The Sahara as the "Cornerstone" of Eurafrica: European Integration and Technical Sovereignty seen from the Desert

Muriam HALEH DAVIS

In early 1958, Stéphane Labauvie, an economist and professor at Toulouse I, published an article in the official journal of the Algerian Office of Economic and Touristic Action (OFALAC) entitled, *Algeria Faces the European Economic Community*.[1] Here, he addressed a question that had been increasingly pressing since the ratification of the Treaty of Rome in 1957: as a constitutive part of both metropolitan and imperial France, what would be Algeria's role in an integrated Europe? As summed up in a report by the Secretary of State for Algerian Affairs in 1959:

> "Given the perspective of the European Common Market, the Algerian case seems particularly different to reconcile since it is not possible to separate Algeria from the European Community without cutting it off from continental France, which would be against its legal status".[2]

While this memo was concerned with the emerging European Economic Community, these legalistic discussions also raised the question of the nature of an emerging European space.[3]

The juridical complications of this question led Labauvie to conclude that Algeria was a "hybrid" territory. Since Algeria was an integral part of France when the Rome Treaty was signed, it thus enjoyed *de facto* membership in the European Community and benefitted from the economic provisions of the Treaty (except those applying to the Common Agricultural Policy).[4] This meant that Algeria was neither a colony nor fully part of France. Its status continued to be governed by article 227 of the Treaty of Rome, which stated that:

> "With regard to Algeria and the French overseas departments, the general and particular provisions of the Treaty relating to the free movement of goods, agriculture, save for Article 40(4), the liberalization of services, the rules of competition, the protective measures provided for in Articles 108, 109 and 226, the institution, shall apply as soon as this Treaty comes into force".[5]

1. S. LABAUVIE, *L'Algérie face à la Communauté économique européenne*, in: *Bulletin Économique et Juridique: Office Algérien d'Action Économique et Touristique*, March 1958, pp.57-61.
2. ANOM [Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer], 81F/2260, L'Algérie et le marché commun, Secrétariat d'État aux Affaires algériennes, Mission d'études, 08.04.1959.
3. While I am aware that the EEC was not synonymous with Europe at this early date, the work showing how the technocratic process of European integration led to a certain idea of European identity gestures at the broader implications on these discussions of market and political integration. C. BOTTICI, B. CHALLAND, *Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory, and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013.
4. It is important to note, however, that Algeria was denied any political participation in the EEC.
5. See I.W. ZARTMANN, T*he Politics of Trade Negotiations between Africa and the European Economic Community; the Weak Confront the Strong*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971.

As a result, Yves Montarsolo characterizes Algeria's position in Europe as "imminent but truncated".[6] While a member of the Community of Six, Algeria was only subject to certain clauses of the Treaty of Rome.[7]

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in the notion of Eurafrica as a prism for studying the links between decolonization and European integration. Algeria plays a privileged role in this story, given its legal status as three French departments. Yet scholars have largely overlooked the role of the Sahara in the formation of a Eurafrican space, perhaps due to a recent emphasis on the Mediterranean. When scholars do study the desert, they often fixate on the promise of "liquid gold", an approach that primarily defines Eurafrica as a neocolonial project committed to the extraction of natural resources. This article takes a different view of Eurafrica by emphasizing how the diplomatic and technological challenges posed by the resources found in the desert led to a new conception of sovereignty. The key institution in this transition was the OCRS (Organisation commune des régions sahariennes), which was created in order to administer and develop the Sahara. The article first looks at the Eurafrica, offering a brief historical trajectory, and then turns its attention to the technical challenges that arose in the OCRS' plan to develop the desert. Moreover, it argues that the political tensions surrounding its activities led the OCRS to claim that its purview was solely technical. This framing of expertise, which disavowed the clearly political nature of its activities, foreshadowed the technocratic forms of rule that characterized forms of governance in Europe from the 1960s onwards.

Eurafrica: A Brief History

If Eurafrica first appeared as a way to appease Germany, it soon morphed into a version of Greater France. In the interwar period the so-called "horror on the Rhine", when France's colonial troops occupied the Rhineland, coupled with Germany's loss of her colonies in Africa, translated into an inter-European tension that centred on the colonies. As a result, in the 1920s the Pan-European movement emerged, spearheaded by figures such as the Austrian-Japanese politician and Count, Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi.[8] Yet as Dramé Papa and Samir Saul point out, the sense of the term Eurafrica had radically changed by the eve of World War II:

6. Y. MONTARSOLO, *L'Eurafrique contrepoint de l'idée d'Europe, Publications de l'Université de Provence*, PUP, Aix-en-Provence, 2010, p.257.
7. The Community of Six refers to the original six founding members of the European Economic Community: France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands.
8. P. HANSEN, S. JONSSON, *Bringing Africa as a 'Dowry to Europe': European Integration and the Eurafrican Project, 1920–1960*, in: *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 3(2011), pp.443-463.

> "Official propaganda spread the image of a strong France that could assure its independence thanks to the military and human resources of a vast, rich, and populated empire".[9]

The tension between a French imperial Eurafrica and a vision that was closer to the concept's original German roots would continue to mark discussions of the Treaty of Rome. In fact, certain French politicians viewed the Common Market with suspicion since it seemed to offer Germany a share in France's hard-won colonial spoils. Jacques Duclos, a French Communist, brought up Eurafrica during the debates on the ratification of the Treaty of Rome and exclaimed:

> "With the Common Market, the capitalist monopolies of Western Germany will see the doors of Africa open before them, where they will be able to manoeuvre in concert with the imperialist Americans".[10]

Despite this mistrust of the role of America and Germany, most centrist and leftist French politicians supported the economic integration of Europe and Africa. Like the Saint Simonians, they viewed the Mediterranean as an economic (and civilizational) bridge rather than a barrier.[11] This link was even more significant due to the spatial recalibration of Eurafrica after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, when the Overseas Territories were relegated to the status of "associated" countries. While the 19th century vision of Eurafrica had included the totality of the continent, the image increasingly centred on the Mediterranean region in the 1950s.

