Sahara to be distributed across all French Union territories.

Former Governor-General of Algeria and then a National Assembly deputy for Rhone, Jacques Soustelle used his position as a former overseas Minister and ethnographer to speak on this matter.⁶⁵ He especially stressed the importance of the local Saharan populations in this debate. He

⁶³ Ibid, p.5941.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.5948.

⁶⁵ Before entering politics, Soustelle completed his doctorate on South American ethnography.

observed that often French and European politicians would discuss the Sahara as if it were an empty space that was neither populated nor developed. Soustelle argued that allowing the French public to become convinced that the Sahara was void and that nothing had been achieved in the Sahara thus far was a dangerous path that the National Assembly was on the verge of treading. In his tone, he comes across as annoyed that those discussing the OCS should suggest that the French would be working with a blank slate, an empty space, making similar, out-dated claims to those made about Algeria in the nineteenth century. He highlighted that the Algerian Sahara alone was home to 820,000 Saharans, representing a far from negligible population. He also emphasised that since France had colonised the desert south of the Algerian departments, large scale developments had taken place, as well as his own role in these projects:

Les routes n'ont pas cessé non plus d'étendre leur réseau vers le Sud. L'équipement pédagogique et social n'a pas cessé de s'accroître. Six cents classes sont ouvertes aujourd'hui au Sahara, en territoire algérien, au lieu de deux cents seulement en 1945. Des centres de formation professionnelle ont été créés dans six localités, et des hôpitaux, des dispensaires que j'ai eu souvent l'occasion d'admirer jusque dans les oasis les plus lointaines du Touat ou du Gourara.⁶⁶

Following these discussions about the economic value of the Sahara and the benefits that the mining resources there could have for France, Alduy brought the debate back to the point that there was a very real political problem with the Sahara. He was concerned that this was being overlooked, alerting delegates to the fact that the Sahara was not like their other desert domain, La Terre Adélie in the Antarctic. This was not only because the Sahara had a notable local population, but also because Alduy envisaged it as France's platform to influencing Europe, the US, the East and even the USSR. For Alduy, the real question that the government needed to answer was about their 'true' objectives for the Sahara.

Quel est le système le plus apte à réaliser le double objectif suivant, d'une part permettre, techniquement et administrativement, la mise en valeur des ressources minières et énergétiques du désert, d'autre part, faire en sorte que ces richesses ainsi produites profitent à la fois à la France, dispensatrice d'hommes et d'investissements, et aux populations locales ou périphériques qui ont droit à la vie et à une vie meilleure ?⁶⁷

For Alduy, it was the latter of the two objectives that the government needed to work towards, focusing on the 'bigger' picture of the entire French Union and not just on the lives of those in metropolitan France. He argued that because of the difficulties in reconciling the conditions required for the economic development of the Sahara with the political and social justifications for undertaking such an enterprise, the National Assembly debates on the matter had become confused and convoluted by December 1956. Alduy maintained that until the government could address these

⁶⁶ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Débats Parlementaires de l'Assemblée Nationale*, December 14, 1956, p.5943.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.5940.

issues, preferably through centralisation, it would continue to be hindered by problems of organising and controlling industrial activity in the Sahara and questioned by both local and foreign powers.

Nevertheless, neither Pineau's promises to protect local, and even Mauritanian political rights, nor Alduy's assurances that any government project would have to be purely economic and not impede on the administration of the Sahara could convince N'Diaye Sidi-el-Mokhtar. The then National Assembly delegate and future President of Mauritania was encouraged by the French government's proposal to develop the economic systems of the Sahara and provide Mauritians with an escape route from an impoverished future. Yet, the proposed OCRS did not appear to conform with his, nor Mauritania's desire for a purely economic organisation. He opposed a certain number of the bill's articles which suggested that this new entity would have a political and administrative nature. For Sidi-el-Mokhtar, the responsibilities to be granted to the Délégué Général of the new Saharan organisation were so similar to those of the governor-general of Algeria and of the High Commissioners in Dakar and Brazzaville, that the government appeared to be creating a new federation rather than an economic project.⁶⁸

Devinat argued that these powers and responsibilities were necessary for the Délégué Général to successfully execute his role. With additional rights over national defence, the head of the OCRS would be able to maintain control over the welfare of the local populations and secure both private and public property. Nevertheless, Devinat did not mean that the Délégué Général would replace, or even supersede the Minister for Defence, and his Secrétaires d'Etat. Rather, in his Saharan leadership role, the Délégué Général would be more focused on, and have a mandate over, the policing and the gendarmerie for the Saharan regions. In addition to these views, Devinat believed that his commission was eager to remain flexible over the duties of the Délégué Général so that they suited the members of the OCRS and the rest of the National Assembly.⁶⁹ For Devinat, the OCRS which was essentially based on economic objectives would be more successful than a parallel political project. But without the support of the member and neighbouring states, it was improbable that the project would be productive. Therefore, the organisation needed a strong foundation of attributions for its director and cabinet in order to guarantee that its activities would be implemented.

Pierre Montel, of the *Indépendants et paysans d'action sociale* party agreed with Devinat, in his assertions that the OCRS required a political nature and security provisions. Montel could not

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.5942. Sidi-el-Mokhtar refers to article 1 of the bill which associates Mauritania with the OCRS, and objects to articles 3, 4, 6, 10 and 11.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 5947.

understand how an economic institution could be established in the middle of the desert without any political support. Moreover, he felt that it was absurd to expect this project to take place in the middle of a desert without any form of defence for the multiple industrial centres.⁷⁰

Mamadou Dia argued that since October of that year, the overseas territories commission had actually revised the wording of the OCRS bill to the point that its authors would not have recognised it as their own. He pointed out that many amendments had been made to prevent the rights of the local assemblies and the local populations from being contravened. He referred especially to article 2 which was modified to ensure that the territories themselves would be able to decide the geographical limits of the OCRS within their own regions. Houphouët-Boigny confirmed this, repeating that it was a fundamental condition written into the project. Upon the other conditions of the proposal being enacted, such as the appointment of the OCRS Délégué Général and the formation of the OCRS High Commission, the territorial governments would vote on and propose which regions of the territories would become a part of the OCRS.⁷¹

For Mamadou Dia, this was fundamental proof that the project required the cooperation of each territory and guaranteed that the government would not seek to reverse the *loi cadre Defferre*, implemented only months earlier.⁷² However, he did warn that although the concept of the OCRS was attractive, not least because of the opportunities it provided for a wide range of French and African groups, it would still be necessary to carefully monitor the implementation of the project to ensure that its activators did not lose sight of its purpose. He further argued that if the OCRS were to retain its character as a public establishment, it should not focus on contributing to the prosperity of private trusts, but to that of the territories concerned and to the French state which would be providing the capital.⁷³

Jean Llanté, an important member of the French Communist Party (PCF), which in 1956 performed a volte-face away from its established anti-colonial stance and support for Algerian independence (Giovaninetti, 2015) to voting for a *carte-blanche* on French military powers in Algeria (Evans, 2006), was nevertheless more suspicious of the justifications used by the ministers, delegates and rapporteurs for creating the OCRS. After briefing the National Assembly on the Sahara's subsoil economy and the state of oil, gas and mineral exploitation in 1956 he then drew the Assembly's attention to the four enterprises who monopolised oil prospecting in the Sahara, despite the non-

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.5952. Montel also draws on former imaginings of the Sahara, playing on fears that the desert was dangerous for newcomers.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.5947.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, p.5948.

existence of oil permits and concessions. Llante remained unconvinced that this monopolisation would have any benefit to the local Saharan populations. He believed it was just demonstrative of capitalist companies taking from African peoples and offering up very little in return.

Llante, in contrast to his party's recent position, also took issue with the overtures of patriotism that his National Assembly colleagues had expressed in relation to the French Sahara. Especially that many of them (he does not specify which ones) had become eager to attach their names to the projects to unite the Sahara once they had become aware of the extent of exploitable resources in the desert. However, his main problem with the government's project and the justifications used for its implementation was to do with who benefitted from the industrialisation. For Llante, the project was designed to enable the French government and private companies to 'loot' the Sahara. He claimed that 'ce que vous apportez est vraiment disproportionné par rapport à ce que vous prenez'.⁷⁴ He argued that the local populations were not prioritised enough in the OCRS bill, with any mention of Saharans, if indeed they were mentioned at all, left until the end of the clause. This was demonstrated from the beginning of the bill, with article 1 the most objectionable in Llante's opinion:

Il est créé une organisation commune des régions sahariennes dont l'objet est la mise en valeur, l'expansion économique et la promotion sociale des zones sahariennes de la République française.⁷⁵

He also maintained that the clauses which promised local benefits and opportunities for social promotion were added as an afterthought when they should take prominence in the proposed law. His language in these debates, using 'vous' repeatedly, rather than 'nous', demonstrates that not only was Llante stating his and the rest of the communist party's opposition to this project, but also setting them apart from the rest of the National Assembly. It was, for Llante, the government's project and nothing to do with him or his political advocates.

While Llante acknowledges the calls from Alduy and other members of the overseas commission to stress the economic nature of the government's project, he felt that deleting a few words from the bill was not enough to change the true nature of the OCRS. The bill's articles, he argues, are proof that political matters dominated the government's project and reaffirm Houphouët-Boigny's own declarations to the French Union Assembly that:

Pour contrôler le développement de ces régions l'idée apparemment la plus simple consistait à créer une entité politique saharienne.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.5944.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

This real nature of the OCRS that Llante was alluding to, was that this project would serve as an opportunity to fund private French companies first, French international business partners second, and the local populations last.

Interestingly, Devinat agreed with Llante on his point about the local populations. But he turned it around by arguing that the OCRS would have to work hard to open its doors to the local populations in order for it to be relevant and of benefit to them. For Devinat, this was an opportunity to improve the objectives of the project, rather than a reason to abandon the initiative altogether.⁷⁷

Grandeur

To borrow Martin Evans' (2006) phrase, 1956 was a 'decisive moment' for France. In a post-war decade that had been marked by short and often paralysed governments, 1956 saw the longest running Fourth-Republic government led by Prime Minister Guy Mollet. Mollet, who prided himself as a Marxist, opposed to Soviet communism and a colonial liberal reformer, presided over the confirmation of independence for Morocco and Tunisia at the beginning of the year. In contrast to his reformist ideals, Mollet's government moved away his election dialogue of reform and harmonisation between the settler population and the Algerian Muslims and shifted towards a hard-line pro-French Algeria stance. He transformed France's approach to the war and began focusing on 'pacification' by protecting locals from the FLN using intelligence, increased military action and by attempting to 'win over Muslim hearts and minds' (Evans, 2006, p. 44). In this way, Mollet led a united government with the right-wing supportive of his anti-FLN anti-Communist policies and the left-wing compelled to remain loyal to their parties. However, the year came to be internationally characterised as a turning point for France, from colonial leader alongside Britain, to outdated and failing imperialist, misguided in its dealings in the Suez in October of that year. France and Britain's military attempt to prevent Nasser's nationalisation of the canal in Egypt led to a political disaster in which both superpowers threatened action should the colonial powers refuse to retreat (Evans, 2006). The incident left French relations with both the US and Britain considerably strained and its consequences were felt throughout French foreign, diplomatic and colonial policy and marked by an urgency to restore France's *grandeur* and place in the world.

In the December 1956 National Assembly debates on the Sahara Hénault reveals the role that the Sahara played in being a hope for preserving French *grandeur*, by arguing that it was through Saharan development that France could rediscover herself:

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.5947.

Grâce au Sahara, la France peut redevenir elle-meme, libérée de trop d'asservissements. Mais, par-dessus les frontières irréelles, qu'elle soit à l'échelle de notre cœur. C'est une œuvre de prestige, certes, d'enrichissement, aussi, pour notre pays mais également pour les terres africaines.

Si la France perdait de vue ces réalités, le Sahara ne serait qu'une occasion manquée de la grandeur française.⁷⁸

Brusset was of the same mind, arguing that through Saharan development and the promotion of its Union's economic and social frameworks could strengthen the position of the franc zone. In doing so the Union could be protected from the competition of the international market, thereby reinforcing France and the French Union's economic position.⁷⁹ Alluding to the idea that the world was watching France's actions, he also declared that it was through exploitation of the Sahara that France could face up to her biggest critics. He even verges on referring to Lord Salisbury's disparaging comment in 1890 when he says that it would be 'la recompense des efforts désintéressés de la France, contrairement à d'autres nations qui nous critiquent'. Brusset's suggestion that this exploitation of the desert would be 'la recompense de la France' would have appealed to his National Assembly colleagues who were keen, in the wake of the Suez crisis, to revive France's global and colonial image.

Pascal Arrighi, who spoke in these debates in his capacity as rapporteur for the commission de l'intérieur, had no such qualms about directly recollecting the 'wisdom' of the former Prime Minister of the UK and the country in general, crowing that even the 'old enemy' made mistakes from time to time. He also draws on this idea of there being two versions of the Sahara, an 'old' one and a 'new' one, when he maintained that France did not have a 'traditional' Sahara, in the sense of a sterile, sandy land with camels and baggage trains, but an industrial hub, of mines and technology, which was strategically invaluable.⁸⁰

These belated retorts to the British reflect more on the once again strained relations between Britain and France in 1956 but are also reminiscent of the continued colonial competition between the two European countries. For almost a century Britain and France had diverged, or at least claimed to have, on their methods of colonisation and colonial rule. For these French leaders, this renewed push to develop a previously overlooked part of the African empire was an opportunity to move ahead of other colonial rulers (Dimier, 2004, pp. 273-275). Moreover, it was linked directly to the post-war need to recover their lost dignity having been defeated a decade and a half previously (Shennan, 1989, p. 287).

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.5944.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.5934.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 5935.

Conversely, by the time that the OCRS project was debated by the National Assembly, the governments of the Fourth Republic were under scrutiny, particularly from right-wing parties such as the UFF. Alexis Pelat, who presented on behalf of his anti-establishment colleagues, warned that the government project risked perpetuating the foreign policy misadventures of government ministers. He argued that many of these politicians had failed France in recent years, such as in Pondicherry⁸¹, Indochina (Vietnam), with the Treaty of Fez⁸², and the end of France's influence in Libya with their exit from Fezzan in 1951, leading to the disintegration of French power around the globe. For Pelat, the OCRS appeared to be a continuation of these French 'failings' which would put French citizens in North Africa in jeopardy. Although other deputies had outlined how the OCRS would strengthen French control, Pelat saw the reverse. He saw it as a granting of sovereignty to the African and Saharan populations and would be as demonstrative of the failures of French colonialism as the independences of Morocco and Tunisia were. He highlighted that these matters directly affected French expatriates with the context of the many (around 600,000) French residents entangled in Morocco and Tunisia, uncertain of their post-independence fate, and the 1.2 million French Algerians waiting on the result of the UN negotiations on Algeria.⁸³ Pelat's speech here is rhetorical of course, as there were no UN negotiations over Algeria in 1956.

As underlined earlier in this chapter, many politicians drew on other state-run projects in order to explain the need for the OCRS or a similar project which would coordinate the industrialisation of this Saharan region. Many of these examples drew on American or Soviet projects as comparable to France's ambitions. This exemplifies France's sense of grandeur and the importance of French promotion on the world stage. By comparing the OCRS to the two superpowers who were not only world leaders in terms of their technological capabilities but were also staunch adversaries, French politicians sought to legitimise their plans for the Sahara. Here the French were using the 'politics of comparison' to establish themselves as worthy of being compared to these political giants at a time when the European empires were disintegrating and France's role as a leader in world politics was in doubt (Stoler, 2001). These comparisons made across time and space are demonstrative of the excitement that surrounded the creation of the OCRS. This excitement centred on what could potentially be achieved and also the fears of repeating past mistakes. In many ways these debates reflect a lack of self-confidence over avoiding the errors of former French governments in their colonisation and administration of the empire. Yet, throughout these debates on the Sahara there is

⁸¹ A French colonial settlement in India until 1954.

⁸² Pelat refers to the independence of Morocco and the end of France's protectorate there.

⁸³ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats Parlementaires de l'Assemblée Nationale*, December 14, 1956, pp. 5950-51.

a confidence in what the territory could do for France and the rest of the empire, particularly in terms of returning France to its 'rightful' place in the world order.

This examination of the debates on the OCRS has enabled an analysis of how these discussions unfolded, revealing the different priorities and motivations of those politicians interested and invested in a new Saharan organisation. Participants used these debates to address their various concerns about the government's approach to its empire. Where certain voices, especially African delegates, were concerned about safeguarding the *loi cadre*, others, such as those from far-right parties feared that the reforms to the empire had gone too far and that the OCRS would be another concession of power to the African territories, loosening France's grip on the region. Continuous points of contention were identified over the purpose and identity of the OCRS, how it would be framed, as economic or political, and who it would benefit. These queries were never truly satisfied during these debates and continued to be ambiguous. By the close of these debates the French Assembly had for the most part found a certain level of consensus over the OCRS. Much of this consensus lay in the ambiguity of the proposal. Advocates of the project attempted to soothe many of the concerns, stressing that it would be as adaptable as required, with an open-door to altering its capabilities and even the territories that it covered. Most importantly, they reinforced that the benefits of the OCRS were to be reaped by all in France, the French Union and the Saharan territories themselves.

Creation

The OCRS was created under the law of January 10, 1957. The law stated:

Il est créé une 'Organisation commune des régions sahariennes' dont l'objet est la mise en valeur, l'expansion économique et la promotion sociale des zones sahariennes de la République française et à son [sic.] gestion de laquelle participant l'Algérie, la Mauritanie, le Soudan, le Niger et le Tchad.⁸⁴

As with the supporting literature on Saharan development which was published in advance of this law, legislation for the OCRS used the language of the time, adopting loaded terms such as *mise en valeur* which revealed much about France's intentions and perceptions of the desert region. The OCRS was a social and economic development project which was designed to combine Pierre July's idea of the Sahara becoming a national territory and Paul Alduy's proposal for a Saharan economic organisation. This law established that all the Saharan parts of the French Republic, that is to say, Algeria, Chad, French Soudan (Mali), and Niger would be united. However, although Mauritania was included as a member of the OCRS, its lands were not incorporated, because of the issues raised by

⁸⁴ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Lois et Décrets* (n°9), January 11, 1957, p.578.

Sidi-el-Mokhtar and other Mauritanian politicians about the political nature of the organisation. These deputies could not come to terms with this perceived nature of the project, unlike other African politicians such as those from French Sudan, Chad and Niger who, at this time, were persuaded by Houphouët-Boigny's stance on the matter (Boilley, 1993). This demonstrates that the OCRS was built on the compliance of these African political leaders, while those in Algeria were not deemed relevant to this project. Just as these politicians' voices were central to the debates within the National Assembly on the bill, so too were they important during the creation of the OCRS. The law stated the specific areas which the OCRS would cover, encompassing:

La commune mixte et l'annexe de Colomb-Béchar; la partie de l'annexe de Geryville située au Sud des Monts des Ksour; les communes indigènes et les annexes de la Saoura, du Gourara, du Touat et de Tindouf; la partie saharienne des cercles de Goundam, de Tombouctou et de Gao.
Les communes indigènes et les annexes de Ghardaïa, El Goléa et Ouargla; la partie Sud de l'annexe d'El Oued; les communes indigènes et annexes du Tidikelt, des Ajjers et du Hoggar.
La partie Nord des cercles de Tahoua et d'Agadès, excluant l'Air, mais comprenant notamment la totalité de la subdivision de Bilma; la région du Borkou Ennedi Tibesti.⁸⁵

However, this law also left room for these boundaries to be altered following consultation with the individual concerned local assemblies. This meant that territories, such as Mauritania, were free to join the OCRS if they wished to and that the articles of the January 1957 law could be modified by the National Assembly when needed. This ambiguity demonstrated the need to map the region and also where the zones of OCRS activity would take place and where the organisation's operational borders would intersect with administrative borders.

The OCRS was presented as an opportunity for all 'participants' to explore and exploit the Sahara. In doing so it created an economic infrastructure which enabled the discovery and exploitation of oil in the area and also was itself bolstered by the exploitation of oil and gas deposits. As Houphouët-Boigny had suggested, the project would then be able to systematically develop the oases and improve conditions for the 600,000⁸⁶ Saharans in the French (Algerian) Sahara (Treyer, 1966, p. 13). The organisation was designed to fill the need to create a single organisation which would oversee Saharan development and coordinate the diverse industrial groups who had been working there since 1953-54. It needed to come up with its own aims and political and development lines. France wanted not only Saharans to benefit from this development, but the other Francophone Saharan countries and the French economy as well. Furthermore, the French political elite was concerned with maintaining the Sahara as a united region in the face of Moroccan and Tunisian independence, the Algerian War and also Sub-Saharan African states moving towards autonomy (Treyer, 1966, p.

⁸⁵ See Annexe 1

⁸⁶ Census figures varied depending on the source. Claude Treyer (1966) was more reserved than the Journal Officiel statistics in 1957.

78). With its extensive funding from Paris, the OCRS was well-placed to support and coordinate these efforts, negotiating the laying of pipelines, and establishing the necessary infrastructures and transport networks required to distribute these resources. However, this did not satisfy the concerns raised in the debates in 1956, that the project went too far politically and risked interfering in the newly assigned autonomy provided by the *loi cadre Defferre*. This controversy was exacerbated when only months after the January 10, 1957 law, the Ministry of the Sahara and the Délégué Général of the OCRS, Max Lejeune was appointed as its minister.

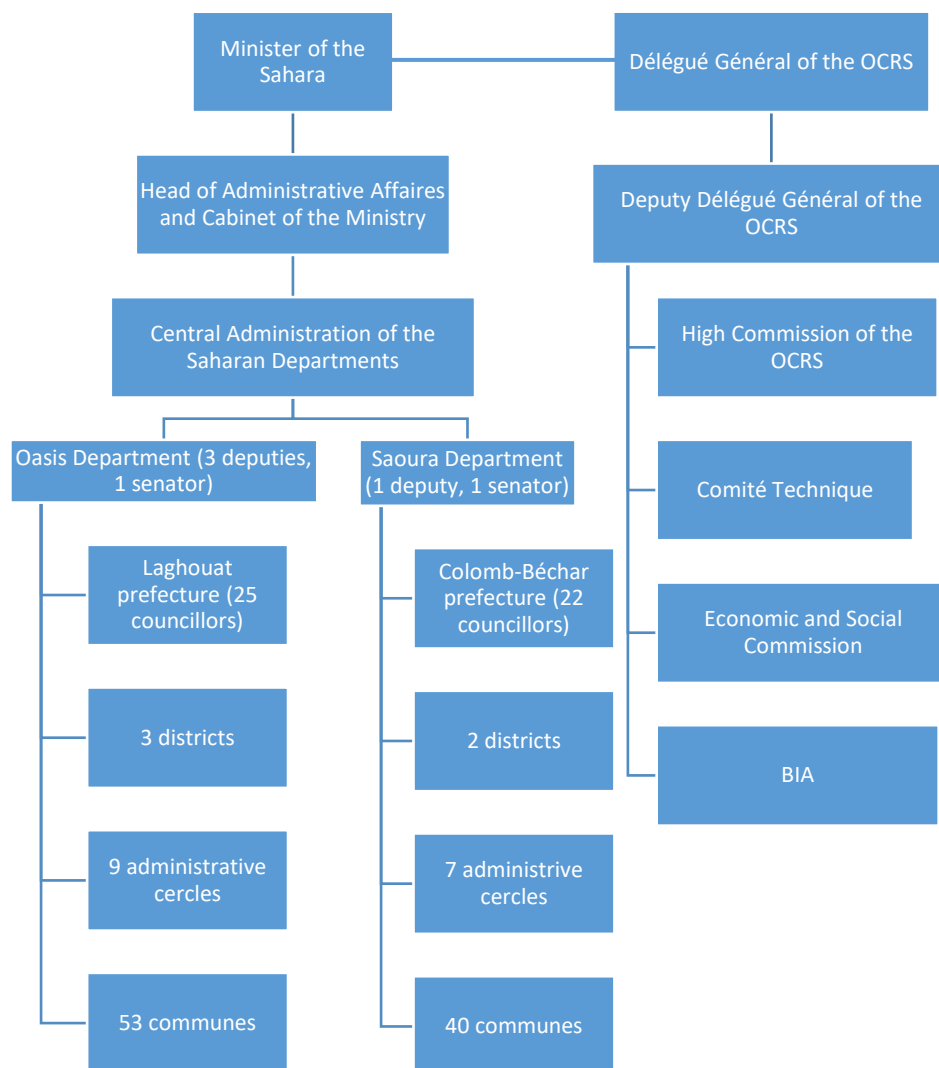


Figure 3: Organigramme of the chain of responsibility in the Ministry of the Sahara and the OCRS in 1957

The Ministry of the Sahara

One of the proponents behind the movement for uniting the Sahara into a single French territory, Max Lejeune, was an intriguing individual. Lejeune was a socialist and veteran of the Second World War, he was also sympathetic to certain centre-right politicians such as Soustelle and also Charles de

Gaulle and his post-war ideas for the French empire. As a deputy of the Somme département throughout the Fourth Republic, Lejeune was popular amongst voters and especially adept at negotiating the perils which faced French politicians at this time. He retained senior political roles in multiple governments since 1946 and it was during his tenure as Secretary of State for the French Armed Forces in 1956 that Lejeune began to work with Houphouët-Boigny on the bill which proposed the OCRS.⁸⁷

With the January 10 law and the June 13, 1957 law which created the Ministry of the Sahara, the Sahara was institutionalised. In August 1957, the four South-Algerian Territories (*territoires du Sud*) were transformed into two Saharan departments, split from the Government-General of Algeria and attached to Paris, to be organised in the same way as the metropolitan and Algerian departments. In doing so, administration of the former south-Algerian territories, the Sahara Méridional and the south-eastern Sahara were placed in the hands of the newly created Ministry. However, this created logistical and administrative difficulties. Firstly, there was no clear established budget for this region and, in 1957, at the time of the creation of the Ministry and the administrative separation of the Saharan territories from Algeria, of the 120 deputies of the Algerian Assembly, only six were from the Saharan territories. Therefore, Lejeune's first year as Minister was occupied more with establishing the administrative and financial organisation of these Saharan departments than with the ambitions of the OCRS.

With the establishment of the Ministry of the Sahara, the political nature of the OCRS was made explicit. This was because of the nature of the legislation tying the Ministry to the Saharan project. It is through a series of laws and decrees that this Ministry can be understood:

La loi n° 57-27 du 10 janvier 1957, créant l'Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes ;

Le décret n° 57-714 du 21 juin 1957, portant délégation de pouvoirs au Ministre du Sahara, délégué général de l'Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes ;

Le décret n° 57-1.152 du 16 octobre 1957, portant règlement d'administration publique, relatif à la structure administrative et financière provisoire de l'Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes ;

Le décret n° 58-398 du 12 avril 1958 fixant l'organisation et les attributions de l'administration centrale du Ministère du Sahara.⁸⁸

This group of texts also outlines the complex organisation of the Ministry, which, under the direction of its Minister, was comprised of a ministerial cabinet, a central administration system, a specialist organism in the form of the OCRS and, the BIA. The establishment of this ministry is interesting

⁸⁷ ADS, 37J 81 ; 84 ; 85 ; 86 ; 88 ; 96 ; 98 ; 105.

⁸⁸ ANOM FM 81F 1812, Présidence du Conseil, Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement, *Notes et Etudes Documentaires : Le Sahara Français en 1958 : Deuxième Partie* (n° 2.414), 20 May 1958, p.4.

because it was formed after the creation of the OCRS. The Ministry was created to fulfil the political and administrative needs of the OCRS and appears to have originally had no other true purpose than to facilitate its activities. Moreover, the creation of the Ministry of the Sahara in June 1957 signified, for the OCRS, entry of the Sahara into 'la vie nationale'.⁸⁹ This was because well-known politicians associated themselves with the project and because the project had an implicit political nature, promoted as the answer to France's energy problems. Therefore, these politicians regarded it as a solution to France's security issues in the face of the insecurity in Algeria and the ongoing uneasiness over the Cold War disagreements. As a result, the OCRS and the Ministry of the Sahara were presented as nationally relevant and integral to the future of France and the French Union.

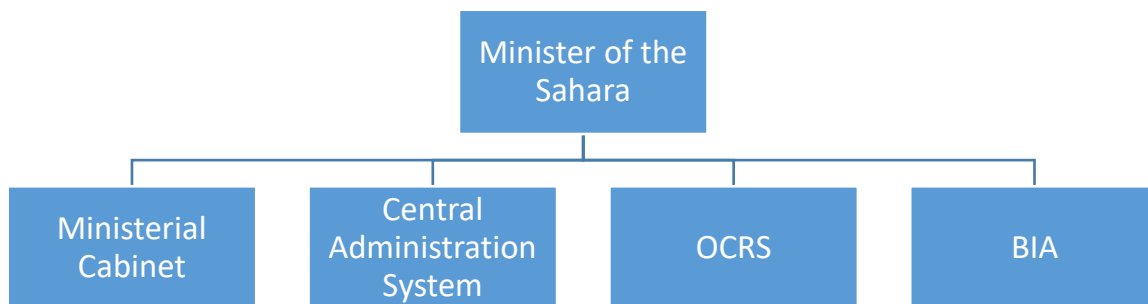


Figure 4: The Ministry of the Sahara organigramme

Under the June 1957 law, the Minister of the Sahara, Max Lejeune, who was appointed by the governments of Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury and Félix Gaillard, was charged with certain duties including authority over the soon-to-be appointed prefects of the new Saharan departments; Saoura and Oasis. These prefects would then ensure the general management of the state officials. Lejeune, as both Minister and *Delégué-Général* would represent the national interests in the Sahara and the administrative control of the territorial collectives.⁹⁰ This meant that he was charged with ensuring that not just France's economic and social objectives were implemented in this region, but

⁸⁹ ANOM, Bib20314 1961-62, Le Service des Relations Publiques et de l'Information, *Bulletin OCRS* (n°1), January 1961, p.5.

⁹⁰ ANOM FM 81F 1812, Présidence du Conseil, Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement, *Notes et Etudes Documentaires : Le Sahara Français en 1958 : Deuxième Partie* (n° 2.414), 20 May 1958, p.4.

also that France's geostrategic control remained over this region. Although it is not mentioned specifically, by referring to the administration of the Saharan departments, interaction with the military command is implied due to their control and influence in the region. It was also reasonable that Lejeune should be trusted in this matter of defence, given his record as former Secretary of the Armed Forces. Therefore, he could reinforce his leadership of this ministry and this organisation through his understanding of the curious intricacies of military rule, as outlined in chapter 1, where military leaders continued to be placed in administrative positions of power.⁹¹

The central administration of the Ministry was made up of a cabinet bureau and a Directorate of Administrative and Social Affairs. The cabinet bureau was responsible for managing personnel, assets, maintaining and disseminating ministerial texts as well as controlling missions and bestowing any honours or decorations. The Directorate of Administrative and Social Affairs was entrusted on the one hand to deal with Ministry matters at a central level and to conduct any relevant studies. In many ways it was the successor of the former General Executive of the Southern Territories of the Government General of Algeria.⁹² As a central administration, it dealt with all the administrative, political and social issues concerning the Southern Territories. It administered the professional staff (including those dealing with Saharan affairs, Muslim chiefs and Maghzens⁹³) as well as managing the loans and grants for the social equipment extraordinary budget. As a prefecture, it dealt with the administrative issues concerning the prefects, controlling twenty mixed and indigenous communes and ensuring the internal security of the Territories.⁹⁴ This reference to control and security suggests that military control, led by administrative powers, over the interior, that is to say the local populations, was a long-term key priority for the French government. The Directorate of Administrative and Social Affairs seems to have picked up where the Executive had left off, with the only changes to the prefecture being a devolution of its powers between the two Saharan departments which were created in August 1957.

⁹¹ 37 J, 85; 86; 105.

⁹² This Executive was created in 1909 in order to perform certain functions for the central administration and for the prefecture. However, with the Statut d'Algérie, it was abandoned in 1947.

⁹³ Nomadic Saharan military forces

⁹⁴ ANOM FM 81F 1812, Présidence du Conseil, Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement, *Notes et Etudes Documentaires : Le Sahara Français en 1958 : Deuxième Partie* (n° 2.414), 20 May 1958, pp.4-5.

Central Administration of the Ministry of the Sahara

<p>Cabinet Bureau</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Personnel management- Assets- Maintaining and disseminating ministerial texts- Mission Control- Honours and decorations	<p>Directorate of Administrative and Social Affairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Administration (political, social, Saharan and African staff)- Loans and Grant management- Prefect administration- Security
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Figure 5: Organisation of the Ministry of the Sahara central administration

The Directorate was broken down into four main services; financial, administrative, social action and health. Within each of the services were bureaus which were charged with several duties. For example, the administrative service was divided into four bureaus; the Bureau of Saharan Affairs, the Bureau of General Administration, the Bureau of General Security and the Bureau of Departmental and Communal Administration. The responsibilities of these bureaux reveal the French priorities in the Sahara, which were not just about exploiting resources and gaining financial benefit, although this chapter has thus far revealed that these were certainly significant interests. For example, the Bureau of Saharan Affairs was not only concerned with managing Saharan affairs personnel and the Maghzens but also studying the problems posed by the administration of tribes and Muslim chiefs. It also sought to study any justice system and issues related to Islam (including the Arabic language). This was accompanied by the Bureau of General Security which hoped to render intelligence more effective through centralisation rather than using another department.⁹⁵ In this arrangement the civil authorities became even more dependent on the military than they had been. With the military ensuring the policing of the Sahara, centralising the gathering of intelligence meant a greater dependence on those with boots on the ground to execute these activities effectively.

This may have suited Lejeune, who in the face of such a complex upheaval was reliant on their superior knowledge of the region. However, it also may have led to other problems, such as how these leaders were prepared to cooperate with the OCS and how they interpreted large-scale French strategic policy in the face of growing unrest in Algeria and discontent from Morocco and

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.5

Tunisia over the terms of their independence and the lands conceded to (and withheld from) these new states.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that the debates on nationalising the Sahara and creating new legislation for a previously overlooked region of the empire, were characterised by major international events. In an important year for the French efforts to regain control of Algeria and step into the spotlight as a leader of European and African industrialisation, the OCRS was used by French politicians to carve out this new vision for France.

A project which had appealed across political party lines, the OCRS was seen by the centre-right as a way to preserve France's prominent position in the world, particularly as a leader of Eurafrica, while left-wing socialists saw the merits of economic development that would increase France's technological capabilities while improving the lives of those who lived in the Sahara. Politicised comparisons with both colonial and non-colonial entities were regularly employed. This line of thought, in which historical figures use comparisons in order to reflect on 'common technologies of intervention and common anxieties of rule' is known as the 'politics of comparison' (Stoler, 2001, p. 864). By using examples of Soviet and American projects, these politicians are not only placing France on an equal, and at times superior, level to the Cold War superpowers, but they are also using examples to legitimise, and at times, 'decolonise' the OCRS. Beyond these comparisons between the OCRS and other existing projects, the comparisons not explicitly made are even more revealing of French planners' approach to and understanding of the empire. The fear of repeating past mistakes is evident with implicit comparisons between the original colonisation of Algeria, in which it became a settler colony, with the 1950s approach to redefining the colonial parameters of the Sahara. These comparisons demonstrate an underlying wish to avoid the failures exemplified by the unspoken Algerian war. Instead these politicians and technocrats sought to reimagine colonisation and to recolonise the Sahara in a *better* way, replacing settlement colonisation with development and technological progress that could be measured in terms of economic success without the messiness of human and political problems.

This predominantly consensual government organisation was established as both a region and a commission of people who would preside over the economic and social development of lands that fell within the jurisdiction of several administrations. The OCRS was designed to coordinate the industrial companies working in the region, but its intimate links with the Ministry of the Sahara left a political undertone to the organisation. Furthermore, there is a sense within the debates about the

project that politicians were driven by the wider context. The Sahara presented an ambitious opportunity to not only restore France's role as an international leader with control over this large, geo-strategic and mineral-rich region, but also to lead the technological advancement of this region by using European funding alongside foreign technical investment and Franco-African politics and administration to benefit the lives of the Saharan populations and the rest of the French Republic.

It was also presented with several difficulties. It was not just in the broader picture of strategy and colonial policy that the OCRS leaders, including Max Lejeune, faced a number of problems. By 1957 there was no coordination of the long-established research and exploitation groups in the Sahara and no rational development plan for those hoping to break into the industrial market. The OCRS was envisioned as an organism which could unite these efforts and put them into effect more productively. Although it was designed to resolve the logistical and technological problems of industrialising the desert, in reality these problems were just amalgamated and destined to be inherited by one organisation rather than several, leading to an impossible workload (Treyer, 1966). Because of the intricately entwined nature of the Ministry of the Sahara and the OCRS, these problems spread and became issues for both the political administration and the organisation. This occurred to the extent that where the OCRS had begun as a purely economic government project, alongside the Ministry, it threatened to take on an administrative, geostrategic and even military nature. Although progress was made in the first year of its creation, particularly in terms of resource exploitation, the construction of the different committees and commissions meant that it still was not in full operation by the end of 1957. However, it is clear to see from this chapter the controversy that this project caused, with certain politicians seeing it as too political. For others it was not enough, some regarding it as an inappropriate renewal of colonialism, and others saw it as the unwelcome dismantlement of France's African empire. With the project being accused of all these different insufficiencies, it is clear that the main foundation of the OCRS was ambiguity. By keeping the identity of the project vague, the OCRS planners could make the project 'agree' with the needs of the different French and African politicians, while also keeping it flexible to change in new political and international contexts. As the project was created, so did the political landscape shift and Max Lejeune was left in charge of this organisation, to navigate the unsteady political scene in Paris and in North Africa at the beginning of 1958.

Chapter 3: IV to V Republic: A shift for the OCRS?

La France a vocation pour une deuxième conquête du Sahara. Conquête très pacifique et très humaine.

Conquête justifiée par notre capacité technique.

Conquête légitime aussi.

Gilbert Maurel, 1957.

On the 15th January 1958, at the home of the French government in Paris, Hotel Matignon, Max Lejeune announced to reporters that the OCRS was France's greatest guarantee of peace. Just over a year since the OCRS was created, the High Commission (Figure 3) of this government organisation met for the first time, with the Minister for the Sahara and Délégué Général Max Lejeune available to lead the meeting and promote France's activities in the Sahara to the national press. Lejeune pushed the organisation's mandate to use economic activity in order to improve the social wellbeing of the local populations and eradicate ancestral and ethnic antagonisms. This 'guarantee' of peace was declared at a point of uncertainty and insecurity in French history.⁹⁶ Following the fallout of the Suez Crisis and the independence of its protectorates in Morocco and Tunisia, France sought solidarity and economic security in its European alliances and its strategically placed colonial assets which served as a bulwark between communist revolution and Anglo-Saxon capitalist dominance. Algerian nationalists continued to fight for independence from French rule. As the conflict escalated dramatically, in 1956 Guy Mollet received a new authority in the form of Special Powers to 'restore civil peace' (Stora, 2008, p. 208). The new French Saharan departments were only months old and the programmes of the OCRS were still very much under construction.

At first glance, Lejeune's archives from early 1958 provide no hint of any impending political crisis in Algiers nor indeed any acknowledgement at all of the difficulties facing France in North Africa beyond the technical issues of setting up the government's industrial programmes in the Sahara. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the progress of the OCRS during this tumultuous year for France and how the themes of continuity and change were reflected in its own reforms and activities. It is the continuity of personnel and practices which at first shapes this chapter, which, like Lejeune's own language, disguises the undercurrent of change which this project experienced and reflected France's national experience. 1958 was also a year of increased technological development in the Sahara, with legislation struggling to keep up with the rapid introduction of new Saharan projects. Lejeune spent much of his second year as Minister guiding the management of these projects and

⁹⁶ ADS, 37J, 85, Max Lejeune, M. Max Lejeune ministre du Sahara nous déclare : « Le Sahara, chance commune doit être une garantie de paix », *Le Figaro*, January 21, 1958.

pushing through the legislative framework which would facilitate France's continued control over industries within the OCRS borders while encouraging much needed foreign investment.

This first meeting of the High Commission of the OCRS dealt mainly with the administrative and logistical matters that all new political and economic institutions must face. This ranged from electing a president and a permanent delegation, to establishing communication structures with the Ministry of the Sahara and creating a draft budget. It also discussed the status of French and foreign private investments and the proposed methods for encouraging private investment in the OCRS. In addition, information was shared on the then current oil and mining research and operational programmes with the members of the High Commission. This administrative body was composed of sixteen African delegates (including representatives from each of the Saharan territories in Mauritania (observer delegates), Soudan, Niger and Chad) elected by their Territorial Assemblies and sixteen 'metropolitans' elected by the French National Assembly. The High Commission oversaw the establishment and coordination of the various OCRS social and economic programmes, had the initial task of putting the January 10, 1957 law into practice.⁹⁷

Lejeune's own handwritten notes of the meeting, which contain scribbles of phrases and ideas, rather than expansive scripts, revealed the key matters, not explicitly listed on the agenda, which concerned him. The first was the ongoing question as to how to frame the OCRS and how the organisation should present itself as being in the best interests of the local populations noting the 'mise en valeur' and the potential for a 'Sahara tourné vers le Nord' or as a 'confederation Sahara-Nord-Afrique'. However, his speculations turn to the other Saharan regions and he appears to discard the latter two ideas for framing the OCRS. He reveals that his priority lay in setting out the OCRS' main policies, which he believed centred on improving conditions for the populations in sub-Saharan Africa, or, as he put it 'pour les populations défavorisées de l'Afrique noire'.⁹⁸ This question of the identity of the OCRS and how it would frame the development of the Sahara both within the desert region and to external actors such as France's European partners appears to dominate Lejeune's plans for the organisation in the early months of 1958.

The identity of the OCRS and its plan for implementing the development programmes continued to be at the front of Lejeune's mind when he met with the High Commission of the OCRS. The High Commission was the last of the OCRS institutions to be formed. In contrast, the Comité technique de direction had met several times in 1957 and had begun to gather data on the financial and technical situation of the new organisation. The delegates of the High Commission had only been appointed

⁹⁷ ADS, 37J, 85, Max Lejeune, *Note sur la Haute-Commission et son Secrétariat* (n°116), February 17, 1958.

⁹⁸ ADS, 37J, 85, Max Lejeune, [handwritten meeting notes], January 15, 1958.

the month before and had not yet had time (unlike the French National Assembly) to discuss the project and its organisation at length. Therefore, the first priority of this meeting was to set the stage for the OCRS and establish its objectives, thereby shaping the structure of this project and its (already underway) activities in the Sahara. The meeting was also an opportunity for the High Commission to promote France's new organisation and demonstrate a 'puissance publique' in the face of the 'menaces sur [le] Sahara', by this he will have meant any immediate threats posed by the unrest of the Algerian war, tensions with the newly independent Moroccan and Tunisian states over their Saharan borders and their involvement in the Algerian conflict, as well as the uncertainty of the Cold War dispute. In his notes, Lejeune was particularly encouraged by the fact that many of these new appointments, made by the French Assembly and the 'Assemblées Constitutionnelles de la République' (the territorial assemblies), were young African and French politicians who represented the new direction that the French Union was headed in and, as the future of this new 'cooperative' relationship between France and Africa, had it in their power to guarantee peace. Lejeune also stressed the importance of not allowing the political powers of the territories involved in the project, to be transferred away from the Territorial Assemblies and High Commissions in Dakar and Brazzaville and towards the OCRS.⁹⁹ This demonstrates that even a year after the creation of the OCRS, Lejeune still felt compelled to stress the 'non-political' status of the organisation. This may have been a result of his awareness of that while he believed there was support for the organisation from nomadic populations, there was a continued reticence from sedentary populations towards the OCRS and ongoing criticism from within Mali over the objectives of the organisation. Lejeune's final concern lay with who would be the key personalities of the OCRS and how to decide which would become the faces of the organisation.

Nevertheless, the first order of the High Commission was to discuss the primary measures required for applying the law that had created the OCRS. The legal matters included the relationship between the OCRS and the Ministry of the Sahara and the requirements the law had for each of the individual territories, beginning with the former territoires du Sud; the departments of Oasis (administered from Laghouat) and Saoura (administered from Colomb-Béchar). The nature of the administration of these two new departments meant that they were directed by the Ministry of the Sahara, unlike the rest of the OCRS which continued to be under the administrative control of AOF and AEF. This administration situation caused a certain amount of concern and confusion as to how the departments would be organised in conjunction with the OCRS. When it came to the regions within AOF and AEF it was expected that the Minister of the Sahara (Lejeune) would consult directly with

⁹⁹ ADS, 37J, 85, Max Lejeune, [handwritten meeting notes], January 15, 1958.

the territorial governments. For Lejeune, this was a matter of reconciling the new 'personnalité' (identity) of these administrative regions, which emerged following the *loi cadre Defferre* of 1956, with the interests of the local Saharan populations who were said to expect a lot from the OCRS. By this he suggested that the OCRS would be in a better position to represent these local populations than say those in Bamako or Niamey. It was also a question of uniting French social development policy with that of social promotion in a previously little-considered region.

De plus, c'est une nécessité impérieuse que d'unifier la politique de mise en valeur et de promotion sociale de régions dont l'originalité spécifique est notoire, tant en ce qui concerne leur climat, leur facies, que le mode de vie des populations : la loi du 10 janvier a précisément pour but d'appliquer à l'ensemble géographique des méthodes nouvelles et adéquates.¹⁰⁰

Social promotion (promotion sociale) was usually used to discuss the promotion of local elites to positions of administrative responsibility and facilitating access to education. Its use here suggests that Lejeune hoped to use this strategy in his approach to create support for the OCRS within the Sahara. Lejeune also emphasises the damaging nature of an administratively split Sahara in order to confirm the necessity of economically uniting these regions. He argues that this is because the regions had often been neglected when it came to social and economic policy. For example, investment funds had previously overlooked the desert regions, especially in AOF and AEF, with their social benefits not reaching these further flung populations. He argued that this was the main mission of the High Commission; implementing the OCRS to rectify the former negligence of French administrative and economic authorities in regions peripheral to colonial centres such as Algiers and Dakar.¹⁰¹

However, in spite of Lejeune's (and many other planners') insistence that the OCRS was a purely economic organisation, the legislation on the High Commission of the OCRS suggested otherwise. Within the accompanying notes made in February 1958 to the original law, the executive was named a consulting organ of the Government.

La Haute Commission a d'autre part et en certains cas une compétence consultative à l'égard du Gouvernement. L'article 4 de la loi du 10 janvier autorise le Gouvernement à prendre, nonobstant toutes dispositions législatives en vigueur, des décrets spéciaux dans un certain nombre de matières. Ces décrets sont pris « après avis » de la Haute Commission.¹⁰²

Lejeune maintained that this intervention of the High Commission was reasonable because of the time-consuming and lengthy procedural nature of law making. The High Commission could therefore use the loopholes of 'special decrees' which could modify existing laws and become obligatory just

¹⁰⁰ ADS, 37J, 85, La Haute Commission de l'OCRS, *Tableau des premiers mesures d'application de la loi créant l'OCRS*, January 15, 1958, p.2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² ADS, 37J, 85, Max Lejeune, *Note sur la Haute-Commission et son Secrétariat* (n°116), February 2, 1958, p.2.

eight days after their publication. This meant that already the OCRS had a way of circumventing the new sovereignty granted to the overseas territories under the 1956 *loi cadre*.

Lejeune argued that this move was necessary so that the OCRS would not be impeded by legislation. He reasoned that the High Commission sought to work with the local populations and inform them directly of OCRS activities, thereby justifying, in a rather Gaullist manner, the bypassing of regional governments. This work was to include local leaders in development plans and provide them with some form of control over their execution. By collecting queries, criticisms and observations from the local communities the High Commission¹⁰³ could overcome legal difficulties by persuading local populations that it was in their interest to sidestep their regional governments. There was a sense that Lejeune believed that material self-interest would, and should, prevail over matters he regarded as less important, such as sovereignty. He also reaffirmed that the High Commission only had control over economic and social matters (despite its ability to modify existing legislation). This meant that the Commission by itself had no power over security or defence in the Sahara, matters which were exclusively under the jurisdiction of the head of the OCRS, the Délégué Général, nor over political and administrative questions which were meant to be addressed by the Minister of the Sahara.¹⁰⁴ Placing sole control over defence and security with the Délégué Général and administrative and political issues with the Minister of the Sahara appears to be problematic. At this time, these two roles were held by the same person – Lejeune. It seems ambitious that he should withhold these matters from the executive, and more probable that he would delegate many of these matters to politicians and civil servants within the OCRS and the Ministry.

It was during the inaugural meeting that the delegates determined the nature and role of the High Commission. Defining the purpose of this executive was deemed crucial by a number of the delegates, including Cheikh Sidya, whose official capacity in the Commission, alongside his fellow senator Pierre Cornet, was to represent the interests of the French Union, however unofficially he spoke on behalf of his home country, Mauritania. He questioned whether it was an assembly or an administrative commission. This was seen as important for understanding the on the ground role of the High Commission and how it should operate. The newly appointed president of the executive, Marius Moutet, who was another French politician with a special interest in international affairs and Minister of the Colonies under the 1930s Popular Front, advised that the answer lay in the law itself which set out several articles to indicate how the High Commission should be run. The High Commission, it was declared by Max Lejeune, was an ‘organisme commun de travail’ that is to say a

¹⁰³ Because the High Commission met infrequently, there was a permanent delegation which was charged with making decisions on its behalf between sessions.

¹⁰⁴ ADS, 37J, 85, Max Lejeune, *Note sur la Haute-Commission et son Secrétariat* (n°116), February 2, 1958, p.3.

commission which was charged with the study of economic and social problems and the preparation of the budgets.

After only a year since its creation, Lejeune pronounced the ambitious objectives for the OCSR's new programmes to be implemented in 1958. These included the construction of 255 kilometers of road, the establishment of a hydraulics program including research, irrigation and drainage, and telecommunications construction (of which 116 circuits were required across just Saoura and Oasis). Within the oil industry delegates such as Louvel identified that progress could not be made without foreign investment, both financially and in terms of equipment.¹⁰⁵

It was at the permanent delegation's meeting at the Ministry of the Sahara in February 1958 that this work continued. Here Louvel (president of the permanent delegation), Al Sid Cheikh, Charles Cruciani, Moutet and André Boulloche (deputy Délégué Général of the OCSR) as well as various other delegates met to discuss certain technical and budgetary issues. Beyond the budget, it was Boulloche's report on the progress of the OCSR's programmes which most interested the delegation. With a pressing need to resolve the transport problems in the Sahara, construction of roads was of particular interest. Six new Saharan engineering companies had been established since June 1957 and had begun construction of routes connecting the 'east' and 'west' Sahara.¹⁰⁶ However, this progress continued to be costly, and despite the OCSR's extensive funding from the French government, the Saharan programmes required more and more money. Although France's colonial assets, including the Sahara, were covered by the 1957 Treaty of Rome, this did not include European investment in French 'domestic' development projects. The solution would have been to apply for funding from the European community or from other foreign countries, however there was a fear within the central government that by securing external funding, the French state would risk conceding control over the Saharan projects and even concede French sovereignty in the Sahara. This debate continued within the OCSR and the National Assembly into the following year, with this problem as well as the other budgetary concerns becoming inflamed with the unfolding political events in Paris and Algiers in the spring of 1958.

The May 1958 crisis and the OCSR

With France's political control weakened by the collapse of Félix Gaillard's government in April 1958, French right-wing actors took action in Algiers and seized power. Frustrations over the Algerian war, and in particular over a perceived lack of assurance from the metropole that French interests in

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.35.

¹⁰⁶ ADS, 37J, Fonds Max Lejeune, 86, Délégation Permanente de l'OCSR, *Procès-Verbal de la réunion tenue le 25 février 1958 au Ministère du Sahara*, February 25, 1958, p.5.

Algeria would be protected, caused riots and disturbances to break out throughout Algiers in May. These incidents, led by disgruntled army generals and student leaders, evolved into a major political crisis. It was only after General Massu's repeated calls for Charles de Gaulle to return and lead France out of this unrest that these demonstrations subsided. This return thereafter signalled the fall of the Fourth Republic and the transformation of French politics.

In spite of these events, in the months following May 1958 OCRS activities in the Sahara continued and relatively little changed. Max Lejeune remained both Minister and Délégué Général and the executive, technical and financial committees of the OCRS continued to meet at regular intervals throughout the year. In fact, this crisis, which was expected to signify uncertainty for France's political institutions did not even affect the personnel involved, let alone the running of the industrial programmes. By October 1958, the Comité Technique de Direction met with a full line-up of delegates to examine the progress of the OCRS' programmes. This committee involved many of the prominent Fourth Republic political and military figures, from Max Lejeune, to Moussa, Bloch-Laine and Labonne to Faure and General Mirambeau.¹⁰⁷ Although there were changes in personnel, with the former Secretary-General of Algeria, Pierre Chaussade replaced on the committee by the newly instated Director of Algerian Affairs, and another Fourth Republic stalwart, Eugène Simonneau whose name ceases to feature in OCRS files after the summer of 1958, the OCRS appeared to be little affected in the months following the coup in Algiers.

Rising tensions between military and civilian planners

Although the May crisis did not immediately appear to have materially affected the OCRS, discussion within the different executive bodies of the organisation demonstrated rising tensions between military and civilian officials. Primarily, the uncertainties faced by the newly instated Fifth Republic of France¹⁰⁸ became evident in discussions about the OCRS' budget. The Comité Technique de Direction, which met in October 1958 to discuss the budget for the 1959 programmes, was unable to financially confirm their infrastructure activities beyond the end of the year. Gilbert Devaux, budget director since 1956 and with the unenviable job of reforming public services during the transitional period between the end of the Fourth Republic and the introduction of the Fifth Republic, spoke on the OCRS programmes at this budget meeting. He recognised that the OCRS had worked to reduce its spending during the summer of 1958 but insisted that more needed to be done in reducing expenditures on non-urgent projects in order to make the budget for 1959 more realistic. To resolve

¹⁰⁷ ADS, 37J, Fonds Max Lejeune, 86, Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes, *Réunion du Comité Technique de Direction*, October 15, 1958.

¹⁰⁸ Constitution introduced on October 5, 1958.

this issue, the committee identified the priority programmes, such as road construction, hydraulics and civil aviation, but put scientific missions, geographic surveys and social-economic studies to one side while economic studies were prioritised.¹⁰⁹ Lejeune identified that these budgetary constraints would affect works that were already underway, especially in the roads and tracks sector, which had several ongoing projects, and required the cooperation of the companies involved. Although certain contractors had offered to continue their work under deferred payments, Lejeune was unwilling to put the OCRS' finances at risk. He preferred to put activities on hold and only execute those programmes that had the necessary budgetary coverage.¹¹⁰

While reflecting on the budget for hydraulics and rural equipment programmes, Bloch-Laine argued that the latter did not require as much investment as the former. He maintained that palm-tree planting operated at a slower pace to the rapid industrial development of the hydraulics programme, and therefore should not be given increased funds. Although Bloch-Laine considered hydraulics as a priority for the OCRS, Lejeune argued otherwise. He reminded the committee of the OCRS' obligations to the Saharan regions of the territoires d'outre mer; Aïr, Adrar des Iforas, Borkous, Ennedi and Tibesti. Alongside hydraulic works, rural equipment was the most direct intervention that the OCRS had with local populations and this should not be forgotten amidst all the other work that the project was conducting.¹¹¹ This discussion demonstrates the key issues that these planners prioritised. Bloch-Laine, with his economics background, identified that the quickest and most profitable industries should be prioritised by the OCRS in terms of funding. Lejeune however was mindful of the OCRS' duty towards the local populations and improving the industries that Saharans depended on.

Although this budget discussion went into great detail over the various OCRS programmes, it did not address expenses which lay outside of the economic projects. For example, the communications and defence programmes were not included in this report. General Mirambeau, who was representing General Jacquier, the Officer General attached to the Délégué Général, at the technical committee meeting highlighted several matters which affected the military. Because of the nature of the January 10, 1957 law, which provided for the inclusion of a 'defence vocation' in the OCRS, the Etat-Major de la Défense Nationale drew the attention of this OCRS committee to the issues that the army faced in the Sahara, in this case railway equipment. He argued that some routes were so

¹⁰⁹ ADS, 37J, 86, Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes, *Réunion du Comité Technique de Direction*, October 15, 1958, p.3.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

necessary, such as between Touggourt and Ouargla, that they should be doubled up by using railroads as well as roads for motor vehicles.¹¹²

Devaux was surprised by Mirambeau's addition. He regarded the vocation of the OCSR as economic and social, but not military. Therefore, he suggested that Mirambeau (and indeed Jacquier) take up any military budget matters with the Ministry of Defence. Lejeune agreed with Devaux on the nature of the OCSR, which although it included military capabilities was not responsible for national defence, rather it required the army in order to protect French interests in the Sahara. This exchange demonstrates the varied interpretations of the OCSR which remained by 1958, even within the organisation itself, but particularly between military and civil planners. Lejeune added that the OCSR had a pioneering vocation, by which he meant that the organisation's main focus was the conception and establishment of industries in the Sahara. He did not agree that the OCSR should continue to cover the costs of maintenance and management and that the industries should become self-funded and profitable in their own right. Although he did not attach a time scale in which an industry should leave the 'establishment phase' and enter 'maintenance', he does argue that the budget should reflect this.¹¹³ This exchange also shows that the lines between military and civil planners' opinions on the priorities of the OCSR were not so clear cut. Lejeune, who had formerly worked closely with the armed forces as Secretary of State, now found himself as a mediator between these civil and military planners.

While the OCSR was made up of delegates and representatives from the various Saharan territories as well as certain French military commanders, it is clear that in the smaller meetings, such as the technical committees and the budget meetings, that it was French, civil metropolitan authority that dominated. The same French politicians who had dominated the Fourth Republic's overseas political institutions were included in the OCSR discussions, not only representing continuity beyond the May 1958 crisis, but also demonstrating the relatively increasing influence of civil, political authorities in the industrial development of the French empire. These were actors with a special interest in international affairs and who regarded the OCSR as an important organisation for cultivating France's image and power on the world stage. By associating themselves with the OCSR these planners saw an opportunity to gain prestige and further their own career ambitions as well as France's geostrategic priorities.

¹¹² Ibid, p.4.

¹¹³ Ibid, pp.4-5.

Aviation

Another industry that the OCRS prioritised for its geo-strategic benefits to France and the empire was aviation and its potential to resolve many of the transportation issues in the Sahara. Aviation was especially important to the control and security of the major oil installations in the Sahara. In early 1957 the OCRS had begun plans to construct a network of military airports which would serve these facilities and enable their rapid defence from possible Algerian nationalist attacks (Cantoni, 2017, pp. 131-132). By 1958 French planners began to look beyond simply serving the Saharan territories. Devaux sought to include the other African territories in the new budget and suggested that the OCRS form a program for the Sahara and the TOMs with budget allocations in each of the concerned ministries (MinFOM, Sahara, Intérieur). Roland Pré, who was formerly the Governor-General of Cameroon¹¹⁴ and sat on this committee on behalf of the AEF's interests, supported Lejeune's position, but argued that although the sub-Saharan African administrations were poorer, they merited a joint civil aviation project because of their ability to maintain a high level of traffic. Pré's inclusion on this committee is interesting as it set the tone of French authority over the Sahara. An imposing figure, Pré was notable for his imposing sense of metropolitan control over overseas territories, which he brought to many other committees including the Comité Consultatif which had debated the constitution for the Fifth Republic (Cooper, 2014).

Moussa highlighted that covering both 'general interest' and 'local interest' aviation under the same government agency would make mediation more complicated. This is because it would be difficult for the administrators to strike a balance between the needs of local aviation and the further afield regions. The committee were not unanimous on this need to prioritise OCRS investment in aviation. Jean Blancard, fuel director and a former functionary in the Ministry of Industry, argued that the oil companies should not be neglected in favour of aviation. He maintained that the OCRS had a duty to the oil industry that should not be sacrificed no matter the urgency in improving the air transportation infrastructure.¹¹⁵ Lejeune settled this particular discussion by announcing that the aeronautical infrastructure programme was under review and that aerodromes in Djanet and Touggourt were being considered but that, despite the National Defence representative's suggestion, the military terrain in Colomb-Béchar was not to be included within these development plans. Although Lejeune maintains that this limitation was as a result of the budget constraints, he does not give Mirambeau any indication that military aviation would be included in future OCRS discussions. He maintained that in addition to the OCRS not being able to fund aviation

¹¹⁴ Roland Pré was also implicated in UPC repression in Cameroon during his tenure (Cooper, 2014).

¹¹⁵ ADS, 37J, 86, Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes, *Réunion du Comité Technique de Direction*, October 15, 1958, p.5.

advancements in Colomb-Béchar, it was also unable to construct a second road to furnish the Ouargla – Touggourt – El Oued zone. Yet, in recompense and indeed in contradiction with his earlier position on the defence budget, Lejeune proposed that the OCRS would provide the military with any necessary equipment that they were lacking. Details of this, however, were not expanded upon at that time. Despite these extensive discussions, all of the Comité Technique, including Mirambeau and Blancard, agreed upon the aeronautical programme for the OCRS.

On this subject of civil aviation and the question of building aerodromes, these discussions reveal the perspectives and attitudes of French planners in terms of the role of the OCRS within the larger empire. Aviation was a method of transport that connected the various administrative regions to one another, and most especially, sub-Saharan Africa to metropolitan France. By constructing more airports in the Sahara, these connections could be further facilitated. Here the OCRS played the role as an intermediary, enabling both local and (for some the more desirable) intercontinental transportation. Aviation also demonstrated how these French planners imagined the OCRS and the Sahara in terms of its strategic position for connecting metropolitan France with the rest of the French Union, at a time when the majority of planes were not yet able to make direct flights from Paris to Dakar or Brazzaville. This infrastructure increased the geostrategic value of the Sahara, enabling France to exact a greater control over the region and to rapidly intervene where needed across North and West Africa.

Securing investment but holding onto sovereignty

Prior to the fall of the Fourth Republic, French policy on foreign oil operations on French Overseas soil (i.e. the Sahara) alternated between unwillingness to permit foreign prospection and a desperate need for international investment. Louis Armand and Pierre Cornet (1956) had written before the creation of the OCRS of the risk that foreign companies posed to France's control over Saharan resources, and therefore threatened French geo-strategic power.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Gilbert Maurel¹¹⁷ ignores the matter of foreign investment entirely in his article *Sahara – Jeunesse de la France*. The first time that foreign intervention or cooperation is mentioned is in the final pages where Maurel lays out the oil operations which were underway in 1957. The sole foreign partner that is included is Shell¹¹⁸ which had a 35 per cent share in a joint venture in Edjeleh with the *Compagnie de Recherches et d'Exploitation de Pétrole au Sahara* (CREPS).¹¹⁹ The article was

¹¹⁶ ADS, 37J, 88, Louis Armand, *Vers un Sahara Moderne*, 1952, p.15.

¹¹⁷ French diplomat and engineer charged with undertaking Saharan industrialisation research by the President of the French Union Assembly in 1957.

¹¹⁸ Royal Dutch Shell.

¹¹⁹ ADS, 37J, 88, Gilbert Maurel, *Sahara – Jeunesse de la France*, September 1957, p.26.

symptomatic of French nationalistic sentiment which was rife in the language of the late Fourth Republic, declaring that in ten years 'la France a trouvé un pétrole comparable à celui mis à jour en 20 ans de recherches en Arabie.' Saying nothing of the non-French technical aid and expertise that had led to this point.

Furthermore, as Mousso (2017) has highlighted, Guy Mollet, who was so eager for European investment in the OCRS and French oil projects, was at the same time reluctant to allow these investors any sway over Saharan operations. In 1956 Mollet's foreign minister Christian Pineau had condemned 'Anglo-saxon' attempts to wrest French Saharan lands away. Yet, at the same time Mollet negotiated with major European powers for France's Saharan territories (amongst others) to be included in the 1957 European community agreements which would guarantee the much-needed outside investment and fulfil his own, what he referred to as Eurafrikan, but were in fact France-Afrique ambitions. Even with these agreements, France maintained a protectionist stance over foreign investment, limiting these enterprises to no more than 49 per cent ownership of joint ventures. Despite the expansion by the French government of the BRP's financial capacity in 1954 in order to fund hydrocarbon research, as the research increased, so did the need for a larger budget. Through the efforts of the OCRS, the French were able to attract several American independent petroleum companies to prospect in the Sahara. These companies had the expertise and engineering capabilities that France lacked, but did not have the international influence of the US major oil companies, and therefore could not challenge French sovereignty in the Sahara. By the beginning of 1958, with the work of these enterprises, oil had been found successfully and transported from Hassi Messaoud to Touggourt and then by railway to Phillippeville where it was taken by ship to Marseille. However, the OCRS still lacked an appropriate framework with which to control investments and manage new concessions. A *code pétrolier* (petroleum code) was proposed by the OCRS to resolve this, but even within the committees of this organisation there was extended debate, primarily over this question of allowing (or not) foreign investors in joint ventures to own more than 49 per cent.

At the Comité Technique de Direction meeting in October 1958, Lejeune invited M. Pessayre, Head of Mines and Energy for the OCRS, to speak about this proposed petroleum code project. During the first eighteen months of the OCRS, a series of studies had been conducted on oil extraction and transportation, this text was written as a result of this work. The code revolved around defining the OCRS' programme of extraction, operation and pipeline transportation of liquid and gaseous hydrocarbons. It responded to the need for a singular programme, where there had been several in operation, which was specifically designed to suit Saharan conditions.

As it stood, mining companies were under either the Algerian mining regime or that of the overseas territories. By recommending a single petroleum code, public authorities were given the choice of maintaining this problematic 'double régime', or to select one or both of these regimes to be extended to encompass all of the OCRS territories or to install a new and unique regime. Pessayre discarded the second option of extending either the Algerian or TOM regime to cover all of the OCRS because he felt neither suited the needs of the OCRS organisation. The Algerian and TOM mining regimes were designed for coastal programmes and not for desert regions. Moreover, they were for mining projects, but not specifically intended for oil or hydrocarbon mining. The particular conditions that the OCRS faced, especially in terms of research and extraction, and the interest of foreign companies in operating in the Saharan regions along with French capital and national interest fuelled the need for a new and separate petroleum code. Although the new code brought in several innovations, it was presented as being, for the most part, based on traditional French mining practices. Pessayre argued that where it differed from existing mining codes was mainly because of specificities to the industry and the geographic locations, adapting French mining principles to desert conditions.¹²⁰

The new provisions were envisaged to give a suitable deal to the concessionaries which would be of benefit from fiscal and legal points of view, with proposed concessions being fixed at fifty years. The code would also provide a more formal and contractual nature to the existing agreements between the companies and the public authorities, using a Concession Agreement to broaden the traditional terms and specifications defining the reciprocal obligations of each party. Beyond such legal specifications such as arbitration and conflict management, the code would recognise the privileges and preferences of the mining rights holders for the transportation of liquid hydrocarbons. The code also called for change in the French tax system for international and local investment in the Sahara. In order to give the necessary guarantees for these investments, as promised by the OCRS law and by the existing guarantees for the TOMs, the code provided for a long-term tax regime which would stabilise taxes over a 25 to 30-year period.¹²¹

In addition, the petroleum code project laid out conditions for geographical competencies. Where a programme was conducted in Algeria, for example if a pipeline extended into one of the Algeria departments, it would be under the jurisdiction of the three public authorities; the *Ministre chargé de l'Algérie*, the Saharan authorities and the technical authority of the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Pessayre specified that the commercialisation of the Algerian pipelines would be carried out

¹²⁰ ADS, 37J, 86, Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes, *Réunion du Comité Technique de Direction – Annexe III- Examen du Projet du Code Pétrolier*, October 15, 1958, p.1.

¹²¹ These provisions were made in article 100 of the petroleum code.

under the price-controlled system of the Algerian authorities, but the transportation for the purpose of extraction would escape this regime. The price controls were designed to protect Algerian industries from foreign competition, therefore gas distribution would remain a part of the aforementioned price control regime. These plans were intended to enable the industrialisation of Algeria, harmonising Algerian gas prices with export prices, carefully controlled by the Ministries that were involved at every level. However, the plans for the Oil Code were also based on the assumption that France would maintain control over Algeria. They suggest that the OCRS was not regarded at this time as an alternative to French Algeria. This is because the code relied on running a pipeline through Algeria to the coast¹²². These discussions, which are documented in depth by Roberto Cantoni (2017) over whether to run the pipeline through Algeria or Tunisia continued months later and ended with an agreement with Tunisia and supported by the Tunisian President Bourguiba. Bourguiba's assent later backfired as a result of his previous assurances (before de Gaulle's return to power) to his allies in the FLN who regarded this volte-face as a betrayal of their Maghreb unity.