With the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the Mediterranean was no longer viewed as a distant humanistic ideal but served as the basis for a Eurafrican economic organization. As Karis Muller writes, the European Economic Community was called a "Eurafrican plan"[12] and many of the founding fathers of Europe such as Walter Hallstein and Robert Schuman were committed Eurafricanists.[13] Yet this technocratic language was never far from the more traditionally humanistic discourse of the Mediterranean. General Octave Meynier (1874-1961), the President of the Association of Friends of the Sahara and Eurafrica (Association des Amis du Sahara et de l'EurAfrique), also ran the journal *EurAfrique*.[14] He spent time in the French Sudan early in his career, subsequently serving as a military commander in Ourgla, in the South of Algeria. In 1930 he organized the Niger-Mediterranean auto rally, and in 1950 he

9. D. PAPA, S. SAUL, *Le projet d'Eurafrique en France (1946-1960): quête de puissance ou atavisme colonial?*, in: *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 216(2004), pp.95-114.
10. Assemblée Nationale, *Débats*. Session on the ratification of Treaty of Rome, 06.07.1957, available online at: http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/traites_de_rome/sommaire.asp.
11. É. TÉMINE, U*n rêve Méditerrannéen: des Saint-Simoniens aux intellectuels des années trente*, Acted Sud, Paris, 2002.
12. K MULLER, *Iconographie de l'Eurafrique*, in: M.-T. BITSCH, G. BOSSUAT (éds), *L'Europe Unie et l'Afrique: de l'idée d'Eurafrique à la Convention de Lomé I*, Bruylant, Bruxelles, 2005.
13. Robert Schuman saw Eurafrica as "the necessary prolongation of a reconciled Europe". R. SCHUMAN, *Unité européenne et Eurafrique: politique révolutionnaire*, in: *Union française et parlement*, 79(1957), pp.1-3.
14. Founded on 4 December 1949 in Algiers this group took over the Association of Friends of the Sahara (Association des amis du Sahara), which was created in 1927. Its goal was to promote tourism in the Sahara and encourage links between North Africa and "black" Africa. See D. PAPA, S. SAUL, op.cit.

organized the first trans-African race, which was a predecessor to better-known rally from Paris to Dakar. Entries from his personal diary illustrate how the new realities of European integration rehashed older ideas of geographical determinism. For Meynier, the beginnings of the notion of Eurafrica dated from 1900 and the Battle of Kousséri, when the French attempted to take control of Chad and unify their West African possessions. At the same time, Meynier attributes the intellectual designs of the project to Eugène Guernier, a professor of law who had also been a member of the French government in protectorate Morocco, and Louis Bertrand, the writer whose *Le sang des races* situated North African history in a distant Latin past.[15]

If this seems a distinctly late 19th century view of Eurafrica, Meynier was also resolutely forward-looking. He viewed Charles De Gaulle's referendum as having encouraged the construction of a French Eurafrica.[16] Similarly, he maintained that the European Coal and Steel Community, Euratom and the Common Market all explicitly worked towards his goal of creating a Eurafrican space. The construction of Eurafrica was also an answer to the problem of racism since it would help encourage a rapprochement among the races. The urgency of his quest is perhaps best captured in a journal entry on 2 March 1957 when, in all capital letters, he wrote: "EURAFRICA IS THE LAST CHANCE FOR EUROPE AND THE FIRST [CHANCE] FOR AFRICA".[17] Meynier is one of several figures one could mention in order to highlight how older traditions of race-thinking found new expression through the post-war quest for European (and Eurafrican) integration and the Cold War.[18]

Eurafrica and Algerian Independence

Indicative of the changing understandings of the French empire, the geographical vision of Eurafrica was not contingent on the continued existence of French Algeria. As early as January 1961, planners realized that the Constantine Plan, the economic and social program introduced by Charles de Gaulle in 1958, would need to be adapted – but not abandoned – in the case of Algerian independence. The Plan itself was drafted four years into the war of independence, and laid out ambitious goals in the domains of land reform, housing construction, and education.[19] One document reflecting on the future trajectory of these initiatives noted that de Gaulle's Constantine speech

15. P. DUNWOODIE, *Colonizing Space: Louis Bertrand's Algeria in 'Le Sang des Races' and 'Sur les Routes du Sud'*, in: *The Modern Language Review*, 4(2010), pp.998-1014.
16. ANOM APC23/8, M. Meynier, journal entry, 10.09.1958.
17. ANOM APC23/8, M. Meynier, journal entry, 02.03.1957.
18. M.H. DAVIS, *'The Transformation of Man' in French Algeria: Economic Planning and the Postwar Social Sciences, 1958-1962*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1(2016), pp.73-94.
19. For a detailed analysis of the Constantine Plan see H. ELSENHANS, *La guerre d'Algérie 1954-1962: la transition d'une France à une autre*, Publisud, Paris, 2000.

> "was not [merely introducing] a market but a program. In [the case of] associated independence, France will continue to pursue its objective, which is to help Algerians become men of the 20th century, but it will formulate minimal demands as a counterpoint to Algerian demands".[20]

An earlier report spoke of the need to create a new structure that could "take over [prendre le relais] the administration of the Constantine Plan" and introduce institutions that would have an international character.[21] Tellingly, the report suggesting creating two organizations the Eurafrican Organization of Economic and Social Development (Organisation eurafricaine de développement économique et social) and the Common Organization for the Development of the Sahara (Organisation commune de mise en valeur du Sahara). Furthermore, the document was adamant that these international organizations were to be inscribed in a regional framework: "[N]umerous reasons make it desirable for this organization to have an international, and more precisely Eurafrican, character".[22] Indeed, given the logic of the Cold War, Eurafrica was a strategic bloc that would enable France to build on the strength of her European neighbours and African territories.

For planners working in the Secretary of Algerian Affairs, there was absolutely no doubt that the Plan would continue as a form of cooperation with the Algerian authorities after independence. They proposed that Algiers become the seat of various international organizations that would be "oriented towards African development and Eurafrican cooperation". Their report continued:

> "Similar to Geneva, Brussels, or Strasbourg in the heart of Europe, Algiers and perhaps Bône and Oran will open themselves to an international mission and serve as a representative of Europe in Africa".[23]

According to this report, Algiers would not serve as the capital of an independent Algeria, which would be better represented by a "Muslim" city such as Blida, Sétif or Constantine. In case Algerians were less than enthusiastic about cooperating with the French Community, the presence of international development agencies would serve as a point of connection and encouragement. Eurafrica was thus a way of safeguarding France's participation in European developmental institutions after Algerian independence.[24]

---

20. AN-P [Archives Nationales,Pierrefitte-sur-Seine], F/12/11808, Assistance technique et financière à l'Algérie associée, Ministère d'État chargé des Affaires algériennes, M. Voillereau, 12.05.1961.
21. MAE [Archives Diplomatiques, Ministère des Affaires étrangères], SEAA/15, Groupe d'étude des structures futures de l'Algérie, Mission d'études, 2e rapport, 23.01.1961.
22. Ibid., pp.7 and 23.
23. MAE SEAA 110, Note d'orientation des études concernant la garantie des biens français en Algérie, no name or date, p.17.
24. For more on the link between colonial development and international aid organizations see V. DIMIER, *Recycling Empire: The Invention of a EU Bureacracy*, Palgrave Macmillian, New York, 2014. Dimier's work also shows how colonial expertise was transformed into European development policy, which speaks to the way that an older mode of political domination appropriated the language of technical benchmarks and procedures.

Yet despite the consensus that Algerian independence would not undermine the existence of a Eurafrican space, there was no agreement on who would benefit from this configuration. As Léopold Senghor had asked in the National Assembly: "Is Eurafrica to be a French Eurafrica, with real equality, or will it be a sort of German Eurafrika"?[25] French politicians were understandably worried about abandoning Algeria to a wider European community, which led to a series of conflicts between metropolitan colonial visions and European geopolitics, most notably on the subject of immigration. With the introduction of the Treaty of Rome, Algerians would have the right to immigrate to Europe freely, something that concerned France's European partners. As a result, articles 38 to 41, which pertained to the freedom of movement for workers, was not applied to Algeria. This meant that a German citizen would not be allowed to work in Algeria, whereas an Algerian would have no legal obstacles to finding a job in a German factory. The Secretary of Algerian Affairs wondered:

> "Maybe the French government would be willing to help the arrival of a certain [amount] of foreign labour in Algeria. In reality, the realization of the Constantine Plan, notably concerning the creation of 400,000 new jobs in five years, implies the existence of a supervisory staff of several tens of thousands of supervisors and technicians".[26]

Despite the local effects of an influx of highly qualified labour, French administrators argued that the modernization of the Algerian economy under the Constantine Plan would make the country an attractive spot for European investment.

Social policy also proved to be a sensitive issue. The fact that Algerians had a lower standard of living seemed to make it difficult, if not impossible, to apply the same policies in Algeria and France. Local labour in Algeria, for example, was paid 30% less than a worker in the metropole. Yet French administrators did not hesitate to point out that the Treaty of Rome had announced a protocol to help Italy with its economic expansion, especially in the underdeveloped zones of the Midi. Following, they concluded: "It would be logical that such a policy also be applied to Algeria, and for the Italian precedent to be invoked as a support for the French request [for European aid for Algerian investment]". Algerian development would be raised in the framework of European – rather than colonial – development.

The European Investment Bank, created by article 129 of the Treaty, would also test the Eurafrican vision. The fact that credits from the Bank could only be offered by a unanimous decision of the Council of Governors made it hard to envisage that the Bank would finance projects in Algeria, even if Algeria was eligible for this aid according to article 16 of the Convention of Association. While the French realized that it was improbable that their European partners would agree to help them shoulder their developmental burden, they envisioned other ways of ensuring that their European neighbours would hold an economic stake in Algeria. The Secretary of State of Algerian Affairs postulated:

---

25. Assemblée Nationale, Débats, 17.01.1956, available online at: http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/senghor/JOAN_débat_investiture_EFaure_17janv 52.pdf (consulted, 16.03.2015).
26. ANOM 81F/2255, L'Algérie et le marché commun, Secrétariat d'État aux Affaires algériennes, 08.04.1959.

> "One can think, for example, of the construction of an enormous central power station, drawing on Saharan gas, which would provide electricity for some countries of the Mediterranean basin".[27]

This kind of thinking, which invoked Saharan resources to ensure the economic needs of Europe (and the political hopes of France), exemplified the Eurafrican vision in these later years. Appeals to the European Community were often cast as a way of helping France with the task of developing Algeria, which had already begun under the Constantine Plan. Faced with the reticence of their partners, the French government used Saharan oil as a bargaining chip.[28]

The Gallic Rooster and the Discovery of Oil

Though only tangentially understood to be part of Algeria, the Sahara was depicted as the counterpart to a weakened Europe. French politicians, economists, and administrators envisaged that Eurafrica would energize France through a dynamic new merger with Africa. In a formulation that echoed the philosophy of the Saint Simonians, Maxime Champ wrote in OFALAC's official brochure:

> "Eurafrica is the order of the day. It seems to offer the promise of a common good for old Europe, on the one hand, which is rich with economic and human experiences […] and for the African continent on the other hand, which is still largely intellectually and materially uncultivated".[29]

The importance of the Saharan desert to Europe was also discussed in a global framework as economists compared its development to that of Texas or California in the United States or Siberia in Russia.