Within the Comité Technique de Direction, the predominant concerns of certain committee members about the petroleum code was how, in political and juridical terms it would meet the conditions of the new constitution. Although this issue had been presented to the State Council who would examine the project, Devaux was concerned about the involvement of the Community. He argued that the government needed to clearly establish whether or not regulatory and legislative provisions would fall within the jurisdiction of the various French Community public authorities. Pré was concerned about the political context in which the text had been written. For Pré the provisions of the Code appeared to take their power from institutions created in the overseas departments and territories, or DOM-TOMs, and felt that there was a risk that any metropolitan profit, that is to say the metropole repatriating the wealth for its own benefit, would appear as a return to former practices. Although he does not use the term specifically, Pré alludes to the concern that the code would be interpreted as a restoration of colonial practices. Moussa agreed and warned that the legal value of this text, written in Paris without any consultation with the Soudan, Chad or Niger, would be disputed.¹²³

Blancard, however, drew his colleagues' attention to the fact that the practices of the code had been in place since March 1957, and with the OCRS introduced mere months before at first the code was subject to this uniform Saharan legislation. Yet, with the changes in the political and institutional context, the Council of State would be obliged to adjust the code accordingly. He believed that the

¹²² ADS, 37J, 86, Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes, *Réunion du Comité Technique de Direction – Annexe III- Examen du Projet du Code Pétrolier*, October 15, 1958, pp. 1-5.

¹²³ Ibid, p.5.

Haute Assemblée would include revisions of the legislation by using a series of decrees.

Nevertheless, the issue of the status of oil extraction in the Sahara and the TOMs would take some time to take effect. It was the activity in the northern Sahara and on the border with Algeria which primarily troubled Blancard. Maisonneuve agreed, arguing that the code was made with the Saharan departments in mind.¹²⁴ As a result of their arguments, the Comité agreed that the code and therefore the activity of the oil companies, was only applicable to the Saharan territories of the OCRS, and not the Algerian *départements* to the north.

In contrast, Devaux declared that oil royalties would not be allocated to the metropolitan budget but would be reserved for the OCRS and the countries both within and peripheral to its borders. Though the budget director was against the principle of rigid allocations, he suggested an annual review with governmental control over how provisions would be shared, while continuing to reflect the needs of the respective stakeholders. For Blancard, who was in favour of granting a minimum percentage to the OCRS, the only way for the public authorities to meet the hopes of the oil companies who paid the royalties was to provide a certain number of services and to guarantee a minimum reinvestment of tax revenues in the form of Saharan infrastructure.¹²⁵

Lejeune also believed that a percentage needed to be guaranteed to the OCRS. Whatever the final decision to be taken by the Government, the Minister argued that the OCRS had to retain its power to intervene in the distribution of royalties, or risk losing its *raison d'être*. By vocation and on an economic and social level, it was an important element of the organisation's role in the region. According to Lejeune, a text needed to be written affirming this role by emphasising that the oil royalties would not only serve to raise Saharan standards of living but also, he suggests in a vague reference to the rest of the French Union, that it would encourage economic development in the peripheral TOMs.¹²⁶

The final version of the Code provided a number of freedoms for the oil companies to work in the Sahara and for France to regulate this industry. Firstly, these foreign companies could obtain an exploration permit which would enable them to start field operations and gather data before committing further investment. Secondly, the BRP, who received all such data, were able to gather information on the region based on the different results from different companies and assess the work and potential advancements of all foreign companies operating in the region. In this way exploitation, particularly foreign exploitation, could take place, but the French would retain control

¹²⁴ Ibid, pp.5-6.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

over all geoscientific knowledge that was developed (Cantoni, 2017). Cantoni (2017, p. 138) also notes the effect that this Code had on France's publicly projected image of a 'Saharan oil boom', which was cemented with de Gaulle's visit (along with Lejeune) to an Algerian oilfield and the signing of the first agreement with a foreign company, the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (SONJ) allowing them to hold more than 49 per cent control of a Saharan permit.

The Oil Code is a useful example of the OCRS' determined progress against the backdrop of the turbulent political scene in France and Africa. Through it, the OCRS was able to move away from the policy of the Fourth Republican governments when it came to international involvement in Saharan industrialisation. Discussions within the OCRS about this Code not only centred on the question of foreign investment, but also on creating an appropriate framework for this Code, specific to the OCRS. The members of the *Comité Technique de Direction* recognised the need for a change in legislation to reflect the OCRS' expanding operations, and that this legislation should protect the financial interests of the member territories of the OCRS (including France). Pré, Moussa and Devaux especially stressed the need for the OCRS to demonstrate that this new legislation would not remove any institutional or industrial power from the DOM-TOMs and that it would reflect the OCRS' mandate to the Saharan territories. For Lejeune the OCRS' role within this Oil Code was as a regional leader that would facilitate its implementation and to ensure that any revenue generated could be directed back to the Saharan territories as well as to metropolitan France. The Code also signified another layer of legislation separating the Algerian *départements* from the Saharan *départments*, further establishing French legitimacy in the region. While these changes may have taken place within the context of a new French political regime, agreements over the petroleum code were hard-won, and continued to be conditional.

Saharan Development Companies

The October 1958 Comité Technique de Direction meeting also served to allow a review to take place of the measures introduced to encourage private investment in the Sahara. Aloi de Louvencourt presented the progress made since the first meeting of this particular committee in December 1957. The finance and administration director also introduced a proposed ordonnance on Saharan Development Companies (SDC). With initial infrastructure limited in the Saharan regions, a very broad definition of the field of intervention of these societies was required. Also, without the need for a geographical location, he noted that their purpose was to subsidise the financing of enterprises whose principal activity contributed directly to the equipment or the development of the regions included in the OCRS. The project intended to support these companies which were vital to the building of infrastructure that would support the oil industry, by making tax provisions and

exemptions to protect the SDCs. These provisions would also ensure that the SDCs received a minimum share of any profits.

De Louvencourt questioned how these companies would fulfil their social development obligations. The OCRS was preparing a text which would provide support in terms of equipment, loans, advances or custom charge breaks to encourage the SDCs to run non-profit social activities. Though, until its publication, there was no clear guide for the companies on how to proceed.¹²⁷ Yet, Bloch-Laine stressed that the statutes of development companies existing in the various territories were, despite their similar provisions, intended to facilitate the financing of activities of very different natures. For example, in France, their activities centred on the conversion of local businesses and resuscitation of critical areas, in the overseas territories, the creation of medium and large-scale operations was prioritised, and in Algeria, companies sought to create enterprises with a mixture of these purposes.¹²⁸ In the Sahara, the two companies - one of which had been established and the other still in the process of being set up - which were considering obtaining the status of SDC were essentially oriented towards participating in financing oil research. They were also focused on creating service companies which sought to enter into contracts with the oil companies and on supporting new activities besides oil. However, their intentions to develop the local economy of the Oasis department within which they operated were unaddressed.

De Louvencourt also maintained that to implement provisions in the Sahara similar to those in the rest of France d'outre-mer, the status of these SDCs needed to be fixed and that the tax guarantees needed to be realistic. De Louvencourt used comparisons in order to work out the best way in which to proceed; in this case by using existing, successful examples from within the French empire. De Louvencourt believed that there also needed to be provisions for minimum dividends and for any loans issued by the companies. However, because these clauses were primarily intended to promote financial market investment in the shares and bonds of the SDCs, the public authorities did not prioritise adopting these clauses while they were already essentially financing companies linked to the petroleum industry.¹²⁹ Devaux was reluctant to guarantee the loans of the Saharan Development Companies if they remained attached to the oil companies. He argued that if such a clause was indispensable, the state could grant it under Article 47 of the Act of 31 December 1953 on

¹²⁷ The January 31, 1958 decree, which approved enterprises the grant of equipment bonuses, loans or advances, interest rate subsidies and guarantees, refunds of fiscal or customs charges, was used as a model for the OCRS' projet de texte.

¹²⁸ ADS, 37J, 86, Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes, *Réunion du Comité Technique de Direction – Annexe III- Examen du Projet du Code Pétrolier*, October 15, 1958, p.6.

¹²⁹ ADS, 37J, 86, Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes, *Réunion du Comité Technique de Direction – Annexe II – Examen du projet d'ordonnance relatif aux sociétés sahariennes de développement*, October 15, 1958, p.3.

‘establishments and enterprises that contribute to the implementation of the modernization plan and equipment of the metropole or the economic and social development plan of the overseas departments and territories ‘.¹³⁰ Devaux demonstrates an inclination to rely on previous metropolitan frameworks rather than use the OCRS budget to potentially fund private oil companies.

Moussa argued that the guarantees provided to these SDCs should only be specifically directed at the Sahara, and that parallel companies in the TOMs did not fall under the project text, and therefore could not be given the same entitlements. He also agreed with Devaux in wishing there to be a clear distinction between the SDCs and the oil companies, arguing that the oil industry had been sufficiently funded and did not require additional tax and loan benefits, while these development companies would need initial state assistance. Yet, Blancard suggested that although the oil companies had been well-funded, they did not have any of the guarantees or protections afforded to the SDCs. He used the example of the *société d'équipement pour l'infrastructure saharienne* (SELIS) which took charge of many of the infrastructure-related areas that the oil industry required but could not resolve itself. For instance, SELIS dealt with, amongst other matters, roads, construction and providing engineering solutions for oil companies. Blancard maintained that although the company was related to the oil industry, it was not a part of it and needed to be treated as financially separate. While other committee members, including Bloch-Laine, argued that because of their involvement with and work for these oil companies, it was unreasonable to exclude oil from their official field of activity. Bloch-Laine agreed that the statute on the SDCs should be adopted and that the matters of tax exemption guarantees and the specificity of their field of activity could be decided upon at a later date. Lejeune approved, noting that the committee needed to grant these provisions but would pass on the matter of the guarantees for capital and dividend to the Minister of Finance.¹³¹ Lejeune's deference to the Minister of Finance over these matters demonstrates that the economic power of the OCRS still remained with the state, with all the projects relying on the French state for approval.

While Lejeune and his colleagues had the ability to frame industrial development in a certain way, ultimately they, and indeed the industrial companies and the African members were dependent on the central powers of the metropolitan government. Using the language of ‘mise en valeur’, he believed that the SDCs could be called upon to specify the nature of their projects but did not wish to reject any which could ‘conditionner une économie locale active et soutenue et de presenter une

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ ADS, 37J, 86, Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes, *Réunion du Comité Technique de Direction – Annexe II – Examen du projet d'ordonnance relatif aux sociétés sahariennes de développement*, October 15, 1958, pp.3-5.

incidence heureuse et constante sur la vie des populations sahariennes'.¹³² However, Lejeune does not qualify what this impact would signify, does not mention any job opportunities or improved transportation, only that the positive impact would be a knock-on effect of the oil industry becoming successful. He uses these populations and the local economy in an abstract way in order to close the debate and justify proceeding with the provisions for the SDCs.

By aiding the Saharan oil companies and their affiliates to quickly enter the trade market, the OCSR believed it was able to contribute to French financial rehabilitation following and amidst the crises in Suez and Algeria. Moreover, this constant comparison of the situation of the enterprises in the Sahara with the rest of overseas France demonstrates the pressure felt within the OCSR to show the stability of French rule over the desert region. With instability elsewhere, there was an urgency for the OCSR project to come to fruition, and reap the financial benefits for France, Europe and the rest of the French Union. In doing so, the OCSR would be demonstrative of a 'successful' form of colonial rule, or even an improved form of colonial rule.

New rules, New leaders?

Following Charles de Gaulle's election as the first Fifth Republic President in December 1958, key government and cabinet positions were appointed in January 1959, signalling a reorganisation of the political elites. With these changes, several of the President's closest allies were rewarded with the cream of the political positions.

Jacques Soustelle, former Governor-General of Algeria and long-time friend of de Gaulle's, since they were resisters during the Second World War, was a prime candidate for such preferential treatment. From 1956 to 1958 he had been the leader of the Gaullist parliamentary group and an integral member of the Committee of Public Safety which had been central to the demise of the final Fourth Republic government and to the subsequent return of de Gaulle to public life. However, rather than a Minister of Foreign Affairs, or of Overseas France position, Soustelle found himself at first being offered the Minister of Information job in July 1958. Then, six months later, in January 1959, he was given Lejeune's job, but under a new guise. As Délégué Général of the OCSR he would preside over the economic and political affairs of the Sahara and its neighbouring territories, but the role of Minister of the Sahara was reimagined. It symbolically elevated the Minister to one of de Gaulle's foreign ministry 'deputies', with the role also encompassing petroleum and atomic affairs. This reimagining of the role for the head of the OCSR and the Saharan Ministry reflects the importance to de Gaulle of the work which took place in the Sahara. At first glance the appointment of this

¹³² Ibid, p.5.

Mesoamerica anthropologist to the political elite of the French Sahara may appear strange.¹³³

However, throughout the 1950s, and during his role as Governor-General of Algeria, Soustelle maintained a keen interest in the economic and social development plans for the Sahara. Moreover, his linguistic abilities (he spoke and wrote in at least four languages including English and Spanish) meant that he was well-equipped to promote France's activities on the international stage.

As a centre-left Gaullist with strong nationalistic political beliefs and conviction in the importance of French authority on both the world stage and within the empire, the appointment of Soustelle to the Saharan ministry may appear as a departure from Lejeune. However, political persuasions aside, Soustelle and Lejeune shared a similar stance on the Sahara in several ways. Lejeune believed in the importance of the new infrastructure and industries to build the quality of life for the Saharan populations. He saw the OCS as an agent for not only improving the conditions for these local peoples, but also for securing French geostrategic interests in the region. Upon accepting the role, Soustelle also drew on the situation of the local Saharan populations, particularly the nomadic Tuareg tribes, who he believed were integral to developing the region. In an inaugural press conference in Paris in April 1959, Soustelle called on French planners to abandon the antiquated and outdated analogies of the Sahara which had a tendency to anachronistically resurface in discussions of the French region.

Tour à tour fertile et riant, puis désolé et stérile, il offrit ses herbages aux éléphants, aux girafes, et aux troupeaux que des artistes inconnus ont gravés ou peints sur les roches brûlées du Tassili des Ajjer. C'est un immense pays usé, où subsistent encore les descendants des peuples, noirs ou blancs, qui l'ont habité jadis et que les Grecs, puis les Romains ne firent qu'entrevoir, Harratines, Berbères, Arabes, ont laissé leur empreinte d'oasis en oasis, tandis que se répercutaient faiblement dans ces solitudes, les grands mouvements de peuples et d'idées qui agitaient le monde connu.¹³⁴

In his academic style, which he had brought to his role in Algeria, Soustelle had used anthropological knowledge, through historians such as Jean Servier in order to run the Algerian government-general¹³⁵. Soustelle drew on his 'knowledge' and 'understanding' of the local populations and mapped out how his Ministry and the OCS could improve their situation in life. Following an account of how much wealth and security the oil and gas reserves in the Sahara had already begun to benefit metropolitan France, the French Union and western Europe, he stressed the advantages of France's work in the region for the local peoples.

¹³³ As it had been when he was appointed Governor-General of Algeria in 1955, despite his lack of experience of the three departments.

¹³⁴ AN, 112 AJ23, Jacques Soustelle, *Conférence de presse sur le Sahara de M. Jacques Soustelle, Ministre Délégué*, April 7, 1959, p.1.

¹³⁵ For more on Servier's contribution to the French government's Algerian war effort, see Neil MacMaster (2013).

Nous avons introduit au Sahara, - et à cet égard je tiens à rendre hommage à mon prédécesseur, M. Max Lejeune – un ensemble de réformes administratives et politiques qui, en associant démocratiquement les Sahariens de toutes origines et de toutes confessions à la tâche entreprise, ouvrent le pays au progrès. Sans fermer les yeux devant les réalités locales qui imposent certains aménagements ou certaines variantes, nous avons tenu à ce que les Sahariens – sans aucune discrimination, je le répète – aient sur place leurs communes, à Paris leurs Députés. Bientôt ils désigneront leurs Conseils généraux et leurs Sénateurs. Le nouveau Sahara s'édifie dans la confiance et dans l'égalité.¹³⁶

Where the OCRS planners under Lejeune's leadership had consistently proclaimed that French interests in the Sahara were purely economic and social, Soustelle's speech here suggests otherwise. He notes the administrative and political reforms to the Saharan regime, arguing that they represented the progress that French rule had made in the region, to the benefit of those who lived there.

The fact that Soustelle was a close ally of de Gaulle, who would support the President's imaginings of the Sahara in terms of its importance for France's strategic energy and nuclear ambitions set the new Minister and Délégué Général apart from his predecessor. Moreover, Soustelle had an acute ability to draw international eyes to France's progress in the Sahara and use his personality, or even celebrity, to promote the work of the OCRS. Mere months after his appointment, Soustelle was interviewed and photographed for *Time Magazine's* front cover (Figure 1), a particularly spectacular montage of stereotyped 'Saharan' images, with Soustelle's face at its centre. While he attended the same committee meetings and tours of the Sahara required of the Délégué Général, he also used his diplomatic abilities to attempt to improve the somewhat strained relations between France and the UK. This included a trip to London, in which he launched a Franco-British parliamentary development group, and reaffirmed France's commitment to improving Europe's position in Africa.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.2.



Figure 6: Jacques Soustelle Time Magazine Cover (Chaliapin, 1959)

In June 1959, the UK Parliament invited Jacques Soustelle to visit and speak with the Cabinet and the House of Commons. He used this visit as an opportunity to explain the new French constitution and France's reformed domestic and foreign policy. Whilst in London, Soustelle was invited to give a paper at Chatham House on his vision of the Fifth Republic. This was not Soustelle's first paper at Chatham House, having spoken there two years previously whilst he was still Governor General of Algeria. Much of his 1959 speech was dedicated to his reasoning for the demise of the Fourth Republic and his views on the coup in May 1958, linking it with the 'strange defeat' (Bloch, n.d.). However, he does use the opportunity to explain his new role as Minister of the Sahara, and to promote French oil and gas industrial development in the Sahara. He appears concerned firstly with allaying any doubts as to the existence of oil in the Sahara and outlines the development of petrol centres in Hassi R'mel and Hassi Messaoud (see Figure 7). This explanation of the wealth of the French Sahara appears to have been used to demonstrate the wealth and potential wealth of the French Republic:

Then there is the gas of Hassi R'Mel with 800 billion cubic metres of estimated reserves, enough to cover the consumption of France for many years. So that we can be sure not only that we will in the

very near future cover our needs in gas and oil, but that we will be able to supply gas and oil to other countries both in North Africa and Western Europe. The dimensions of that reserve both in oil and gas are so great that they are on a different level from a purely Saharan, Algerian, North African, or even French problem; they are on the level of international needs. To my way of thinking, the gas can provide a kind of economic link between both Sahara Algeria [sic.] to Ndandejoke [sic.] on the one side and France, Britain, Spain, Italy and Germany on the other.¹³⁷

By underlining the economic stability that the Sahara provided, he also highlights the rising position of France in the world order, as the facilitator of European and Western wealth. This links to Charles de Gaulle's wider foreign policy, to promote French grandeur and improve the country's *rang* (rank) on the world stage. It also demonstrates Soustelle's ambitions for France to lead a renewed Eurafica funded by Saharan resources.

Soustelle also addressed questions over the French administration of the Sahara. British political and journalist observers at the House of Commons struggled to comprehend France's role in the Sahara nor their motives in the region. When questioned on why the Sahara should be administered separately, Soustelle claimed that it was not due to any 'political trickery'. Where they may have implied that Soustelle was ignoring the 'Algerian question', he brushed aside these queries and instead justified the French prerogative, with France's operations 'essential because of the vast resources of that area' and that the method administering the Sahara separately from Algeria 'would in no way prejudice the constitutional rights of the people there'.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ The Chatham House Online Archive, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Jacques Soustelle, *Prospects for the Fifth Republic* (n°8/2631), June 4, 1959, p. 11.

¹³⁸ AN, 112 AJ23, Manchester Guardian, *Sahara A-tests to go on French Stand*, June 4, 1959.

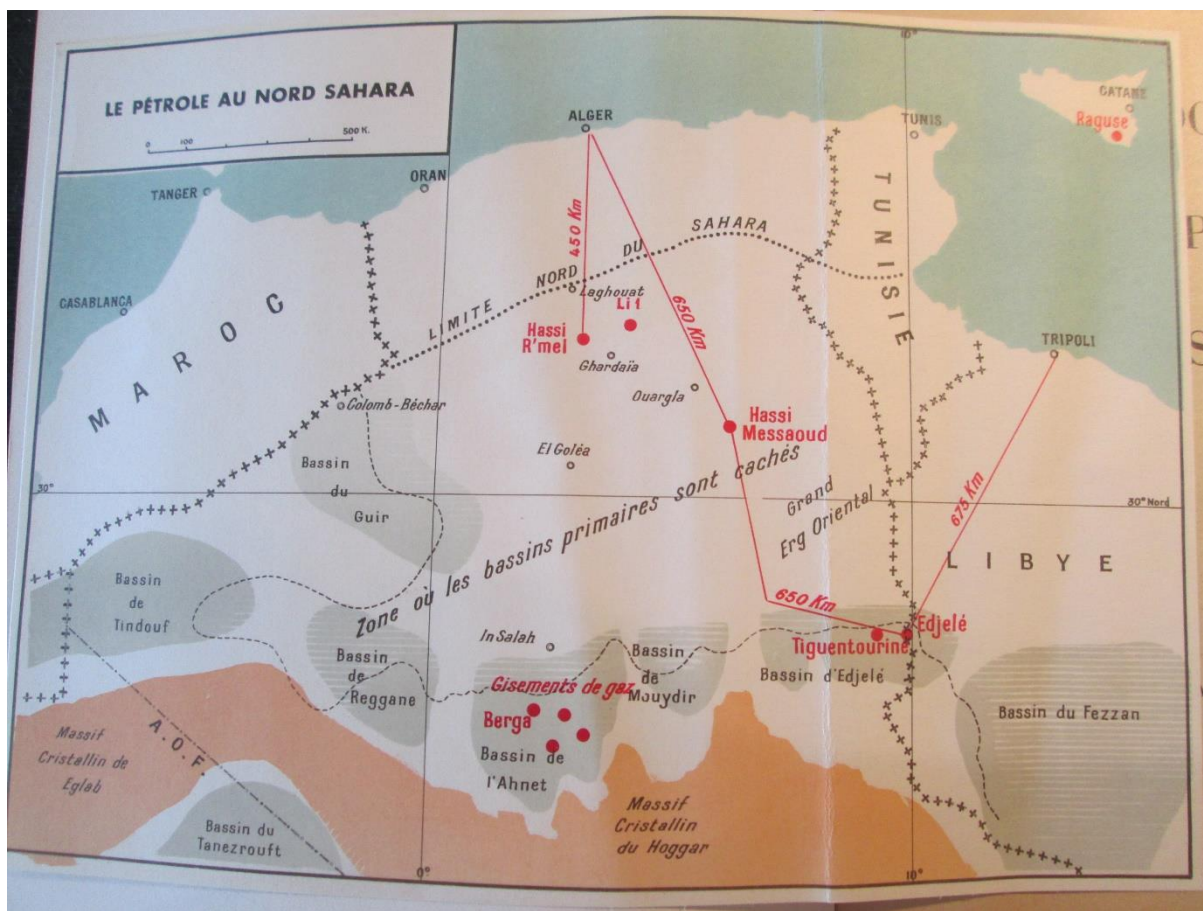


Figure 7: Le Pétrole au Nord du Sahara¹³⁹

Soustelle not only used his visit to London to promote the new French Republic, but also to stress France's plans for their nuclear programme. *The Daily Telegraph* reported on Soustelle's speech in the House of Commons to the Franco-British Parliamentary Relations Committee and his clarification to the committee and the British media that France was committed to the planned atomic tests in the Sahara.¹⁴⁰

While there was significant change between the style of leadership and governance over the Saharan departments and the role of the OCS, Soustelle's work in the early months of 1959 demonstrates the continuities between his own and Lejeune's tenure as Minister and Délégué Général. Where the OCS, under Lejeune, had begun to lay the foundations for a profitable and durable petroleum industry in the Sahara with a local infrastructure angled towards facilitating this work, Soustelle exhibited a similar desire to continue this progress. His first actions were to continue the implementation of the petroleum code which would resolve France's strategic issue over

¹³⁹ AN, 112AJ23.

¹⁴⁰ AN, 112 AJ23, Daily Telegraph Political Correspondent, *France not to drop A-tests – Soustelle speech*, June 4, 1959.

maintaining sovereignty in the Sahara whilst encouraging international investment in industrial projects.

Legislative Change

With the new constitution came alterations to the legislation governing the Sahara; its metropolitan ministry and the OCRS. In 1959 a new law for the OCRS was introduced, altering the intended purpose of the organisation in an attempt to make it less controversial under Charles de Gaulle's new government. The primary intention of this overhaul was to close any legislative loopholes which could allow the OCRS to bypass the sovereignty of the member overseas territories (French Soudan, Niger and Chad).

The January 10, 1957 law which originally created the OCRS outlined the purpose of the organisation to be 'la mise en valeur, l'expansion économique et la promotion sociale des zones sahariennes de la République française.'¹⁴¹ The law stipulated that Algeria, Mauritania, French Soudan, Niger and Chad would participate in the management of this project through their respective representatives at the High Commission who were in charge of creating action programmes and controlling their application. The law also went into detail on the OCRS' economic and social mission in the Sahara. In terms of its social aims, the OCRS was intended to promote measures which would improve the quality of life of local populations and to ensure that any social promotion would take their traditions into consideration.

With the fall of the Fourth Republic and the new constitution for the Fifth Republic which was voted in by referendum on 4 October 1958, it was seen, by multiple parties that the OCRS needed to be reformed in accordance with this new political system. Modifications to the laws governing and the structures of the OCRS were proposed and subsequently implemented in 1959. These included; reviewing the territorial jurisdiction of the organisation, an overhaul of the internal organisation of the OCRS and the establishment of a specific rule of law for the two Saharan departments. The first modification was seen as necessary because under the previous law the delimitation of the OCRS zones had only been made in terms of creating the Saharan departments of the Oasis and Saoura. The areas covered by the Overseas Territories of French Soudan, Niger and Chad, were supposed to have been fixed by decrees following consultation with the concerned territorial assemblies. However, with the birth of the Community, a new definition of territorial jurisdiction for the OCRS was required within the framework of the new constitution.¹⁴² Therefore this modification was

¹⁴¹ ANOM, Bib20314 1961-62, Le Service des Relations Publiques et de l'Information, *Bulletin OCRS* (n°1), January 1961, p.5.

¹⁴² ANOM, FM 81F 1812, *Annexe v*, 10 May 1959, pp.2-3.

simply a matter of altering the legal paperwork of the OCRS to bring it in line with the constitution of the Fifth Republic and also to ensure that on paper the actions of the organisation could not bypass the sovereignty of the territories concerned. Some of these changes to the legislation on the Sahara and the OCRS, such as the modifications to the Saharan *départements* may have eventually taken place under the Fourth Republic.

By modifying the OCRS' territorial jurisdiction, the High Commission in its original form was necessarily altered, with a new body called the Economic and Social Committee being formed. At first, this organisation only existed on paper, while it was in its design phase, in order to ensure sufficient representation from across the region following agreements between the OCRS and its neighbouring states and territories.¹⁴³ This demonstrates that the OCRS was modified in order to reflect the changed nature of the French Republic and the rebirth of the French Union as the French Community. Yet, the OCRS still retained its ambiguous nature, remaining an intangible and ill-defined organisation. This closer inspection of these modifications show that little changed in terms of the realities of the OCRS, many of the alterations were made so that the language of the OCRS law reflected the new constitution.

The legal reorganisation of the OCRS prompted further centralisation of matters relating to economic development. From 1959 onwards, measures for economic development would be enacted by decree through the French government's Council of Ministers, following consultation with the Council of State and the Minister of the Sahara. However, this did not apply many of the economic matters pertaining to the Sahara, including research, exploitation of resources, transport or the fiscal regime for these activities within the OCRS borders which remained under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Sahara and the OCRS itself.¹⁴⁴ This modification was deemed necessary because the OCRS was originally created before the Ministry, and this clarification was overlooked at the time. It is also revealing of the ongoing question of where the power in this region lay, in the Sahara or in Paris. In reality it lay in Paris because the OCRS was dependent on its budget; provided and controlled by the central government. However, the OCRS could only function by virtue of the planners involved and their ability to successfully frame the organisation in such a way that could convince the state to continue this funding, as well as the territorial governments to continue being members of the OCRS.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p.3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, pp.3-4.

The 4 February 1959 amendments to the OCRS law were arguably implemented in order to depoliticise the OCRS and focus on the economic and social aims of the organism. Jacques Soustelle, who was appointed Minister of the Sahara and Délégué Général in January 1959 argued that the community vocation of the OCRS could only be possible should the Ministry of the Sahara and the OCRS be separated. A year later this was confirmed with the 10 June 1960 decree which affirmed the social and economic competences of the OCRS (Treyer, 1966, pp. 26-27). However, it is clear that this separation did not signify a disassociation of the Ministry from the OCRS. Rather, their aims and purposes were diverging and becoming more tangibly distinctive, with the OCRS focused on developing the Sahara, while the Ministry focused on the political and administrative aspects of government. Soustelle also deemed it important that the OCRS needed to reform in order to tie in with the new Community's aims.¹⁴⁵

On 7 April 1959, Soustelle gave a speech at an unspecified French press conference on the Sahara. This speech addressed the developmental achievements of the OCRS, stressing their positive effects on the local populations. These ranged from the administrative reforms which 'en associant démocratiquement les Sahariens de toutes origines et de toutes confessions à la tâche entreprise, ouvrent le pays au progrès' to the social reforms including 'les immenses efforts de scolarisation, l'élévation des salaires, l'établissement de la sécurité sociale et du code du travail'. He also praised the progress of the health sector, with high increases in the number of hospitals, infirmaries and clinics in villages in the south of the Sahara.¹⁴⁶ However, he highlights that the work of the Ministry and the OCRS is not over:

Mais la mission que nous nous sommes fixée est très vaste. Il faut attaquer de toutes parts les problèmes : faire des routes pour que circulent les hommes et les marchandises, creuser des puits pour rénover les palmeraies et abreuver les troupeaux, électrifier les Ksour, intensifier le combat contre la maladie.¹⁴⁷

The amendments to the OCRS and the Ministry of the Sahara which were introduced following the birth of the Fifth Republic and the Community in 1958 represented more of a change in legislation than an on the ground shift. The modifications were used to clarify the purpose of the OCRS and justify it in light of the new French Community within which the African countries were promised more autonomy and less direct political intervention from the French state, but also important benefits (including economic, technical and educational) to remaining in the empire as opposed to

¹⁴⁵ AN, 112AJ23, Jacques Soustelle, *Sahara – 1959: Note : l'Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes (OCRS)*, 26 March, 1959, p.1.

¹⁴⁶ AN, 112AJ23, Jacques Soustelle, *Sahara – 1959: Conférence de presse sur le Sahara de M. Jacques Soustelle, Ministre Délégué*, 7 April 1959, p.1

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.2.

choosing independence and isolation from France as in the case of Guinea (White, 1979). By arguing that the OCRS would not bypass these promises, French planners were able to continue the development programmes, including the oil industry, within the Saharan regions. However, these planners still understood that the power in the Sahara lay with the French state along with any control over and indeed responsibility for activities in the region.

Conclusion

By the summer of 1959 the face of the French Republic in the Sahara, the Minister of the Sahara and Délégué Général of the OCRS, had changed quite significantly. Charles de Gaulle had begun to ring out the personnel changes which had been threatened since the Algiers crisis and the subsequent disintegration of the Fourth Republic. As a long-time friend and supporter of de Gaulle, Jacques Soustelle may have had loftier ambitions than that of deputy and Minister of the Sahara (and Délégué Général of the OCRS). Yet, the longer he retained the appointment, the more de Gaulle's ambitions for the Sahara shone through his representative in overseas France. Although Soustelle was a political opponent of Lejeune's, his work came to reflect much of that of his former colleague. Lejeune was cautious in his approach to the Sahara, seeking to establish French sovereignty over the lands and resources in a way that fifty years of military rule had been unable to do. Soustelle came to build upon this work of securing a 'better' system of colonial rule in the lands south of Algeria. This work began with the reforms of the OCRS, which altered the focus and justifications of the organisation to reflect the new constitution and its provisions for the French Community. The OCRS was in many ways in a constant state of self-comparison and looking to understand how it would be seen by others and therefore creating a certain image that it wanted to project. This is reflected in the ways in which planners, such as Soustelle, but also other proponents of the OCRS use comparisons to look to France's (and the Sahara's) neighbours, its economic rivals and also potential models and past colonial mistakes in order to establish the best way to achieve the organisation's objectives.

The OCRS' debates about the petroleum code nevertheless demonstrate a climate of change in French colonial affairs during 1958. The progress of an oil industry in the Sahara in need of increased financial and technical investment had been delayed by questions of foreign investment and fears of relinquishing French sovereignty of the Sahara to foreign countries through the signing of industrial contracts. The new petroleum code proved a turning point for these debates, enabling private companies to profit from the potential oil riches that lay beneath Saharan soil. Charles de Gaulle's first trip to the Sahara later that same year only served to reaffirm this argument that joint ventures could in no way displace France's influence and power in the region. In what were his final months

as Minister and Délégué Général, Max Lejeune continued to propagate France's social development mission in the Sahara, and the benefits that these new industries would provide for local populations in the form of infrastructure. This did not alter the intentions of French politicians that the new constitution would signify a renewed empire under an 'improved' form of colonial rule, demonstrated by French progress in the Sahara.

Chapter 4: Acting on the ground: The military and industrialists

*Le Sahara parvient aujourd'hui au premier plan de l'actualité.
Ceux qui avaient eu l'intuition de son avenir ont été récompensés par l'activité des pionniers
libérateurs de ses richesses.*

Max Lejeune, 1957¹⁴⁸

Article 3 of the January 1957 law on the OCRS set out the organisation's main aim, which was to

Promouvoir toute mesure propre à améliorer le niveau de vie des populations et à assurer leur promotion sociale dans le cadre d'une évolution qui devra tenir compte de leurs traditions.¹⁴⁹

Beyond the projects which supported the oil and gas industry, the responsibility for putting the work of the OCRS into action in the Sahara fell to the two main groups of people who worked on the ground. These were not the populations autochthonous to the territory, or who even lived there for sustained periods of time. These agents of the French state had been controlling factors in the region for over half a century. The first of these was the French military. A fixed presence in the Sahara since the late nineteenth century, France's military forces did not only serve as a defence against those perceived to be hostile to French rule, but were also embedded in Saharan political, juridical and indeed economic fields. Before becoming a region under civil authority, the Sahara had been a military region. The creation of the *Territoires du Sud* in 1902 had done little to change this, and the 1957 Ministry of Sahara and OCRS laws recognised the historical role of the military. Provisions were made to accommodate the military's needs but also include Saharan military leaders in the higher echelons of the political structure of the Ministry of the Sahara, and even on the committees of the OCRS. Nevertheless, where the Minister of the Sahara and the OCRS were predominantly focused on the implementation of development projects in the Sahara, in practice many of these military commanders were more concerned with defending French interests as a whole, rather than facilitating specific development projects. By 1957 the key defence concerns lay with the problematic border situation, or indeed the lack of a tangible border.

The second of these groups responsible for putting the OCRS into practice were the industrial actors; from government-paid scientists to mining companies and their subsidiaries that operated in the region encompassed by the OCRS. The majority of these industrial companies were coordinated by

¹⁴⁸ ADS, 37 J, 104, Max Lejeune, *Industries et Travaux d'outremer*, (n°43), June 1957, p.306.

¹⁴⁹ ANOM, FM1 AFFPOL 2207, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Lois et Décrets* (n°9), January 11, 1957, p.579.

the BIA and the Comité des Zones d'Organisation Industrielle Africaine (ZOIA) which were large specialised state organisations that operated within the OCRS. Although there were private companies that were awarded contracts, such as mining permits, much of the documentation from industrial companies, that was collected by and sent to the OCRS and the Ministry of the Sahara, came from government subsidiaries such as the French public oil authority, the Bureau des recherches de pétrole (BRP). This means that today the OCRS archives, in addition to the BRP files, contain annual reports, scientific studies and surveys from the BIA and the ZOIA to demonstrate the progress made by these actors and measure the advancement of the various development projects. It is not necessarily possible to measure the effect of the OCRS on the standard of living for those voices absent from the archives, the local populations. Nevertheless, this chapter examines the OCRS' development agenda and its implementation in the form of industrial and educational projects.

The Saharan military under the OCRS

The January 10, 1957 law enabled an inter-army military unit to be created for the Sahara which could be used to keep troops on hand ready to be dispatched to the Algerian war or to protect the industrial structures of the OCRS. This provision was included so that the military could more easily protect the borders of the Saharan departments, and along the Tell Atlas Mountains, which were under constant threat (Treyer, 1966, pp. 30-31). However, as Boilley (1993, p. 227) highlights, critics argued that if this were a social and economic organisation, then why should it need an army? The creation of an inter-army military unit posed several problems, including the logistical question of extracting units from Algeria, the AOF and the AEF in order to create a new army. General Bodet, General of the Armée Aérienne and Commander in Chief of the Zone Stratégique de l'Afrique Centrale in 1958, highlighted these problems in his letter to the Minister of Defence.¹⁵⁰ After having visited Dakar, Bamako, Fort Lamy and Brazzaville, he was made aware that although all of the military commanders apparently supported the concept of the OCRS, they had concerns over how the military aspect would be implemented. Firstly, local military leaders were concerned that without a joint command they may become less powerful and even disposable. Secondly, they feared that in calling up their reserve forces for the OCRS, the armies of the AOF and AEF would be stripped bare.

One solution that the military developed for these problems was to create a General Commanding Officer who would report to the Délégué Général of the OCRS. This inter-army commander would

¹⁵⁰ ANOM, FM 1AffPol/2208, P.L. Bodet, Commander in Chief of La Zone Stratégique de l'Afrique Central to Ministère de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées, *Annexe II*, (n°86/Z.S.A.C./E.M./S), 6 June 1958, pp.1-3.

effectively have the same responsibilities as the military leaders of each of the regions of Algeria, the AOF and the AEF, but he would be their subordinate.¹⁵¹ Despite his official duties, which involved organising the defence of the regions, the main mission of this commander was to ensure the unity of the Saharan regions' defence. The document which outlines the responsibilities of the Commander of the OCRS military suggests that he had little real power. He was essentially a coordinator to ensure military communication between the regions and actually depended on the authority of the Algerian, AOF and AEF military commanders, making him unable to operate an OCRS military separate from them.¹⁵² This suggests that despite concerns over the existence of an army for the OCRS, the legislation for it meant that it would have been unable to actively function. This is not because the policymakers behind the OCRS would not have wanted an army, but because the military as an institution wanted to maintain its existing structures.

The OCRS relied on the military in order to provide regional stability and local security for the oil and gas installations and later the nuclear testing project. However, this posed problems for the French military in the Sahara, because not only did they prioritise the Algerian war, which was mostly active in the north apart from some attacks in the south and to the pipelines, but their focus was also mainly on securing borders against infiltration. They identified that the frontiers to the north of the Sahara were under threat from pro-independence forces in Morocco and Tunisia, from the FLN fighters, and after 1960, from Mali and Mauritania. With the OCRS creating a new set new borders, the military did not feel equipped to defend the OCRS region in addition to the administrative regional borders (See Figures 1 and 8). This demonstrates that there was a rift between French planners' ideas and propositions for the Sahara, and the on the ground actors – the military's ability and even willingness to put these plans into practice.

Borders

A largely contested notion, the idea of 'artificial boundaries' suggests that there is a 'real' or 'pure' frontier to separate administrative entities. Yet, even the use of physical traits to demarcate is a way of attributing political meaning to geographical objects (Pursley, 2015). The majority of African borders were first demarcated in the late nineteenth century and have remained virtually intact since then. Scholars often highlight the African exception, in which the drawing of boundaries for these countries was different to the process of demarcating land on other continents. Firstly, the process took place over a relatively short period of time, from 1885 to 1904. Secondly, the pressure of military and geopolitical interests meant that certain factors were ignored. For example, the

¹⁵¹ Ibid, pp.1-2.

¹⁵² Ibid, pp.1-6.

colonialists who drew these borders made many mistakes due to their misunderstanding of the geography of the area or because they used simplistic methods rather than taking into consideration the demographic, ethnographic or topographic factors (Herbst, 1989, p. 674). That said, all frontiers are arguably artificial since landscapes which cannot often be distinguished from one another are divided and restrictions are placed on peoples who fall on one side or the other of an imaginary boundary. It could be argued that Africa is not an exception: the boundaries between the lands and peoples of Chad and Niger or Mali and Mauritania were no more artificially divided than those of Germany and Denmark or Slovakia and Hungary (Touval, 1966).

The borders of the Sahara and the OARS were no different in this way. While they had never before been physically fixed, using borders continued to be imperative in justifying the creation of new regions, political or otherwise. With regards to the Sahara, the southern borders lacked international recognition because of their 'lack of history'. They were simply drawn as a result of an agreement in 1905 which would separate rival French military explorers of North and West Africa (Zartman, 1965, p. 155). Furthermore, the interior administrative borders of French colonial Africa were not regarded by the French government as important as the boundaries which separated French West and North Africa from other states and European colonies. Indeed, the Saharan borders within the AOF arguably had little significance to French political elites prior to the OARS since the territory was administered as a whole and the internal boundaries could be altered according to military needs. This can be demonstrated with the case of Niger where the military territory's (since 1911) legal status was changed in 1922 to being a colony after the nomadic dissidents of the Sahara had been defeated. Before its change in legal status, the internal boundaries of Niger were monitored and controlled by the military (Fuglestad, 2008).

Following the Second World War and the publication of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, which highlighted the right to self-determination and for a country to exert power over its arena of sovereign authority, borders became linked with sovereignty and came to be a key part of independence demands. This position was taken by certain previously colonised states to exert their historical rights to territories which they believed had not been returned upon independence. For example, sections of the Moroccan Istiqlâl Party in the late 1950s claimed that large parts of Mauritania, northern Mali, the Spanish Sahara and the Algerian *Territoire des Oasis* historically belonged to Morocco and therefore sought to create a Greater Morocco or Greater Maghreb (Lecocq, 2010, p. 48). These claims were equally distrusted in France as they were by Malian nationalists, the FLN (who went to war with Morocco in the *Guerre des sables* in 1963 over these claims) and the Mauritanian political elites.

Following the enactment of the *loi cadre Defferre* in 1956 and the reinstatement of the previously exiled Sultan Mohammed V, the Moroccan Istiqlâl was involved in a number of cross-border insurrections against the French military. These included strategic attacks across the border between southern Morocco and the French Sahara. With the ending of the French and Spanish Protectorates, these insurgents believed that historic parts of Morocco should be returned to the Kingdom. However, it was not just historical claims which motivated the Istiqlâl, the mineral-rich Mauritanian north was an attractive prospect for the Moroccan Government. Party members were also frustrated by the French military preventing nomadic farmers from crossing the border to use lands for grazing. In the 1950s, these claims came to concentrate more on gaining the Mauritanian and Spanish Sahara territories than on the less-feasible-to-obtain regions in Mali, Algeria and the French Sahara (Lecocq, 2010, pp. 61-62). Those involved in the disputes, for the main part Morocco and France, but also Mauritania, became engaged in diplomatic, military and media campaigns to win Saharan and Mauritanian support. In late 1956 and during 1957 the Istiqlâl and Moroccan Liberation Army (ALM) along with the Bîdan nomadic Rgaybat warriors led attacks on key locations in the French Sahara and Mauritania such as Colomb-Béchar and Atar and in late 1957 and 1958 on the Spanish Sahara (Lecocq, 2010, pp. 63-64). Following a joint operation by Spanish and French forces, in early 1958 the last of the Rgaybat forces defected to the French side and the ALM surrendered to France. Sporadic violent attacks continued across the borders well into the 1960s and Moroccan claims over Mauritania did not subside until the 1970s, but incursions of the likes of the late 1950s did not reoccur (Lecocq, 2010). Nevertheless, the dictating of borders by the French state created a deep-seated resentment in Morocco against both France and Algeria which erupted during the *Guerre des sables* and has endured in the contemporary period (Joffé, 2010). Moreover, the division of the Spanish Sahara in the 1970s between Morocco and Mauritania left nomadic populations, including the Rgaybat devastated and leaves the battle over Saharan borders unfinished. This was a fundamental issue for the OCRS planners because of the weight of importance that the different African elites attached to borders. It was also the reason that these planners repeatedly clarified the role and purpose of the OCRS to these elites, distancing the organisation from any political connotations it may have evoked. Even though the OCRS had mapped borders, these borders were not intended, or so these planners claimed, to represent a political space. This demonstrates another ambiguous facet of the OCRS and how it was presented by French politicians. While these actors were vague about the reach of the OCRS, the legislation contradictorily allowed for an army to defend the organisation's borders. This constant framing of the organisation was used in order to convince these elites, and any other observers of France's activities in the Sahara, that the OCRS had no administrative power over the African arenas of autonomy.

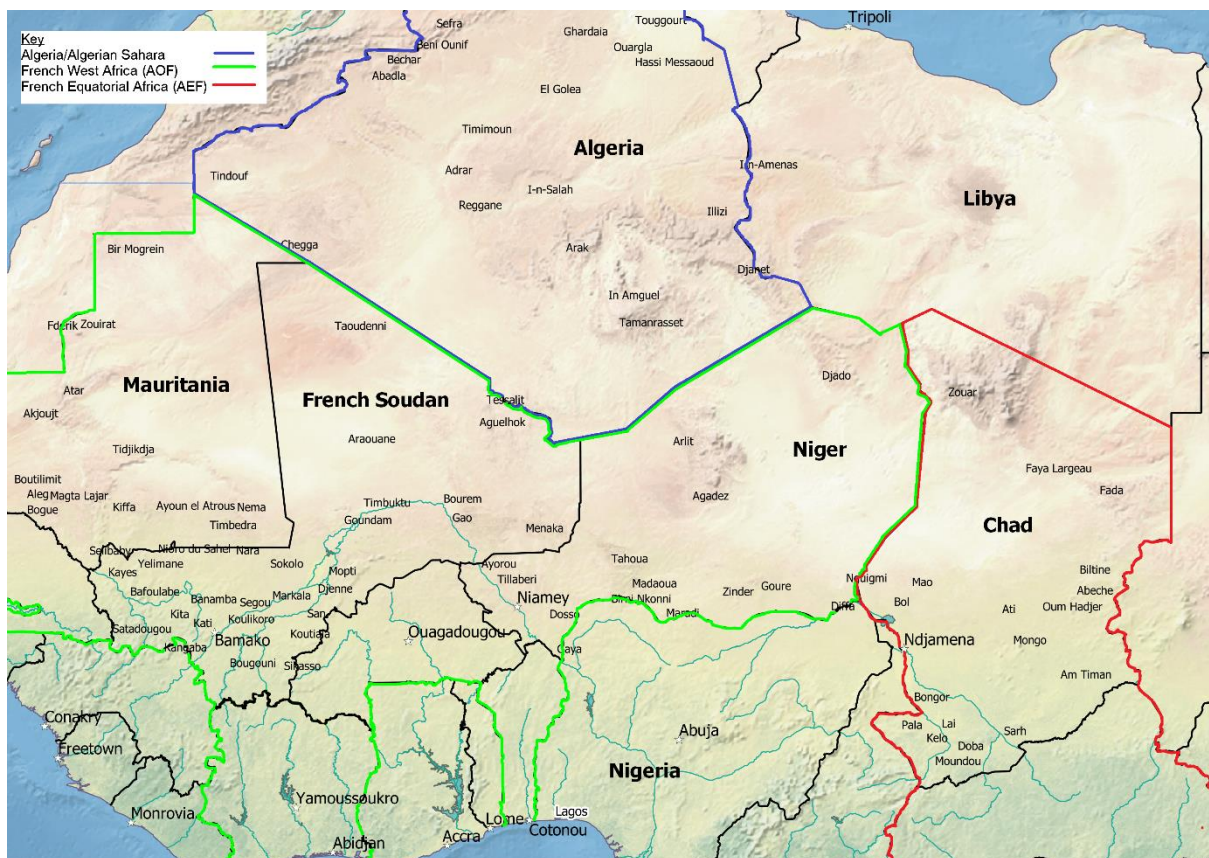


Figure 8: Map of Sahel region

Military priorities and rivalries with civilian authority

Into the mid-1950s, the use of military experts to administer the Saharan territories was still a prevalent method of French control. The use of these 'specialists' and 'experts' meant that the military saw themselves as best placed to manage affairs in these regions on behalf of the French government. However, by 1956, as France escalated its war against the FLN and the ALN, there were times when the military commanders in the Sahara felt the need to remind certain civilian administrators of their 'zone d'influence'. This can be seen in certain communications such as one in November 1956 from General Quénard, the Commander of the troops in the Saharan zones and the former Inspector General of the Southern Territories.

Les Coloniaux donnant l'impression de vouloir administrer directement les Reguibat L'GOUACEM. Cette manière de faire est en contradiction formelle avec les décisions prises lors de toutes les conférences qui se sont tenues à ce sujet et en particulier, avec celle tenue à Saint-Louis le 1^{er} Mars 1937.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ SHD, 1H3243, Quénard, R., *Fiche à l'attention de M. L'Inspecteur General des Territoires du Sud* (n°CTSTSA/REN/2), November 1956.

In this note to the Inspector General of the Southern Territories about the ‘immixtion de l’AOF dans les Affaires de l’Algérie’, Quénard reminds the AOF administrators, or *Les coloniaux*, as he calls them somewhat pejoratively, of their role (or lack thereof) in the Sahara, particularly in terms of avoiding interactions with tribes outside of their areas of jurisdiction. The Reguibat L’Gouacem that Quénard refers to were nomadic tribes that lived across the borders between Mauritania, Western Sahara, Morocco and Algeria (See Figure 9). Quénard argues that the suggestion from these civil servants to directly administer these peoples was in contradiction with historic French agreements about the inter-territorial management of North and West Africa. This demonstrates the continued tensions between civilian and military rulers throughout colonial rule and the necessity for civil administrators who coordinated with the OCRS to have the military’s support for any projects taking place in the Sahara.

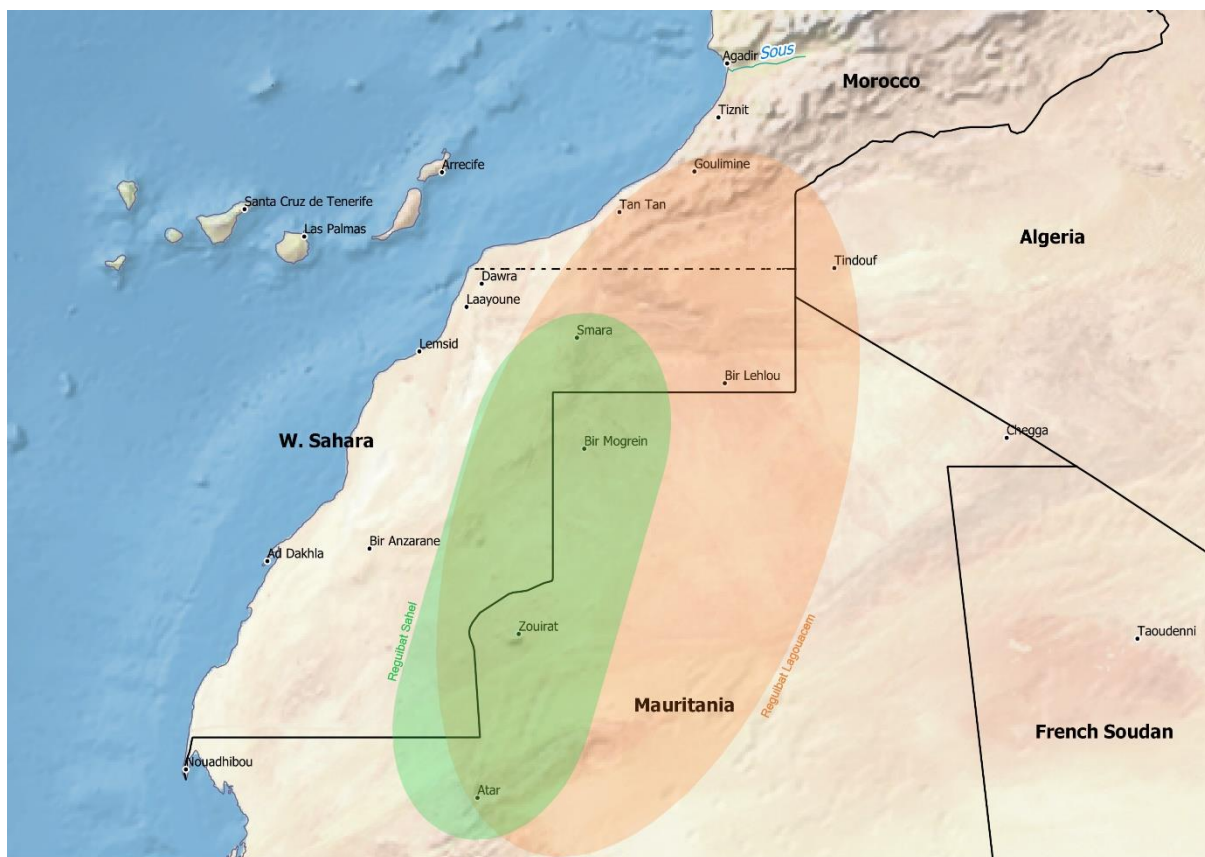


Figure 9: Map of the Reguibat L’Gouacem region

Further reports on military activities and priorities in the Sahara in 1957 demonstrate that many of the regional commander’s early relations with the OCRS focused on establishing clear lines of communication with the Ministry of the Sahara after it was created in June. This was because of the confusion over the new administrative system in the Sahara, for which new communication channels

had to be set up to differentiate between the OCRS government project and the new centralised Saharan administration.¹⁵⁴

In his role within the OCRS, the inter-army commander was charged with overseeing the protection of the organisation's programmes. From 1956 onwards, the military had been aware of threats to the OCRS in the form of plans to attack the oil installations. In 1957 General Salan attributed increased FLN penetration into the Sahara with their desire to disrupt industrial development, this may have been as a result of the long-held policy (since 1954) of the FLN to target their attacks on infrastructure and large symbols of colonial infrastructure. As a result, Salan called on the regional commanders to gather intelligence and monitor the movements of these rebel bands.¹⁵⁵ However, there was a certain level of tension between the Commander's role and the French military in the Sahara's defence priorities. The OCRS inter-army commander tended to write reports as a snapshot of the overall military situation. His reports do not contain much of a focus on any specific threats or on the defence of specific industrial centres. In this way his reports were more directed towards the point of view of army activity, such as the Algerian war effort, and less of a detailed account of OCRS activity.

By the summer of 1958 this was still the case, and the inter-army reports by the OCRS military command were yet to include the other countries of the OCRS in the AOF and AEF. This demonstrates the command's preoccupation with the more immediate defence issues posed by increased FLN activity and the potential for the war to intensify in the Sahara. The inter-army commander also reaffirmed the role of the army, in response to demands from French oil companies, via the Minister of the Sahara, for further protection. General Crevecoeur, who was the military commander for the OCRS territories in April 1958, made the army's position clear in a dispatch about oil installation security to the *Direction Générale de la Sûreté nationale (Algérie)* (DGSN). He states that the army was charged with regional protection and not internal security for oil installations.¹⁵⁶ Here Crevecoeur reveals how he sees the role of the army in the region and demonstrates the tensions which existed between the French military leaders and the industrial companies.

By May 1959 the French military became increasingly aware of the growing of FLN influence outside of Algeria. They identified the southern borders of the French Sahara as a point from which the FLN

¹⁵⁴ SHD, 1H3244, General Mirambeau, *Référendum et élections législatives* (n°05896/CIS/REN/2), August 19, 1958, pp.1-2.

¹⁵⁵ SHD, 1H3243, Commandement Supérieur Interarmées, *Ordre de Recherche de Renseignements – Pénétration rebelle du Sahara*, (n°1108), 1 March 1957, pp.1-2.

¹⁵⁶ SHD, 1H3244, General Crevecoeur, *Sécurité des installations pétrolières* (n°03065/OCRS/REN/2), April 22, 1958, pp.1-3.

was moving into and out of Algeria. With the completion in September 1957 of the Morice Line, a 300km long construct of electric and barbed wire fences, mines and watchtowers along the Tunisian border and an equivalent along the Algerian border with Morocco, access for the FLN to outside arms and provisions was limited. This led to the ALN seeking other options along the southern Saharan borders. Here, cells organised their operations through the use of a chain of North-African traders along the Tessalit-Gao road from the northern border of Mali to the centre of the country and south to Niamey and Dahomey (southern Benin).¹⁵⁷

The military's preoccupations extended to potential unrest resulting from the September 1958 constitutional referendum. One directive, from General Mirambeau, the provisional inter-army commander of the Sahara in August 1958, called on all the sector generals in the Sahara to alert their units to potential threats against those voting. This is because he identified:

Le danger que représente pour les rebelles, une participation massive du corps électoral au referendum du 28 septembre prochain et une acceptation à une large majorité de la constitution proposée par le Général de Gaulle n'a pas échappé au FLN.

Aussi déploie-t-il tous ses efforts pour empêcher, à tout prix, les électeurs inscrits de prendre part au vote et pour convaincre ceux d'entre eux qui sont domiciliés dans des agglomérations occupées par les Forces de l'ordre qu'il est de leur intérêt de répondre « Non » à la question posée.¹⁵⁸

Before and during the referendum in the Sahara, the military had a particular role which included applying pressure on the Saharan populations to vote. A secondary role involved determining the state of mind of the locals and their political positions towards both official (French) and unofficial (FLN) authorities in addition to their local and religious leaders. While the Saharan populations had been able to vote in the 1958 constitutional referendum, in December 1959, the OCRS military command, led at this time by General Jacquier, reported on why the Sahara could not and should not be able to participate in the Algerian self-determination referendum. He believed that the other territories of the OCRS could not be prevented from seeking independence, but that with regards to the Algerian Sahara it was imperative that it remained French, using the departmentalisation of the *Territoires du Sud* and their separation from the Algerian *départements* to support his argument. Jacquier suggests that the Saharans should not be given the opportunity to seek independence as part of Algeria.

Here the military took a leading role in the region promoting the Sahara, along with Algeria, as an integral part of France, and one which should unquestionably remain so. Jacquier therefore used this

¹⁵⁷ SHD, 1H3245, Commandement Supérieur des Forces Armées de la zone de défense AOF – Togo, *Influence du FLN au Soudan et au Niger*, (no number), 13 May 1959, p.1.

¹⁵⁸ SHD, 1H3244, General Mirambeau, *Référendum et élections législatives* (n°05896/CIS/REN/2) August 19, 1958, p.1.

line of argument to justify the military's continued leading role in the Sahara on behalf of the French state. However, they were aware that some of Algeria's neighbours were keen to claim the Saharan regions as their own despite France's investment in the area. The military also warned that if such a referendum were to go ahead, the FLN would seek to use it to claim all Algerian territory, including the ex *Territoires du Sud*.¹⁵⁹ Jacquier's recommendations, for the most part, reflected the political position of de Gaulle's government in 1959. However, when the referendum on Algerian self-determination was eventually organised in 1961, in line with France's agreements with the GPRA, the Saharan populations were permitted to vote and voted as Jacquier predicted, for an independent Algeria that included the Sahara. Even after the 1961 referendum French politicians and planners attempted to argue that the effects of the referendum should be limited to Northern Algeria and not the Sahara which had already been separated through the Ministry of the Sahara (Cantoni, 2017, p. 146).

Following the appointment of Jacques Soustelle as Minister for the Sahara in July 1959, a noticeable change of focus for the military was dealing with the consequences of the new nuclear-testing plans. These plans involved using the (supposedly) less-populated lands in the Sahara for French nuclear experiments. Areas which were considered for the tests were Colomb-Béchar and Reguibat. Indeed, beyond addressing the Algerian referendum, by December 1959, the military were occupied with preventing anti-nuclear protestors, emanating from both within and outside of the Sahara, from disrupting these tests. They were also responsible, as on the ground administrators, for calming local fears amongst the European, Muslim and nomadic populations, over nuclear explosions destroying homesteads and farmland.¹⁶⁰

By the late 1950s tensions between the French military and the metropolitan government had reached breaking point over the Algerian war. This was characterised by a number of events including the military's interception of the FLN leader Ahmed Ben Bella's plane in October 1956 and his subsequent arrest; the May 1958 crisis, and in the early 1960s the formation of the paramilitary Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS) and the assignation attempt against de Gaulle (Evans, 2012). In July 1958 it was not only FLN propaganda that the French military was attempting to subvert, but also political anti-military literature. Following the May 1958 crisis tracts were published by certain French anti-military and communist groups and distributed across Algeria and the Sahara. In an attempt to destabilise the military, these pamphlets critiqued the military officers who had been involved in the crisis. Using this intelligence in July, General Crevecoeur, hoped to subvert the spread

¹⁵⁹ SHD, 1H3245, Commandant Interarmées au Sahara, *Remarques sur la Fiche « Physionomie de l'adversaire fin 1959 »* (n°127084), 30 December 1959, p.1-6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

of propaganda which critiqued the coup and the military's role in the Algerian war. Crevecoeur had these tracts sent to the various military command posts in Algeria and across the Sahara. One particular letter, which was reportedly sent from an unnamed communist group in France and addressed to the soldiers of the 10eme Région Militaire in the Sahara. The letter condemns the Algiers Putsch of May 1958, denouncing the attack on republican institutions in the name of 'patriotism'.¹⁶¹ By sending this letter to the military based in the Sahara, the author attempts to create a division between this army and the other 'unpatriotic' French army in Algeria.

Correspondence, which was sent to servicemen in the Sahara, critiqued the coup and called for a resolution to the crisis in Algiers. These tracts were picked up by military intelligence and branded as communist propaganda. However, the authors did not identify themselves as communist, therefore the origins of the document may have been claimed by the army to be communist in order to discredit the authors and heighten the potential threat that they posed. While the wording of the document is not communist, Crevecoeur believed that the purpose of this document was to undermine French command. He therefore ordered that closer attention be paid towards inter-army relations, particularly between soldiers who originated from Algeria and the Sahara. This is because he suspected that the document was designed to create discord between the soldiers from France and the so-called 'Sahariens' or Saharan soldiers.¹⁶² The term 'Saharien', translated as Saharan, was the French non-specific label for anyone, nomadic or sedentary, that came from the Sahara. This term is problematic because it homogenises diverse populations from multiple backgrounds, ethnicities and religions. Nevertheless, it was used in official discourse in order to simplify communications.

These challenges to the French military may have had more to do with critiquing the way in which de Gaulle and his supporters used the May crisis to bring about the end of the Fourth Republic, than an anti-colonial attack on French authority in the Sahara. However, the military continued to be concerned about the spread of communist ideas. While these discussions were made by the army in Algeria, they were also linked with a potential threat to the OCS and France's influence in the region. These concerns appeared to manifest when in 1961 Brigadier General Paruit reported in the *Bulletin de Renseignements* on the growing relationship that Mali was fostering with Soviet Russia.

Le Gouvernement de Bamako a entrepris une prospection méthodique des possibilités des Pays de l'Est en matière d'aide économique. Quelle qu'ait pu être sa bonne volonté, l'Ouest semble avoir été écarté systématiquement.

¹⁶¹ SHD, 1H3244, Général Crevecoeur, *Note de Service : Propagande Subversive* (n°05048), 12 July 1958, p.2.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Tant dans la Presse, qu'à la Radio, que par les déclarations de ses responsables, le Gouvernement du Mali a clairement défini le caractère de son neutralisme. On ne saurait mieux l'orienter vers l'Est.

A l'actif de l'Union Soviétique, il faut signaler d'une part, l'important trafic d'armes qui s'est déversé sur le Mali à partir de la base soviétique installée en Guinée, d'autre part, les accords qui ont été signés à Moscou le 19 Mars par la délégation dirigée par Madeira Keita.¹⁶³

Despite declaring their neutrality, upon independence in 1959 Mali officially exited the OCS and all of its programmes. In the meantime, the Malian President courted Russia, purchasing arms from the Soviet base in Guinea. This was one of both the French military and the French government's greatest fears, that communism would supplant French colonial rule and prevent continued relations or even a postcolonial relationship between France and her former African empire (Keese, 2008). Anti-communism permeates much of the French army's correspondence, including communications with the military in the Sahara, during the late 1950s.¹⁶⁴ The army had long considered themselves as the last bulwark against the 'Red Threat' (Tucker, 2011, p. 172). The question of communism and its influence over North Africa also became an important point of contention in Franco-American relations during the Algerian War. The US democrats (in particular John F. Kennedy) were concerned that if the war continued, the French would push Algeria into the arms of the Soviets. However, Eisenhower's administration had supported the OCS for its potential to steer North and West Africa away from the communist influence (Cantoni, 2017, pp. 132-133).

This anxiety over communists undermining French colonial rule and military operations is so prevalent that it is worth assessing the impact it had on the military command. Communist conspiracy was traced as seeking to undermine colonial rule and pull apart empires. Shipway (2002, pp. 65-66) highlights the colonial minister Marius Moutet's private secretary, Gustave Moutet's assertion in 1947 that with the events in Indochina and Madagascar, he had recognised the 'warning signs' of a 'vast enterprise' which sought to dismantle the Overseas Territories and would play a significant role in future arenas. This line of thought became so instilled in the military that by 1950 the military intelligence services, through the Service de Documentation, d'Etudes et de Contre-Espionnage (SDECE) supported the (originally British) idea that communists had embedded themselves into sub-Saharan Africa (Shipway, 2002). The SDECE purported the idea that these communists in Africa were there to exploit nationalist and racially-charged attitudes and expel Europeans from the continent. As a result of this misrepresentation, the French military developed a tendency to label any unknown or unwelcome entities in French-held territories as 'communist' (Shipway, 2002, p. 66).

¹⁶³ SHD, 1H3247, Commandement Interarmées au Sahara, *Bulletin de Renseignements – Action sur le Sahara à partir du Mali* (n°9/9), 1 May 1961, p.1.

¹⁶⁴ SHD, 1H3244 ; 1H3245 ; 1H3247.

Beyond the military fears of communism, by the end of 1959, Jacquier identified the principal threats to France in the Sahara that came from two main groups of adversaries. The first was from the FLN, with raiders leading attacks and missions such as planting radio antennas and crossing the northern border of the Saharan *départements* (which was also the northern border of the OCRS), from the Sahara and into Algeria. The second threat was perceived to be from countries peripheral to the OCRS region; Morocco and the Armée de Libération Marocaine (ALM), Tunisia, Libya and the newly independent Mali which was no longer a part of the OCRS. Jacquier remarked that:

Avec lesquels des problèmes de délimitation de frontière n'ont pas été résolus et qui ont émis des revendications territoriales importantes sur le Sahara Français.

Ces pays, outre les démarches qu'ils ont entreprises sur le plan politique et diplomatique, mènent en direction du Sahara une action subversive souvent liée à celle du FLN. Cette action s'appuie sur les données : ethniques (tribus frontalières), religieuses (confréries), économiques (terrains de parcours, puits, palmeraies, exploitations pétrolifères ou minières), politiques (colonialisme – indépendance), historique (destinées communes avant la pénétration française)¹⁶⁵

Jacquier claims that this subversive action was being operated on different levels in Saharan society which he breaks down into several categories. He believed that the FLN was targeting tribal groups on the Saharan borders in order to gain support against the French, using religious claims to pit Muslims against the 'Catholic' French, targeting French and Saharan economic bases, especially agriculture and the mining and oil industries as well as political and historical claims.

These threats were perceived to be as a result of a variety of reasons, and were broadly categorised, the most pressing being the dangers to French economic development and local agriculture, anti-colonialism and continued border disputes. The latter were classed as political and historical, between France and these countries, especially because of the *loi cadre Defferre* which gave Morocco and Tunisia their independence but denied any reclamation of Saharan territories which were declared French.¹⁶⁶ By breaking this so-called subversive action by the FLN in to these categories, Jacquier demonstrates how he believes French colonial power was being targeted, through the areas that mattered most to the French state; the economic and political structures, and the areas that the state and indeed the military may have had the least control over; local religious communities and nomadic tribes living on the fringes of the Algerian Sahara.

Military cooperation with the French planners was central to facilitating the OCRS and its activities. The army's knowledge of the region, its history and its peoples was integral to ensuring that the OCRS projects, and those of its subsidiaries, could be implemented. It is for this reason, in addition

¹⁶⁵ SHD, 1H3245, Commandant Interarmées au Sahara, *Remarques sur la Fiche « Physionomie de l'adversaire fin 1959 »* (n°127084), 30 December 1959, p.1.