This was a clear departure from an earlier view of the Saharan desert which relegated the territory to the realm of explorers and considered it to be politically irrelevant.[30] In articulating their newfound desert ambitions, French politicians fre-

27. Ibid.
28. Of a predicted consumption of more than 100 million of tons of oil in 1965, 50 million were to come from the Sahara (ANOM 81F/2255, L'Algérie et le marché commun, Secrétariat d'État aux Affaires Algériennes, 08.04.1959). In contrast, the European Development Fund (FED) had financed a number of projects in Algeria on the heels of a decision taken in the spring of 1960. As of 1 July 1961, it had financed projects totaling 87.3 million new francs. It was reported that other projects, including agricultural education and hospitals, were under review in the amount of 270 million. See ANA [Archives Nationales d'Algérie], GGA (Gouvernement Général de l'Algérie), 10 E-762, Agreement par la Communauté Économique Européenne de projets d'équipement public à financer par le Fonds Européen de Développement. CEDA, Département de l'équipement public to le Secrétaire générale de l'administration, 02.08.1961.
29. ANA, M. CHAMP, *La Promotion Sociale en Algérie*, OFALAC (Office Algérien d'Action économique et touristique), in: *Bulletin Economique et Juridique*, Nov-Dec 1960.
30. Some of the most notable Saharan explorers included: Henri_Duveyrier (1840–1892), Paul-Xavier Flatters (1832–1881), Pere Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916), Maréchal Leclerc (1902-1947), General Laperrine (1860-1920) and Amédée-François Lamy (1858-1900).

quently invoked the words of Lord Salisbury at the Conference of Berlin. Considering the desert to be a political and economic wasteland, he had declared that he would let the "Gallic rooster" peck (gratte) at the sands of the Sahara".[31] Benito Mussolini had also insulted French grandeur when he expressed his disinterest in the Sahara by proclaiming that he was "not a collector of the desert". As a gage of just how much times had changed, Henry Peyret, who had presented a report on the Sahara to the National Assembly, declared in an article for the journal *L'Économie* that while this region that had once been considered a "dead land", it now exercised a "magical power" over the French.[32]

The question of whether the Sahara was to be defined as "Algerian" or "French" had both economic and political implications. French Deputy Pierre Henault suggested that the Saharan territories had the same relationship to Algeria as Algeria did to France.[33] Thus, he argued that the "real" Algeria was comprised of the three departments of Alger, Oran, and Constantine.

This argument gained force in the 1950s as maps of the Sahara often depicted Algeria as a coastal territory that stopped just short of Laghout in the South. Yet the arguments for the specificity of the Sahara relied not only on its resources, but also invoked France's role as a benevolent modernizer. After all, while other populations may have inhabited the region for a longer time, it was the French who had literally created the Sahara thanks to its introduction of economic development. A brochure published by the ministry of the Sahara and the Overseas Departments and Territories claimed that:

> "Each time, the different ethnic groups establish themselves in the Sahara, and especially the Berbers, they attempt to close in on themselves. By reorganizing the Sahara, France has, in the proper sense of the word, 'invented' the Sahara".[34]

The observation that the Sahara had been a *terra nullius* was thus posed in economic terms; France had invented the desert by ending its isolation from broader economic currents.

France's attempts to define its sovereignty in the Sahara predated the discovery of petrol in 1956. From the early 1950s, a juridical ambiguity accompanied the drive to industrialize and develop the desert. In a letter to *Le Monde* on 15 March 1951, Gabriel Puaux, who had been the High Commissioner of France in Syria and Resident General in Morocco, proposed developing the Sahara along the lines set out by the Tennessee Valley Authority.[35] Émile Bélime, the ex-General Director of the Office

31. CARAN [Centre de Recherches des Archives Nationales], F/60/4004, Assemblée Nationale, Report by M. Henault, 19.12.1956.
32. ANOM 81F/188, H. PEYRET, *La Chance de la France*, in: *L'Economie*, supplement to 18.07.1957, p.3.
33. AN-P F/60/4004, Assemblée Nationale, Annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 12 décembre 1956, rapport fait par M. Hénault.
34. ANOM 81F/965, *Sahara*, Société d'information du Ministère d'État chargé du Sahara et des DOM et TOM, Paris, 1961.
35. As recounted in ANOM 81F/188, *Le Sahara et l'Opinion Française*, in: *L'*Économie, 7(1958), p.18.

du Niger, had suggested the reunification of the Sahara in 1951. The head of the Committee of the French Sahara, a group that enjoyed the support of important figures involved in industry, the army, and journalism, Bélime sought to convert the Sahara into a national territory that would have the same administrative status as any other French territory and would be a key part of the French Union.