¹⁶⁶ SHD, 1H3245, Commandant Interarmées au Sahara, *Remarques sur la Fiche « Physionomie de l'adversaire fin 1959 »* (n°127084), 30 December 1959, p.1.

to defence issues, that the military was integrated into the OCSR in the form of representatives on certain committees (such as the *Comité Technique de Direction*) and the inter-army commander who could mediate between the civilian planners and the army. These military commanders understood their importance in the administration of the Sahara. This often led to enhanced tensions with the civil administrators, especially those that the military did not regard as having a role in the Sahara, such as those operating from Dakar or Brazzaville. On the surface the military prioritised regional defence, but they also played a key role in the Sahara in ensuring that French control over the region remained in place. Yet, they did not necessarily always agree with the French state or its planners on the way in which this control should be maintained. While the military prided themselves on their knowledge of the Sahara and its inhabitants, another very different set of planners were working for the OCSR to develop the region's industries and the lands in which these peoples lived.

Industrial actors under the IV and V Republics

The OCSR was designed by French planners to improve the quality of life for those who lived in the Sahara. Both public and private files refer to this provision of the organisation, from the law creating the organisation, to newspaper reports and official interviews with the media, to National Assembly debates recorded by the *Journal Officiel*.¹⁶⁷ However, little is said about how French planners intended for this social development to take place and there is no evidence in these archives that the locals in question were ever included in this development agenda. One interpretation is that it was through economic improvement that French planners intended to fulfil this aim.

By 1957 the northern region of Saoura and Oasis had been broken down into industrial regions shared between the largest industrial companies contracted by the OCSR. Figure 3 demonstrates this spread, with the Compagnie des Pétroles d'Algérie (CPA), the Société National des Recherches et d'Exploitation de Pétrole au Sahara (SNREPAL) and the Compagnie Française des Pétroles (Algérie) among the most predominant of these companies. This first year of prospection under the OCSR was spent cutting the areas of exploitation in half, concentrating on the richest areas in oil based on the extensive research conducted by these companies since 1952. With 39 billion francs in total at the disposal of these companies, the 18 seismic teams and 5 gravimetric teams delimited the principal 'zones of interest'. The *sociétés* then worked within these region, their research teams drilling test wells and cutting down the main problems faced by oil prospectors in desert regions.¹⁶⁸ The BIA, which co-ordinated these companies, had been presided over by Eirik Labonne and Louis Armand, both of whom had stressed the importance of foreign investment for the success of the Saharan

¹⁶⁷ See ANOM, FM 1AFFPOL; ANF, 112AJ23; ADS, 37J.

¹⁶⁸ ADS, 37J 98, A. Martin, *Les Recherches d'Hydrocarbures, Arts et Manufactures* (n°81), 1958, p.24.

industrial projects (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014). Although the CPA was a majority foreign owned company (65% in 1957) and had made a significant contribution to the financing of Saharan oil prospection (17.7%), 82.3% was funded by French investment. André Martin, Engineer-in-Chief of Mining, Director General of the Autonomous Petrol Administration (RAP)¹⁶⁹ and of CREPS, boldly maintained that the progress in the Sahara, led by the OCRS and French financing, had increased the esteem held for France by not only its citizens but around the world.

Nos ouvriers, notre maîtrise, nos Ingénieurs se sont taillés avec cette activité magnifique, la part du lion. Dans ce métier difficile où la légende ne parlait que de Texans, ils se sont élevés du premier coup, au niveau des plus grands découvreurs de pétrole. En fait, leur rapidité nerveuse les a placés en avant. Le Pays doit le savoir, et peut en être fier.¹⁷⁰

Martin uses the comparison of the 'legendary' Texan oil workers with French technocrats in order to demonstrate France's rapid success in the industry. In doing so he paints a picture of French progress and equal standing in the industry with their far more experienced American counterparts. In many ways this was fanciful patriotism on the part of Martin, yet he does demonstrate the urge, within France's Saharan industries, to overstate the country's success in the Sahara. Not only could foreign investment be attracted but also the companies could demonstrate to the government, the economic stability and progress achieved in so short a period. In doing so the Fourth Republic government, at that time craving stability in all political and economic areas, would be induced to continue investing in Saharan oil prospection. While Martin does not explicitly refer to the OCRS, he does draw implicit links to the organisation through his analysis of oil extraction and the companies involved in this work, including the different public services such as the BIA which was directly connected to the OCRS.

¹⁶⁹ The RAP (Régie Autonome des Pétroles) was formed in 1939 to exploit the oil fields in Aquitaine. In 1966 the company merged with the Bureau des Recherches Petrole (BRP) and the Société Nationale des Pétroles d'Aquitaine (SNPA) to form Elf Equitaine Group.

¹⁷⁰ ADS, 37J 98, A. Martin, Les Recherches d'Hydrocarbures, *Arts et Manufactures* (n°81), 1958, p.24.

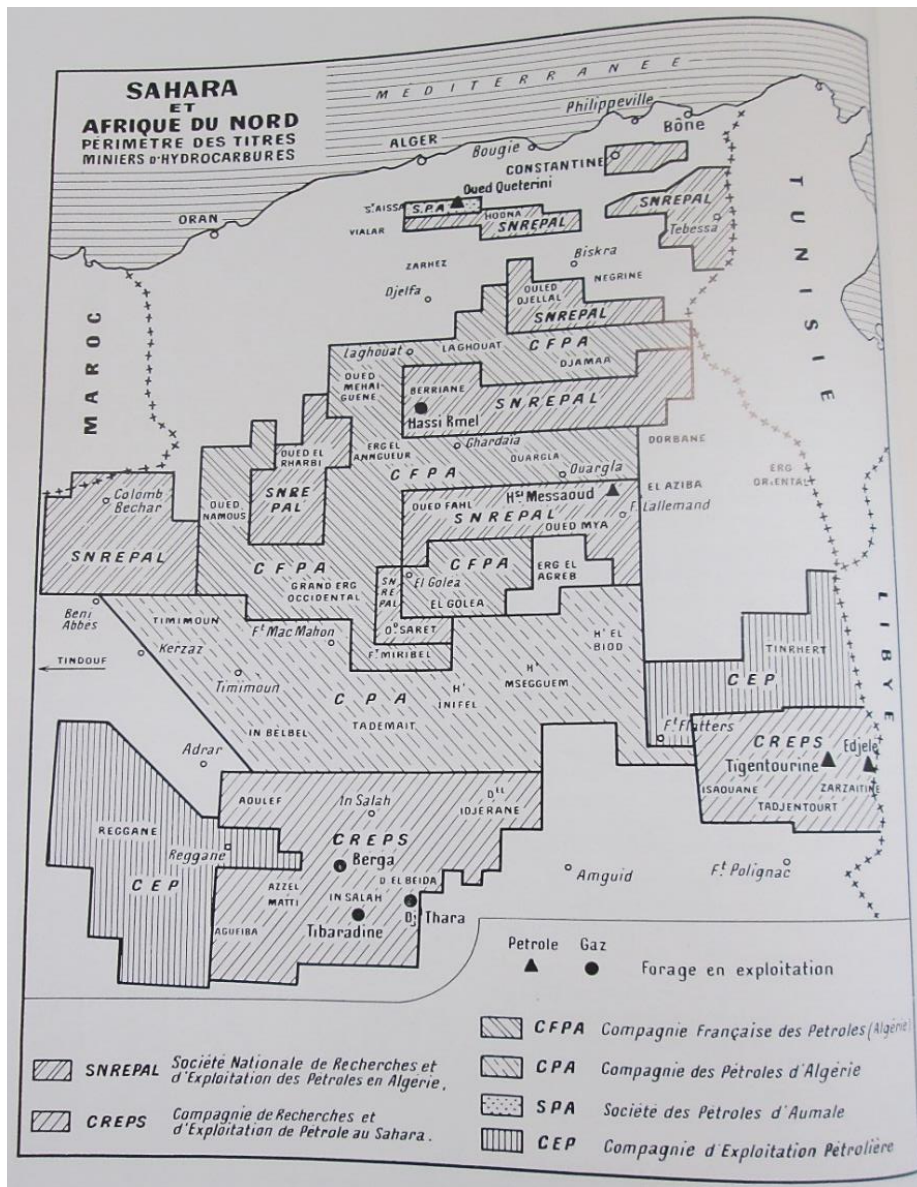


Figure 10: Sahara et Afrique du Nord: Perimeters of Mining and Hydrocarbon titles, 1957¹⁷¹

Martin also downplayed the technical problems which faced these oil prospectors. OCRS planners had previously argued¹⁷² that it was not only foreign investment that was required but also technical support from foreign companies and engineers who could resolve mechanical failures associated with the heat and sand, and air filtration problems. The Mining chief, however, believed that the French engineers had begun to solve these issues, but that travel in the Sahara remained the biggest barrier for the industrial companies. Travelling from Algiers to Edjeleh by truck or lorry would take around ten days, and that was only if the vehicle held up to the weather and road conditions. Therefore, Martin maintained that significant progress in the Sahara could not take place without

¹⁷¹ ADS 37J 100, Service Documentation, Notre Sahara (n°1), December 1957, p.22.

¹⁷² See chapter 3.

improved infrastructure, most particularly well-constructed roads.¹⁷³ However, this was an obvious area for mining companies to highlight when explaining a lack of immediate success in the Sahara, by passing the blame onto infrastructure they could avoid confronting the more immediate mechanical and technical issues.

The public department of Hydraulic and Rural Equipment in Algeria had, prior to 1957, been researching irrigation in what became known as the Saoura department. Their pedological and agrological research in this region meant that their work fell under the remit of the OCRS and were able to benefit from the organisation's funding. Georges Drouhin, director of the scientific service in 1958, outlined the progress made to irrigation in the Sahara under the OCRS. In the preface of Durand and Pierre Simonneau's article for *Terres et Eaux*¹⁷⁴, Drouhin highlighted that the OCRS intervention benefitted work which was already well under way in the northern region of the Sahara, just south of Oran. Although this is an academic article, designed to illustrate the scientific research of these on the ground actors, it is also demonstrative of who these actors were and how they understood their work as part of France's development agenda. For example, Drouhin is eager to show how the irrigation work was beneficial to the local populations.

Au prix de gros efforts, il sera sans doute possible de multiplier les centres de culture qui apporteront une amélioration considérable aux conditions de vie des autochtones...¹⁷⁵

Drouhin's language echoes the development language used during the late 1950s with its paternalistic implications. His suggestions that these 'centres de culture', by which he meant agricultural culture, would improve the lives of local peoples implies that it was the role of French experts to bring better agricultural techniques to the Sahara for the benefit of those who lived there. His measuring of this improvement only amounts to these peoples having improved access to water, but he is reluctant to exaggerate these gains.

...mais en l'état actuel des connaissances, on n'a pas le droit de laisser espérer, comme le fait une certaine presse bien intentionnée mais mal renseignée, que le Sahara puisse un jour devenir « une grande Normandie » et nourrir sur ses ressources propres une très nombreuse population.¹⁷⁶

Durand and Simmonneau's research into experimental irrigation is based on their own, French scientific research, using European methods and technologies. Here they sought to examine 'les possibilités de mise en valeur d'une part, sur l'évolution des terrains sous l'effet de la pratique des irrigations d'autre part'. Although these methods were intended to improve existing date palm

¹⁷³ ADS, 37J 98, A. Martin, *Les Recherches d'Hydrocarbures, Arts et Manufactures* (n°81), 1958, p.24.

¹⁷⁴ ANF, 112AJ23, Sahara- 1959, Durand, J. H. and Simmonneau, P., *Les Périmètres irrigables expérimentaux du Sahara Occidental, Terres et Eaux*, 1958, pp.10-33.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.11.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

farms, there is no mention of local expertise or local farming techniques in this article. Even the photos of the plantations (see Figure 11) where their research was conducted are devoid of any farm workers, showing only Durand and Simmonneau themselves, or an empty farm.



Figure 11: Périmètre Expérimental à Adrar, 1958.¹⁷⁷

The article, along with its accompanying photos, give the impression that these were French experts who were doing on the ground work that had a clear impact on those who lived and worked in the Sahara. It is used not just to present Durand and Simmonneau's research, but to justify their continued work. While this was an article for a scholarly journal, and therefore for a mainly academic purpose, its inclusion in the Délégué Général's (Jacques Soustelle) files on the OCRS demonstrates that it was at some point sent to show the results of this irrigation work. It may have been sent to simply inform Soustelle of the environmental programmes underway in the Sahara, but it also may have been used to underline the interest in continuing to fund this type of research.

The industrial and financial reports sent by industrial groups, such as the BRP and the BIA to the OCRS and the Délégué Général are also revealing about the types of actors who worked on behalf of the French government in the Sahara. The reports produced for the OCRS, such as the BRP Annual Report, were designed to demonstrate how funding had been used and to encourage continued

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

government support for their programmes. These documents are filled with the language of 'progress' and 'development' in order to measure the success of the petrol programmes.

Le développement des gisements reconnus en Métropole, au Sahara et en AEF a été poursuivi à la cadence prévue sans pour autant avoir ralenti les nouveaux travaux de prospection ou rétréci leur champ d'action.

A l'actif du bilan 1958 doivent être portés l'ample confirmation de l'importance des découvertes sahariennes et le renouveau de l'intérêt pétrolier du Bassin Parisien, la mise en place du feeder du gaz de Lacq et la pose accélérée des pipe-lines du Sahara.¹⁷⁸

These reports also emphasise the importance of the programmes for France and the rest of the empire, recalling the benefits of the BRP's work, without necessarily outlining what made it beneficial, particularly for the local populations.

Au fur et à mesure que les perspectives techniques s'élargissent, les bienfaits que ces activités doivent apporter aux économies française, africaine et européenne apparaissent plus considérables et justifient la poursuite d'efforts soutenus, dont l'ampleur réclame le concours effectif.¹⁷⁹

Yet they are forward looking, outlining timelines for continued work, showing how projects could expand, thereby aiming to justify continued funding for these industrial companies. These justifications came in the form of drawing on the French government's priorities using phrases such as 'la Communauté française' and 'des pays d'Europe et d'Afrique' to demonstrate that any profits from these enterprises would filter back to France and provide wider benefits beyond the Sahara and indeed metropolitan France.

Educational development

Social development was not just to be measured through the industrial improvements and economic advancements. The OCRS allocated budget funds to local infrastructures including schools. Within the organisation an *Education nationale au Sahara* service was created and in 1958 it was directed by M. Gladel.¹⁸⁰ In the December 1958 issue of the French monthly magazine, *Notre Sahara*, Gladel was interviewed about the work of the OCRS within the social sector in the Sahara. The interview reveals the OCRS development agenda and the intentions of the French planners who implemented this agenda. When asked to explain what these planners were doing in the desert, so often imagined as free of people, to educate young 'Sahariens', Gladel was quick to negate this old-fashioned assumption about the Sahara.

Il n'est plus guère de Français qui ne sachent aujourd'hui que le désert n'est pas véritablement...désert : journaux, revues hebdomadaires, publications mensuelles, livres, discours,

¹⁷⁸ ANF, 112AJ23, Sahara- 1959, Bureau de Recherches de Pétrole, *Rapport Annuel – Informations Générales*, 1958, p.3.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Few biographical details can be found about Gladel. He was not a senior figure within the OCRS, and his full name does not feature in any of the OCRS archives in ANOM, ANF or ADS.

cinéma, tout nous parle Sahara et cette immense contrée est devenue la vedette de l'actualité française et internationale. Mais, si l'on cite volontiers les richesses d'un pays on oublie trop souvent que c'est l'homme qui l'habite qui lui donne sa véritable valeur. C'est à cet homme-là que nous pensons, à lui que nous voulons donner les moyens de vivre la grande aventure de son pays. Depuis longtemps déjà, bien avant que l'on signale pétrole et métaux rares, des éducateurs ont œuvré au service de la jeunesse saharienne.¹⁸¹

While Gladel dismisses what he sees as out-dated assumptions about the Sahara, he nevertheless retains a paternalistic language which would not have been out of place in the nineteenth century. By claiming that it was French educators and French technocrats that could give the local populations the means to improve their quality of life, he neither suggests that these peoples were capable of making these improvements themselves nor that they had any input into this education agenda.

Gladel mapped out the development of the French education system for these young 'Sahariens' from 1943 to 1957 based on increasing class sizes; from 171 classes of public primary education and 'professional courses' for 6,927 students in 1943 to 530 elementary classes for 17,581 students, made up of 15,469 Muslims, of whom 2,898 were girls, and the remaining 2,112 pupils were non-Muslims. However, while these figures on the class sizes may demonstrate growth, the article does not provide any percentages, only numbers of Muslim girls and boys versus non-Muslims (of both genders) from 1943, 1947, 1956 and 1957. There is little consistency in the types of figures collected, with those from 1943 simply the number of classes and total students. The figures also do not take population growth into consideration and are not necessarily useful in understanding how French education affected the Saharan youth and their job or life prospects. Gladel uses them as a way to show French readers that the OCSR was not starting an education system from scratch in the Sahara but was working to improve what he saw as an existing, successful system.

Le progrès de la scolarisation est très sensible et les statistiques marquent une nette avance : 17,726 élèves fréquentent les classes primaires élémentaires : c'est donc 3,550 enfants de plus qui sont entrés à l'école cette année. La progression des effectifs, de l'ordre de 25%, est inégalement répartie : pour l'ensemble du département de la Saoura, l'augmentation est de plus de 47% alors que, dans les Oasis, elle se situe aux environs de 16%.¹⁸²

For Gladel, these statistics were useful in understanding the improvements to this system. Again, he uses the language of 'progress' to explain the OCSR and indeed France's role in the Sahara. These courses included 'professional classes' for men such as agriculture and business, and specific courses for girls which taught home-making, cooking, sewing and weaving. This demonstrates certain

¹⁸¹ ANF, 112AJ23, Sahara-1959, Les Ecoles Sahariennes : une interview de M. Gladel, *Notre Sahara* (n°3), December 1958, p.16.

¹⁸² Ibid.

assumptions made by these planners; not only of the superiority of French education, but also the imposition of French family, as well as education and work, norms on the local populations.

Gladel underlines that the majority of these schools were for the sedentary populations in the Sahara. However, provisions were made for children who could not attend school regularly, such as young Tuareg nomads. For these a tutor was assigned who would accompany a tribe, although he does disclose not any details about where the teacher came from, whether he was French or came from the Sahara, Gladel reveals that he was paid for by the parents and by the director of the Tamanrasset school who assigned the posts. Nevertheless, accompanying photos to the article of some of the Saharan schools depict western-dressed teachers surrounded by local children (Figure 4). It can also be assumed that the teachers came from either France or Algeria (mainly from within the settler population, although there were some Algerian teachers), based on his explanation of recruitment difficulties.

Le Sahara, à quelques exceptions près, ne fournit pas ses propres maîtres : il est contraint de les recruter en France ou en Algérie. Or, depuis quelques années, les enseignants de la Métropole hésitent à demander un poste en Afrique et l'Algérie a du mal à trouver les maîtres que nécessite l'important effort de scolarisation qu'elle s'impose. Une quinzaine d'instituteurs seulement ont été recrutés cette année ; aussi, tout comme l'Algérie, le Sahara doit-il faire appel aux instituteurs du plan de scolarisation. Les candidats ne nous ont pas manqué : de janvier à septembre nous avons reçu près de trois cents candidatures : moins d'une centaine ont été retenues.¹⁸³

Where Gladel highlights that teachers had to be brought in from France and Algeria he demonstrates the ways in which the Sahara was advertised to qualified workers. While it was difficult to encourage teachers to move abroad, the Sahara was framed as a place to take a sabbatical and use the experience as a vocation. It was not, however, advertised as a location for expatriation, where a French or Algerian teacher could move their family and begin a new life. This was in line with the OCRS planners', including Armand, aversion to the Sahara becoming a settler colony like Algeria had been before. In addition to advertising these posts as temporary and vocational, Gladel also highlights the financial incentives, offering an additional 30 per cent on top of the salary as compensation, covering the cost of the initial travel and accommodation, were used to entice such teachers to take up posts in the Sahara. Besides these state provisions, Gladel also mentions private institutions, which were mainly religious schools, and accounted for around one thousand children, and schools administered by the army in more remote areas where state arrangements were not possible. This system also meant that teachers doing their military service could be 'lent' to the state-run schools on a temporary basis. This recruitment plan that Gladel describes is again demonstrative of the French authorities' development agenda, which was built on the introduction

¹⁸³ ANF, 112AJ23, Sahara-1959, Les Ecoles Sahariennes : une interview de M. Gladel, *Notre Sahara* (n°3), December 1958, p.20.

and expansion of French technology and knowledge to be replicated across the new Saharan departments.



Figure 12: Saharan schools, 1958¹⁸⁴

Gladel also introduces the language of citizenship to this interview when he describes the children attending the schools.

Si nous considérons que les petits Français des départements de la Saoura et des Oasis ont droit à l’instruction, tout comme les enfants des Basses-Alpes ou du Loiret, nous avons le devoir de mettre à leur disposition les moyens de s’instruire. Il nous paraît essentiel d’établir un programme complet de scolarisation et d’en prévoir la réalisation progressive, aussi rapidement que nous le permettront les moyens mis à notre disposition.¹⁸⁵

While outlining the schools programme, he uses comparisons to liken the children with those living on the mainland in France, even calling them French rather than locals or ‘Sahariens’ as he does earlier in the interview. Again, using the language of ‘progress’, his intention here may be to demonstrate the worthiness of the education programme and the benefits of continued funding for these schools. He maintains that dedication and enthusiasm on the part of these students was not in question; that it was the responsibility of the French authorities to ‘give them the means’ with which to become men of the twentieth century ‘qui comprennent le monde où ils vivent et soient en mesure d’oeuvrer utilement à son édification’.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p.19.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p.20.

Conclusion

By 1959 the interests of the French state and the OCSR planners had become quite different to those of the military actors who were meant to facilitate the various security, economic and development objectives of this organisation. The different French archives which contain these voices are demonstrative of the different purposes of and limited margins of manoeuvre for the military and also the industrial actors. These were not local voices, but military leaders, industrialists and scientists who represented the French state and the OCSR in the Sahara. The military archives, held in Vincennes are not public archives, with the majority of the documents intended for a superior officer's eyes only. The reports were also less likely to contain measured language which could be scrutinised by journalists, the public or even foreign governments. These archives demonstrate the competing objectives of the French army, who were seeking to retain French presence in the two Saharan departments of Algeria by securing the borders against potential threats and preventing the dissemination of FLN or anti-government propaganda. By using the military's historical role as the purveyors of knowledge about the Sahara and the peoples who lived there, the commanders demonstrated what they saw to be the superior knowledge of an 'on the ground actor'. For them, this role involved a knowledge of the nomadic tribes and their languages and ways of life, as well as the countryside that they lived in. This explains the Saharan commanders' attitudes to 'outside' administrators, including those from Paris; that while these politicians were involved in the administration of the Sahara, they needed the military in order to execute their policies. This role extended to the OCSR military commander's attempt to secure this French rule and advocating subversive action in an attempt to prevent the Saharan populations from choosing independence with Algeria.

The military's policy is linked to the development agenda of the industrialists working in Saoura and Oasis. These OCSR experts were often academics that had previously been working for government agencies and had their own professional priorities as well as official objectives as representatives of French authority. Their work ranged from resource research and exploitation to agricultural advancement to the improvement of local and regional infrastructure. This work was aimed at fulfilling the OCSR economic and social priorities, that is to say improving the French and French Community's economy and the standard of living for the local Saharan populations. However, little is said about how these populations were to reap the benefits of the OCSR. The language used by these experts is reminiscent of the early colonialists in the nineteenth century, who researched those who lived in Algeria and in the Sahara; their cultures, traditions, and practices. This colonial language appears to merge with that of development, seeking to improve local lives with French education systems, French agricultural research and French technologies. However, while progress

was sought by these industrialists, they did not necessarily define how it could be measured or consult with the local populations on their needs or their visions for improving lives and livelihoods in the Sahara. In this way, the actors of the OCS continued to intervene in the Sahara in similar ways to those of the nineteenth century colonialists; by providing the improvements with little regard for what those lived there wanted.

Chapter 5: Responding to France in the Sahara

Le problème du Sahara est très clair pour nous. Nous connaissons un Sahara nigérien, tchadien, libyen, malien, mauritanien, algérien, marocain et tunisien. Le problème du Sahara ne sera concret et précis qu'après une entente entre la France et le GPRA, dans une Algérie indépendante, maîtresse de son destin et naturellement de son Sahara.

(President of the Niger National Assembly, Boubou Hama, 1961)¹⁸⁷

Introduction

France's activities in the Sahara prompted a range of reactions from the West African and Equatorial African countries involved in the OCRS as well as their neighbours and the nationalist groups struggling for independence from the French empire before 1962. The African political elites of West and Equatorial Africa reacted extensively to the proposal of the OCRS project and the introduction of the January 10, 1957 law. The OCRS had a different significance for each administrative region, depending on their local political, strategic, and also economic priorities and concerns. Attitudes to the OCRS were shaped by global and local geopolitical contexts.

In this post-Atlantic Charter and Bandung conference era, sovereignty and self-determination provided an internationally recognised legitimate language to demand political and economic rights. Reactions to the OCRS demonstrate the difficulty in presenting it as a legitimate organisation in the region. Coupled with the Ministry of the Sahara, the OCRS had control over the Sahara, but the planners and politicians within these structures found it hard to legitimise this control. As a result of this legitimacy issue, these same politicians struggled to get the Saharan regions and then (after 1960) the nation-states to accept being part of the OCRS. In Chad, the African leaders of the Territorial Assembly agreed for Chad to participate in the OCRS. Among these was François Tombalbaye, the leader of the *Parti Progressiste Tchadien* (PPT), the largest political party in Chad by 1957. Tombalbaye perceived the OCRS as an opportunity to reap economic benefits. However, this acceptance of the OCRS was not without limitations, with questions of sovereignty and administrative authority dominating the cooperation negotiations, particularly upon Chadian independence in 1960. Chad's AOF neighbour Niger had a more complex relationship with the OCRS, initially agreeing to participate in the OCRS, but this agreement shifted with the rise and fall of the pro-independence Sawaba political movement led by the OCRS delegate and Prime Minister of

¹⁸⁷ ANF, AG5(1)1825, Economic and Financial Affairs – Petrol and Gas, Boubou Hama, *Reunion du comité économique et social de l'OCRS à Colomb-Béchar*, December 8, 1961, p.1.

Niger, Djibo Bakary. In this way Niger's complex party politics came to shape relations between the OCRS and the AOF territory.

The issue of sovereignty and administrative borders were of a significant concern for both French Soudan (Mali) and Mauritania, whose African political leaders regarded the OCRS as an attempt to secede large parts of their countries prior to independence to prevent them from inheriting these lands. Although French Soudan at first accepted being a part of the OCRS, upon independence in 1959/1960 cooperation agreements to continue being a part of the OCRS were not signed, and Mali left the organisation. Mauritania proved to be a unique case. It was the only territory whose political leaders, before the organisation was created in 1957, refused to allow its Saharan regions to be included, yet still sent delegates to the High Commission of the OCRS to act as observers. With the discovery of oil in Edjeleh in the French Sahara and the subsequent growth in the economic value of the Sahara, the limited statements made by the FLN on the OCRS were tied up with broader statements about the Sahara and the ex *Territoires du Sud*. The FLN opposed any attempts to partition the Sahara (Oasis and Saoura) from Algeria. This is an unsurprising attitude from those who sought an independent Algeria. What is perhaps less well known is how these arguments may be linked to an increased alliance between the Algerian National Liberation Army (ALN) and Mali who provided material support to the ALN.

It was not only African countries and territories that were following France's plans for the Sahara. France's European partners were kept abreast of the OCRS, particularly while the organisation was still under construction and France was seeking foreign investment. The US and the UK were also interested in France's activities in the Sahara, especially with the prospect of new oil resources entering the global market. However, European responses to the OCRS are difficult to evaluate since French archives do not contain much evidence that France's allies in Europe engaged with the organisation or its practices. Nevertheless, it is possible to analyse how these countries reacted to French activity in the Sahara, particularly in terms of their nuclear testing programme. By engaging with source material from Jacques Soustelle's archives, it is also possible to understand aspects of the British government's reaction to France's Saharan developments and indeed how the French hoped to be perceived by their rival and ally.



Figure 13: Chad

African Opposition

Mauritania

When the plans for the OCERS were being drawn up in 1956, Mauritania was initially included. Mauritanian politicians prevented the Mauritanian Sahara from being included in the plans for the OCERS by declining to enter into negotiations over the organisation. During the French Union Assembly debates of December 1956 Souleymane Ould Cheikh Sidya¹⁸⁸ argued that there would be no question of partitioning the territory, even for the purposes of an economic organisation. He feared it would legitimise the continuation of empire and French exploitation of African resources (Boilley, 2005, p. 224). Even though Mauritanian lands were not included in the OCERS, the organisation was explicitly denounced as France's attempt to secure lands at the end of colonial rule. While the French Union representatives of the other territories of French Soudan, Chad and Niger were reluctant for their lands to be included in any new administrative structures, they continued to be a part of the negotiations, in order to determine what their membership in the OCERS would

¹⁸⁸ Cheikh Sidya was an elected representative of Mauritania in the French Union.

precisely entail. Nevertheless, the OCRS law left it open to Mauritania to decide whether or not to be a part of the organisation. Furthermore, Mauritania continued to have a hand in the project, by sending deputies to the High Commission as observers. Mauritania's main argument against the project was similar to that expressed in French Soudan; a belief that it was a method of partitioning lands and denying the return of ancient Mauritanian lands to their peoples. This tied in with Mauritania's continued disputes with Morocco and French Soudan over their borders demonstrating that the questions about the OCRS were not only about relations between France and its (former) colonial territories, but also about definitions of sovereignty over the space between the (soon-to-be) independent African countries.

There were certain Mauritians who called for a 'Greater Mauritania' or 'Greater Maghreb' (which was usually understood to cover the entirety of the Maghreb in a similar way to pan Africanism) which would encompass their current lands as well as parts of Morocco, the Spanish Sahara and northern Mali. These claimants formed the small Mauritanian Renaissance Party in August 1958 and drew on the 11th century Almoravid Empire in their justification for Morocco being a historical part of Mauritania. The party was led by the Bîdan, Bouyaguiould Abidine, who had family connections in French Soudan and increasingly espoused pro-Moroccan sentiments. With this connection the party grew in areas of French Soudan which left French and Soudanese political elites fearing Bîdan cooperation with the Moroccan Liberation Army (ALM) or a mass exodus of Bîdan from French Soudan to Mauritania. Furthermore, they were suspicious about the political and legal ambiguities of the OCRS and therefore of France's ambitions in the Sahara (Evrard, 2015).

Reluctant Partners

Chad

The January 10, 1957 law required the French government to consult each territorial assembly involved in the OCRS before implementing any programmes within each domain. These assemblies were elected territorial governments that had had a number of powers, including jurisdiction over the territory's budget and civil service, transferred to them from Paris under the *loi cadre*. This was not a decolonisation, the situation remained colonial, with Governor-Generals being renamed as High Commissioners, devolving their 'power of the Republic' to the governor (Chef de Territoire), who represented French sovereignty in each territory. Other matters, such as security, the appointment of certain local administrators, the judicial process also remained under French control (Cooper, 2014, pp. 253-254). Chad's entry into the OCRS can only be understood through an examination of the territory's debates on the organisation and the influence that local and regional political party lines had on these discussions. By 1957, one of the leading figures in the Chad

Territorial Assembly was the founder of Chad's *Rassemblement Democratique Africain* (RDA) branch; the *Parti Progressiste Tchadien* (PPT), Gabriel Lisette. Lisette used the PPT to appeal to the dominant south-Chadian Sara ethnic group as well as other southern chiefs and the urban population. The PPT set itself in opposition to the historically French-supported *Union Démocratique Tchadienne* (UDT) which recruited its members from amongst prosperous Muslim merchants from Fort-Lamy (N'Djamena) and Fort-Archambault. Of Guadeloupian parentage, Lisette had studied at the *Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer* (ENFOM) in 1941 and was posted to Chad in 1946. In 1956, representing the RDA in the French National Assembly, Lisette was a proponent of the *loi-cadre* reforms, which would expand electoral suffrage and the autonomy of the individual territorial governments. However, as a delegate of one of the poorest territories of the French empire, he was less convinced that the reforms would address economic weaknesses. He believed that without significant economic efforts from the French government to help the local governments, the entire reform could fail.¹⁸⁹

The OCRS presented itself as an attempt from the French government to provide this much needed support. Although it was not created within the framework of the *loi-cadre*, it was nevertheless established to aid development in Saharan territories including Chad. By 1957, Lisette's PPT had become the leading political party and Lisette became Vice-President of the Government Council in May and was a leading voice in the Chadian discussions of the OCRS. Support for the organisation was less than straight-forward and required a debate within the Chad Territorial Assembly to untangle the January 1957 law and its implications for Chad.

Mere months after the January 1957 law for the OCRS was laid down, administrators at the *Haussaires* (High Commissions) of Dakar and Brazzaville began to act upon Article 6 of the law and sent telegrams to the Governors of the concerned AOF and AEF territories to call for them to elect two delegates to represent their Saharan region at the High Commission of the OCRS.¹⁹⁰ On the face of it this seemed a fairly straight-forward request, however in the Territorial Assemblies it generated a certain amount of debate. In Chad it prompted a lengthy debate within the Assembly and a call to the Minister of Overseas France for further information on the limits and attributes of the OCRS before it could proceed.¹⁹¹ Ahmed Kotoko's (PPT Territorial Assembly delegate of Tchado-Cameroonian descent) opening speech introduced the matter of the OCRS, raising important questions about development and the beneficiaries of the project. He highlights that the Chad

¹⁸⁹ Gabriel Lisette, Assemblée Nationale, *Debats*, March 20, 1956, pp.1090-1091.

¹⁹⁰ ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Telegram from Pignon to the Governors of Saint-Louis, Niamey, Port-Lamy and the Haussaires of Dakar and Brazzaville (n°70127), 11 Dec. 1957.

¹⁹¹ ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Telegram from AFCOUR, Brazzaville, to France Outremer (FOM) (n°213), 18 Sept. 1957.