Similarly, the Assembly of the French Union had proposed creating a French Saharan Africa (Afrique saharienne francaise) in 1952, a unit that would have existed within the French Union. This initiative resembled Pierre July's suggestion of constructing an "autonomous administrative conscription, distinct from the surrounding territories" in March 1952. July was a Resistance hero and had served as Minister for North African Affairs under Pierre Mendes-France.[36] Typical of the modernizing tendencies of the latter, the discussion regarding the Sahara centred on the military, industrial, and energy interests involved. Exemplifying the merger of industrial and strategic objectives, Eirik Labonne proposed the creation of African Zones of Industrial and Strategic Organization (Zones d'organisation industrielle et stratégique africaines, ZOIA) in 1950. In outlining the relationship between security and development initiatives, he claimed that "industry is the modern army". The desert was not only the land of modernity, but also a potential menace for France. Labonne postulated that since "nature detests a vacuum", North Africa would soon turn to anarchy if it remained a "blank" economic space.[37] As the decade progressed, a host of works expressed the hope that the mineral and energy potential of the Sahara would serve to bolster France's place in the international community.[38]

The OCRS and African Visions of Territory

The law to create the OCRS was presented for Guy Mollet by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the future president of the Ivory Coast, on 1 August 1956. Invoking both the Tennessee Valley Authority and Siberia he maintained that the project did not intend to "fold the Sahara in on itself – which would make no economic, political, or human sense", but rather to "increasingly [associate] the Saharan regions with all of the

36. D. OTTAWAY, M. OTTAWAY, *Algeria: The Politics of a Socialist Revolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1970, pp.103-104.
37. There were other prominent figures involved in the early heady days of Saharan dreams. Eirik Labonne worked closely with Louis Armand, the future head of EURATOM who had been the head of the SNCF and was the President of the Bureau Industriel Africain (BIA), created in 1952.
38. P. MOUSSET, *Ce Sahara qui voit le jour*, Presses de la Cité, Paris, 1959; P. CORNET, *Sahara, terre de demain*, Nouvelles Éditions latines, Paris, 1956; D. STRASSER, *Réalités et promesses sahariennes: aspects juridiques et économiques de la mise en valeur industrielle du Sahara français*, Encyclopédie d'outremer, Paris, 1956; M.-R. THOMAS, *Sahara et Communauté*, PUF, Paris, 1960; G. GERSTER, *Sahara: Desert of Destiny*, Coward-McCann, New York, N.Y., 1960.

territories around it through the common development [of this region]".[39] While the vision took concrete form in 1957, the creation of a distinct administrative unit in the Sahara exposed a tension between France's economic and political designs in the region. Seen as a "means of struggling against the underdevelopment of the French Union", the creation of the OCRS was accompanied by the creation of the ministry of the Sahara on 21 June 1957.[40] The head of this ministry, Max Lejeune, would also serve as the director of the OCRS.[41]

Yet there were serious challenges to implementing the networks that would make it possible to render the Sahara a single economic space. Indeed, the natural world was not a passive actor in this process. The high level of gypsum in the soil, for example, made the construction of roads extremely difficult.[42] In addition to the general insecurity of the war, developers struggled in order to construct irrigations networks, and were constrained by the high cost of transporting materials. One of the most difficult roads to construct proved to be that of Gassi-Touil (that went from Fort-Lallemand to Hassi Bel Buebbourthat) that traversed the sand dunes or the Grand Erg Oriental.[43] Another technical problem was the exportation of oil itself. The French market was largely saturated and the question of transporting liquefied gas across the Mediterranean was far from evident.[44] Moving it would be costly due to the vast distance to the sea (430 miles in the case of Hasi Messaoud) and constructing pipelines was highly risky. Despite France's claim that the Sahara could be the "Texas of France", *Time Magazine* speculated that oil delivered to France from Algeria cost about six times the amount of a barrel transported from Texas.[45]

The OCRS would still have to contend with Algeria's African neighbours, however. Indeed, as French administrators were very much aware, unilateral decisions by the French Republic would no longer apply to states such as Niger, Chad, or Mauritania.[46] Niger, the French Sudan (later Mali), Chad and Mauritania had been granted internal autonomy under the loi cadre or framework law, and had become formally independent in 1960. Mali itself was in crisis in the summer of 1960. In the Maghreb, Morocco and Tunisia had recently won their independence. In order to maintain the

39. AN-P F/60/4004, Assemblée nationale, Annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 1er août 1956. Projet de loi créant une organisation commune des régions sahariennes, présenté au nom de M. Guy Mollet par M. Félix Houphouët-Boigny.
40. CARAN F/12/4004, Assemblée nationale, Avis sur le projet de loi créant l'OCRS, 12.12.1956.
41. Lejeune was replaced by Olivier Guichard in June 1960. A. BOURGEOT, *Sahara: espace géostratégique et enjeux politiques*, Autrepart 16, Niger, 2000.
42. ANOM 81F/188, *Sahara: Bulletin d'information de l'OCRS*, 9(1959), p.12.
43. CARAN F/12/11810, *Une route au Sahara*, in: Industries et Travaux d'Outre-Mer, November 1960.
44. One commentator posed the following questions: "How [are we] to succeed in a period of global saturation while taking into account the following factors: American trade barriers, competition from Russian oil, the discovery of Libyan oil deposits and also the quotas applied by the large international companies in the development and production in the Middle East"? ANOM 81F/188, *Sahara: Bulletin d'information de l'OCRS*, 1(1960), p.10.
45. ANOM 81F/966, reported in: *Le FLN et le pétrole saharien* by the Service de documentation et de contre-espionnage (SDECE), 16.04.1958. Originally published in *Time Magazine*, 20.01.1958.
46. AN-P F/60/4004, *OCRS une compétence désormais strictement économique et sociale*, in: *Le Monde,* 06.02.1959.

integrity of an economic (if not political) space, French administrators sought to reinforce the technical, social and economic missions of the OCRS. Another strategy that helped the OCRS distance itself from a colonial framework was put into place by the decrees of June 1960, which gave the OCRS a vocation that was both regional and international. The internationalization of the Sahara granted research permits to international companies and was enshrined in the oil code of 1959.[47]

The French had good reasons to worry that an organization of African forces would block their designs in the region, but what this coalition would look like was anyone's best guess. Many African countries adopted an expansive notion of national space. In 1958, those in favour of a greater Maghreb in Mauritania had formed a political party known as the National Mauritanian Renaissance (Nahda al-Wattaniyya al-Mauritaniyya).[48] The territorial unit claimed by the Mauritanians included the North-Western part of the French Sudan and Southern Morocco, and was rooted in the territorial unit of the Almorahid dynasty.[49] Just two weeks prior, the Moroccan nationalist and leader of the Istiqlal party, Allal El Fassi, championed a "Greater Morocco" that exceeded the boundaries of the historical Idrissid dynasty. The agreement between France and Morocco regarding the Sahara had been governed by a 1902 convention. The borders for the Western Sahara seemed to be relatively clear since they followed the division between Spanish and French territories.[50] But Morocco reclaimed the Sahara as well as historical rights over Mauritania. El Fassi even insisted on the "Moroccan character" of Timbuktu.[51] Though Moroccan claims were made on a different basis from those of the French, they were a direct response to French designs. Rather than economic development, Al Fassi rooted his legitimacy in the notion that Moroccan culture and religion stemmed from the Sahara. He produced a map of a "Moroccan Cherifian Kingdom and its Natural and Historical Limits", implying that Morocco would be the direct successor to the French colonial

47. For more on the oil code see H. MALTI, *Histoire secrète du pétrole algérien*, Découverte, Paris, 2010
48. This party emerged from a split within the Association of Mauritanian Youth (AHM) in 1958. It accused the nationalist PRM (Mauritanian Regroupement Party), which refused any form of federation with Morocco, and was in favor of joining the French Community, of being complicit with France. The party was dissolved on 20 August 1960 and certain elements later regrouped in the PPM (Mauritanian People's Party), which was the sole political party in Mauritania from 1961 to 1978. P.-R. BADUEL, *Les partis politiques de Mauritanie (1945-1993)*, in: *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 72(1994), pp.87-107.
49. B. LECOCQ, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisaiton, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*, Brill, Leiden, 2010, p.66.
50. For a study of the role of the Moroccan question in the Franco-Spanish relationship during the 1950s see M. CATALA, *La France, l'Espagne et l'indépendance du Maroc, 1951-1958*, Les Indes savantes, Paris, 2015.
51. Allal el Fassi proclaimed at a youth congress of Istiqlal on 27 March 1956 "Our independence is reduced and will remain so as long as a party of this country rests under foreign protectorate or influence. As long as the Spanish desert, in the south, rests under the Spanish protectorate or administration; as long as the Sahara, from Tindouf to Atar, and the Algerian-Moroccan reaches, have not returned to their country, our independence will remain unstable and our first task will remain the pursuit of action to liberate the country". ANOM 81F/188, *Le Sahara et l'opinion française*, *L'Économie,* supplement to no. 596, 18.07.1958.

presence.[52] This battle was not merely one of rhetoric. The Moroccan army sent 5,000 men into Mauritania in 1956 and sent 10,000 soldiers to quell the Spanish Sahara in Operation Ecouvillon. Disagreements over Saharan borders between Algeria and Morocco would eventually lead to the 1963 War of the Sands and a prolonged (unresolved) conflict over the fate of the Western Sahara.

The question of territory was both political and technical. The geography of oil and the possibility of its exportation definitively influenced the question of North African borders. The evacuation of petrol from Edjelé (near the Libyan border) was especially controversial. The FLN had made this issue key to its "battle of petrol"; it insisted that the Sahara was an integral part of Algeria and that this wealth belonged to the Algerian people.[53] The FLN thus undertook a campaign against the nationalist hero Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, throwing support behind the more radical Pan-Arab leader Salah ben Youssouf.[54] This was largely due to the former's stance on the Edjele-Gabes pipeline, which was repeatedly subjected to sabotage by the FLN.

Other issues plagued Algeria's relationship with Libya. A treaty signed on 10 August 1955 between France and Libya, which relied on aerial photos of old caravan routes, outlined the borders between the two countries. Yet Libyan authorities invoked the Franco-Italian Laval-Mussolini accord (which was never ratified) to claim that the areas containing oil along the Algerian border belonged to Libya. When the Company for the Research and Exploitation of Petrol in the Sahara (Compagnie de recherche et d'exploitation de pétrole au Sahara, CREPS) was drilling for oil in 1956 along the Libyan-Algerian border, it was still unclear what was Libyan *versus* Algerian territory.[55] This border had stemmed from the Italian colonization of Libya, allowing the petrol company Esso-Standard to insist that the oil was located in Libya, and was therefore subjected to the Fezzan treaty. It asked the government to intervene on its behalf, but the French administration noted:

> "Given the valuable material interest that are at stake, such a position taken by a powerful company risks leading the French and Libyan governments to a discussion that can only harm [their relationship]".[56]

The letter thus recommended negotiating the border with the Libyan government before any new surveys for oil were undertaken.

52. M. SHIPWAY, *Algeria and the 'Official Mind': The Impact of North Africa on French Colonial Policy South of the Sahara*, in: M.E. MARTIN, S. ALEXANDER J.F.V. KEIGER (eds), *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-62: Experiences, Images, Testimonies* Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002, p.72.
53. ANOM 81F/966, Notice d'information: Le FLN et le pétrole saharien, SDECE, 25.07.1958.
54. ANOM 81F/966, L'évolution du différend Tunisio-Algérien dans l'affaire du pipe-line Edjele-Gabes, SCECE, Présidence du conseil, 24.07.1958.
55. For a history of the CREPS see A. BELTRAN (ed.), *A Comparative History of National Oil Companies*, Peter Lang, Brussels, 2010, pp.101-102.
56. ANOM 81F/966, Service des affaires sahariennes et du personnel militaire to Secrétaire d'État à l'intérieur chargé des Affaires algériennes, Frontière algéro-libyenne dans la région de l'Edjele In Azaoua, 20.02.1956.