Assembly had not been consulted on the creation of the organisation, but that did not mean that Chadians could not profit from Saharan development. His speech makes clear the delicate balancing act between benefitting from the socio-economic development promised by the OCRS, and losing autonomy through the creation of a politico-administrative structure which might have 'mission creep':

Pour nous, sur cette affaire, l'avis de notre Assemblée n'a pas été demandé, mais l'OCRS est là, il faut en profiter. Pour profiter de cet organisme, il faut envoyer des techniciens capables de procurer à notre Territoire des richesses. La mise en marche de cet organisme va poser des problèmes de compétence, de structure et de doctrine qui seront très longs à débattre. Economiquement, l'OCRS mettra notre Territoire en valeur en développant les richesses de son sous-sol, mais sur le plan politique, la création d'un Ministère du Sahara nourrit nos craintes. Le Ministre peut prendre également les fonctions de Délégué de l'OCRS et devenir le détenteur d'un pouvoir économique et social, mais également politique et administratif, car nous risquons de perdre nos produits miniers en échange d'une vague promesse d'aide qui ne pourrait rapporter avant tout à une partie du Territoire.¹⁹²

Kotoko, with his language of 'reciprocity', 'cooperation' and 'mutual benefit', demonstrates that he was troubled by the political implications of the OCRS, notably the joint role of the Minister of the Sahara and the Délégué Général of the OCRS. This demonstrates his concern about 'mutual benefit' and the extent to which Chad would profit. But it also shows Kotoko's interpretation of the authority that the Territorial Assembly, implying that Chad could choose whether or not to join the OCRS.

Nevertheless, Kotoko surmised that:

Si cet organisme pourrait nuire à notre avenir, je tiens à vous dire que je voterai contre. Toutefois, je pense que le Gouvernement français tiendra compte de nos observations. Je suis du même avis que mes Collègues, c'est-à-dire que l'O.C.E.R.S. [sic.] ne peut pas être un Gouvernement, c'est uniquement une organisation économique et sociale, rien de plus.¹⁹³

Here he shows that he believes the government of Chad would be listened to by the French, he is confident that the voices of Africans counted where in the past they had been disregarded. Lisette agreed with François Tombalbaye and Kotoko's position, arguing that the Chadian government had no power to refuse their membership in the OCRS because of the terms of the January 10, 1957 law.¹⁹⁴ This discussion is quite pointed, suggesting that while the government was not asked about the OCRS, from the Chadian elite's point of view, it should have been asked. Kotoko demonstrates a clear sense of agency, almost implying that the government could effectively veto the OCRS by refusing to elect representatives to the High Commission of the organisation. In this way he indicates the authority that the Chad Territorial Assembly had over this matter. There is a sense that by this point in time power relations were such that whilst the French were still making policy without

¹⁹² ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Assemblée Territoriale de Tchad, *Dossier : Projet d'avis sur les limites de l'OCRS* (n°295), 4 Jan. 1958, p.35.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p.49.

African input, French politicians would be potentially forced to shift their position and begin adapting to African concerns.

Kotoko stressed the importance of Chad remaining 'un Territoire uni et que son intégralité soit respectée'.¹⁹⁵ This reveals his fears that the OCRS would undermine this and that the Ministry of the Sahara's administrative mandate over the Saharan departments of Saoura and Oasis would be extended to the Chadian region involved in the OCRS.

A common understanding of the term administration appears to have been important for the Council of Government to determine. For example, Lisette understood that:

Il est certain que le terme 'administration' peut prêter à équivoque, quoiqu'il en soit, un décret ne peut pas avoir plus de force que la loi elle-même. Nous nous en tenons donc à l'interprétation du décret en fonction des termes de la loi. Nous ne disons pas que le décret empiète sur les attributions de la loi. Nous interprétons le décret en fonction de la loi. C'est à dire que nous ne considérons pas que l'Administration ici signifie 'administration du territoire', mais administration des biens. Et il est certain que l'existence d'une organisation aussi importante, posera d'importants problèmes d'administration au sens de 'la gestion'. Et c'est bien ainsi que j'interprète le terme, en m'appuyant sur les intentions de la loi du 10 janvier 1957.¹⁹⁶

By using legal language and terminology, Lisette shows the importance of law and following the rule of law. It was not just the planners within the OCRS who were tied up with the question of what the OCRS legally constituted, it obsessed African politicians as well, both supporters and critics.

Politicians such as Lisette were very aware of the ability of states like France to use language to bring political entities like the OCRS into existence. These political elites were operating during an era of shifting political circumstances and new political entities, with the creation of the UN, the use of referenda on self-determination and also the creation of multi-lateral trade and economic organisations such as the EEC. Lisette uses this type of language to – linguistically at least – limit the power of the OCRS, to only having control over its assets. In this way he asserts Chadian agency in the face of being presented with the *fait accompli* of the OCRS.

Nevertheless, Tombalbaye maintained that the Territorial government only had a duty to discuss the economic aspect of the organisation and no more. The UDT Minister Jean Baptiste (Minister of Economic Planning and Councillor of the Territorial Assembly), who was of French and Chadian descent, demonstrated the split in opinion amongst the Chadian representatives, especially across the party lines of the PPT and the UDT, arguing that the OCRS could be a positive opportunity for Chad. He believed that the OCRS' economic and social objectives had the potential to significantly improve the quality of life for people living in a particularly impoverished region of the territory. As a

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.36.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p.54.

result of this potential outcome, Jean Baptiste was in favour of the OCRS. Furthermore, he also uses the language of agency and development, maintaining that the fact that the Territorial Assembly were able to select their own delegates for the High Commission of the OCRS, they were being granted direct influence over economic plans for the region and could therefore use this influence for the benefit of Chad. In this way Jean Baptiste's language is not that different from his colleagues in the Territorial Assembly, he is just less suspicious of the OCRS. Thus, a shared language was used across the political spectrum, but it was put to use for different reasons.

Jacques Nadingar, a member of parliament from the south of Chad who became a staunch opponent of Tombalbaye's regime following independence in 1960¹⁹⁷, also pressed the point that Chad had been held back in the past by its geographical situation and lack of resources. He argued that it was not so much an issue of a lack of agricultural and geological wealth in the country, but the difficulty in obtaining these riches which had previously halted Chadian progress. By including the territory in the OCRS, France had afforded Chadians the opportunity to benefit from not only economic development but also cooperation and the improvement of local societies. He maintained that, even though they were not being offered the opportunity to refuse the French state, this potential for development was a fundamental reason as to why the project could not be refused in Chad. It is for this reason that Chad could offer Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti, the Saharan region of their Territory to the OCRS for development and administrative reorganisation as needed by the High Commission.¹⁹⁸

However, Georges Gerin who was a representative in the Chad Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture and Industry, highlighted that Chad was not consulted on the creation of the OCRS because they were not an independent nation-state like Tunisia and Morocco, who were not invited to be a part of this organisation.¹⁹⁹ If they were an independent country, then France would have needed to discuss the plans for the OCRS with Chad. However, since they were still a part of the Community, the French government had jurisdiction over these lands and therefore had no legal necessity to negotiate with the Territorial Assembly before creating this project. Again, the Chadian debate's focus on how joining this organisation may affect the Assembly's administration of Chad's Saharan region reveals the importance, for these politicians, of agency and autonomy over decisions which would affect Chad. Delegates including Gerin interpreted the OCRS as a French structure that Chad could benefit from, but the authority over the OCRS remained in Paris and not with the individual

¹⁹⁷ Relatively little has been written about the life and career of Nadingar; his political party is unknown at this time, but in October 1960 he filed a motion of censure against Tombalbaye's government and in 1963 Nadingar was assassinated, presumably by agents of President Tombalbaye (Magrin, 2001, p. 31).

¹⁹⁸ ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Assemblée Territoriale de Tchad, *Dossier : Projet d'avis sur les limites de l'OCRS* (n°295), 4 Jan. 1958, p.41.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.38.

Assemblies of each Saharan region. Therefore, these delegates faced a delicate balancing act over retaining and exerting their sovereignty, while also claiming socio-economic benefits from the OCRS. Following discussions about the OCRS and what it would signify for Chad, the Territorial Assembly delegates identified two main issues for debate; which delegates to elect and how to delimit the Saharan region of Chad. The first issue was problematic because certain Chadians believed that their delegates at the High Commission should be representative of the Saharan region, i.e. from the Saharan region itself, and not just someone to represent Chad. However, Tombalbaye and his advocates argued that the delegates ought to be the 'most valuable' candidates, that is to say those most suited to the role, and not necessarily just representative of the Saharan region. In this way, the Chadian government could maintain control over their interests. The PPT politicians wanted to avoid the selection of a representative of Chad who came from the Saharan region. They feared such a candidate would be too regionalist and not represent Chad in its entirety. The dossier which documents these debates shows that more than half of the Assembly session was devoted to this issue.²⁰⁰ The importance of this debate to the delegates shows that they were eager to establish the lines of political representation within this new political structure, and who in the government had the right to represent which part of the territory. Each political party put forward their own candidates, with Ahmed Mangué (PPT) and Moussa Yayami (PPT), representatives from the southern regions gaining more than thirty votes each ahead of the northern UDT candidate Issa Allatchimi. This reflects the power of the PPT within the Assembly.

Even after the candidates were chosen, certain Chadians, including Issa Allatchimi a Chad Territorial Councillor who represented the northern region of the country, continued to be dissatisfied with the results and appealed to the French government to cancel the vote.²⁰¹ In his official request, addressed to Félix Gaillard, then Prime Minister under the Fourth Republic, Allatchimi effectively requested that the devolved powers given to the Territorial Assembly, that were intended to enable increased African representation, be overridden. He argued that this government was not representative of the Chad territory, thereby suggesting a lack of confidence in the new system. In his appeal to Gaillard he outlined a three-page list of reasons that the delegates were unsuitable. His main reasoning was that the representatives to the OCRS should be of 'Saharan' origin, that is to say, from the region included in the OCRS. He also highlighted the contradiction that the OCRS called for two representatives, even though it encompassed only the Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti (BET) region in Chad which had only one representative in the Territorial Assembly. Meanwhile the other three

²⁰⁰ Ibid, pp.59-94.

²⁰¹ ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Camille Heline, Vice Président du Parti Républicain Radical et Radical-Socialiste to M. Félix Gaillard, Président du Conseil (PR/ch/rc n°4784), 3 March 1958.

Saharan regions (that he does not name, but presumably referred to Kanem, Batha and Biltine), which were not part of the OCRS, were represented by twenty councillors. Allatchimi in particular regarded the election of Ahmed Mangué, who represented the Logone region, to the High Commission of the OCRS as nonsensical as there were no Saharan populations in that area of Chad. In many ways this letter is demonstrative of a dissatisfaction within the Chadian Assembly over the southern region's political domination. Allatchimi appeal to the colonial authority in an attempt to outmanoeuvre his political rivals was part of a long tradition, stretching back to the nineteenth century, of appealing to and using the colonial power as a foil to address regional rivalries. Nevertheless, this complaint proved to be fruitless, with Gérard Jaquet responding, on behalf of Gaillard, that he did not have the power to overturn the Territorial Assembly's vote and that Allatchimi could continue to pursue his case, but the tone of his letter intimated that he was unlikely to succeed. In this way Jaquet, representing the colonial power, says that the French state was not willing to interfere in the affairs of this political structure that it had so recently established, at least not on this particular occasion. The lack of further correspondence on this matter in this archive suggests that Allatchimi decided against further action.²⁰² Allatchimi's appeal reveals the role of both French and African politicians had in attempting to work out this new, not quite post-colonial, political order.

The second issue which was debated by the Chad assembly was on which region of northern Chad would be made a part of the OCRS. Although certain *députés* believed that Chad would be part of the OCRS regardless of how the Assembly voted, the French and Chadian politicians agreed that the Assembly had some measure of control in deciding where the OCRS programmes would take place. Rather than believing that France would partition Chad and designate certain parts of the territory as belonging to the OCRS, certain Chadian elites perceived the project as an opportunity to develop and industrialise one of its regions.²⁰³ As a result of the Territorial Assembly debates, Chad selected the BET region to be included in the OCRS.²⁰⁴ Even this was a matter for debate, with some, including Nadingar fearing the repercussions of delimiting Chad:

Cependant nous craignons une réorganisation territoriale qui, administrativement, nous ôterait le B.E.T. Cette région du Nord est liée fortement à l'ensemble du Tchad par son passé. Elle est et demeurera tchadienne. Mais nous sommes favorables pour une réorganisation simplement économique, sans création de circonscription administrative nouvelle.²⁰⁵

²⁰² ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Gérard Jaquet à Camille Heline (n°1097/CAB/CP), March 26, 1958.

²⁰³ ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Assemblée Territoriale de Tchad, *Dossier : Projet d'avis sur les limites de l'OCRS* (n°295), 4 Jan. 1958, pp. 40-41.

²⁰⁴ ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Pignon to M. Lejeune, Ministère du Sahara (n°259), 10. Jan 1958.

²⁰⁵ ANOM, FM 1 AffPol/2207, Assemblée Territoriale de Tchad, *Dossier : Projet d'avis sur les limites de l'OCRS* (n°295), 4 Jan. 1958, p.41.

Nadingar highlights Chadian agency, and the need to prevent the French state from creating a new administration over the territory and threatening the devolved powers to the Territorial Assembly.

Député Mustapha Nasri expanded on the benefits of using the BET region for economic development under the OCRS:

Isolée dans ses montagnes et ses dunes, la Région du Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti peut apparaître comme le bout du monde et l'on doit dire qu'à l'heure actuelle cette région reste encore difficilement accessible. C'est ce qui explique que l'on n'ait pu mettre en valeur ces territoires qui n'ont été jusqu'alors que des postes d'observations et des lieux de déportation. Mais de cette région abandonnée une région industrielle dont la richesse vivifiera le pays tout entier.²⁰⁶

Here he highlights how the region had been used in the past, mainly as the Chadian equivalent of Siberia, but he also underlines the reason why – its geography. As a result of poor transportation, it was a difficult region to access and was of little use for their agricultural economy. However, its potential as an industrial centre had long been recognised. Nasri maintains that this economic expansion would bring financial benefits to the whole of Chad.²⁰⁷ Unsurprisingly, no mention is made here about the economic benefits of the OCRS to Eurafrica or even to the rest of the French Community. Rather, these debates are limited to Chad and regionalist arguments about the Saharan areas of Chad.

In these Senate debates, Mustapha Nasri reveals his pro-French stance when he describes the complex sovereignty and territorial unity of these lands:

Cette région est française parce que la France lui a apporté la paix et une plus grande prospérité, mais cette Région est également et aussi fondamentalement Tchadienne. Tchad ne possède pas simplement une unité administrative et politique, mais il a aussi une unité essentielle fondée sur le travail en commun de ce dernier demi-siècle et sur la volonté de vivre en commun pour bâtir un avenir commun.²⁰⁸

With phrases such as 'avenir commun' Nasri uses the voluntarist language of the nation-state and omitting the Eurafrican and Franco-African frames of reference to suggest a desire amongst Chadians to live in harmony and to suggest that the lands and its peoples were indivisible. However, despite the administrative status of these lands, he underlined that:

Malgré l'immensité sablonneuse qui le sépare du reste du pays, malgré sa position géographique excentrique, le Borkou-Ennedi-Tibesti est et veut demeurer partie intégrante de ce Tchad qui est, malgré la diversité des races, des coutumes et des religions, notre patrie commune.²⁰⁹

Although Mustapha Nasri does not explain how he knew that the populations of the B.E.T. wanted to remain a part of Chad, this text reveals an attitude amongst the *députés* in the Chadian senate.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p.42.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p.46.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 44.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

These politicians were very keen to demonstrate the unity of Chadian lands and exert their authority as the rightful inheritors of this region. This is in line with sentiments expressed in Mali and Mauritania at this time that they were prepared to work with France and industrialise these regions, but they would not provide any opportunity for their sovereignty to be denied.

This attitude is confirmed with Mustapha Nasri's reference to the French Soudanese Minister of the Interior, Keita Madeira, who said in November 1957:

Nous approuvons l'O.C.R.S. en tant qu'organisation économique permettant l'exploitation sur une plus grande échelle des richesses sahariennes. En revanche, nous sommes résolument contre la thèse qui tend à faire du Sahara une entité politique et administrative, soit rattachée directement à la Métropole, soit constituée en Territoire à part. Nous sommes partisans de l'O.C.R.S. telle qu'elle a été définie par la Loi du 10 Janvier 1957, c'est-à-dire à condition qu'elle n'empiète pas sur la personnalité politique des Territoires.²¹⁰

These debates were deemed successful by the Council of the Government in Chad in the sense that they achieved a resolution on the two main areas for debate. Firstly, the Council agreed that the B.E.T. region would be incorporated into the O.C.R.S. Secondly, they elected Ahmed Mangué and Moussa Yayami as the Chadian delegates for the High Commission of the O.C.R.S, thereby confirming their support of and willingness to cooperate with the Minister of the Sahara and the O.C.R.S.

These debates demonstrate, amongst other things, the role that the O.C.R.S played in illuminating the evolution of the political lines in Chad, particularly between the PPT and the UDT. This domination, by the majority party, the PPT, over the Assembly vote on the O.C.R.S can be understood within the broader context of the attempt by this party to maintain a political monopoly within Chad and as external representatives of the country. This situation manifested with the prevention of the one candidate, who was a UDT member, from BET from representing the region within the O.C.R.S. These political rivalries became further exposed just months later when Lisette was ousted from the PPT and Tombalbaye emerged as the new political leader. Tombalbaye maintained a close relationship with France, having campaigned for the French constitution 'yes' vote in 1958 as advocated by many other regional RDA party leaders, including Houphouët-Boigny (Cooper, 2014). Upon independence in 1960, Tombalbaye worked with Jacques Soustelle to ensure Chad's continued involvement in the O.C.R.S. Yet, within Chad Tombalbaye began to dismantle any opposition to his leadership, beginning with those in his own party and other political groups, including the UDT. He worked to replace the French who had left their administrative posts in the north with southern prefects, gendarmes, medical staff and legal administrators. Many of these southerners were not trained for these new

²¹⁰ Ibid, pp.45-46.

roles but were eager to remove educated Muslims from positions of influence and especially exclude them from government (Massaquoi, 1990).

Niger

Shortly after the creation of the OCS in 1957, former *Parti Progressiste Nigerien* (PPN) co-leader Djibo Bakary's Sawaba party of Niger (a broad coalition ranging from urban leftists to conservative rural notables mainly from the Hausa regions) won the Territorial Assembly elections, and Djibo Bakary was made President of the territorial government. Djibo Bakary, an anti-colonial leftist, who was also perceived by certain French politicians as anti-French (because of his history of campaigning against former Governor of Niger, Jean Toby and his regime), had some reservations about the OCS and Niger's inclusion (van Walraven, 2013).²¹¹ Certain scholars (Bourgeot, 2000; van Walraven, 2013) have stated that Niger, and especially the Sawaba party, was reluctant to join the OCS because of the political implications it posed, threatening the newly won autonomy promised by the *loi-cadre Defferre*. However, Max Lejeune's archives tell a somewhat different story, mapping the unfolding discussions between the OCS leaders and the Nigerien political authorities. Djibo Bakary welcomed Lejeune's representative Serge Goudouneix upon his visit to the different Sahara regions, including Niger, in the summer of 1957. On July 28, at a conference in Niamey with the Nigerien Territorial Authorities, Bakary took the opportunity to pass on his interest in Niger taking part in the OCS, believing especially that the High Commission delegates needed to be swiftly appointed. However, Djibo Bakary was keen to establish that the OCS would not signify an 'amputation territoriale', that the powers of autonomy that the *loi-cadre* of 1956 had provided would continue to be respected and that the 'nomads blancs du Niger' would not be allowed to think that they were to be integrated 'totally' into the OCS. By this he was referring to claims that the OCS would become a form of administrative region for a nation of nomadic Saharan populations, thereby racializing his fears of separatism. However, Goudouneix dismissed these fears not by refuting them (which may have alienated the nomads) but by reassuring the Nigeriens that the OCS was no more than an economic development organisation which would work with the Territorial governments to put industrial programmes into place in the Saharan regions.²¹²

For Djibo Bakary, as long as these conditions could be met, the OCS could not start their programmes to develop and 'improve' the northern region (Agadez) of Niger soon enough. Goudouneix assured Djibo Bakary:

²¹¹ For more on Djibo Bakary and the Sawaba movement, see van Walraven (2013).

²¹² ADS, 37J, 83, Mission Goudouneix, Serge Goudouneix, *Mission en Afrique Occidentale Française de Monsieur Goudouneix du Cabinet du Ministre du Sahara*, July 24-August 5, 1957, p.9.

Ce qui est essentiel n'est pas l'importance terrienne de la zone OCRS mais la participation effective du Niger à l'OCRS qui agira d'abord sur une certaine zone. Il ne s'agit pas de prendre et emporter les richesses, mais grâce aux bénéfiques « rapportés par telle ou telle région » d'assurer pour l'ensemble des zones OCRS la promotion sociale des populations.²¹³

For Goudouneix it was not a question of land, or borders, but about the voluntary participation of Niger in this economic development organisation. He maintained that when Djibo Bakary informed the local populations of the OCRS and its intentions, he could liken it to the Common Market or as a supra-territorial association. This comparison is interesting firstly because the European Common Market was still under construction at this point, but also because it was a non-colonial example, suggesting to the Nigeriens that France would work on an equal basis with the African members of the OCRS. This idea that through the OCRS Niger could be a part of the conversations about the economic management of the Sahara is important because it appeals to the African politicians' desire for increased representation and sovereignty over their lands.

The Nigerien Territorial Assembly, under the leadership of President Georges Condat (a mixed-heritage Nigerien of French Peul descent and also of the Sawaba party), met on January 15, 1958 to discuss the OCRS and assign two representatives of Niger to the OCRS High Commission. This discussion reflected the conversations between Djibo Bakary and Serge Goudouneix the previous summer, seeking to formalise the prevention of any political delimitation of the Saharan zones. They had also suggested that Niger would enter into the OCRS only if it remained an essentially economic organisation.

This debate in which leaders of the various Nigerien political groups and political representatives from the different regions spoke their concerns about the implementation of the OCRS again focused mainly on the question of delimitation. The delegates were unanimous in their support for Niger joining for economic purposes, in order to reap the benefits. As Abdoulaye Mamani (a union worker from Zinder and close friend of Bakary) highlighted, 'l'aspect économique revêt une grande importance'. However, little was said about how the OCRS would improve the lives of the Saharan populations, nor of how the Territory Assembly foresaw the development programmes, beyond the territory receiving significant economic benefits as a result of the collaboration. There was more concern that any economic success should not come at a cost to their newly achieved political freedoms.²¹⁴

²¹³ ADS, 37J, 83, Mission Goudouneix, Serge Goudouneix, *Passage de la Mission Goudouneix au Niger – Niamey*, July 28, 1957, p.3.

²¹⁴ ADS, 37J, 83, Assemblée Territoriale du Niger, *Séance Plénière du Mercredi 15 Janvier 1958*, January 15, 1958, pp. 198-200.

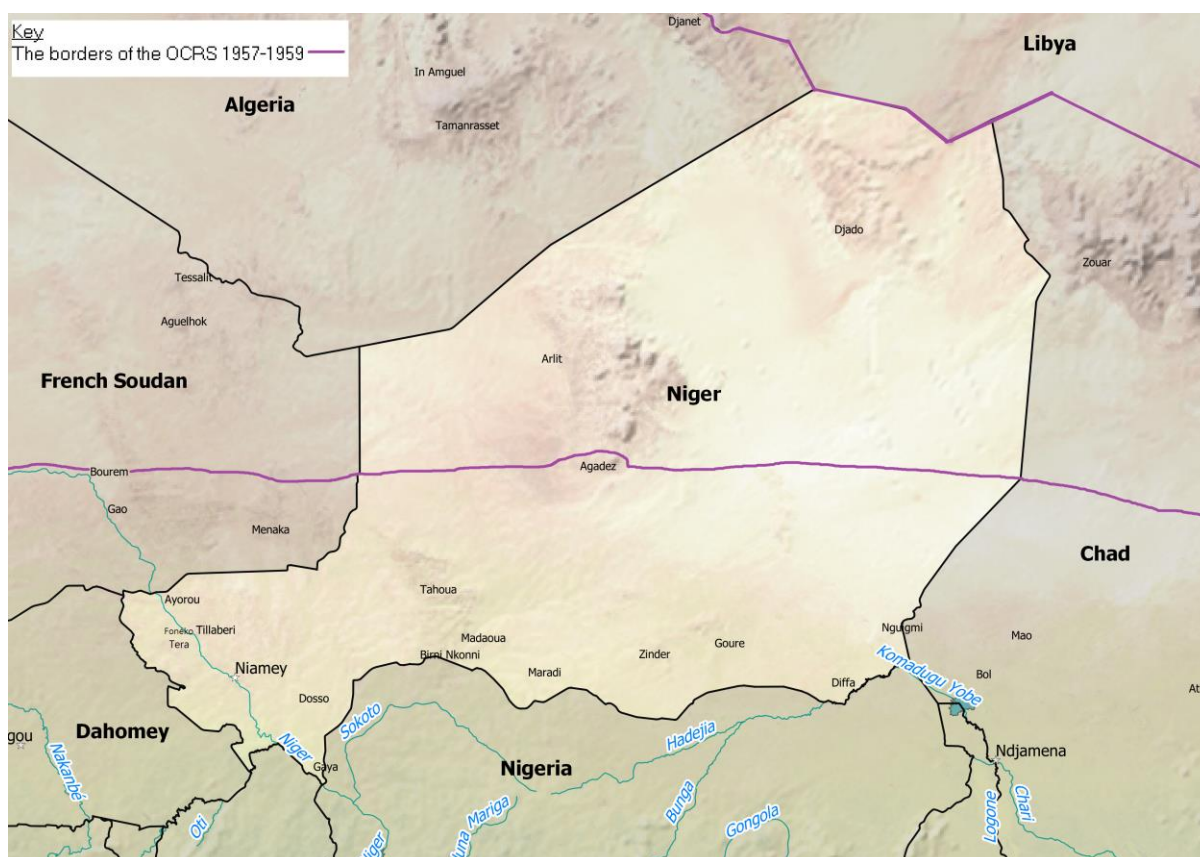


Figure 14: Map of Niger

Speaking on behalf of the radical inter-African Mouvement Socialiste Africain (MSA) political group, which had been affiliated with Sawaba since January 1957, was one of the Sawaba leaders, Adamou Sékou. He was a judicial clerk from Téra (see Figure 14), who was educated at the prestigious William Ponty school in Senegal and was considered a hardened militant due to his service in the French military in Madagascar during the repression of the Malagasy uprising 1947-1948 (van Walraven, 2013, p. 96). Sékou outlined the fears of his fellow party members and indeed the local populations that he represented. These concerns, far from being pro-French, were about potential loss of sovereignty, loss of political advantage and the reformation of colonial structures in the guise of new organisations. The Sawaba party's apprehensions were not allayed by Max Lejeune's initial declarations to Niger that his duty was to execute the OCRS law and nothing more. Sékou maintained that despite the insistence from OCRS planners that the organisation was purely economic, Sawaba-MSA politicians were still concerned. These concerns were based on the potential for the OCRS to slip from an economic plan to a political plan as demonstrated by the creation of the Ministry of the Sahara and the departmentalisation of the Algerian Sahara in June 1957, along with

its own police and armed forces. For Sékou this was proof that the OCRS had become an autonomous political and administrative 'Etat dans l'Etat'.²¹⁵

Furthermore, the legislation had no clear terminology in its definitions of the Saharan regions:

Aujourd'hui, avec le développement de la science et de la technique et, il faut le dire, aussi avec l'évolution accélérée de la situation mondiale, les perspectives changent : le désert nigérien s'appelle « Sahara » et le Sahara : « l'OCRS » - Le Drame est que cette appellation voudrait consacrer la division du pays. Le paradoxe voudrait que les seules réserves, susceptibles de transformer la vie des hommes et des femmes de ce pays, échappent à notre contrôle. Le Pays, de ce fait, perdrait toute perspective d'expansion, et trouverait réduit, politiquement et économiquement, à une bande de terre écrasée entre les richesses du Sahara et de la Nigeria.²¹⁶

Once again, the importance of naming and pinpointing the identity of the Saharan organisation re-emerges. This demonstrates that the ambiguous nature of the OCRS was not acceptable for Sékou and his contemporaries. Sékou highlights that not enough of a distinction had been made between the economic body and the state department to persuade Sawaba politicians that the *loi-cadre* was not being violated. Unsurprisingly these politicians were suspicious about France's intentions for the OCRS in Niger. The identity of the organisation was central to these debates which focused on how Niger could move from the unequal relationship it had with France to a more equal one.

However, Abdoulaye Mamani, a union worker from Zinder and a leader of the *Union Démocratique Nigérienne* (UDN) wing of the Sawaba party, saw the OCRS as an opportunity for Niger within the broader picture of the French Union's inclusion in the European Common Market and the potential for oil prospection and increased employment for the Nigerien workforce.

Au cocktail donné en l'honneur du Ministre, MM. Djibo Bakary, Boubou Hama et Condat n'ont pas manqué d'exprimer notre pensée. Le Vice-Président a formulé des craintes sur le côté social. En effet, nous faisons partie du Marché Commun auquel est lié le problème du Sahara. Le Vice-Président, par une question qui a paru naïve à certains mais qui a son importance, avait déclaré que la main d'œuvre africaine doit être employée dans cette exploitation ; il faut éviter une ruée de main d'œuvre étrangère – nous avons eu l'exemple de l'exploitation des mines belges d'où la classe ouvrière autochtone a été chassée par les Italiens.

L'exploitation du Sahara doit servir, non seulement à la classe ouvrière africaine, à la mise en valeur des Territoires, à l'intérêt de toute la Fédération, mais encore à aider tous les hommes de ce pays à évoluer, à chasser la misère des foyers.²¹⁷

Mamani draws on his trade union background to compare the Common Market with the Sahara.

While the companies within the OCRS may hire many European skilled workers, he suggests that the OCRS may provide an opportunity to discuss the employment of local workers. His interest lay with how capitalism and globalisation could serve the interests of the owners of the means of production

²¹⁵ ADS, 37J, 83, Assemblée Territoriale du Niger, *Séance Plénière du Mercredi 15 Janvier 1958*, January 15, 1958, pp. 195-196.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 196-197.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 200-201.

by giving access to less wealthy workers who were prepared to work for less. Here Mamani is looking to the future of the country, for him this was more than just a colonial question, it was about laying the foundations for labour and union policies in a politically autonomous Niger.

Maurice Camara, a veterinary specialist originally from Guinea who was pro-UDN and a member of the MSA, was more concerned about how the French government perceived the African territories. He argued that:

Nos inquiétudes au sujet de cette Organisation sont fondées sur les déclarations nettes de certains responsables français qui pensent que tous les désirs de démembrement administratif seront avalisés dans les TOM sans discussion.²¹⁸

However, he believed that just because the OCRS potentially had a political nature, that did not mean that the Niger Territorial Assembly should reject the offer to join it without discussing it first, just as they would with any other communal project.

Nous avons accepté d'entrer dans un Ensemble, nous avons adhéré librement à la vie en commun, l'Afrique noire française a choisi le régime de la Communauté, mais il nous semble que l'on peut exploiter la zone saharienne française sans lui octroyer un régime étatique qui aggraverait une balkanisation déjà excessive de l'Afrique.²¹⁹

Camara argues that the benefits of the OCRS for Niger were not just about what the project could do for one country. He was invested in the whole idea of the community and a communal project which was part of a new international order. Camara maintained that it was Niger's place to take control of their future and to begin this by managing their entry into the OCRS:

Notre langage, en cette séance mémorable, doit être un appel à la réconciliation, un message de paix, car on se bat aux portes des régions sahariennes, c'est une lutte fratricide à laquelle nous ne pouvons pas rester indifférents parce que son dénouement peut influencer la destruction de réalisations qui se mesureront, demain, à l'échelle planétaire.²²⁰

Camara's words reflect a decisive tone, that Niger and the Sahara were experiencing a potential turning point. Drawing on the regional conflicts and unrest in North and West Africa, particularly the Algerian War, Camara suggests that the region could not reach its potential without an end to this violence. He was committed to the idea that Niger's future lay in a community with its neighbouring countries, but that any progress for these countries required peace.

The Niger Territorial Assembly voted to become a part of the OCRS on the assurance from France that they would not lose any part of their territory. They also voted for three delegates to be sent to the High Commission of the OCRS to represent Nigerien interests. The candidates were Boubou Hama, a Songhay from Fonéko (see Figure 14) and brought up in a modest background who had

²¹⁸ Ibid, p.204.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

become a teacher after studying at Ponty. Boubou Hama was one of the founders of the PPN-RDA. The other two candidates were Djibo Bakary and Georges Condat who together represented the MSA. However, after some clarification, Boubou Hama revealed that he was never and should not have been considered a candidate; he had been proposed by the RDA. He maintained that because the candidates should be politically representative of the entire country, only Djibo Bakary and Georges Condat could be considered since they were from the majority-ruling party. Moreover, because the MSA were permitted to put forward two candidates and the RDA only one, delegates from the latter party chose to abstain from the vote. With the RDA abstaining, the two delegates to the OCRS were elected by a majority.²²¹ This idea of Hama's as to who could represent Niger outside of the country is interesting when compared with the debates in Chad. The Chadian Assembly had discussed that delegates should represent the Saharan region, in Niger, Hama saw that elected political representation was more important. That is to say, the candidates should reflect the ruling party in the country.

In a High Commission meeting in January 1958, the representatives from the different OCRS regions; Saoura and Oasis, Chad, Mali and Niger as well as the Mauritanian observers, had the opportunity to pose a number of questions to Max Lejeune about some of the finer details of the 1957 OCRS law. Djibo Bakary, then Vice President of the Council of the Government in Niger and later President (July 1958 to December 1958), and had been elected that month by the Territorial Assembly as one of the delegates to the OCRS, sent his observations and questions by letter to the High Commission. Before these questions were answered, he argued, the Nigerien delegation were unable to take a definitive position towards the OCRS. However, Djibo Bakary recalled that there was no evidence of any consultation in Niger. He also highlighted the apparent contradictions in this law surrounding the political nature of the OCRS. Drawing on the arguments he, and his political colleagues had presented to Goudouneix in July 1957, and had discussed in their National Assembly debate on January 15, Djibo Bakary outlined the key concerns for Niger on entering the OCRS officially:

Elle [l'Assemblée Nationale] constate que le décret 57-713 du 21 Janvier 1957 attribue des pouvoirs politiques et administratives au Ministre du Sahara.

Elle accepte la mise en commun de toutes les ressources de la communauté franco-africaine et la mise en valeur rationnelle du Sahara.

Mais elle affirme que tout découpage administratif ou politique des régions sahariennes est contraire à la loi et inutile pour une organisation économique.²²²

²²¹ Ibid, pp.220-222.