Things were even more complicated regarding the countries to Algeria's South. Both Niger and Chad had signed agreements with the OCRS in 1959, although these contracts were never put into practice.[57] Even after the independence of Mali in 1960, the OCRS was still operative in these regions. But as time went on the organization increasingly had to contend with African attempts at federation that were demonstrated in a series of Pan-African conferences held between 1919 and 1945. Two opposing visions marked this movement. Radical leaders known as the "Casablanca" group opposed the moderate "Monrovia group", which favoured a more gradualist approach to African unity.[58] Unlike the OCRS, which foregrounded economic rather than political concerns, many African leaders saw political integration as a prerequisite for economic integration. Moreover, while France emphasized the elasticity of national sovereignty as a way to maintain imperial ties, African leaders such as Modibo Keïta (the first President of Mali), Kwame Nkrumah (the leader of Ghana) and Sekou Touré (the first President of Guinea), were ill-disposed to cede their hard-won national sovereignty to a supranational African body. All of these leaders saw the association between Europe and Africa as essentially neo-colonial after the break-up of the Mali Federation and the failure of the scheme for a "Franco-African Community". This radical version of African federation was opposed by the more gradualist approaches that sought to prioritize "non-controversial ethical and economic areas such as transport and communications" over political integration, taking a position closer to that of the OCRS.[59]

Indeed, it would be mistaken to characterize African attitudes to the OCRS as blanket hostility. Historians Baz Lecocq and Bruce Hall both underscore that the OCRS had sustained support from the Tuaraeg elite (more specifically the Bidan and Kel Tamasheq). Hall notes that in the writings of the Kidan notable Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Cheikh, not only were the actions of the French exalted, but the history of the region was "whitened" as the Cheikh seemed to argue for "nomad supremacy".[60] African support for the OCRS may not be as paradoxical as it initially seems. The Ivory Coast, one of the richest countries in Africa, would have much to lose in an African federation. Indeed, it would be far too simplistic to state that colonial borders were necessarily seen as an act of neo-colonialism.[61] Eurafrica was one possibility among a series of other visions for organizing African space. In seeking to

57. C. TREYER, *Sahara: 1956-1962*, Société des Belles Lettres, Paris, 1966, p.27.
58. A. ADEBAJO, Paradise Lost and Found: *The African Union and the European Union*, in: A. ADEBAJO, K. WHITEMAN (eds), *The EU and Africa: From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa*, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, London, 2012.
59. G. MARTIN, *Dream of Unity: From the United States of Africa to the Federation of African States*, African and Asian Studies, vol.12, issue 3, pp.169-188.
60. B. HALL, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 258-261; B. LECOCQ, op.cit., pp.298-307.
61. B. LECOCQ, *L'histoire d'un coq qui grattait le sable. Conflits frontaliers et nationalisme au Sahara à la fin de l'époque coloniale*, paper presented at the conference "Frontières et Indépendance en Afrique" held in Paris, 21-22 May 2010. Available online at: https://www.academia.edu/925275/2010._L_histoire_dun_coq_qui_grattait_le_sable_Conflits_frontaliers_et_nationalisme_au_Sahara_à_la_fin_de_lépoque_coloniale.

reorganize their relationship to France, African leaders also reconceptualised their relationship with neighbouring countries.[62]

The FLN waged its struggle not only against France, but also against those African nations who sided with the colonial power. Regarding Chad and Niger, which had decided to participate in the OCRS, Algerian nationalists stated "these two unreliable fruits of the balkanization of Western Africa completely adopt the thesis of their masters in Paris".[63] This hostility was not surprising given the GPRA's stance towards the Sahara. In a memo addressed to African states, Ferhat Abbas declared:

> "The Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic cannot subscribe to the French thesis of a *res nullius*, a vacant land that has definitively come under French sovereignty. France did not discover the Sahara as one discovers a vacant land with no master".[64]

Calling for a deconstruction of the myth of the French Sahara, Algerian nationalists waged a very public war against Eurafrica in encouraging Maghreb unity. During their engagement in a "diplomatic war", the FLN was not only concerned with the UN and the global North, but also its African neighbours.[65] Following, in 1960 the FLN created the Saharan Wilaya 6, which was situated in Northern Mali and led by Franz Fanon and Abdelaziz Bouteflika (under his *nom de guerre*, Si Abdelkader el Mali).[66] Wilaya 6, which also included the Saharan regions, played an important role in the war. As the historian Berny Sèbe writes, the paradox of Wilaya 6 was that "although it was the theatre of very few armed confrontations, its strategic and economic importance kept growing in the course of the war".[67] The FLN's newspaper and organ for propaganda did not mince words in outlining the their vision of the desert: "The contestation of colonial domination is global, and we completely reject it [on la rejette en bloc]. One cannot refuse [such a situation] for ourselves while accepting it for our neighbours". Despite the rhetoric of Pan-Africanism and Pan-Maghrebism, substituting horizontal links of solidarity for the existing vertical links of colonial dependence proved difficult.