²²² ADS, 37J, 81, Djibo Bakary, *Haute Commission de l'OCRS – Déclaration des représentants du Soudan, du Niger et des Oasis et réponses du Ministre*, January 24, 1958, p.23.

He therefore called on Max Lejeune to ensure that the OCRS would not destabilise the climate of confidence that the *loi-cadre Defferre* had created in sub-Saharan Africa nor delay the advancement of a world-leading Community. By suggesting that the French Community was in fact Franco-African, Bakary shifts the balance of power away from France, suggesting that the African countries involved were not in fact part of France's (reimagined) empire, but were instead equal partners. He also confirmed his 'faith' in this community, but insisted that 'la garantie de la nation est une nécessité absolue à l'égard de toute ingérence étrangère.' What Djibo Bakary meant by foreign interference here was not clear, whether he meant other countries, but more likely he meant France. His use of the term 'nation' again implies equality between these African countries and France equivalent to relationship of the EEC member states. It also reveals the importance Bakary attached to the idea of the nation-state and that Niger's sovereignty could no longer be interfered with by colonial powers or otherwise.

Lejeune, however, dismissed the issue of any contradiction in the OCRS law.

En exécution de la loi du 10 janvier, le Délégué Général a reçu, par décret, Délégation des pouvoirs exercés par le Haut-Commissaire et les Gouverneurs de l'AOF. Ce décret a été pris après avis du Ministre de la FOM et de l'Algérie. Une telle mesure n'est pas contraire à la loi-cadre. Il ne faut pas se laisser distraire par de faux problèmes. C'est par une collaboration active et sans réticence que nous pourrions réaliser le développement économique de Sahara et relever le niveau de vie des populations Sahariennes.²²³

He regarded the discussion as a 'false problem' and uses the legislative language of the OCRS, such as how he, the Délégué Général, received his powers, to avoid Bakary's questions. Lejeune dismisses these concerns as a semantic discussion, instead prioritising the High Commission's agenda and the implementation of the OCRS' activities.

Beyond the general nature of the OCRS the Nigerien delegation was also concerned about some of the finer details of the organisation and how it would affect the provisions of the *loi-cadre* for the territorial assemblies. This included calling on the High Commission to compile a list of administrators working in the OCRS regions and their functions. Knowledge of who these civil servants were was important to the Nigerien delegates so that they could map the French administrators still operating in the region. Bakary's Sawaba government had struggled to 'Africanise' its administrative positions in 1957 as this required the approval of Paul Bordier, the French governor of the territory (van Walraven, 2013, pp. 111-112). In an independent Niger in 1960, under Diori's PPN-RDA government, Nigeriens could be appointed for the first time without deference to a French administrator. As the pre-independence leading party in Niger from September 1958 the PPN had researched the French administrators in a similar way to the previous

²²³ Ibid, p.25.

Sawaba government. As a result of this research the PPN could plan their replacements with the 'right' people and secure their political influence in formerly French-held positions (van Walraven, 2013).

The early 1958 question from Djibo Bakary about who these French administrators revealed a discrepancy in the system. These administrators, although they worked within the region encompassed by the OCRS, were appointed and employed by the French central government. By January 1958, the OCRS had not yet been provided with this information by the Ministry of Overseas France. Lejeune believed that the number in Niger was quite low, but that the services in the other territories could be extended to cover all the OCRS zones, which would mean an influx of personnel into Niger, but would also represent a sharing and distribution of resources within the organisation.

The other problematic issue with the OCRS, for the Nigerien delegates, was over the customs procedure. They were concerned with how the May 20, 1955 decree²²⁴ and the January 25, 1957 order exempting from customs duties any equipment and materials used by companies developing of the Saharan regions of Algeria would affect the customs regime in place. Lejeune responded that the customs duties were handled by the *grands conseils* and that it was the place of the OCRS to encourage the importation of any materials needed for the Saharan development programmes. He saw room for the customs system to be adapted for the benefit of the OCRS members, such as when it came to a more controlled circulation of everyday consumer items and fixed customs duties at the ports of entry for equipment for the Saharan development programmes.²²⁵

The final issue foreseen by the Nigerien delegation was to do with the legislative language of the OCRS and the potential division of Niger into two 'blocs'. There was some concern that the boundaries of the OCRS would signify the creation of two political and administrative regions, one under the jurisdiction of the OCRS and the other to be abandoned since 'la partie Sud du Territoire est réellement attirée par le bloc britannique (Nigéria)'. Lejeune resolved this issue with his explanation that the law did not signify any 'découpage politique de Territoire du Niger'. He clarified that 'la mise en valeur par l'OCRS implique que ses Agents soient en contact direct avec l'Administration actuelle des Territoires.', and that the southern region would in no circumstances be abandoned to British Nigeria. This drawing on the competition of Nigeria reflects a shared fear for the French and Nigériens, something that Lejeune was able to use to his advantage, that the OCRS and France would protect Niger from 'losing' part of its territory.

²²⁴ Decree n°55-628.

²²⁵ ADS, 37J, 81, Djibo Bakary, *Haute Commission de l'OCRS – Déclaration des représentants du Soudan, du Niger et des Oasis et réponses du Ministre*, January 24, 1958, p.26.

Despite these careful discussions of the OCRS by the Nigerien Territorial Assembly, Niger's involvement was dependent on the leading political party; the Sawaba group. In the High Commission Niger was represented by the leaders of this same party. This situation proved to have significant consequences for the OCRS mere months after the first High Commission meetings. 1958 proved to be a turbulent year, not just for France with its political and constitutional crisis, but also for Niger which again experienced a political rupture (Fuglestad, 2008). The Sawaba government's main opposition, the PPN-RDA had continued to oppose the coalition government since its formation in 1957. These confrontations reached fever pitch in April 1958 when the Sawaba government retaliated against RDA attempts to gain a foothold in the Sawaba held central and eastern regions. Using carefully orchestrated mob violence, the government targeted RDA militants in a government-sponsored coup d'état which aimed to literally cut the opposition down in size (van Walraven, 2013, pp. 121-124). An escalation of violence in April 1958 led to fears in France that their control over Niger was no longer secure, a French investigation into the riots discovered that had the gendarmerie been permitted to intervene, the violence might have been prevented. Since it was the interior ministry, controlled by Bakary that had executed the orders, the report surmised that the Sawaba government was to blame. Klaas van Walraven (2013) identifies these events as the beginning of a rift between Bakary's Sawaba government and the French state.

The tipping point for the Sawaba government came as a result of Charles de Gaulle's proposed 1958 constitutional referendum. This vote was held across the French Union in order to gain approval from the empire to form the Fifth Republic and reorganise the colonial territories. French administrators, and even military leaders, campaigned across the empire for a 'yes' vote to approve the new constitution. The empire, to be reshaped as the 'Community' (Communauté), would continue to enjoy the autonomy that the *loi-cadre* had provided but without the vulnerability of independence. Therefore, 'yes' signified 'autonomy within a Community still dominated by the metropole, while 'no' would mean independence, but also a rupture with France and all the benefits of being associated with the French framework, such as economic aid (van Walraven, 2009, p. 270). The choice of Sekou Touré's Guinean Democratic Party (PDG-RDA) to campaign for the 'no' vote, and its subsequent success in the referendum is well-documented (Chafer, 2002; Schmidt, 2009; Cooper, 2014). However, less remembered is how close Niger came to also voting for independence at this time. Van Walraven's (2009; 2013) work has explored Bakary's campaign for the country to vote 'no' despite the threat of losing French economic aid and its membership of the OCRS. He argues that the Sawaba government had been growing in strength until August 1958, on the basis of the destabilising of the RDA during the violence of April that year, and this strength encouraged the majority party to reject the constitution. However, this party stance led to the weight of the

metropolitan forces being directed at Niger and Bakary's government. This repression of the Sawaba movement by France led to the U-turn in Niger, with the country voting 'yes', Bakary uprooted and the government replaced by an RDA regime led by Hamani Diori less than a month later (van Walraven, 2009). France's campaign to ensure that the constitution was supported in Niger demonstrates that their assurances of autonomy and non-interference had a limit. The African territories were free to operate as long as their actions coincided with France's plans for the empire.

This political rupture was important in the context of the OCRS not just because it altered the personnel at the heart of the High Commission, but also because where the organisation had been working with a reluctant Nigerien government, the new regime was more receptive. The Prime Minister that replaced Djibo Bakary was his cousin and political rival, Hamani Diori.



Figure 15: Hamani Diori and Jacques Soustelle, 1960²²⁶

Diori, who was one of the founders of the PPN-RDA and a friend of Houphoüet-Boigny, had been a leading campaigner on behalf of the RDA for the 'yes' vote in 1958. Upon independence he was elected the country's first president. His foremost concern was for Niger's economic well-being and his close ties with France. These explain his support of the OCRS and eagerness for Niger to continue to be a part of it, even beyond independence. This is because not only would he be able to use Niger's membership to maintain links with France, but he could also ensure that his country would profit from the oil and gas revenue (Rouvez, 1994, p. 143). Unlike in other countries, Diori was reluctant for Niger to nationalise its gas industry because of the cost to the newly independent state which had little in the way of financial means for large economic projects. This may have been behind Diori's eagerness to remain a part of the OCRS beyond the country's independence, meeting with Jacques Soustelle in 1959 and 1960 to negotiate *coopération* agreements between France and

²²⁶ AN, 112 AJ23, Sahara – 1959.

Niger.²²⁷ It was these agreements which changed the OCRS' relationship with Niger. Where before 1960 Niger had been included in the OCRS as being one of France's colonial Saharan territories, after independence France and the OCRS had to agree upon a deal for Niger to be a part of the project and to be included in the budget which had been designed for the benefit of France's colonial possessions. The OCRS had to adapt to the fact of independence and the emergence of sovereign nation-states. This was not built into its framework from the outset when there had been an assumption that some form of *loi cadre* model could continue. With this adaptation to these shifting political circumstances, the economic organisation became a vehicle for post-independence French technical and financial assistance to the new nation-state.

Mali

In French Soudan, the OCRS became a sticking point in a country beleaguered by competing Malian and Tamasheq (Tuareg) nationalisms²²⁸. The dominant political party, the Union Soudanese-RDA (US-RDA), formally opposed Tamasheq society, particularly its tribal chiefs that it suspected of plotting to destabilise the Malian nation. However, the party had little influence over the northern regions of French Soudan and knew that the RDA needed to work with the chiefs who had a widespread influence over their nomadic subjects and extensive knowledge of the region. The OCRS became a point of contention between these Malian politicians and the tribal chiefs who had actively supported French and even in some cases Moroccan and Mauritanian claims over the Sahara. In turn, France was distrusted by the RDA for courting these tribal chiefs and potentially undermining Malian sovereignty (Lecocq, 2010).

Malian leaders from the south of the territory were suspicious from 1956 onwards that the French were plotting to hold onto the Sahara despite the legislative reforms of the *loi-cadre* which had created greater autonomy for the Territorial government. Certain French activities such as the increasing attempts to control the Sahara during the final years of colonial rule as well as courting Tuareg attentions served as the basis for these doubts (Boilley, 2005, p. 179). With the plans to introduce the OCRS in 1957, members of the US-RDA such as Modibo Keita perceived the project as an attempt to partition the Saharan parts of the land they hoped to inherit. They argued that the OCRS would appropriate the administrative regions of Gao and Timbuktu in order to construct an autonomous territory. In his speech at the French Union Assembly, the Soudanese delegate and US-

²²⁷ AN, AG5(1)1926, Coopération, J. Meo, *Protocols d'accord entre le Gouvernement de la République Française et le Gouvernement de la République du Niger*, May 5, 1959, pp.1-2.

²²⁸ Baz Lecocq (2010) outlines the distinction between these two forms of nationalism which existed and indeed still exist in Mali. The first, linked to the nation-state, was formed of multiple ethnic groups and political parties united in the vision of a Malian state, while the second, largely composed of Tuareg groups from the north of the country sought their own national independence, particularly from the Malian nations.

potential French supporter, would be present in the High Commission. In addition, by preventing the Bidân's nomination, the US-RDA could stamp out any potential separatism.

Allasane Haidara used his position to underline the official Malian position, which was that the OCRS should in no way cause rift between the nomadic and sedentary populations, nor between the different ethnic communities in Soudan. In this way he justifies his appointment by arguing that candidates should not be elected based on ethnic or regional nationalist grounds. Due to these stipulations, Allasane Haidara and the other US-RDA leaders used their power to counteract any attempts to put the OCRS into effect, preventing any OCRS programmes to be implemented on Malian lands until the September 1958 referendum when the French Union (apart from Guinea which became fully independent) was turned into autonomous republics within the French Community. Even beyond the referendum, Malian politicians were reluctant to allow OCRS projects to be established on their territory for fear that it would lead to a loss sovereignty. Upon independence in 1960 Mali chose to withdraw from the organisation (Lecocq, 2010, pp. 59-61).

Soudanese political elites perceived the OCRS as continued French interference in the delicate relations between the different tribes and populations in Soudan. In fact, certain African politicians argued that not only was the OCRS a way of retaining parts of French colonies in the final days of colonial rule, but also a way of ensuring that these countries were inherently divided (Boilley, 2005, p. 177). Soudanese politicians in France accused the French outright of engaging in racist politics, pitting 'blacks' against 'whites' and Saharans against Southern Soudanese (Lecocq, 2010). This was exemplified by the launching of two petitions between 1957 and 1958 by the *cadi* of the Ahel Arawan, Mohammed Mahmoud Ould Cheikh (also known as the Qadi of Timbuktu). The second, a letter addressed to the French President categorically rejected any attempts for the Tuareg lands being dominated by black populations (Boilley, 1999, p. 292). Thanks to Pierre Boilley's (1999) gathering of testimonies, it is now well-known that the French military was behind the signing of these petitions, revealing that the fears in Bamako were justified. These officers sought to foster divisions between the sedentary and nomadic Soudanese peoples in an attempt to continue working with these Tuareg tribes and aid them in forging their own autonomous region (Joly, 2013, p. 83). French political and military leaders may have attempted to use this situation to their advantage, for political, economic and strategic purposes. It was not just a question of creating ways for French administrators and the army to retain influence in a region that was rapidly replacing French technocrats with Africans, but also a reaction to the Algerian War spreading further south. With the FLN pronouncing in October 1957 that a 'southern front' would be established, the FLN declared they would be able to operate across the border between Soudan and the Algerian Sahara. Other

than the OCSR, the French army perceived the need to create new strategies for controlling the Saharan region of Soudan (Joly, 2013, p. 83).

The Qadi of Timbuktu's courting of the French military has been well-documented, particularly his friendship with Marcel Cardaire (Boilley, 1993, 1999, 2005; Lecocq, 2010; Hall, 2011). Cardaire was a French military officer who served in French Soudan in the late 1950s and is argued by certain historians to have been one of the most influential and well-known of the officers serving in the region (Lecocq, 2010, p. 52). On the request of the French military, in 1956 he travelled with his companion, the Qadi who was an ex-Kel Tamasheq tribal leader, and together they spent time with the nomadic populations of the Sahara, gathering information on the societies as well as promoting the French administrative framework in the Sahara (Hall, 2011, pp. 304-305). One of Cardaire's main conclusions was that the country's borders were problematic and should be redrawn. The Qadi was of the same opinion, believing that new borders should be drawn, separating 'white nomads' from their 'black neighbours'. This is because he believed that the nomads belonged culturally and economically to the Sahara (Lecocq, 2010, pp. 52-54).

The Qadi argued that the borders of the Sahara ought to be dictated by the lands where people of different races chose to inhabit, with the 'black sedentaries' historically preferring to live and work along the borders of the Sahara. He argued that the 'white nomads' had greater ties to the Sahara where they had long traditions of roaming and trading goods received in sub-Saharan Africa with those sold along the northern coast. In this way the Qadi regarded racial definitions as being tied to ways of life (Lecocq, 2010, p. 54). The Qadi was laying the basis for the creation of an imagined Tuareg (Tamasheq) community by using their ethnic, cultural and economic differences as grounds for the limitations of the community. His campaign in favour of the OCSR was based on his arguments that the *loi cadre Defferre* of 1956 made all Saharans full citizens of France, through treaties with France they had become French subjects and felt no affiliation with the African federalist and independence movements. Moreover, as he outlined in his second petition, he felt that they had race-based hierarchical claims to prevent them from being dominated by sedentary 'blacks' and that at the same time their culture and society separated them from North African states and territories. Furthermore, the Qadi believed that based on these arguments, the people of the Sahara had a right to either remain French citizens or be given their own territory (Lecocq, 2010 p.55).

Lecocq (2010, p. 56) doubts the Qadi's claims for a Saharan National Territory when he explains the limits of the Qadi's petition. Despite travelling extensively through the Sahara and the Sahel, gathering signatories from many tribes, the Qadi failed to convince all. For example, in the Hoggar

and Ajjer areas of Southern Algeria, he failed to convince the chiefs to adhere to his campaign. Although it could be argued that the Qadi's campaign demonstrated that there was some existence of an imagined Tuareg community, the fact that not all of the confederations adhered to it shows that this sense of a belonging to each other and to the Sahara did not encompass the whole of the OCRS region. It also reaffirms that the Tuaregs were not a single community but a heterogeneous set of peoples within which existed multiple communities which may or may not have associated with each other.

Nevertheless, it was not only the Kel Tamasheq in French Soudan who expressed their interest in the OCRS. In Niger, these nomads, who were hostile to 'all-black parties', and were suspicious of the *loi-cadre* and an autonomous Nigerien government, viewed the OCRS and the planned Saharan departments with hope for an alternative authority over Saharan lands (Fuglestad, 2008, p. 184). As in French Soudan, their interpretation of the organisation lay with the redrawing of Saharan borders to create a territory which would better reflect their understanding of the regional boundaries. Indeed, Modibo Keïta later dismisses the uprising as a result of colonial divide and rule tactics, arguing that French relations with the Tuaregs were responsible for the 1963 uprising in the north of Mali (Sèbe, 2013). The interest in borders became one of the key arguments of the Tuareg, who later used the OCRS as an example of how the region should be organised during their uprisings in 1963 and in the 1990s (Wedaddy, 2013; Abhervé, 2013). However, little has been said of the nomadic response to the economic and social aims of the organisation and as a result of southern political dominance in Mali, Niger and Chad, the Kel Tamasheq were not represented within the OCRS in the High Commission. These nomadic peoples were not given a voice or a place at the discussion tables of the OCRS because this supposedly transnational organisation identified the members of its commission along national lines, in other words they were chosen by the Territorial Assemblies. Nevertheless, their grievances were used and manipulated by the French in order to secure support for the OCRS and in order to retain strategic alliances within the border regions, where many of these tribes lived, between the Algerian Sahara and northern French Soudan.

This lack of representation may be more of a reflection of the methods used by the French to administer African populations than an exclusion of the nomadic peoples from the OCRS. As Yattara (2005, p. 77) highlights, during the colonial period the French administered the sedentary populations directly, whereas with the nomadic populations they preferred a more indirect approach. This approach lay in the military tactics employed during the turn of the century, between 1890 and 1910, with the use of 'special nomad administrators' who were supposed experts in local languages, culture and practices in order to relate to and work with these populations. However, Lecocq (2010, p. 43) highlights three main reasons for a relative lack of Tamasheq and Bîdan political

participation. Firstly, politics was regarded largely by these communities as an urban phenomenon, secondly, many lacked interest, depending instead on French direction and thirdly few had access to French education. Although many Bîdan became involved in the Saharan borders disputes in the 1950s, between Mali, Mauritania and Morocco, by the end of 1958 the majority had returned to the French side, lured by the promise of lands in the French Sahara and northern Mali. Therefore, when Mali retreated from the OCS in 1960, many, along with the Kel Tamasheq were dejected. The Tamasheq were particularly despondent as they had believed that by joining the French Community in 1958 their lands would remain French within the OCS. By 1960, many of these tribes hoped to move on from this disappointment and use the international arena to voice their claims to sovereignty as those struggling in Algeria and the Middle East were doing so effectively. In this way they sought to break free from their then perceived future as a 'national minority' devoid of real power (Lecocq, 2010, p. 61).

North African Reactions

The FLN

One of the main threats to French operations in the Sahara, both defensive and industrial, that the French military identified was the activity and influence of the FLN. Struggling for sovereignty and an independent Algeria, the FLN were against the implementation of the OCS and any conceptions of France attempting to retain lands, power or influence in the Sahara. Propaganda flyers written by the FLN and discovered by the French military in February 1958 were reported to warn locals of the 'Bataille de Sahara' which was to take place the following month. This battle was said to demonstrate the FLN's power in the Sahara and their control of the zones.²³⁰ The 'battle' came in the form of FLN claims, received by the French military through a 'well-placed' but anonymous source within the nationalist organisation, that the *loi cadre Defferre* of 1956, which gave independence to Morocco and Tunisia, should also apply to Algeria. As a result, General Salan highlighted in his report to the Saharan command units the ways in which he perceived that the FLN was preventing the *loi cadre* from being successfully executed:

Pour apporter à l'option internationale la preuve que rien n'a changé en Algérie, le F.L.N. est déterminé à interdire l'application de la loi cadre. A cet effet et dans le cadre d'activités accrues dont il a par ailleurs senti la nécessité en tant qu'action indirecte au profit de ses unités de la frontière franco-tunisienne, Armée et Front doivent :

- 1 – interdire par tout moyen la figuration de musulmans dans les délégations spéciales, étant entendu que les réfractaires seront supprimés physiquement.
- 2- Neutraliser l'action politique et la propagande des S.A.S., chercher à en éliminer les Officiers ou circonvenir les harkis.

²³⁰ 1H3244 1958 reports

Although the FLN does not specifically mention the Sahara in their campaigning against the *loi cadre*, the fact that the military in the Sahara prioritised neutralising these efforts to spread subversive messages demonstrates where their main concerns lay. These general instructions from Salan to the French military in Algeria and the Sahara are filled with the language commonly used by the military to undermine the nationalists and came as part of the political campaigning surrounding the *loi-cadre*. For example, by suggesting that the FLN was attempting to subvert the law and therefore implying that their actions were criminal, Salan's report is reflective of the military's ongoing campaign against the nationalists. His report also demonstrates the role of the French military during the *loi-cadre* campaign as being quite similar to that exhibited just eighteen months later during the campaign for the 1958 'yes' vote in the referendum – to secure French political interests in the name of stability and security. In this way the French military regarded legislative reform, and their role in enforcing it, as an antidote to rebellion.

Military reports from 1959 on FLN activity in the Sahara suggest that it was of little priority to the Algerian nationalists. Documents suggest that there was little rebel activity and such that there was did not have the infrastructure or organisation of that in the coastal areas of Algeria. Furthermore, acts of terrorism in the main urban areas of Colomb-Béchar, Touat and Tindouf were reported to have all but disappeared.²³²

However, the OCRS united both the Muslim and European delegates in the Algerian Assembly in opposition to the organisation, albeit for different reasons. As Pascal Arrighi, a pro-French Algeria Gaullist and represented the National Assembly's *commission de l'intérieur*, informed the Assembly of this opposition in the debates about the OCRS in December 1956:

Les oppositions algériennes aux thèses défendues par ces propositions ont été formulées à diverses reprises. C'est ainsi que les 5 juin et 5 juillet, notamment, l'assemblée algérienne reconnaissait, dans une résolution, le principe tendant à « réaliser une œuvre constructive au Sahara sur le plan technique », mais s'élevait « contre toute amputation éventuelle d'une partie territoire indépendant qui relèverait directement du gouvernement de la métropole ».²³³

At this time Muslim delegates were still quite politically varied, but still sought a 'legal' resolution to the Algerian war, as opposed to the armed action of the FLN. The European²³⁴ opposition in the

²³¹ SHD, 1H3244 Général d'Armée Salan, *Fiche de Renseignement – Activités rebelles sur les plans politique et militaire* (n°1767), 4 March, 1958, p.1.

²³² SHD, 1H3244, Commandant Interarmées au Sahara, *Remarques sur la Fiche « Physionomie de l'adversaire fin 1959 »* (n°127084), 30 December 1959, p.3.

²³³ Journal Officiel, *Débats Parlementaire de l'Assemblée Nationale, 1^e séance du 13 décembre 1956* (n°137), p.5935.

²³⁴ The minority settler population of European origin that had a disproportionate political representation in the Algerian Assembly compared to the much larger Muslim populations.

Algerian Assembly to the OCRS is logical because of the historic debate over sovereignty between Paris, Algiers and the French military. This was far from a political consensus between the settlers and pro-French Algerians and the Algerian nationalists. The former, who sought to keep Algeria a part of France, did not want French Algeria to be left amputated from the Sahara. However, the Algerian nationalists did not want an independent Algeria amputated from the Sahara and all of its resources and populations.

The Sahara was a key sticking point in the Evian peace talks from 1961 onwards, where French negotiators, led by de Gaulle, maintained that the desert could not be considered within the discussions. In February 1961, in discussions with the FLN representatives Ahmed Boumendjel and Tayeb Boularef, Georges Pompidou (who at the time had no official political capacity but represented de Gaulle as his former cabinet chief) declared that the Sahara 'C'est une affaire à part. Il est hors négociation'. Conversely, the FLN representatives argued that there were no discussions to be had if the Sahara were to be retained by France (Malek, 1997, pp. 14-15). In the months that followed this encounter, negotiations between de Gaulle's negotiators and the FLN continued to be halted by the question of the Sahara and how it would be 'returned' to Algeria. It was not until September 1961 that de Gaulle began to concede on the Sahara, suggesting that whatever the situation of a future Algerian government, appointed by France or otherwise, the government would need to claim the Sahara, signifying that there would always be a question mark over the Sahara. The FLN negotiators recognised this as a concession by de Gaulle, and for the first time an opportunity to discuss the sovereignty of the Sahara (Malek, 1997, p. 17)

Demise

Charles de Gaulle's September 16, 1959 speech on the Algerian right to self-determination produced shockwaves around the world. In Algeria the settler population saw this *volte-face* as a betrayal from the French government. Meanwhile, the rebels were wary of the promise of a 'government of Algerians by Algerians, backed up by French help and in close relationship with her, as regards the economy, education, defense and foreign relations'. They feared that this would be a false-independence, in which Algeria was still controlled from Paris (Byrne, 2016, p. 67).

De Gaulle's speech also had significant repercussions for the French National Assembly and indeed his own cabinet, with some who had served in Algeria and in the Algerian government disillusioned by what they perceived as giving up on the Algerian cause. Amongst these were Lejeune and Soustelle, from different political persuasions but united in their beliefs in a French Algeria. Soustelle's reaction to the announcement was the more drastic of the pair, joining the *Rassemblement pour l'Algérie française* (RAF), a pro-French Algeria political movement which sprang

into being in September 1959 in protest against de Gaulle. In the wake of the Week of the Barricades in January 1960 where Europeans violently clashed with the *gendarmes*²³⁵ Soustelle resigned from the government on February 5, leaving the OCRS and the Ministry of the Sahara.

Soustelle's departure marked a legislative change for the OCRS as the Délégué Général was no longer also the Minister of the Sahara. This meant that the administrative authority over the Saharan departments ceased to be combined with the direction of the economic organisation of the French Sahara and the Saharan regions of newly independent Niger and Chad. Robert Lecourt, a centrist of the *Mouvement républicain populaire* (MRP), who had supported de Gaulle and served previously as Minister for Coopération (March 27, 1959 to February 5, 1960), was made Minister of the Sahara. The long-time supporter of de Gaulle and assistant to Georges Pompidou, de Gaulle's chief of staff, Olivier Guichard was appointed as the new Délégué Général. Under Guichard the OCRS was able to continue its programmes in the Sahara. His early role in the spring of 1960 predominantly involved consolidating the work that Soustelle had begun; securing the cooperation agreements and the OCRS budget allocations for Niger and Chad. Guichard was also supported in these efforts by former Minister of the Sahara, Lejeune, who retained a place in the OCRS' economic commission. This meant that despite Soustelle's departure, the OCRS retained much of its former character and there is a sense in Lejeune's archives and the National Archive documents of 'business as usual'²³⁶ in the face of the Algerian self-determination negotiations and the French Sahara being surrounded by newly independent African nation-states.

After the independence of Mali (1959/60), Niger (1960) and Chad (1960), these nation-states automatically left the OCRS but were invited to rejoin as autonomous members. Mali, however, chose not to re-enter the organisation, while Niger and Chad negotiated a *coopération* deal with the OCRS in the hopes of continued economic development within their respective countries.²³⁷ In 1961, Guichard continued to stand by the mandate of the OCRS and its work, arguing that the organisation was adaptable to changes in the administrative framework as evidenced by its durability in the face of the end of the Fourth Republic and the independence of Niger and Chad. Guichard sought to reinvent the OCRS once again as an economic organisation with an 'international vocation'. By this

²³⁵ For a full account of these events see Evans' *Algeria: France's Undeclared War* (2012, pp. 228-230)

²³⁶ See for example, ADS, 37J, 81-87; AN, AG5(1)1825 Economic and financial affairs, Petrol and Gas

²³⁷ ADS, 37J, 74, *Assemblée Nationale Compte Rendu Analytique Officiel*, June 9, 1960, pp. 1-28 ; 101, Agence France-Presse, *Sahara : OCRS – bulletin bi-mensuel* (n°66), p.4 ; ANOM, FM 81F 1812, Philippe Schneyder, *Petrole, où va le Sahara français ? Des ombres au tableau, L'observateur du moyen orient et de l'Afrique*, October 14, 1960, pp. 21-23.

he hoped to attract other independent Saharan nations to the organisation, such as Mauritania and even Morocco and Tunisia.²³⁸

However, the African delegates of the OCRS were not so convinced by Guichard's attempt to reinvent the OCRS and appeal to potential new members. In the December 1961 meeting of the OCRS' Economic and Social Committee in Colomb Béchar, Boubou Hama suggested that the only way the Saharan lands of Niger, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia could be united was once France and the Provisional government of the Algerian republic (GPRA) came to an agreement liberating Algeria and putting the country in control of 'her' Sahara.²³⁹

Nevertheless, in January 1962 Guichard continued to oversee economic and infrastructure programmes in the OCRS member states and the Algerian departments. Programmes included improvements to the road networks in the French Sahara, Niger and Chad, particularly between the major towns, improvements to communications networks, particularly between Agadez and the southern regions of Zinder and Niamey and research into improving Niger and Chad's access to Hassi-Messaoud's butane gas reserves.²⁴⁰

This continuation of Saharan activities without any sense of an impending end to the OCRS' mandate over the Saharan departments comes in contrast to Charles de Gaulle's September 1961 admission that Algerian sovereignty over the Sahara was no longer a question (Evans, 2012, p. 251). While France may have still wanted to secure its assets in the region, namely its oil, military bases and lines of communication, little seemed to have changed in Guichard's management of the OCRS. While de Gaulle appeared to concede the Sahara in order to unblock the negotiations with the GPRA, its significance for the OCRS was fatal. With the termination of the organisation written into the Evian Accords, the GPRA obtained a complete re-annexation of the Algerian Sahara to the rest of Algeria upon independence. Despite this abrupt end to the organisation, the Evian Accords provided for continued development of Algerian industries in the Sahara, namely the oil industry. The creation of an Organisation Technique de Coopération Saharienne (OTCS) to replace the OCRS would enable France to consolidate its investments in the Sahara while providing technical assistance to the newly independent state of Algeria (Naylor, 2000). Although this new organisation lasted only until 1963,

²³⁸ AN, AG5(1)1825, Economic and Financial Affairs, Petrol and Gas, Olivier Guichard, *Quelles que soient les formules retenues demain pour l'Algérie l'OCRS peut aisément s'y adapter sous réserve que le principe d'une exploitation commune soit respecté*, déclare au « Monde » M. Olivier Guichard, *Le Monde*, February 11, 1961, p.4.

²³⁹ AN, AG5(1)1825, Economic and Financial Affairs, Petrol and Gas, Boubou Hama, *Reunion du comité économique et social de l'OCRS à Colomb-Béchar*, December 8, 1961, p.1.

²⁴⁰ AN, AG5(1)1825, Economic and Financial Affairs, Petrol and Gas, Olivier Guichard, *Conférence Intersaharienne sur les transports, les communications et les échanges : résolutions*, January 15-17, 1962, pp. 1-5.

similar bilateral agreements were set up with Chad and Niger, ending the long-coveted French dream of a united Sahara.

Curious Observers in Britain and Europe

The nature of the OCSR was so ambiguous that it was not necessarily a well-known organisation in Europe, outside of a small circle of the political, economic and business elites. This means that references to the OCSR are limited outside of France and directly affected African countries. However, it is possible to trace the reactions and attitudes to this project by analysing European discussions and commentaries of French activities in the Sahara. From 1956 to 1958 these discussions tend to focus on the growing oil and gas industries.²⁴¹ However, from 1958 and 1959 onwards these discussions began to focus more on the development and testing of the nuclear weapons, a practice which caused widespread controversy on both the domestic and international stage. This is reflective of the enhanced focus that Charles de Gaulle paid to nuclear development during his return to power in 1958, continuing the work of the government of René Coty to produce a nuclear deterrent which would raise France's *rang* on the international stage and act as a material representation of French authority.²⁴² Conversely, little has been said in Europe of France's social aims for the Sahara in the late 1950s. This demonstrates an international perception that French activity in the Sahara was predominantly focused on economic and geostrategic objectives for the benefit of both the metropole and the European Community.

In terms of discussing the French oil industry expansion, reactions to France's work can be traced in Germany to discourses on a 'Saharan Ruhr' in 1955. While in Europe borders were being redrawn, the example of the division of Germany's economic region was used in French narratives about the Sahara. Before the OCSR project had even been proposed, France was in discussions with Germany about working together to develop a munitions centre in the Sahara. Since the early 1950s, US newspapers had reported on Franco-German *rapprochement* in terms of the two European countries investigating mutually-beneficial industrial development in North Africa (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014). In January 1955, *The Economist* reported on these talks, which at the time were yet to form any particular shape. Cynical suggestions²⁴³ had been made that the Saar (the post-Second World War French Protectorate) would be exchanged for a piece of the Saharan pie. However, *The Economist* was doubtful of this, suggesting that neither Chancellor Adenauer nor the French Prime Minister

²⁴¹ AN, AG5(1)1825 Economic and financial affairs, Petrol and Gas; ADS, 37J, 81.

²⁴² AN, 112 AJ23/24; AN, 580AP15; ADS, 37J, 81/84/101.