---

62. As Frederick Cooper notes, "most saw the French Union as providing a connection not only to France and its resources but to each other". F. COOPER, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ and London, 2014, p.213.
63. ANOM 81F/965, *La question du Sahara: neutralisme et coopération*, in: *El-Moudjahid*, 01.11.1961.
64. F. ABBAS, *Mémorandum adressé aux États Africains à propos du Sahara (30 juin 1961)*, in: G. MEYNIER, M. HARBI (eds), *Le FLN: Documents et histoire, 1954-1962*, Fayard, Paris, 2004.
65. M. CONNELLY, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.
66. M. MATERA, *An Empire of Development: Africa and the Caribbean in God's Chillun*, in: *Twentieth Century British History*, 1(2012), pp.12-37.
67. B. SÈBE, *In the Shadow of the Algerian War: The United States and the Common Organisaiton of Saharan Regions (OCRS), 1957-62*, in: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, (2010), p.304.

Technical Sovereignty in the Sahara

It was largely these political concerns that led the OCRS to emphasize its technical and developmental role. Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson have defined Eurafrica as a way of resolving the "contradiction between national autonomy and colonial dominance".[68] Yet the exercise of French authority in Algeria was not only a question of striking a balance between sovereignty and imperialism. Instead, French technocrats sought to introduce a fundamentally different kind of sovereignty in the desert. In other words, the technocratic spirit of the Fifth Republic and the studies on the regional question in Europe allowed France to introduce a new basis for claiming authority in Eurafrica. This tendency was most pronounced in the Sahara, where France sought to actively substitute technical prowess for political involvement. In the Southern regions of Algeria, French administrators used technical cooperation and the extraction of natural resources to maintain a form of political control.[69]

In order to remake the Sahara, the OCRS had to battle these technical questions as they created a new "economic space" that was fundamentally depoliticized. The predominant vision of Sahara oscillated between the view of the desert as a national space (which was thus an extension of the metropole) and the creation of an economic organism that had more limited functions.[70] And while the OCRS was initially seen as a compromise between the two, its orientation became increasingly economic with a ruling on 4 February as well as a decree adopted on 11 March 1959.[71] This trend towards depoliticisation was furthered by the law of 10 June 1960, which revised the law of 1957 by separating the functions of the ministry of the Sahara from the Director of the OCRS. This measure would keep OCRS from undertaking any political actions. As clearly stated by the *OCRS Bulletin*: "The new fact, the important fact, is that, through the separation of functions, we [have] 'depoliticized' and 'de-administrated' [déadministrativé]" so the organization could "fulfill its technical, economic, and cooperative role".[72] Rather than discussing the political valence of the development of the Sahara, the OCRS concentrated on informing the public of the technical questions that it faced in the desert.

The switch to economic vocabulary, or the introduction of an "empire of development", did have significant effects on the post-war rendering of Eurafrica.[73] As the 1950s an 1960a witnessed a more capacious relationship between the state and the nation, sovereignty was defined through economic intervention rather than explicit

68. P. HANSEN, S. JONSSON, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2014, p.20.
69. For more on the post WWI roots of attempts to govern the world economy, and the attendant rise of technocratic rule, see J. MARTIN, *Governing the World Economy: Economic Expertise and the Reshaping of Global Order, 1916-1948*, PhD Dissertation in History, Harvard, 2016.
70. ANOM 81F/188, *Sahara, promesses et problèmes*, in: *Le Monde Diplomatique,* May 1961.
71. See, for example ANOM F/12/11810, *OCRS une compétence désormais strictement économique et sociale*, in: *Le Monde*, 06.02.1959.
72. BNF 4-FW-6704, *Bulletin OCRS*, 1(1961), p.10, emphasis in original.
73. M. MATERA, op.cit.

political authority. Camille Bégué, a member of the pro-Gaullist Party, The Union for the New Republic, explained during a debate at the National Assembly: "Power is justified by the services that it provides to citizens". Given France's technical and financial assistance, Bégué was confident that "the people of Algeria [would] become not only a people of workers, but also a people of consumers, a people *tout court*".[74] The hope that development would be able to define the contours of the nation was thus exemplified by France's introduction of an administrative unit in the Sahara.

Conclusion

This article has shown that questions raised in the Saharan desert played a key role in the construction of a Eurafrican space in the 1950s. Regardless of the optimism of French planners and administrators, this project nevertheless encountered numerous political as well as technical obstacles, namely, the Algerian war of independence and African aspirations to national sovereignty. As a result, the role of the OCRS helped replace a language of politics (national sovereignty) with that of development (technical expertise). This new mode of claiming authority was not merely a question of neo-colonialism. [75] Instead, the development of the Sahara prompted a fundamentally different "staging" of European sovereignty.[76] The Sahara thus played a central role in the gradual and uneven transition from colonialism to European integration and the articulation of a new mode of technocratic expertise.

But a focus on France's activities in the Sahara shows that this model of governance was already part and parcel of the updating of colonialism in the late 1950s; as Frederick Cooper has argued, although imperial administrators eventually abandoned attempts to create supranational forms of governance, they eventually implemented these ideas in "making a new Europe".[77] An analysis of various attempts to administer the Sahara thus demonstrates not only how European actors attempted to profit from African resources, but also how forms of governance and sovereignty migrated across the Mediterranean.

74. Assemblée nationale, *Débats parlementaires*, 08.06.1958, pp.810-813.
75. Guy Martin, for example, sees Eurafrica as a "rationalisation of the neo-classical theory of international development" whereby the colonies are restricted "to the function of suppliers of raw materials and agricultural products". G. MARTIN, *Africa and the Ideology of Eurafrica: Neo-Colonialism or Pan-Africanism*, in: *The Journal of Modern African Studies 20*, 2(1982), pp.221-238.
76. S. GEROULANOS, Z.B-D. BENITE, N. JERR (eds), *The Scaffold of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2017.
77. F. COOPER, op.cit., p.268.