²⁴³ According to so-called critics which *The Economist* journalists do not specify. It should be noted here also that *The Economist* articles rarely have by-lines, owing to their tradition of having a collaborative force writing their articles.

Pierre Mendès-France were willing to risk agitating their parliaments and kept their conversations relatively reserved, with no drastic changes proposed at that time (*The Sahara for the Saar?*, 1955). Nevertheless, in a secret meeting in Cologne in March 1955, French and West German industrialists met to discuss the formation of a munitions centre in the Sahara. The French contingent were confident that technology had by then reached a sufficient level to exploit previously untapped Saharan riches. However, they needed German investment to make their industrial plans a success. Armand drew on Cold War fears that a soon-to-be obsolete Ruhr would leave Western Europe exposed to Russian nuclear attacks and used these fears to justify moving European industrial productions to the Sahara (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, p. 180).

Although not an official European response, the London-based newspaper, *The Economist* demonstrates British popular interest in France's plans for the Sahara and the OGRS in 1956. The news magazine links the government's proposal of the project with the political and economic fallout of the Suez Crisis. Interestingly, it also casts doubt on French claims to the desert, asserting that it belonged to Algeria and that 'as long as the Algerian rebellion smoulders on, no Saharan dispensation can seem definite'. As a result, the author (or authors) argues that France was treading a precarious line, but the singular context in which Africa was yet to have an oil industry (unlike in the Middle East) meant that neither Morocco nor Tunisia had taken France to task over Suez. Moreover, with Houphouët-Boigny proposing the project, *the Economist* argues that France's plans were more internationally-accepted than if the project were to be wholly French-led. The article also suggests that France's approach, working with African leaders to develop its overseas territories was one that other western countries should attempt (*Investing in the Desert*, 1956). It also compares France's plans with other industrial projects, suggesting that as a result of its research into resources, 'the Sahara may rival Canada as a source of raw materials'. In this way *The Economist* compares the Sahara with one of Britain's Commonwealth countries, drawing a parallel between the colonial region and the former colonised country that had experienced significant economic growth after the Second World War. The quality of mined resources is also compared with another UK-recognised example when the iron ore is described as 'almost Swedish quality' (*Investing in the Desert*, 1956, p. 643). This comparison is a conscious recollection of the important role that Swedish iron ore played in the Second World War, particularly with regards to Britain's attempts to prevent Germany's trade of the resource with Sweden (Leitz, 2000, pp. 61-63). This comparison therefore suggested that the Saharan ore was so valuable to be as strategically important as that from Sweden and potentially integral to economic stability in the face of another war. Therefore, despite a certain level of disapproval over the situation in Algeria, this attitude towards French economic strategy has a certain level of respect.

However, the article does raise the issue of investing in the Sahara, doubting France's ability to fund the expansion of the oil industry in order to make it profitable. This was reflected with France's ongoing attempts to secure investors in Europe, advertising the Saharan project as Eurafrican. *The Economist* underlines that the French would struggle to make such an investment offer attractive enough while there was uncertainty over dividends and while they continued to insist on controlling operations. A strong, co-operative 'directing body' would therefore be needed for there to be any success in terms of the bureaucratic side of the project. This reflects the tensions for French planners of making the economic project work without turning it into a politico-administrative organisation. *The Economist's* understanding of Eurafrica largely cut African agency out of the equation. In this article it refers to this 'talk of Eurafrica', but that the notion would ideally, for France, be led by French politicians and technocrats and 'with Germany as an active partner', by this the authors mean an investor that would have little political input. The article also highlights the issue of coherency in the OGRS region, with the territories involved being administratively and economically separated, with different monetary systems, fiscal systems, customs duties and mining legislation (Investing in the Desert, 1956, p. 643). This separation, for the African countries involved, was a political necessity in order to prevent the continuation of colonial rule or the establishment of an undesired African federation, one which was outside of their control. The concrete and symbolic differentiation which needed to take place for France and the OGRS to avoid accusations of neo-colonialism was the very thing which made the OGRS unviable. The author(s) suggest that France could only be successful if it retained political control over the desert, secured investment funds for its developing industries and ensured that any benefits or profits from these industries reached the coastal populations in Algeria, and also Tunisia and Morocco. *The Economist* tends to skirt over the involvement of the other African countries and their share of the role in running the OGRS or even its benefits to their countries and the rest of the French Union.

The Times reporting in December 1956 also suggests that the success of the OGRS lay with France's ability to maintain 'political sovereignty' in the desert and to sufficiently fund the project quickly and efficiently. For this journalist time was of the essence for France, with 'hinterland' politics threatening to overtake France's plans in the Sahara. The British newspaper highlights the variety of interest in this region, particularly from recently independent Morocco. However, they conclude that the main problem for France would be finance and therefore stipulates that their success lay with securing 'some form of cooperation' from other European countries that would be willing to invest money in exchange for a share in 'the benefits of the Sahara's riches' (Correspondent, 1956). The British newspaper's understanding of 'cooperation' here was purely financial, that these other European countries would only make a financial contribution to France's activities, thereby

suggesting a form of Eurafrika. In this way 'cooperation' signified European investment not technical assistance, an arrangement in which French actors would operate in the Sahara using European money, and these countries would have no control over how the money would be invested nor over the administration of the Saharan regions.

France's European economic partners had mixed views on the OCRS and French activity in the Sahara. While West Germany was hesitant to be definitively involved, Belgium and the Netherlands were even more sceptical. Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak was a well-known proponent of European co-operation and of African development. In January 1957 he argued that France had made a crucial start to the latter with their Saharan project. He maintained that politically Europe was ready to coordinate actions in Africa. However, the central problem causing disagreement within the Common Market were the economic matters and the question as to whether or not investment in France's Empire would have any material benefits for the investors (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014). This meant that when it came to France including provisions for their Overseas Countries and Territories in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, there was no objection from the rest of their European associates. However, when they were expected to invest in what they perceived as France's territories without any evident profit to be made, certain countries were made to feel alienated.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the variety of interpretations that members and observers of the OCRS had about France's activities in the Sahara. Each member territory had its own concerns and understandings of the organisation, with many of their questions revolving around how the OCRS would affect their sovereignty and autonomy over the lands. The Nigerien, Chadian and Malian Territorial Assemblies were relatively new political structures that were still finding their feet and testing their relationship with the colonial power. The OCRS was another test and support for the project was multi-layered and conditional. This was especially revealed in the debates over joining the OCRS and the representatives from the Saharan territories that would be a part of the decision-making section of the organisation. One of their key questions was about the amount of political autonomy that each Territorial Assembly was willing to give up in order to gain socio-economic benefits, and even by the end of the negotiations the answer was still not clear to these politicians. The OCRS reveals the tensions that existed across party lines within these different Assemblies, there were not just North-South tensions between nomadic and sedentary African populations, but also within the urban centres and the regional parties. The debates over the OCRS revealed the

different priorities that these parties had and also the alliances that were springing up amongst the emerging African political elite.

Representation was not as simple as the OCRS law had apparently suggested. As a result of the open-ended article in the law on Saharan representatives, the different territories, and indeed the different political parties in each territory interpreted this idea of who could represent the Saharan regions in various ways. Whether it was someone from the region itself that would be a part of the OCRS or someone from the 'representative' or majority party of the territory was left to each Assembly to decide. Once decided the colonial state had no interest in overruling the local government on this matter. This stance by France gives the impression that it was attempting to honour the autonomy of these governments, but in fact any overruling of the assemblies would have required coercion on France's part. While there were some politicians in these Assemblies that appeared to buy into the idea of a *vie commune*, questions remained about the power that they had both legally on paper and symbolically. Their fears that the OCRS would signify a partitioning of the territories or that they would be subjected to mission creep were never truly allayed.

The French did interfere with these governments when they appeared to act in contrary ways to the metropolitan government's plans for the empire. One such example was France's involvement in the 1958 constitution vote in Niger. Yet, in other cases where coercion would have been required, it was not used. For example, in French Soudan where the government had consistently questioned the motives of the OCRS and decided to not continue to be a part of the organisation and was permitted to decide this upon its independence in 1960. However, arguably coercion was not used in this case because Mali was not integral to the OCRS and to French economic development in the Sahara. Many of the industrial projects took place in the Algerian Sahara and were continued until 1962 when the Saharan lands were released to the new Algerian government under the terms of the Evian Agreements. From examining the demise of the OCRS it is evident that there was a political necessity to make the organisation look different from previous forms of colonial rule, both in concrete and symbolic ways, this requirement is also arguably what made the OCRS unviable.

Conclusion – The OCRS: a (re)colonisation project

Within a changing international order following the end of the Second World War, the concept of colonial empires came under increasing scrutiny. The rise in discussions about autonomy and self-determination fostered the emergence of international conferences such as Bandung in 1955 and new multi-lateral political entities such as the United Nations influenced the emergence of a new language of reforming, decolonising and ending empires.

French planners were working to rethink the empire in various imaginative ways. This can be recognised in the re-emergence in France of the inter-war concept of Eurafica, merging French visions of industrialised African colonies funding France and the French empire with the hopes of an economically united Europe led by France. The Sahara was to be the starting point of this objective. This was a region that, throughout a century and a half of exploration, invasion and colonisation, was transformed within the minds of French politicians and civil servants. Once an exotic, dangerous, empty desert of little material use, by the 1950s it was framed as the economic hope for a reimagined globally-connected France. This hope can be understood in the language of Soustelle and his contemporaries. He believed that ‘c’est même au Sahara que se trouve pour une part l’avenir des terres françaises de l’Afrique et de l’Europe’²⁴⁴ and, alongside other politicians, perceived the Sahara as a manifestation of the grandiose concepts of Eurafica and France-Afrique.

These ideas about reshaping the empire found concrete form in the shape of the OCRS; a political compromise between other nationalisation projects and economic organisations proposed to the French government in the early 1950s. The Saharan nationalisation discussions, that were separate from but linked to the OCRS, demonstrate a dissatisfaction with the colonial framework in a region that was historically administered by the military under a superficial form of French rule. When Algeria was departmentalised in 1848, the Saharan regions south of the Tell Atlas Mountains were brought under French control but largely administered by the French military with few civil political structures established before the 1950s. So, for France to re-imagine the colonial relationship, colonisation first had to take place. This colonisation was framed in the form of economic development and technological modernity, creating a new identity for the Saharan region of Algeria, as French departments but with a distinctive Saharan identity and a membership in a Common Saharan organisation.

²⁴⁴ AN, 112AJ23, Sahara – 1959, Jacques Soustelle, *Conférence de Presse sur le Sahara de M. Jacques Soustelle, Ministre Délégué*, April 7, 1959, p.1.

The OCRS shines a spotlight on the ways in which France approached its wider policy in the Sahara. This policy was formed out of the National Assembly discussions first initiated in 1951 before the discovery of oil in the Sahara. The debates on creating this new organisation demonstrate the impossibility of separating France's economic and political ambitions for the Sahara. They reveal a range of recommendations, from across political lines, for administering the Sahara. These recommendations were based on creating an administrative system that would primarily enable the French to exploit the Sahara and secure France's economic and strategic interests, while also portraying France as a benevolent force for aiding the local Saharan populations. The debates also highlight the various ways that colonial and non-colonial comparisons from across time and space were used by French planners in order to justify their actions in the Sahara. In this way, these debates reveal the weight of history as these planners painted a bright new technocratic future and set their activities apart from their various competitors, especially Britain and the US.

The OCRS, a Fourth Republic invention, survived the French political crises in 1958 and the introduction of the Fifth Republic constitution. This thesis demonstrates that the May 1958 crisis was not a watershed moment for the OCRS. While the personnel in the upper echelons of the organisation may have changed following the establishment of de Gaulle's government of Michel Debré (January 1959 – April 1962), this did little to halt the on the ground work of the OCRS especially in the oil and gas industries. These new executives, led by Jacques Soustelle, altered the ways in which the OCRS was presented to its African members, France's European partners and other investors and observers including Britain and the US. The discourse of the OCRS under Soustelle continued to be disconnected from the organisation's practices. These planners in Paris downplayed the controversy of the OCRS' political aspect and focused instead on turning the organisation into a bastion of economic development.

Yet, nineteenth century colonial mindsets and practices were so ingrained in the French colonial state, that even by the late 1950s French activities in the Sahara continued to be based on scientific exploration and military administration. The 1957 laws on the Sahara established new administrative structures, but these were based on the existing systems and the laws integrated the military commanders, rather than replacing their authority. The French state did not necessarily have the means to replace the military in the Sahara. This was in contrast with France's colonial infrastructure in Algeria which was based largely on settler colonialism, which had become a headache for the metropolitan state long before the outbreak of the Algerian war.

The weight of France's colonial history in Africa also led African leaders to be suspicious of the OCRS and France's intentions for the Sahara. The OCRS was presented as an organisation made up of

French and African partners, with a co-operative relationship similar to that of the European Common Market. However, unlike with the European partners, this relationship between France and the African members of the OCRS was not equal. France had never treated them as equals before, and the case of the OCRS did not demonstrate that anything had changed beyond the language that the French planners used.

The OCRS was not a decolonisation project, nor was it a project of post-colonial *coopération*. It did not fit neatly into the notions of multilateralism and *coopération* that were circulated by French politicians in the late colonial period. The OCRS was designed to improve on the colonial mistakes made by French governments gone by. With its focus on economic improvement, and the development of infrastructure that would aid those who lived in the region, French politicians and technocrats had resolved, in their eyes, the issue of controversial settler populations, while serving the relatively small numbers who already lived there. The benefit of vast mineral resources which could resolve the political and financial struggle to access oil and nitrates, coupled with the geostrategic value of the land, arguably outweighed the investment costs.

This was a very self-conscious organisation. The planners involved were all internationally-aware politicians and technocrats who were eager to frame the OCRS in a certain way. They used comparisons with other development and economic organisations throughout time and space to demonstrate the importance of the OCRS, justify its existence and to show the superiority of French programmes. Non-colonial comparisons were preferred by these planners. These included desert programmes in the US, the Soviet Union and even China. By using such examples these planners sought to situate the OCRS as the kind of project which crossed ideological and geopolitical divides, thereby attempting to decolonise the language used for these programmes if not the practices themselves. Comparisons were also made with the new international political organisations, including the UN and the EEC. Multi-lateral political structures were a popular way of legitimising post-war relations and by comparing the OCRS with these organisations French planners could show what 'their' organisation was, and how it was different.

Just as it was impossible to make a nation of French citizens out of violently repressed peoples (McDougall, 2017), so too was it impossible to implement the OCRS without coercion or other colonial methods akin to those used during the initial colonisation. This is not to say that the leaders or populations of the member countries of the OCRS were threatened with violence upon failure to participate. Rather, that the project could not be made to be a success while within the organisation the African actors remained subordinates to the French, and moreover while they desired sovereignty and independent rule.

While the form which decolonisation came to take, of empire to nation-state, was certainly not inevitable, the attraction of the independent, sovereign nation-state that could be an equal partner in large, multilateral economic and political organisations overcame the idea of being unequal partners in an ambiguous unit that had little certainty of economic success or stability for those involved. This thesis moves away from the idea that late colonial French planners sought to explore alternatives to ending the empire as Frederick Cooper (2014) suggests. Instead, certainly in the case of the Sahara, James McDougall's line of argument about the impossible Republic fits with the impossible task that the OCRS was faced with; making a 'French' Sahara without forcing the African leaders in the Saharan territories to co-operate.

This study of the OCRS focuses on the actors within the organisation and directly related to its implementation, particularly the first two Ministers of the Sahara who were also *Délégués Général* of the OCRS, as well as leading industrial and military figures. This thesis has also examined the perspectives of the African elites on the OCRS, but there are certain voices that it is unable to capture. The archives that this research is based on were compiled by French administrators and do not contain accounts from the local populations. However, these archives have provided an insight into the French experience in the OCRS, but future research may enable a deeper exploration of how the organisation was experienced by those who lived and sought a living in the Sahara.

The OCRS is not only an interesting history of a colonial power searching for new ways to legitimise its presence in a contested region, but additionally it reveals the mechanisms used to attempt this non-leaving. This study of an organisation previously largely overlooked by scholars demonstrates the importance of fostering a curiosity about this history and about comparable projects and microhistories. These narratives may further expand our understanding of the French (or indeed British) presence in Africa by taking a closer look at other colonial and non-colonial modernisation and development projects. Comparing the OCRS to other development projects was a common theme for French planners. Comparisons were made between the French project and other seemingly dissimilar projects such as the Iraq Development Board and the Tennessee Valley Authority. A future project could provide a fine-grained analysis of the relationship between 'colonial' and 'non-colonial' ideas and policies about modernisation and development.

This thesis may also provide a platform into further understanding the non-leaving of the French, and indeed other European countries, from Africa long after the breakdown of formal empires. The language used by the French in the Sahara to legitimise their presence is reflected in contemporary justifications for becoming involved in African affairs. Previously French actors had spoken of 'economic and social development', 'progress' and 'improvement'. Within the wide framework of

'development', European and American states, NGOs, aid operatives and even organisations such as the EU and the UN now speak of 'modernisation' and 'aid', which are central themes to an expansive literature (Sumner & Mallett, 2013, pp. 1-7). These themes also encompass a broad language of ownership, reciprocity and other terms which may be interpreted as a continuation of the desire to legitimise their presence.

Archives Consulted

Archives Départementales de la Somme (ADS)

37 J		Fonds Max Lejeune
	74	Soudan and Mali (1881-1964)
	81	Creation of the Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes
	83	Tours and official trips by Max Lejeune and Goudouneix (1957-1961)
	84	Management of OCRS administrative affaires
	85	High Commission of the OCRS
	86	The OCRS' Comité technique de direction
	87	OCRS Economic and Social Commission
	88	Bureau d'investissement africain
	96	Bureau de recherche du pétrole (1932-1960)
	98	Private investment measures and permits (1957-1958)
	101	Bi-monthly review, <i>Sahara</i> (1957-1960)
	104	OCRS Bibliography and Documentation (1956-1962)
	105	Defence of the Saharan Territory (1951-1962)

Archives Nationale d'Outre-Mer (ANOM)

FM 1AFFPOL	2207	Ministry of Colonies; Management of Political Affairs – Organisation and Administration of the Sahara (1951-1958)
	2208	Ministry of Colonies; Management of Political Affairs – Territorial Assembly
FM 81 F	1812	State Ministry for Algerian Affairs – Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes
Bib20314	1961-62	OCRS

Chatham House Online Archive

**Journal Officiel de la République
Française (1951-1962)**

**Service Historique de la Défense
(SHD)**

1H		Algérie – Zone Alger-Sahel ; Command of troops and services in Southern Algeria
	3243	Correspondence November 1956-1957
	3244	Correspondence January – September 1958
	3245	Correspondence 1959
	3247	Correspondence 1960

Archives Nationales (AN)

101 AJ	19	Martial de la Fournière Archives (1946-1974) – 1960-1974
112 AJ	23	Jacques Soustelle Ministerial duties – <i>Généralités</i> , Saharan Affairs
112 AJ	24	Jacques Soustelle Ministerial duties - Overseas Departments and Territories ; Atomic energy
580 AP	15	Fonds Christian Pineau (1929-1993) – North Africa
AG5(1)	1825	Charles de Gaulle Archives, President of the Republic - Sahara
AG5(1)	1926	Charles de Gaulle Archives, President of the Republic – Niger (1958-1959)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Projet de loi créant une organisation commune des régions sahariennes

Annexe n°2762 séance du 1^{er} août 1956, pp.2417-2419²⁴⁵.

Projet de loi créant une organisation commune des régions sahariennes, présenté au nom de M. Guy Mollet, président du conseil des ministres, par M. Félix Houphouët-Boigny, ministre délégué à la présidence du conseil. – (Renvoyé à la commission des territoires d’outre-mer.)

Exposé des motifs

Mesdames, messieurs, les problèmes soulevés par la mise en valeur des espaces sahariens ont, depuis plusieurs années, été étudiés par les diverses assemblées. D’éminents parlementaires ont déposé des propositions de loi dont quelques-unes élaborées jusque dans le détail.

Il est apparu au Gouvernement que le moment était venu de faire le point et de proposer une solution assez souple pour pouvoir s’adapter aux innovations dont l’expérience fera apparaître la nécessité, assez nette toutefois pour répondre à des vœux exprimés par une opinion nationale quasi-unanime et mettre un terme à certaines spéculations aventurées.

Les réformes proposées portent d’abord sur l’organisation économique.

Après la période de pacification et de découvertes géographiques accomplies par la génération qui nous a précédés, sont venues les découvertes minières et bientôt les prospections systématiques rendues possibles par le perfectionnement des techniques.

L’importance des moyens à mettre en œuvre, industriels ou scientifiques, est sans rapport avec les capacités présentes des populations locales. Si riches que soient nos espoirs de mise en exploitation des découvertes déjà faites, il faudra, pour la plupart d’entre elles, des années, peut-être des décades, et des investissements massifs pour toucher au but. Il y faudra aussi la grande expérience scientifique, technique et bancaire que possèdent les organismes métropolitains spécialisés pour apprécier des possibilités d’exploitation qui ne pourront se faire probablement que par grands ensembles.

Soit que ces ensembles se trouvent sur des confins, soit qu’il s’agisse du transit ou de l’écoulement des produits, la mise en valeur des régions sahariennes ne peut se faire qu’en symbiose avec les territoires périphériques. Il ne s’agit pas, en effet, de replier le Sahara en quelque sorte sur lui-même – ce qui serait un non-sens économique, politique et humain – mais d’associer davantage dans une mise en valeur commune et par des efforts partagés, les régions sahariennes avec tous les territoires limitrophes. C’est la raison qui a incité le Gouvernement à présenter le projet instituant une organisation commune des régions sahariennes.

Cette organisation commune des régions sahariennes assure entre les intéressés un contrat permanent qui doit permettre de résoudre les problèmes de liaison, de coordination, d’information réciproques au mieux des intérêts de tous.

²⁴⁵ Archives de l’Assemblée Nationale, Journal Officiel de la République Française, *Annexe n°2762 – session ordinaire de 1955-1956 – Séance du 1^{er} août 1956, August 2, 1956, pp.2417-2419.*

Elle vise, aussi à unifier la législation économique sur l'ensemble de la zone intéressée, s'inspirant des mesures prises pour la TVA, ou la Sibérie.

Constamment assisté des conseils des administrations les plus compétentes, sous le contrôle permanent du Parlement et des assemblées territoriales, le délégué général, grâce à cette organisation, doit pouvoir remplir de la communauté nationale tout entière et faire participer à la prospérité générale tout le Nord-Ouest et le Centre africains.

Mais il a paru nécessaire au Gouvernement de ne pas limiter cette réforme à la création d'une autorité purement économique qui risquait de devenir indifférente aux incidences sociales.

Ceci d'autant plus que l'unité de conception qui doit présider à la mise en valeur économique du Sahara peut se transposer sur le plan humain.

Bien que différencié suivant les contrées ou les tribus, et se présentant un peu par îlots de populations, comme les « Inselberg » des massifs montagneux sahariens, le mode de vie saharien présente des similitudes, des impératifs communs commandés par une unité climatique totalement prépondérante, qui impose une unité végétative et humaine justifiant amplement le souci depuis longtemps manifesté de réunir toutes les populations disséminées dans ces vastes étendues sous une autorité commune qui n'aurait d'autre souci que la promotion économique et sociale des Sahariens.

Ce n'est faire reproche à personne que de constater que les soins des territoires périphériques du Sahara vont d'abord aux régions plus peuplées, d'accès plus facile, où le caractère sédentaire prime le nomadisme.

Aussi bien, cette attitude n'est que le reflet d'une situation historique : avant 1880, l'autorité de la Régence de Tunisie – pour n'en citer qu'une – ne s'étendait pas au Sud de la ligne des chotts, de Tozeur à Gabès. Au-delà, de ces ultimes limites territoriales, on pénétrait au Sahara comme on entre en haute mer. Les états partant des bases algériennes, les autres de l'Afrique noire, que de mettre un terme aux rezzous et du même coup d'apporter une amélioration sensible à la vie des habitants de ces régions.

Le rattachement administratif s'est fait ensuite naturellement avec la base d'où étaient parties les méharées pacificatrices.

Les tâches de la paix ne font qu'imposer, aujourd'hui, un regroupement conforme à l'unité profonde de ces contrées comme à leurs besoins nouveaux.

Dans la nouvelle organisation administrative, le projet fixe des règles qui permettent à l'action du Gouvernement de s'adapter aux situations locales. Les conditions de vie sont si diverses, les agglomérations si dispersées, les distances si grandes qu'il a paru difficile d'établir immédiatement ce que nous appellerions une vie départementale.

Les droits actuellement acquis étant explicitement confirmés, le souci permanent de la nouvelle organisation à travers tous ses travaux sera de faciliter l'harmonisation et l'extension de ces droits dans le respect constant des particularismes locaux. Respect qui ne signifie pas consécration aveugle mais bien au contraire possibilité vivante de progresser au rythme des exigences du monde moderne.

L'autorité du délégué qui permettra donc de mener de front la promotion économique et la promotion humaine manifestant ainsi aux populations de ces régions présentement déshéritées le

haut intérêt et la grande sollicitude que leur portent le Gouvernement et le Parlement de la République.

Projet de loi

Le président du conseil des ministres,

Décrète :

Le projet de loi dont la teneur suit sera présenté à l'Assemblée nationale par le ministre délégué à la présidence du conseil, qui est chargé d'en exposer les motifs et d'en soutenir la discussion.

Art. 1^{er} – Il est créé une « Organisation commune des régions sahariennes » dont l'objet est la mise en valeur, l'expansion économique et la promotion sociale des zones sahariennes de la République française et à laquelle sont associés l'Algérie, la Mauritanie, le Soudan, le Niger et le Tchad.

Art. 2. – L'organisation commune des régions sahariennes englobe les zones suivantes réparties entre l'Algérie, le Soudan, le Niger et le Tchad :

La commune mixte et l'annexe de Colomb-Béchar ; la partie de l'annexe de Geyrville située au Sud des monts des Ksours ; les communes indigènes et les annexes de la Saoura du Gourara, du Touat et de Tindouf ; la partie saharienne des cercles de Goundam, de Tombouctou et de Gao ;

Les communes indigènes et les annexes de Ghardaïa, El Golea et Ouargla ; la partie Sud de l'annexe de El-Oued ; les communes indigènes et annexes du Tidikelt, des Ajjers et du Hoggar ;

La partie Nord des cercles de Tahoua et d'Agadès, excluant l'Aïr, mais comprenant notamment la totalité de la subdivision de Bilma ; la région du Bourkou Ennedi Tibesti.

Les limites seront consultées par décret après consultation des territoires intéressés.

Art. 3 – L'organisation commune des régions sahariennes a pour mission :

1° D'Établir et mettre en œuvre les programmes généraux de mise en valeur, principalement dans les domaines énergétique, minier, hydraulique, industriel et agricole ;

2° D'Établir et de mettre en œuvre un plan d'infrastructure (transports et communications) en fonction de ces programmes ;

3° De susciter l'installation d'industries extractives et de transformation et de créer, lorsque les conditions le permettent, des ensembles industriels intégrés ;

4° De promouvoir toute mesure propre à améliorer le niveau de vie des populations et à assurer leur promotion sociale dans le cadre d'une évolution qui devra tenir compte de leurs traditions.

L'O.C.R.S. est habilitée à passer avec les territoires et Etats limitrophes des conventions destinées à permettre le développement de zones d'intérêt économique commun.

Art. 4 – Dans les zones définies à l'article 2, peuvent être édictées par décret en Conseil des Ministres sur rapport des Ministres intéressés, et après avis du conseil d'Etat, nonobstant toutes dispositions législatives en vigueur, des mesures spéciales relatives à l'administration locale, aux régimes domaniaux, foncier, agricole, minier et hydraulique, à l'immigration, à l'utilisation de la main d'œuvre, aux transports et aux communications, au régime des sociétés, des investissements et à leur fiscalité et, d'une manière générale, à tout ce qui concerne la mise en valeur économique ainsi que la création et le fonctionnement d'ensembles industriels.

Il pourra être institué un régime fiscal exceptionnel de longue durée au bénéfice des entreprises dont la création, l'équipement ou l'extension auraient une importance particulière.

Art. 5 – L'organisation commune des régions sahariennes comprend :

1° Une commission mixte de coordination et de contrôle composée par moitié des représentants des régions sahariennes et par moitié de représentants des Assemblées constitutionnelles de la République, dont le rôle est de définir et de contrôler les programmes d'action commune et d'intervention de l'organisation saharienne dans le cadre de ses missions énumérées à l'article 3.

2° Un comité de direction composé par moitié de membres nommés par le Gouvernement de la République et par moitié de membres désignés par la commission de coordination, chargé de suivre l'exécution de ces programmes ;

3° Un délégué général nommé par décret en conseil des ministres, représentant le Gouvernement de la République dans les zones sahariennes, responsable de l'exécution de ces programmes.

Art. 6. – Les membres de la commission de coordination et de contrôle sont désignés comme suit :

1° Représentants des régions sahariennes :

- 7 membres représentant les zones sahariennes de l'Algérie ;
- 2 membres représentant les zones sahariennes du Tchad ;
- 2 membres représentant les zones sahariennes du Niger ;
- 2 membres représentant les zones sahariennes du Soudan ;
- 2 membres représentant la Mauritanie.

2° Représentants des Assemblées constitutionnelles :

- 7 députés désignés par l'Assemblée nationale ;
- 4 sénateurs désignés par le Conseil de la République ;
- 2 conseillers désignés par l'Assemblée de l'Union française ;
- 2 conseillers désignés par le Conseil économique.

La commission de coordination et de contrôle tient une session annuelle.

Elle élit son Président et établit son règlement.

Le délégué général de l'O.C.R.S. assiste aux séances.

La commission discute et adopte le rapport général publié chaque année par le comité de direction, qui comporte notamment un compte rendu d'activité, une description de la situation financière et un état prévisionnel des dépenses et des recettes.

Elle adresse ses recommandations au comité de direction.

Art. 7. – Le comité de direction, présidé par le délégué général, comprend, outre l'officier général désigné à l'article 11 :

1° 6 membres nommés par décret en conseil des ministres, choisis au sein du conseil d'administration du bureau industriel africain :

- 1 représentant du ministre de la France d'outre-mer ;
- 1 représentant du ministre des finances ;
- 1 représentant du ministre chargé des affaires algériennes ;
- 1 représentant du ministre des affaires étrangères ;

2 membres proposés par le conseil d'administration, dont un représentant le bureau de recherches pétrolières.

2° 6 membres nommés par décret en conseil des ministres, choisis parmi les représentants des régions sahariennes.

Il se réunit sur convocation du délégué général ou à la demande de sept de ses membres, et en tout cas au moins une fois tous les deux mois.

Il présente un rapport annuel sur l'activité de l'organisation.

Le délégué général assure l'exécution des décisions du comité pendant les intervalles entre ses réunions

Art. 8. – L'O.C.R.S. a la personnalité morale et l'autonomie financière. Elle dispose d'un budget de fonctionnement rattaché à la présidence du conseil.

Art. 9. – Le développement économique du Sahara bénéficiera de l'assistance technique et financière métropolitaine. Cette assistance sera mise en œuvre par l'intermédiaire du bureau industriel africain, dont les statuts seront modifiés par décrets.

L'alinéa 4 de l'article 17 de la loi du 5 janvier 1952 ne s'applique pas aux activités de l'O.C.R.S.

L'O.C.R.S. pourra faire appel à la caisse centrale de la France d'outre-mer dans les conditions prévues par la loi n°46-860 du 30 avril 1946 et par les décrets subséquents.

Pour le compte de l'O.C.R.S. le délégué général peut négocier, sous réserve de l'approbation du Gouvernement, avec les organismes internationaux et étrangers une aide financière sous forme de prêts ou de participations dans les entreprises sahariennes.

Les ressources de l'O.C.R.S. provenant de ces opérations seront exonérées de tout impôt.

Art. 10. – Les lois et décrets se rapportant aux questions visées à l'article 4 deviennent obligatoires huit jours après leur publication au *Journal Officiel* de la République française. Pour l'exécution de ces lois et décrets, le délégué général prend des arrêtés qui sont publiés au *Bulletin officiel* de l'O.C.R.S.

Le délégué général correspond avec le Gouvernement, dont il reçoit les instructions.

Il assure l'exécution des missions confiées à l'O.C.R.S., qu'il représente dans tous les actes de la vie civile. Il prononce les affectations à tous les emplois civils à l'intérieur du périmètre saharien défini à l'article 2.

A cet effet, les pouvoirs actuellement exercés par le gouverneur général de l'Algérie, par les haut-commissaires et gouverneurs de l'Afrique occidentale et de l'Afrique équatoriale françaises lui sont dévolus.

Art. 11. – Le délégué général est responsable de la défense et du maintien de l'ordre dans les régions sahariennes définies à l'article 2.

Le commandement et l'emploi des troupes terrestres et aériennes stationnées dans ces régions sont confiés à un officier général qui assiste le délégué général pour la défense et le maintien de l'ordre.

Art. 12. – Le Gouvernement est autorisé à passer des conventions avec les Etats limitrophes qui accepteraient les objectifs de l'O.C.R.S. et souhaiteraient s'associer d'une manière permanente à ses

travaux. Ces conventions fixeront les conditions de l'association. Elles pourront prévoir une représentation de ces Etats au sein de l'organisation. Elles pourront également étendre tout ou partie des compétences de l'O.C.R.S. à certaines régions dépendant de l'autorité de ces Etats.

Art. 13. – Des décrets fixeront les modalités d'application de la présente loi.

Toutes dispositions contraires à la présente loi sont abrogées.

Appendix 2 : Ethics Review

FORM UPR16

Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Research Degree Operational Handbook for more information)



Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	441288
PGRS Name:	Kelsey Suggitt		
Department:	SLAS	First Supervisor:	Dr Natalya Vince
Start Date: <small>(or progression date for Prof Doc students)</small>	October 2014		
Study Mode and Route:	Part-time <input type="checkbox"/>	MPhil <input type="checkbox"/>	MD <input type="checkbox"/>
	Full-time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PhD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Professional Doctorate <input type="checkbox"/>
Title of Thesis:	Impossible Endings? Reimagining the end of the French empire in the Sahara, 1951-1962.		
Thesis Word Count: <small>(excluding ancillary data)</small>	75,283		
<p>If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study</p> <p>Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).</p>			
UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:			
<small>(If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)</small>			
a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Candidate Statement:			
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)			
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):	7DFA-0B77-E8AC-1F85-CCEF-CB37-1258-F581		
If you have not submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:			
Signed (PGRS):			Date: 26/07/2018